

MESSAGE

IN A

WORD

INSPIRED SUCCINCT SERMONS UNIQUELY EXPRESSED

MARGARET A. BLINCOE

Smashwords Edition

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my husband, E. Thomas Blincoe.

Over the years, the generosity that he has shown me in kindness, support, patience, provision, and love have made me aware of the love and care that my heavenly Father has for me. Thomas has taken good care of "Daddy's little girl." Words cannot articulate the love and respect that I have grown to have for him. It is because of who he is, where we have been, and—because of the faithfulness of God—where we are now, that I dedicate this book to him.

Thomas, my Message in a Word to you is:

He's Original Noble Outstanding
Rises Above Boundless Limitations Everyday

I love you.

Foreword

Truly God has used Margaret in this adventure to reveal that there is a deeper meaning in a word.

The true essence and beauty of her spirit has allowed her to extract a great understanding from each word. God has moved in her mightily. His liberty has flowed freely through her. Margaret is truly God's child and an inspiration to me. The beauty of her spirit has been magnified

and amplified to the point that her desire to share this adventure will have a far-reaching effect on others. God has birthed a special purpose in her life to win souls to Jesus Christ by defining the meaning of syllables in a way that gives a new and fresh perspective on the definition of the word.

I have truly learned from her and through the movement of the Holy Spirit that we have to be careful of words we speak and the names with which we label people.

God has imparted to Margaret a fresh, pure, and genuine revelation. She is a true crusader of the Cross, on which our Lord and Savior died.

Margaret is a workmanship of God, being formed and molded as the precious pearl that she is. God has birthed forth His Word and revealed it in her, as a mature oyster reveals its treasure when opened.

Her name means Pearl, signifying a precious, developed mother-of-pearl washed by the sand and water of the sea. She has been washed by God's Word and by the numerous experiences she has endured.

Now, it is time for her to bring forth what the Holy Spirit has revealed to her through hours of meditation and prayer. She has labored and the harvest is ready.

Whoever desires a deeper understanding of His Word and of words will benefit from reading this book. For God has searched her thoughts and tested the integrity of her heart. May this book be a success—a testimony and an honor to Him, our Creator. May the undeveloped oysters of her life (including our children) open one day to reveal the true essence of their spirits.

E. Thomas Blincoe, the author's husband

Acknowledgments

To God: Who is the Source of my life and the Source of this book, for if it had not been for the issue He had with me, this book would not be in existence. Lord, here is the baby. I thank You—You are the Genius of Geniuses. You are God—Glory On Display.

To my children: Gregory, Shelley, Patrick, and Christopher, you are truly gifts from God to me. I thank Him so much for entrusting you to

me. You are each so special in your own unique way. You will never know the joy that you have brought into my life. You have all been beneficial in teaching me as many valuable lessons as I've tried to teach you in the process of God growing me up. Thank you for letting me grow with you. Thank you for loving me and encouraging me to put out what God has put into me. I love you all.

To my husband: Thomas, words cannot express the love and admiration that I have for you. I love you for the patience that you have shown me, the love that you have demonstrated to me, and the care that you have provided for me. You truly are a gift and a blessing to me.

To my mom and dad: You have both departed earth and transitioned home. You were the vehicles that God chose to bring me into this world. Everyone thought I was Mom's favorite. No, Mom, you were my favorite. Thank you for loving me unconditionally and believing in me at all times. Some of your last words to me were, "When are you going to finish the book?" Dad, thank you for affirming me and assuring me that I do have what it takes to deliver this baby. And for letting me know that I was cute.

To my siblings: Louise, Major, Earl, Carolyn, Nathaniel, John, LaFonda, and Laquita. What an honor to be born into such greatness. Each of you is special in your own right. We are so blessed to have such a godly heritage. To those of you who believed in me when at times I could not believe in myself, thank you. For the ones of you who listened and encouraged me when at times I did not think I could go on, thank you. To you who have been my confidants and who have kept my feet to the truth of God's Word in my life even when I didn't want to hear it, thank you. To you who have been with me from the beginning of this conception, when neither of us were aware of the significance of it all, thank you for your listening ear and your gentleness of spirit. I love you and thank you all.

To Pastor Randolph: You genuinely have a pastor's heart. Thank you for your teachings that have had such a profound effect on my life. Thank you and Gail for your love and concern for my family. Thank you for the open door policy that I have been privileged to have with you at Trinity Church.

To Sanford: You, too, have been privy to this baby in its latter stages—the dreams, the pains, and now the birthing. Thank you for your patience and your listening ear.

To Carrie: I am deeply indebted to you for the tireless hours you have

put into this project. I called; you came. Your expertise on the computer baffles me. You cannot possibly know how much help you have been. Thank you; thank you; thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To Lillie Ammann, my editor: I am deeply indebted to you for your invaluable insight and feedback. You took the baby (book), cleaned it up, and made it presentable. Words are inadequate for the appreciation I have for you. Thank you.

To all of you who listened patiently when I preached and you had no way out: I thank you. Words can never express how much you all mean to me. The support and encouragement that you have extended to me have been phenomenal.

Introduction

The conception of this book came about from a series of recurrent dreams. In some of the dreams I was pregnant; in others I would have had the baby. In one of the dreams I was told the importance of what to eat and how it could directly affect the baby. Later on, in another dream, I could see myself breast feeding the baby. All of these dreams were very vivid.

The dreams continued to come in different stages over a span of twelve years. I had no idea as to what these dreams meant until much later. I thought the dreams might be a natural longing to have another child. However, I came to realize that was not the case. It was not a natural longing; it was spiritual.

After many dreams and much wondering and pondering, I began to question God as to what the dream meant. I heard these words: "Feed my sheep." Of course, I took this literally to mean preaching, which frightened me. I put the thought on a shelf in my mind.

But the idea was always there, shouting at me, sometimes louder than others. I can certainly see now that it was a pregnant, unsettled matter. Maybe that was why God phrased it in this manner: "I have an issue with you."

For years I pondered the dream and the statement, "Feed my sheep." Eventually I moved to a new city and went to work for a Christian book

store for some twelve years. The logo on the bags read, "Feed My Sheep."

I realized one day as I was working that was indeed what I was doing by selling books. I finally began to feel that I was operating in the area of my ministry. This in a sense was preaching or "feeding the sheep." It was a ministry to me.

However, after I retired from working outside my home, I woke abruptly early one morning—2:00 A.M., to be exact. I heard the words, "I have an issue with you." Needless to say, it got my attention.

I got up and went downstairs with pen and paper in hand. I recorded this in my journal: "Lord, why are you angry with me? What have I done or not done to make you so angry that you have an issue with me?"

I immediately thought of the fact that I still wasn't preaching. Yes, maybe that was it. I wasn't selling books anymore, or possibly it was something else. I just didn't know.

Now I am amazed that I had that concept of God—to think that He would be angry with me. My concept about God needed to be dealt with as well. I referenced the dictionary and found the exact meaning that I was looking for; a matter of dispute between two or more parties, a vital or an unsettled matter, or the point at which an unsettled matter is ready for a decision.

At this point I could think of nothing else, except the fact I thought God was angry with me. And about what, I still didn't know. All the same the thought was constantly on my mind. I would from time to time go back and ponder on the word, always coming up with the same definition, the one I had fixed in my mind. As I prayed and pondered, I again turned to the dictionary, and what I read this time absolutely astounded me. However, it would still be some time before the pieces began to fit.

Once again, I had been doing a lot of pondering, and I began to realize that I looked at things with tunnel vision. I saw things one way, and that was my way. Remember, I referred to the dictionary and found the definition that I was looking for—the definition for issue stated above. I had heard the word issue used many times in this context: "He or she has issues." So I figured the issue God had with me was really serious.

Up to this point I hadn't considered that words have multiple meanings. I begin to sense that God was challenging me to come out of my little box and see things from a different perspective.

On one of my biannual trips to California, I was visiting with one of my brothers. He had a meeting with a minister friend and invited me to ride along so we could visit on the trip. I agreed. As I waited for him to finish his meeting, the pastor's wife came in and introduced herself to me.

She said, "Write the vision and make it plain upon tablets, that he may run that read it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it, because it will surely come. It will not tarry." She also said to write it in boxcar letters and store it on the computer. This, too, was something I pondered in my heart.

At this time I had written one acrostic. After the encounter with the pastor's wife, the acrostics began to flow freely. I remembered the new definitions I had found for the word issue. Of course, there are many more definitions for the word. These are the ones that I choose to consider:

- * The act of flowing out
- * Something published or distributed
- * An edition originating from a specified source
- * To exit
- * Act of going out
- * Something produced, published, or offered
- * Progeny
- * Baby
- * To be published or circulated

I remembered what the pastor's wife had said to me about writing and putting it in boxcar letters. I started to get a clearer understanding of what God had been saying to me over the years through the dreams and in other ways.

I certainly was pregnant with an unsettled matter. I could now understand His saying to me, "I have an issue with you." He had something He wanted birthed through me so that it could be published or circulated. I was to be the carrier. This is the issue.

The acrostics are plain in the sense that they are bold, clear, simple, and yet profound. Each acrostic is defined in such a way as to give you a vivid picture. Each acrostic is an

Inspired

Succinct

Sermon

Uniquely

Expressed.

It has been a privilege to be a part of this publication. I want to honor God for what He has deposited in me. For He takes what He has deposited in us and uses it to His glory. I'm blessed to be used as an outlet to deliver what He so faithfully placed into my heart.

God led me on this adventure to reveal to me that there is a much deeper meaning to words than what we first think. I had prayed for God to expand the borders of my mind, and I believe He did. I have had a wonderful time digging and pondering on the Word and the words.

God is indeed the Genius. He has shown me how the same word can have multiple meanings. He has used this time to bring about much healing in my life by broadening my perspective on many things. He helped me to realize that not everything is right or wrong. Some things are just different.

Words are valuable and contain messages. Discovering those messages has been like solving a puzzle. The Lord has reiterated the importance of the spoken and written word to me. We are living in an age where the meaning of words is constantly being changed. I have a new awareness of the importance of "guarding my heart," for from it flow the issues of life.

And, most importantly, I've come to understand that my way of looking at things is not the only way; it is just my way. And my point of view is as small as the point on my pen or pencil. All truth comes from God and is found in His Word.

I pray that you will be as inspired reading this issue as I was in writing it and that you share this adventure with others as freely as I have shared my thoughts with you.

Message in a Word includes 52 acrostics, each followed by a short devotional. If you read one devotional each week, you will have time to meditate on it and absorb what the Lord has for you. However you use it, I pray that God's Word and the messages in the words of these pages bless you and enrich your spiritual walk.

I now present to you the baby. Its name is *Message in a Word*. Birthed through me, it originated from none other than God Himself. Without Him, I couldn't have done this. I thank Him for His patience and love for me from the conception to the delivery.

To God be all the glory and honor.

FOUNDATIONAL EDUCATION AWESOMENESS REVERED

Do we want a higher education? Let's start with the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is forsaking evil in all forms, knowing there will be consequences for what we do, and dreading the outcome. Over the years I have heard of several definitions for the fear of the Lord.

John MacArthur, author of *The MacArthur Study Bible*, said, "The fear of the Lord is a state of mind in which one's own attitudes, will, feelings, deeds, and goals are exchanged for God's."

Here is an excellent operational definition for which I cannot take credit and do not know the source. "The fear of the Lord is the continual awareness that I am in the presence of a holy, just, and almighty God, and that every thought, word, action, and deed is open before Him and is being judged by Him."

This definition was taken from *Hard Sayings of the Bible*:

"The term for fear can describe everything from dread, or being terrified; to standing in awe or having reverence. When used of the Lord, it applies to both aspects of the term, a shrinking back in recognition of the difference or holiness of God and the drawing close in awe and worship. It is an attitude of both reluctance and adoration that results in a willingness to do what God says."

The fear of the Lord is fundamental and foundational to all spiritual knowledge and wisdom. Getting educated about the fear of the Lord, then, is absolutely vital, for it sets the stage for our learning, living, and worshipping. It is a prerequisite to any other subject that we would embark upon.

Our textbook is the Bible. Let us not just have it; let us get to know the contents. More importantly than that, let us get to know the One who is the Word. His name is Jesus.

"And he said to man, 'the fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'" (Job 28:28, NIV)

"My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God." (Proverbs 2:1-5, NIV)

"Who, then, is the man that fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him. The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them." (Psalm 25:12, 14, NIV)

"Fear the Lord, you His saints, for those who fear him lack nothing." (Psalm 34:9, NIV)

To fear God is to have an awesome respect and reverence for Him. We get to know Him and trust Him to operate using His own discretion, because He is God. We are giving Him the place of honor that He alone deserves. We tremble at His presence.

"You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." (Psalm 45:7, NIV)

We need to love what God loves and hate what He hates. How will we know what He loves and what He hates? We will have to get into the Word and discover for ourselves those things that are pleasing and those things that are displeasing to Him.

This was prophesied of Jesus in Isaiah:

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord." (Isaiah 11:1-3, NIV)

Jesus came to show us how to live. Let's follow His example. The Bible has all the answers. Let's learn about the awesome and reverential fear of the Lord. It is foundational to all other learning that we can acquire. He is awesome; we are not!

Foundational Education Awesomeness Revered

WHAT I SHOULD DO OBVIOUSLY MATTERS

There never was nor will there ever be anyone as wise as Solomon was. But there are times when we need to know what to do. What is wisdom? And how do we get it?

And he said to mankind: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline." (Proverbs 1:7, NIV)

"Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; beside the gates leading into the city, at the entrances, she cries aloud: 'To you, O men, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind. You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, gain understanding. Listen, for I have worthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right. My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness. All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse. To the discerning all of them are right; they are faultless to those who have knowledge.'" (Proverbs 8:1-9, NIV)

Wisdom not only sees and knows the truth of a matter, it also sees and knows what to do about the matter. Wisdom knows the truth and how to apply it to any given situation. It institutes sound discretion, showing insight and discernment. Wisdom begins with knowing God and seeing things from His perspective.

Remember how God appeared to Solomon in a dream and told him to ask for whatever he wanted? This is Solomon's reply: "So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" (1 Kings 3:9, NIV)

Since he did not ask for long life or wealth for himself, the Lord gave him incredible wealth along with a wise and discerning heart, unlike anyone who has ever been or ever will be. (1 Kings 3:10-12)

This wisdom enabled Solomon to make the right ruling concerning the two women and the baby. One of the babies had died during the night. Now each was saying the live baby was hers. Read and discover how this was solved. (1 Kings 3:16-27)

Where does wisdom come from? Of course, what I am speaking of here

is divine wisdom. Divine wisdom comes from God and is revealed to us through the Bible.

For the LORD gives wisdom, and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright. He is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. (Proverbs 2:6-9, NIV)

God's wisdom resides in His Word; therefore, it is imperative for us to get into the Word, so that the Word can get into us. In Jesus are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, so "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6, NIV)

How do we gain wisdom?

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5a, NIV)

The Word tells us that fools despise wisdom and discipline; therefore, we will not be fools, and we will become wise knowing what the will of God is for our lives. We listen and receive instruction; we give attention to the Word and receive discipline and correction. We are then able to practically apply what we have learned to our everyday lives.

We are told that, "Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding." (Proverbs 4:7, NIV)

Wisdom cries aloud to us everywhere, so we need to pay close attention.

And, lastly, we search for wisdom, because: "Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her." (Proverbs 3:13-15, NIV)

There is so much more to learn about wisdom, and the Bible is overflowing with instructions on how to obtain it and how to correctly discern right from wrong.

Solomon said: "Wisdom is even better when you have money. Both are a benefit as you go through life. Wisdom and money can get you almost anything, but only wisdom can save your life." (Ecclesiastes 7:11-12, NLT)

What I Should Do Obviously Matters

KNOWING NOTHING OURSELVES WE LEARN EAGERLY DISCOVERING GOD EXPERIENTIALLY

We see the President of the United States on the television screen often. We hear him make speeches. We have a picture in our minds of what he might be like. We hear things about him. All the knowledge we have of him is secondhand. We do not know him personally. Most of us will never get close enough to get to know him personally.

If we are not careful, we relate in basically the same way to the Lord. We have some knowledge, but it is secondhand. Many of us do not know Him up close and personal. All the knowledge that we have of Him we heard from someone else.

The good news is that it doesn't have to stay that way. We can get to know Him personally. As a matter of fact, He wants to know us personally.

We need to take the time every day to read, study, and meditate, so that the Holy Spirit can bring revelation to us. In our daily walk and the situations we encounter, we can then begin to discover God experientially.

Early on, I realized that the reason that I could not trust God was because I did not know God. And of course, because I didn't know Him, I couldn't trust Him. When my children were small, I didn't leave them with just anyone—I would leave them only with someone who had gained my trust. It's the same with God.

As I gained more knowledge of Him, I learned to know His ways and take Him at His Word. That's how I learned to love and trust Him. We must get to the place where we know God, not just a lot of facts we have gathered about the Lord.

Rather, we know Him because of our personal experience. We can say that He loves us, because we have experienced that love. We can say that we trust Him, because He has proven Himself to be trustworthy to us. The point is that we have to experience God for ourselves.

The Apostles had that kind of knowledge. They said: "That which was

from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life." (1 John 1:1, NKJV)

The reading of the Word is so good that I could go on and on and on, but I would love to whet your appetite to go and taste and see how good it is yourself. (Psalm 34:8)

The Apostles had seen, heard, and touched. They were eyewitnesses and had been up close and personal with the Lord.

How do you get to know a person? It is only by spending time with them, conversing with them, listening, having meals with them, finding out their likes and dislikes.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (Hosea 4:6a, NKJV)

J. I. Packer, author of *Knowing God* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), said "What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set for ourselves in life? To know God. What is the 'eternal life' that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God."

"This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3, KJV)

What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment than anything else? Knowledge of God.

"Thus saith the Lord, 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understands and knoweth me.'" (Jeremiah 9:23, KJV)

What, of all the states God ever sees man in, gives Him the most pleasure? Knowledge of God. "'I desire the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings,' says God." (Hosea 6:6, NKJV)

In the book *The Priority of Knowing God* (Discovery House Publishers, 1990), Peter V. Deison writes: "Getting personal with God begins with knowing. The more deeply we know the more fully we can love, and the more fully we love the more completely we can serve."

**Knowing Nothing Ourselves We Learn Eagerly Discovering God
Experientially**

**UNFOLDS NEEDED DISCERNMENT EXPERIENCE RENDERS
SIGHT TO APPRECIATE NEW DIMENSIONS INSIGHT NOW
GRASPED**

Have you ever been in the dark about something—absolutely clueless, and then a light bulb goes off in your head? Have you ever had the words on the pages of your Bible leap up as if you were reading in 3-D? You can see clearly now; the fog is gone.

"The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple." (Psalm 119:130, NKJV)

Understanding is to comprehend, have knowledge of, to grasp, stand under, to have perception, and to apprehend. To recognize, discern, and realize.

We have recognized the need for a foundational education, and it begins by educating ourselves on the fear of the Lord. We have to study, and we do that by acquiring and gathering information. We then become knowledgeable about the subject we should know. After we have acquired information, we need a clear understanding as to how to respond to what we have learned.

So, now we're going to take a look at understanding. Just because we know something doesn't mean that we have the right perspective on it. That is why we trust in the Lord with all our heart and lean not on our own understanding; in all our ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct our paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

We certainly need understanding, for if we don't have understanding we have misunderstanding. My brother Earl said: "If the basis of your understanding is misunderstanding, how much understanding do you think you have?" I would venture to say none.

"Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding." (Proverbs 4:7, NKJV)

Over and over in the verses about the fear of the Lord, Scripture says, "To turn from evil or to shun evil is understanding." Understanding is then displayed by our act of obedience.

Knowledge without understanding is akin to air without oxygen. There are many elements in the atmosphere, with the most important being the compound oxygen. This example shows us the importance of having a good understanding.

"If He should set His heart on it, If He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, And man would return to dust. If you have understanding, hear this; Listen to the sound of my words." (Job 34:14-16a, NKJV)

Myles Munroe has quoted this in probably every book he has ever written: "If you do not know how something is supposed to function; you will misuse or abuse it."

It is absolutely crucial for us to have an understanding. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is ***understanding***." (Proverbs 9:10, NKJV, bold italics mine)

Unfolds Needed Discernment Experience Renders Sight To Appreciate
New Dimensions Insight Now Grasped

FIRMLY ACCEPTING INFALLIBLE TRUTH HEARD

The Bible gives us the definition of faith: "Now faith is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses]." (Hebrews 11:1, AMP)

That is so good. What better definition could we get than that? "But without faith it is impossible to please and be satisfactory to Him. For whoever would come near to God must [necessarily] believe that God exists and that He is the rewarder of those who earnestly and diligently seek Him [out]." (Hebrews 11:6, AMP)

Our walk is a walk of faith. The Word tells us, "Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, 'The righteous will live by faith.'" (Galatians 3:11b, NIV) That is why it is so important to get into the Word and trust Him at His Word. He said that He has magnified His Word above His Name. (Psalm 138:2b)

"God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" (Numbers 23:19, NIV)

The word *infallible* means unerring, incapable of erring, absolutely trustworthy. Faith is seeing beyond the present and believing that we

have already received the promise. I heard a minister say some years ago that we need glory glasses in order to see beyond the circumstances and situations that arise in our lives. We don't see as the world sees. We look through eyes of faith, seeing what cannot be seen with our natural senses. For we know that the things we see are temporal (not real) and the things we cannot see are eternal (real).

These truths need to be cemented into our hearts. The only way we can begin to have faith is to take God at His Word and believe that He will do just what He said He would do. The only way we can take Him at His Word is to get to know Him. Our faith will always be challenged, for that is how we grow and mature in our walk. It's like exercise—the more we do, the stronger we become.

Abraham is called the father of all the faithful. "What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'" (Romans 4:3, NIV)

When he had been promised a child, the Scripture tells us, "Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised." (Romans 19-21, NIV)

And understand this, those of us who believe are children of Abraham.

He is the father of us all. 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 things that are not as though they were." (Romans 4:16b-17, NIV)

We need to stop calling things as we see them and start calling all those things that are not as though they were. Whenever God gave me a promise from His Word, it wouldn't be long before I was challenged to the hilt, for the very thing that I had been promised looked to be in total contradiction to the Word. It always will, for we have an opponent. That is when we have to trust God to be true to His Word.

Our part is to believe. Period!

Forever Always I'll Trust Him!

Factually Accepting Invisible Things Here!

Feelings Aside I'll Trust Him!

Firmly Accepting Infallible Truth Heard!

TOTALLY RELYING UPON STEADFAST TRUTHFULNESS

Do we dare be vulnerable and take a leap of faith? So many of us have had such disappointments in our lives that we get to the point that we don't trust anyone. Most of us don't trust the people we see—much less someone we can't see!

We were told that we have to believe that He does exist, that He will reward us if we diligently seek Him. Since we've had so many disappointments already, why not take Him at His Word?

Satan's main purpose is to make us doubt the validity of God's Word. You can't trust a person who is not true to their word, so the only way you learn to trust a person is because of the validity of their word. Have no doubt, God can be trusted.

The psalmist said: "I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your loving kindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name." (Psalm 138:2, NKJV)

"They replied, 'We want to perform God's works, too, What shall we do?' Jesus told them, 'This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.'" (John 6:28-29, NLT)

In other words: the work that is required of us is to believe: "Trust Him!" He is the only way to God, and He is the truth of God.

Jesus stated, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6, NIV)

You can't build a relationship without trust. Trust and truth go hand in hand; they are twins. It's what you say and what you do that determines your trustworthiness. When you consistently tell the truth and do what you say, you are deemed trustworthy. Words are very powerful. And when we don't do what we say we are going to do, we can't be trusted. We establish a bad reputation for not telling the truth.

"As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out of my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish

what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:10-11, NIV)

Back in the olden days, a man's word was his bond. It was also said, "A man is as good as his word." As trust is a critical factor in a marriage, or in any other meaningful relationship for that matter, it is absolutely crucial in our relationship with the Lord. He is Truth.

Trust means to have confidence in; to rely upon; to count on; to depend upon; to believe, expect, and hope; to have faith in. Trust refers to belief in another person's actions. That is why, as I stated earlier, we need to know who we are trusting. It means expectation or hope.

Truth means honesty, conformity to fact or reality, constancy, a true statement or undisputed fact. Is that not our Lord?

"My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him." (Psalm 62:5, NKJV)

"Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us." (Psalm 62:8, NKJV)

"Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him And He shall bring it to pass." (Psalm 37:3, 5, NKJV)

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And he shall direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6, NKJV)

Trust is learning that we put no confidence in the flesh; we rely totally on Him for our every need. I know it is hard. Being told the work that we do is to believe seems easy enough, right? However, it will probably prove to be the hardest work we will ever do. Thomas saw, but he still had to feel the nail prints to believe. (John 20:24-29)

Remember, we walk by faith—not by sight. I have a little saying that I keep on my desk. It reads, "The power of Christ is the measure of my expectation." (*Abide in Christ*, Andrew Murray, Wilder Publications, 2008)

So when we begin to realize the power of God, we will begin to trust Him with all that we have. Just how big is your God? We look not at our insufficiencies, but His all-sufficient power.

There are so many instances in my life where I have had to learn to trust God. One of the most challenging has been releasing my children. It was

really hard to let go of them. It has been many hard years and many tears. I wish I had known some of the truths that I now know. It was about learning to trust my heavenly Father, the One they belonged to long before they were entrusted to me. I had to learn that I did not own my children. They were on loan to me; I was their steward. More and more I was able to let go and know without a doubt that they were in good hands. Now, when I think about it—all the struggles that I went through—I cannot believe that it took as long as it did.

How could I not trust Him? I'll tell you why: because I did not know Him to be the loving, all-caring, faithful, merciful, and patient God that He is. There could be a list of the attributes of His character that goes on and on because now I have experienced them for myself.

This is what the Lord says: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and depends on flesh for his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wasteland; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:5-8a, NIV)

These verses of Scriptures tell us how God takes care of those who put their trust in Him. For He alone is our hope and expectation. "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe." (Proverbs 29:25, NIV)

"He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely will be delivered." (Proverbs 28:26, NJKV)

Wayne Jacobsen stated in his book, *He Loves Me! Learning to Live in the Father's Affection* (Windblown Media, 2007): "He knows that only by trusting him can you participate in relationship with him and enjoy the fullness of life in his household. He also knows you'll trust him only to the degree that you are certain of his love for you."

Totally Relying Upon Steadfast Truthfulness

BASIC ESSENTIAL LESSON IS EVERYTHING VIEWED

ETERNALLY

One of my sons and I were discussing his job situation, and I made a comment that he should trust God in it all. He responded, "I have never seen anyone else who puts God in everything."

That was probably the best compliment that I have ever had, although I don't know how accurate "everything" is. That should be the way it is for believers. We should view everything from an eternal viewpoint.

As I was writing this acrostic, it seemed to me that I was repeating what I had previously written. The writings seem to have a redundancy. Maybe God is trying to get something very important over to us. This verse came to me: "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little." (Isaiah 28:10, NKJV) Only by repetition will the truth be learned.

To believe is to have assured reliance on the character, integrity, or truth of someone or something. It means to place confidence in or to depend upon. It is the basis of reliance, faith, or hope. It is confident hope.

All of us believe in something or someone. The something isn't so important. Certainly, by now we know not to put our trust in material things, which can be here today and gone tomorrow. The question is whom do you trust? Is this person reliable? Can they magnify their word above their name? (Psalm 138:2) Is their word a constancy of trust? Is it infallible and unerring? Will it forever be established? (Mark 13:31)

Well, this is where the character of God comes in. He is indeed trustworthy. For we are told: "God is not a man that He should lie, nor a son of man that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" (Numbers 23:19, NIV) The answer is no to both of those questions.

God is not a liar; it is impossible for Him to lie. (Hebrews 6:18a). God keeps His Word. His Word will not return to Him without accomplishing what it was sent to do. (Isaiah 55:11)

Have you gotten a word from the Lord, just for you, as if it had your name on it? I have.

My oldest child was a runaway. He left home to go into the far country and squander his inheritance. It was a heartbreaking experience. I was on my knees praying and crying one night when I got this word. "Thus says the Lord, refrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord, and they shall come back

from the land of the enemy. There is hope in your future, says the Lord, that your children shall come back to their own borders."

Do you think I didn't get challenged on that word? Yes, I sure did. I've had to look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are eternal. And most of all, I've had to take God at His Word.

"Then they asked Him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?' Jesus answered, 'The works of God is this: To believe in the one he has sent.'" (John 6:28-29, NIV)

Since The Fall, we have been reduced to perceiving things through our natural senses. Now, as Christians we have a different mode of operation. It is called believing, faith, trust, truth—all one and the same. We have been called to a life of faith. We have been called to live a life that is not in accordance with this present world. It is called living otherworldly. That means we live with our eyes on eternal things, not on the things we see.

Since we live in an otherworldly state, we don't see things as the world does. We see things from God's point of view. He wants us to live in this world with a heavenly perspective. We are in this world but not of this world. This is not our home.

We don't call things as we see them; we call things that we don't see into being. (Romans 4:17b) We will say what God says and let that be the final word. We come to realize that God doesn't have to be seen—all He has to do is speak the Word. If God has spoken, we can take His Word to the bank.

Believe—what a small word for such a big job. That is our job; our work is to believe. It is probably the hardest thing we will ever do. Believing is nothing more than complete trust in the integrity of God's Word. Our believing is basic to our walk with the Lord, for we are told, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." (Hebrews 11:1, NIV)

Then we are told, "... without faith it is impossible to please and be satisfactory to Him. For whoever would come near to God must [necessarily] believe that God exists and that He is the rewarder of those who earnestly and diligently seek Him [out]." (Hebrews 11:6, AMP)

Basic Essential Lesson Is Everything Viewed Eternally

AS BRANCH I'M DEVELOPING ENDURANCE

I had to make an important call one morning and was put on hold for a very long time. Needless to say, I got very agitated, until I decided I would be productive while waiting. Little did I know that this phone call would prove to be a valuable lesson.

I put the phone on intercom and went about my daily chores. In the meantime, every few seconds or so a recording would come on and inform me to continue to wait.

"We know how important your time is; someone will be with you right away."

"All of our agents are currently assisting other customers."

"Please continue to hold for assistance; someone will be with you shortly."

"We appreciate your call. Please do not hang up. Someone will be with you right away."

"Please continue to hold, we'll be right with you."

"In our attempt to serve everyone in an efficient manner, sometimes it is necessary to put you in a queue or place you on hold."

"Be assured we're working as hard as we can so your hold time is minimal."

This went on and on with a repeat of the same messages. Their "right away" was much later; and "shortly" turned out to be a very long time. I did hang up once. Only to be placed in a queue again at the end of the call log.

I learned something in this little test. I realized I had to remain on the line if I were to accomplish what I needed to on the call. I learned to continue to wait, to remain on the line. It was a lesson on endurance.

I was constantly hearing, more than anything else, "Please continue to hold." "Please remain on the line." Over and over again.

I began to think of the word abide—how I need to continue in Him, remain in Him, not give up, hang in there. Have you ever walked past a tree or grapevine and heard the branches grumbling or murmuring?

I know how ludicrous that sounds, but I think we need to consider the things we say and how we sound. Instead of hearing grumbling, we

often see the branches swaying in the wind. They are praising the Lord. We could take a lesson from that, also.

We are told in a parable in John 15:1-17, that He is the Vine and we are the branches. We are told to remain in Him and He will remain in us. No branch can bear fruit on its own, for apart from Him we can do nothing.

I began to learn some time ago about how important it is to come into a place of rest in God. I just wanted to end the phone call! However, doing so would have made the wait that much longer.

That is exactly what we do with the Lord. We get impatient with waiting on Him. We move out from under His watchful eye and care. When we do it ourselves, we make Jesus' death on the Cross null and void. Staying on the line, continuing to hold, not hanging up was just another lesson reminding me of how I need to abide.

Let's define the word. Abide means to stay, to reside, to continue firm or stable. It also means to bear or to wait for. To endure, to withstand, to remain, dwell, tarry, or live. The Greek root meaning for endurance is abide. It is maintaining an unbroken fellowship with the Lord.

I really believe that we should have the same attitude toward God that He has toward us. We are wed to Him, and our response should be, "I'll never leave you nor forsake you. I am with you to the end. I will love you in the good and the bad, in the happy and in the sad. I will stay with you when times are good, and I will stay when times are bad. I am with you when my health is good, not just when I need to be healed. I am here for the duration."

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through the one who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor anything above, nor anything below, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
(Romans 8:37-39, ISV)

I was walking one day and passed a tree branch that had not survived a storm. It was a fairly large branch, still pretty and green. As I continued to pass it each day, I could see it slowly withering away, and eventually it completely dried up. Actually it had died the day it was disconnected from its source, but it looked alive.

Those who believe but have somehow drifted away, who are not in the Word, not communicating with the Lord, basically doing their own thing, are much like the tree branch. Although disconnected, they might

for a while look healthy, alive, and vibrant. However, before long everyone will know what state they are in. They are dry, with no praise, no joy. They are dead.

Of course, the Scripture tells us the body without the Spirit is dead. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (John 15: 4-5, NKJV) Without Him we are nothing and, as the Scripture says, we can do nothing.

What do branches do anyway? They are offshoots, as we are His offspring. Stay put, abide, and you'll grow and have overflow. Always Be In Dependent Existence. That proves we are truly acknowledging Him as our Source. We draw our strength from Him; therefore, hang in there.

Staying should always be on our minds. We need to have stick-to-itiveness. Talk to yourself and say: "I've counted the cost and I'm in for the long haul." No branch can produce fruit without roots!

As Branch I'm Developing Endurance

TOTAL REALITY UNFOLDED THROUGH HIM

A person who has been placed on the witness stand to testify is usually asked, "Will you tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

They then reply, "I will."

But sometimes they don't.

This is called perjury, which means lying under oath. Well, we don't have to worry about being told an untruth by God. He can't lie.

Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly

encouraged. (Hebrews 6:16-18, NIV)

"I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name." (Psalm 138:2, NKJV) The way God communicates with us is through His Word, and His Word is associated with His character.

Somehow, we seem to think that if we see something, it is real. In fact, the things we see are temporal, which means limited by time or relating to life or secular concerns. In other words, it has nothing to do with the eternal.

If we can see it now, it's here today, but it may be gone tomorrow. Eternal means we can't see it with our physical eyes, but it is everlasting or perpetual. It endures throughout all times. And that is what we should have our eyes set on.

"Because we do not look for things that can be seen but for things that cannot be seen. For things that can be seen are temporary, but things that cannot be seen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18, ISV)

Let's take a look at the definition for reality: "That which has existence apart from any idea any mind may have of it, and which would exist if there were no mind anywhere to entertain a thought of it. That which is real has being in itself. It does not depend upon the observer for its validity." (Author Unknown)

WOW!

Truth is the real state of things. And that doesn't mean the truth as we see it. It is the Word of God, as spoken. It is in accord with the truth that is revealed by God, which is accurate and trustworthy. The Word of God is truth.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6, ISV)

Jesus prayed to the Father and asked Him to, "Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth." (John 17:17, ISV) We are cleansed and changed by the Word of God.

Total Reality Unfolded Through Him

REALIZING EVERYTHING ABOUT LIFE INVOKES TRUSTING YOU

The You that I am referring to in **REALIZING EVERYTHING ABOUT LIFE INVOKES TRUSTING YOU** is God.

Because **REALIZING EVERYTHING ABOUT LIFE INVARIABLY TOUCHES YOU** (you and me)!

I believe that repetition is good sometimes; for it is only by repetition that the truth will be learned. So, let's recall the definition for reality we read earlier: "That which has existence apart from any idea any mind may have of it, and which would exist if there were no mind anywhere to entertain a thought of it. That which is real has being in itself. It does not depend upon the observer for its validity." (Author Unknown)

Jesus is reality. Selah. Pause and think on that! He is the only One Who can carry us through the tough times when life deals us a blow. He not only carries us through, He knows where He is taking us. He brings us out by carrying us through whatever state we are in. He is our only hope and stay.

Following Jesus invokes our trust because we are prone to not trust, especially things we do not see. It is hard for us to put into effect or operation something that we cannot see. We are sort of like the people from Missouri: "the Show-Me State."

"Since we consider and look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are visible are temporal (brief and fleeting), but the things that are invisible are deathless and everlasting." (2 Corinthians 4:18, AMP) We really have to keep in mind that our walk is a walk of faith. Nothing that we see is the real thing, for whatever we can see is subject to change. And change will come eventually; so we can truthfully say, "This, too, shall pass."

I have been told countless times, "You are not facing reality." What the people who told me that consider real is not my reality and, therefore, not a part of my world. It appears real to them because they perceive it through natural eyes. But I walk by faith, and my spiritual eyesight becomes clearer and clearer as I believe what the Word of God says to me. Because I believe, I see through the eyes of faith.

Here again, it is a matter of keeping our focus on our Savior, the Author and Finisher of our faith. I don't know what we would do without the Lord, especially now when all we hear is gloom and doom. The world is geared to incite fear and frustration. Therefore, it is imperative that we

keep our eyes on Jesus.

We have to get into the Word and see what it has to say about any situation we are in. We must also take into account that this is what The FALL did for us. It reduced us to depending on our natural instincts instead of living a life of faith. We have **Fulfilled Appetite Lost Life** every time we yield to what we feel, touch, see, hear, and taste. Instead be a doer of the Word and walk by faith.

Realizing Everything About Life Invokes Trusting You

OUR BEING ENTIRELY YIELDED

When we were children, if my mother told us to do a thing and we did not do it, she had a way of saying, "Did you hear me?" She would then say, "I know you're not hearing me, because you would be doing what I said if you had."

I learned in later years what she was really saying. My mother was very stern in her discipline of us. She knew the importance of obedience. If we don't learn at an early age to be obedient to our parents, it can be very difficult for us to hear and obey the Lord and to adhere to the other authority figures in our lives. In some cases, it can certainly mean a matter of life or death.

Our Being Echoing Yes should be our motto. Unfortunately, that isn't usually the case. Sometimes obeying doesn't come easy for us. We are dealing with a rebellious nature that is being transformed into the image of God's Son, Jesus. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus learned obedience by the things He suffered. (Hebrews 5:8) If Jesus had to learn obedience, how much more will we have to.

What does obey mean? It means to hear, to give ear to, to comply with the orders of, to submit to the authority of, and to yield. The Word tells us, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Matthew 11:15, NKJV and other verses)

Interpretation: All who can hear, let them obey. I have a little show and tell that I do with my grandchildren. I get an umbrella and put it over their heads, telling them that they need to listen to and obey those who have been placed in their lives as authority figures (Daddy, Mommy,

Mimi, and Papa, and any other designated authority figure). I tell them as long as they stay under the umbrella, they are safe. The same way the umbrella is used to shield us from the elements of the weather, obedience is used to protect us and shield us from harm that would otherwise come to us. When they are disobedient, it is like having holes in the umbrella—they are not protected. But as long as they obey, they are safe.

"This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world." (1 John 5:2-4, NIV) I can tell you, it has not been easy for me. I know the Scriptures tell us that his commands are not burdensome and that everyone born of God overcomes the world, so now I am aware that when I am having a problem with obedience, it is a love walk problem, because I have not been perfected in God's love the way that I should be.

I can remember when I was growing up, there were certain things that I would not do. I did not want to hurt or disappoint my mother. I loved her and wanted to please her. I had her in mind when I was about to do something that would disrupt our relationship. Scripture says: "Joyful are those who listen to me, watching for me daily at my gates, waiting for me outside my home! For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord." (Proverbs 8:34-35, NLT)

As I was walking one afternoon I saw a nearly naked little boy running up and down the sidewalk. I thought, "How comfortable little ones are being naked." First of all, they don't realize they are naked; they are happy and free, unashamed.

That was the condition of Adam and Eve. The Scriptures tell us they were naked and not ashamed. They had no idea they had no clothing on, because, in fact, they were clothed—in God's righteousness. The minute they disobeyed, they realized they had been stripped of their spiritual clothing (covering). There is a great lesson to be learned in that passage of Scripture.

God's Word also tells us that "to obey is better than sacrifice." (1 Samuel 15:22, KJV)

It is better to obey and do as we should rather than substitute something else—some notion about what we think is right. Just do the right thing. OBEY!

The one thing that children should learn early on is this: With disobedience comes pain. If we disobey, we will suffer the consequences. And children will not learn properly if they are not allowed to suffer the consequences. Sometimes they make a horrendous mistake—as Adam and Eve did—and will carry the residue of it all their days. How I pray that we will learn to listen.

As the song goes, "Trust and obey, for there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey." (John H. Sammis, 1887) Obedience is the key that will bring the needed power into our lives. If we want that power, we must obey.

I believe this is the only way that our lives will have the impact on others that it should. Think about it. Do we think God is going to trust us to represent Him in the way that we should if we are not being obedient to what He would have us to do? And how is anyone we influence going to do right if we do not?

I had to start looking at that in regard to my children. Why were they not listening? One day I said to one of my sons, "You never listen." It was as if the words boomeranged back to me. "You don't, either."

I knew then I needed to improve my listening. I needed to be obedient to what the Lord had told me to do. Until you can be led, you cannot lead. A good place to start is at home.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will give us a revelation of the importance of obedience. The consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience were separation and death. We were never to be at odds with God, but look at what their failure to obey cost us. We are still experiencing the repercussions of what disobedience can do.

Only Jesus could bridge that gap that separated us from the Father. Disobedience is no small thing. "Lord, not my will, but Your will be done. Yes, Lord, we will obey."

Our Being Entirely Yielded

LET INSTRUCTIONS START TAKING EFFECT NOW

As mentioned earlier, when my siblings and I didn't do something my mother told us to do, she would say, "Did you hear what I said? I know

you didn't, because you're not doing what I told you to do."

So it's not surprising to know that one of the definitions for obey is to hear, to prick up the ears, and to listen with the intention to obey. When I complained that my son never listened, the Holy Spirit got my attention with, "You don't either." His Words made me stop and think. As a matter of fact, that was one of many valuable lessons I learned in those child-rearing days.

Not listening causes miscommunication. A short definition for communication could be: Information conveyed is received and understood.

So, could it be that we are not getting the message? "And He said, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear'" (Mark 4:9, ESV). Do you hear that? For we are being told if we do not do what we have heard, we are deceiving ourselves.

"But be doers of the Word [obey the message], and not merely listeners to it, betraying yourselves [into deception by reasoning contrary to the Truth]." (James 1:22, AMP)

"Cease to hear instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge." (Proverbs 19:27, ESV)

"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to His voice and hold fast to Him." (Deuteronomy 30:19-20a, NIV)

"Let the wise listen to these proverbs and become even wiser. Let those with understanding receive guidance." (Proverbs 1:55a, NLT)

"My Sheep listen to my voice, I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27, NIV)

Let Instructions Start Taking Effect Now

YIELDING ENDS STRUGGLING

Just say yes! Yes, Lord; yes, Lord, my soul says yes! Yes is an affirmative reply. It says, "I agree." It says, "It is so." Saying "yes" is

consenting to something.

When we say "yes," we mean, "Yes, Lord, You are right. I consent to what You say. I accept Your Words as truth."

In this, I must be totally honest with you. Some time ago, I discovered that I was really undone. I was in total opposition to something that God wanted to do in my life. I was discouraged to realize that, because up until that time I really thought I had it right with God.

Did the Holy Spirit ever shine the light on my soul and show me where I was! I had a choice to make. I could say "yes" and let Him do what needed to be done, or I could continue in my own way. God will do the work only when we agree with Him about our condition.

When we stop our struggling and say "yes," we are agreeing to the changes that are needed in our lives. Saying "yes" confirms that we agree with what Christ has done to bridge the gap and put us into the right relationship with God, and in order to continue in that fellowship, we must be obedient.

"Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" (Amos 3:3, NIV) Our struggling only prolongs the process. Whatever the situation, we need to stop opposing God.

What does yield mean? If we went by what we encounter daily on our highways when people come to yield signs, we would never know, would we? For we normally encounter drivers speeding up when they approach the yield sign.

Actually, to yield means to end resistance, to give over, surrender or relinquish, to move over, to make room for another, to be willing to concede, cease opposition, and stop fighting.

So much of our walk with God depends on our yielding. We want to do it our way and walk with God, too. That doesn't work. You have to make a choice.

I have a friend who is known for this phrase: "The yoke will choke." Why do we keep resisting? Have you ever tried walking a dog that wants to be the alpha—do its own thing and go where it wants to go? You keep trying to lead it in one direction, and it continually tries to go in another. It constantly strains at the collar, and chokes in the process.

That is why dogs are sent to obedience school. We say "heel" to the dogs, and we need to say "yield" to ourselves. Too bad we don't have a school to learn obedience. But, then again, we do. We are in school, the

school of God's Word.

"Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.'" (John 14:23-24, ESV)

From these Scriptures we can surmise that the proof of our love of God is our obedience. I always examine my obedience when I am having a problem with my love walk.

When we don't yield, we strain. In the meantime, we choke our blessings, choke the progress that we could be making in our lives. Why can't we just say "yes" and rest? Stop resisting.

Yielding Ends Struggling

DAILY I'M LIVING INTENTIONALLY GOVERNING EVERYTHING NEEDFUL TODAY

Do you wake up with purpose? Do you have a passion? What has God told you to do? Are you doing it?

I'm sorry to say that I wasn't for a long time. That is why I know that God is longsuffering. But I decided that I didn't want to continue to avoid doing what God told me to do. I want to be diligent to the work that I have been commissioned to do. For a long time, I was not clear on what it was that I was to be doing. I can tell you I have clarity for right now. I am focused and intentionally occupying.

"So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'" (Luke 19:13, NIV)

Jesus said: "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work." (John 9:4, NIV)

To be diligent requires steady, earnest, and energetic effort, painstakingly doing or showing care in what we are undertaking.

If we don't know what it is that we are to do, the Word tells us to "Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established." (Proverbs 16:3, ESV)

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6, NIV)

So, I would say that in everything that we do, we should be painstaking—doing it with all of our might. We were told to occupy until He returns. (Luke 19:13b) No, that does not mean sitting and occupying space on the sofa or taking up space in the universe.

Occupy means to engage your attention and energies toward something, to take possession of. In other words, we are to be found worthy of the call that He has placed on us. (Ephesians 4:1) Whatever talents we have are to be operational, yielding a return on the investment God has placed in us. Whatever our occupation, it should be done as unto the Lord.

My brother John told me recently that the definition he had gotten for procrastination is this: "the act of being presumptive." We seem to have the idea that we will be here tomorrow. This is indeed being very presumptuous, for we do not know what tomorrow might bring. That is why it is so necessary for us to occupy until He returns. Do what is necessary for today; don't put it off.

I like the word intentionally. It means that I am determined, I have resolve, and I am focused. No fooling around. I have purpose to my life.

Daily I'm Living Intentionally Governing Everything Needful Today

DISPOSITION REGARDING EVENT APPREHENSIVELY DISPLAYED

I'm starting a new job today, and I can hardly stand the anxiety. My mind has gone off into so many different directions, you cannot imagine. I have envisioned all sorts of things that will or could happen. How will I ever get through all of this? Will I be able to accomplish the workload, all the new people, and new environment? What if, how, when, and where?

Don't think for a minute that I have not had these feelings while endeavoring to finish this assignment. Have you ever gone through an ordeal of this sort? I have—most all of us have, if we are honest with ourselves and others.

What is dread? It is an overwhelming apprehension, to regard with fear. It's having a fear of some event, life, or the future. We dread getting up in the morning, dread cooking breakfast, dread going to work, dread the work that we are doing. On and on we go—dreading. Why can't we begin to look at things differently and have an attitude of anticipation and gratitude? We need to learn to enjoy our lives and those around us, instead of having this dreadful outlook on everything. The only dread we should have is that of displeasing the Lord.

This is what I believe we should do: "This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118:24, ESV)

Whatever the day has to offer, Lord, I offer it up to you as a prayer. You go before me and do in and for me all that I am not able to be and do for myself.

This is the attitude that we need in order to do what is necessary in our lives, to complete our everyday tasks. Also, we need to be there for other people who need our help. We need to be mindful that we are supporting them, not with a spirit of dread, but with a heart grateful that we are able to do it.

I heard Joyce Meyers say that fear is a cousin to dread, and I truly believe that. This has been my challenge in this project. I finally realized that it was not that I didn't want to write. I was afraid to. Of course, since I am not the Source, only the conduit, I had to get over my fear and dread. I had to realize the words were not from me but coming through me.

Often we can see a word within a word. In this instance, we find read in the word dread. My interpretation: Often we read something into a situation that has not happened and will probably never happen. We are expending energy on something of no value that we could otherwise be doing something productive.

"For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Proverbs 23:7a, KJV) We need to take those thoughts captive and bring them into obedience with the Word.

"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds." (2 Corinthians 10:4, NIV)

God gave us our emotions, but they are to be our servants, not to master us, having us going off into all kinds of frenzies. The Lord has already told us, "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD,

'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV)

Whenever the enemy brings thoughts of dread to your mind, immediately rein in those thoughts and make them comply with what the Lord has to say about the situation. The battle is in the mind, and if those thoughts are not bought into line, we will get into trouble every time.

Let us begin to do what the Word has told us to do. "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." (Philippians 4:8, NIV)

"You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you." (Isaiah 26:3, NIV)

Disposition Regarding Event Apprehensively Displayed

YOUR OWN KINGDOM ENDED

Did you ever get tired? Just completely worn out trying to order your own life? As Dr. Phil would say, "How is that working for you?"

Whatever we have done so far has not worked. I have certainly come to the conclusion, "This just isn't working. And furthermore, I'm tired."

That is why Jesus said to us:

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

"Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered." (Proverbs 28:26, ESV)

I confided to a friend some time ago that I really want to see God do something in my life, rather than my making things happen (which, by the way, I have a knack of doing quite often). If things are not happening fast enough to suit me, I tend to try to help the process along.

But I'm learning something in all of that: I get absolutely no satisfaction. Why? Because I did it. I made it happen. In fact, I said to her, "I want God to do something in my life so that I and everyone who knows me

will recognize that God did it." We do it our way, and it does not work.

I have to keep reminding myself, "If you could do it yourself; why did Jesus have to go to the Cross?" There would have been no need for Him to do so. We are the reason that He had to suffer and die. Simply said, we are just like Adam and Eve, thinking that we know better than God or that we are just as knowledgeable as He is.

What a shame! What is the purpose of a yoke? It is meant to team up. There are two instead of one pulling the load, and they agree to go in the same direction. Yoke means to unite, link, couple, and join.

"Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" (Amos 3:3, NIV) Ending the reign of our own kingdom means that we have given up the control of our lives and consented to the reign of Christ in our lives. We have surrendered all the rooms of our heart for the occupancy of the Holy Spirit, to let Him move in to lead and guide us in all truth. Our own kingdom has come to an end, and we are willing to go in the right direction. When we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, our kingdom of darkness comes to an end. We have yoked ourselves up with the One who is able to keep us until the day of Jesus Christ. Praise the Lord!

Your Own Kingdom Ended

WISDOM IN LIVING LIFE

Would you want to be a robot, programmed to do someone else's bidding? Well, thank God, we are not robots. Even if we were, we wouldn't know it. Robots don't think, feel, or have any emotions—they are robots. They are programmed to do what someone else wants them to do.

And yes, there are some people who think they have been given the job of keeping everyone else in line. They are doing something that God Himself does not do: trying to coerce people to do something they are not willing to do of their own volition.

We have been given the privilege of making choices for ourselves. But, with freedom comes responsibility. We have also been given instructions and a guide to lead us in the right direction, but we have the option of obeying or not obeying. It's that simple.

Think about it. If we can love God, we can reject God. Everything that we have the option of doing, we have the option of not doing. We need to learn to be wise in our choosing.

In his devotional *Everyday Life* (<http://www.allenrandolph.com>), Pastor Allen Randolph wrote:

"Your will is a powerful thing, a wondrous gift given to you by God. God meant for your will to serve you, to give you strength of determination and direction. Your will is at its best when in submission and agreement with God's will. When you allow your will to wrongly rule you, it replaces determination to do what's right with stubbornness to do only what you want. Your will is given to empower you to serve God with loving wholeheartedness, not because you must but because you choose. Who but a loving God would give such a gift and trust you to use it wisely and well? God does not usurp your will even when you use it wrongly. He will not coerce or control your will, against your will; he desires to rightly direct your will through your trusting cooperation."

No one wants to be told what to do or when to do it, and God doesn't do that. However, I would like to emphasize that, while our wills are given free rein and we can choose whatever we want, know there are consequences to our choices.

We need to look to Jesus, who is the Author and Finisher of our faith. (Hebrews 12:2) Here is Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane:

"Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, 'Sit here while I go and pray over there.' And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me.' He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.'" (Matthew 26:36-39, NKJV)

John MacArthur's commentary from the *MacArthur Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson, 2006) on this passage of Scripture states: "This implies no conflict between the Persons of the Godhead. Rather, it graphically reveals how Christ in His humanity voluntarily surrendered His will to the will of the Father in all things—precisely so that there would be no conflict between the divine will and His desires."

"'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work.'" (John 4:34, NIV)

"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." (John 5:30, NIV)

Again we read, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me." (John 6:38, NIV)

Jesus came to do the will of the Father—that was His mission.

Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him." (John 8:28-29, NKJV)

He came not to exert His own will and desires but to please the Father.

"Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: 'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.' Then I said, 'Behold, I have come—In the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God.' Previously saying, 'Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them' (which are offered according to the law), then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.' He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:5-10, NKJV)

Sometimes this gift we have been given can work against us as well as for us if we do not wisely discern right from wrong. We can be so careless in our choosing, and we make choices that alter the course of our lives. We do not know more than our Creator.

"People ruin their lives by their own foolishness and then are angry at the LORD." (Proverbs 19:3, NLT) That is saying that we would much rather have someone else to blame, rather than make the choice and take responsibility for our actions. We make the mess and then blame God.

"There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death." (Proverbs 14:12, NLT) What it all boils down to is: Life or death. You choose.

Wisdom In Living Life

MENTAL INCLINATIONS NEEDING DIRECTION

The mind is the fertile soil that awaits the seeds for sowing. Before The Fall, Adam and Eve had God's thoughts. They didn't have any other frame of reference. They were in agreement with His plans for their lives until Eve was deceived and decided that she wanted to be like God.

We all most likely have heard the saying, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." How true that is, and the best way to keep from wasting our minds is found in this Scripture. "Commit your works to the LORD, And your thoughts will be established." (Proverbs 16:3, NKJV)

I have come to the conclusion that my soul is definitely at odds with God, because it does not want to obey. It hates the things of God. My soul, not renewed, is at enmity with God.

Scripture tells us that our thinking should distinguish us from the world: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." (Romans 12:2, NIV)

We are cleansed by the Word. I visualize a washing machine cleaning the clothes. I envision the Word swishing around in our minds and cleaning up our twisted thinking to bring our thinking in line with the Word.

"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. 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. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds." (Ephesians 4:17-23, NIV)

"Set your minds on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." (Colossians 3:2, NASB)

We are also told to take every thought captive and make it obedient to the Word of God. (2 Corinthians 10:5) We cannot afford to let our thinking go rampant and take us to places in our minds that we should not go. We see the results of that on the news every day.

This is our news: Our minds need directing. That is why it is so important for us to get into the Word, so that the Word can get into us. We need to saturate ourselves with the truth. We also know books and movies can work on our minds for good or for evil.

What do you feed your mind, so that your spirit can get nourishment? (Luke 4:4) Whatever you feed it is what you will get out. I know you have heard the mind compared to the computer. In either case, we can get out only what we have put in.

The definition for mind is the element or complex of elements in an individual that feels, perceives, thinks, wills, and especially reasons. It is the conscious mental events and capabilities in an organism. The mind is where our intentions and desires are formulated. It is the seat of the intelligence.

The Bible has a lot to say about the mind. If not directed properly, as my grandmother would say, the mind can get us into a "heap of trouble." The mind is the battlefield, for everything that originates starts here.

It can certainly be used for good, and it just as easily can be misused. Jesus was asked the question: What must we do to inherit eternal life?

"And He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all of your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.'" (Luke 10:27, ESV)

Jeremiah tells us that only God knows what is in the mind of a man. (Jeremiah 17:10)

James Allen writes in *As a Man Thinketh* (Tarcher, 2006),

Mind is the Master power that molds and makes,
And Man is Mind,
And evermore he takes
The tool of Thought,
And, shaping what he wills,
Brings forth a thousand joys, a thousand ills:—
He thinks in secret, and it comes to pass:
Environment is but his looking glass.

Everything that happens to us has to be settled in the mind. On one occasion, the results of a mammogram came back suspicious, and I had to consult with my physician. I can remember fretting and visualizing all kinds of things that might be wrong. I was really afraid. One day as I slept, I heard, "The battle is in the mind." I knew I had to settle up there, get into the Word, and believe God for what it had to say to me concerning that situation.

There are so many places in the Word that tell us about the mind. One in particular that comes to mind is:

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:5-8, NKJV)

Most of all, remember this: If we are in Christ, we have the mind of Christ.

Mental Inclinations Needing Direction

FIXING OUR CONCENTRATION UPON SAVIOR (SOURCE)

Think about what would happen if we kept our focus fixed on Him. For one, we would be de-stressed. Whatever is troubling us would be minor compared to His almighty power. That should in itself be reason enough to fix our eyes on Jesus.

I would encourage all of us to concentrate on the Lord. I read this little line and never forgot it: "The power of God is the measure of my expectation." (Andrew Murray, *Abide in Christ*, Wilder Publications, 2008) I write that to say this: We need to magnify the Lord and not our troubles, to fix our attention on Him and not what is happening in and around us.

Let Him be the center of our attraction. The Word needs to be the elephant, and the trouble is the ant. "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19, ESV)

We become what we focus on. That is nothing new for me to say; we hear it all the time. We just don't do it.

"Looking away [from all that will distract] to Jesus, Who is the Leader and the Source of our faith [giving the first incentive for our belief] and is also its Finisher [bringing it to maturity and perfection]. He, for the joy [of obtaining the prize] that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising and ignoring the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2-3, AMP)

We can never say this verse enough: "You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!" (Isaiah 26:3, NLT) It is a conditional verse—if you keep your mind fixed on Him. You give Him your concerns; He gives you His peace.

The origin for the word focus is very interesting: The focus of life in ancient times was the hearth. Focus is the Latin word for hearth, fireplace, from which come Italian fuoco, Spanish fuego, and French feu, all meaning fire. The modern sense of focus was coined by the German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) and was first used by him to designate the point at which a parabolic mirror concentrates light rays to cause burning. *Family Word Finder* (Reader's Digest Association, 1975), 315.

Can you see the correlation here? If we concentrate or fix or focus on Jesus and the finished work that He did for us, it will become burned on the pages of our hearts. Focus means a center of interest or activity, close or narrow attention, concentration. It is the central point, or center. It is the concentration of attention or energy on something (Someone, in this instance).

Fixing Our Concentration Upon Savior (Source)

LIGHT ALONG MY PATH

A lamp is a burning light or torch, a candle or light that is carried in the hand. The function of a lamp is to light our path, to help us to see where to set your feet.

I am using lamp as it is presented in this Scripture: "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105, AMP) The fact

that the lamp is carried in the hand implies to me that we are to keep the Word of God close at hand, ever before our eyes.

Seeing makes walking a lot easier, because you can tell where to set your feet. In fact, holding the lamp out too far defeats the purpose for the lamp and makes it almost impossible to see. We have to keep the lamp close. The only way to stay on the right path is to keep the lamp before us.

The Word gives us light to guide us in the right direction. It's like having your headlights on bright on a dark road. If we just follow the light, we can see and stay on the right path.

I had a dream once that I was driving a big van, and it was pitch dark all around us. I couldn't see a thing except the headlights of the van ahead of me. In the dream, I was told to keep my eyes on the light. That is exactly what we need to do in regards to the Word. Stay in it—don't just read it and turn away. Don't deviate to the right or left; just stay true to it and do what it says.

If we are to reach our destination, we must keep our focus—keep our eyes on the path that has been laid out for us. The Word keeps us on the path. And we don't need to see all the way down the road, either. Just enough light to see directly in front of us is sufficient to get us from Point A to Point B.

Seeing too much at one time might not be such a good idea. God is the One who knows all there is to know and what to do with that knowledge. He gives us what we need, when we need it.

"For the commandment is a lamp, and the whole teaching (of the law) is light, and reproofs of discipline are the way of life." (Proverbs 6:23, AMP)

"The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple." (Psalm 119:130, NKJV)

As we get into the Word and let the Word get into us, we will have direction for our lives, for we are being led by the One who is truly the Light of the world.

Light Along My Path

THINK HEALTHY OR UNHEALTHY GATEKEEPING HAS TO START

Gatekeeping! Gates are structured to let things and people in and out. A gate is the entrance into something. A gate usually has a key, and whoever owns the gate has the key. The owner does not have to let in everyone who comes to the gate. The main purpose of the gate is to protect what we have inside and to keep intruders out.

David said, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11, NIV) Let's hide the Word in our hearts so that the Holy Spirit can bring the Word that we need, in our time of need, back to our remembrance.

"Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have love, pity, and mercy for him, and to our God, for He will multiply to him His abundant pardon." (Isaiah 55:7, AMP)

Uncensored thinking will get us into a heap of trouble, if we are not careful to control our thoughts. Whatever you feed on is what you will become. I heard this thought one day: "Whatever you want to die; don't feed it."

We are told, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." (Proverbs 4:23, NIV) We are the gatekeepers of our minds. We hold the key and determine what goes in and out of our minds. Why would we let someone that we knew to be dangerous into our home? Why would we let intruders in? Would we open the door to a robber? Then why do we let every thought come and make its home in our minds? Why do we let our thoughts go rampant?

It has been said, "You can't keep a bird from flying over your head, but you can sure keep it from making a nest in your hair."

"For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:4-5, NASB)

See the emphasis on "we are," for *we are* the ones that have to take the thoughts captive and make them do what the Word says. No one else can do it for us; we have to do it. Why? Because we have the right to think whatever we want. So, let us begin to think on the right things.

Yes, we do have control over what we think about. In fact, we have been told what to think about. "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." (Philippians 4:8, NIV)

If we change our thinking, we can change our lives. We wonder why we are in such despair. It can be traced to the way we think. Everything begins with a thought. Our thinking has to be restructured and brought in line with the Word of God.

Think about this: The thing that separates Christians from the world is their thinking. Just listen to them talk. When we are born again of the Spirit of God, our minds have to be cleansed by the washing with water through the Word. (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Think **Healthy Or Unhealthy Gatekeeping Has To Start**

SEEDS

Minds—fertile fields, awaiting seeds for sowing.
As sperm travels to connect with the egg
So thoughts hover to find entry into the mind.
Once there, they find their way into the heart.
Thoughts become words, and words become actions,
Showing us a clear picture
Of what thoughts can do to the heart.
You are the gatekeeper; you hold the key.
Only you can guard your heart.

METHOD OF THINKING IS VIEWED ETERNALLY

Often, it is not what we say or do so much as why we say or do it. I am amazed at how we can justify what we do or say and condemn others for the same thing. I say this because I am guilty of it, and the Lord takes me to task on it every time.

"But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his

height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'" (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV) We should constantly ask the Lord to search our hearts and know our thoughts to see if there is anything in us that needs correcting and to lead us in the right way. (Psalm 139:23) God examines the motives of our hearts.

Therefore, we should ask ourselves: What is the underlying reason for what we say or do? We need to constantly ask ourselves this question as God examines our intentions.

"People may be pure in their own eyes, but the LORD examines their motives." (Proverbs 16:2, NLT)

"The LORD's light penetrates the human spirit, exposing every hidden motive." (Proverbs 20:27, NLT)

"So don't get ahead of the Master and jump to conclusions with your judgments before all the evidence is in. When he comes, He will bring out in the open and place in evidence all kinds of things we never even dreamed of—inner motives and purposes and prayers. Only then will any one of us get to hear the 'Well done!' of God." (1 Corinthians 4:5, MSG)

"Even children are known by the way they act, whether their conduct is pure, and whether it is right." (Proverbs 20:11, NLT)

We need to understand that our hearts are an open book before God. He knows our thoughts before we think them. (Psalm 139:2b) Let us be honest in our assessment of ourselves. In the Gospels, Jesus always knew what was in the hearts of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They always had an underlying agenda trying to trip Jesus up on something He said or did.

Are we honest with ourselves? If we can lie to ourselves, most likely we will not be honest with other people. It is a good idea to be outright and upfront with ourselves and others so that we will not be judged. "But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged." (1 Corinthians 11:31, NASB)

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." (Jeremiah 17:9-10, NIV)

Realize that God knows us—everything about us—and perceives our

thoughts from afar. Our motives—whether they are pure or ulterior—are a matter of the heart. I believe that as we get things right with God, the purer our hearts will become. As we think His thoughts, we will then say and do the right things. Guard your heart. "Even Death and Destruction hold no secrets from the LORD. How much more does he know the human heart!" (Proverbs 15:11, NLT)

Method Of Thinking Is Viewed Eternally

CLEARLY HAVING OPTIONS I CAN EXPRESS

A lot of us couldn't wait until we were eighteen, and, oh boy, when we turned twenty-one, we really thought we had arrived. We didn't realize we had only gained a number of years, but we had not yet matured—not by a long shot. We were by no means grown.

In some states, we were by law considered of age, free to make choices that up to that time we had not been allowed to make. Our parents and other people had made all of our decisions, but then we were about to embark upon our own life. Freedom, freedom! And were we ever expressing ourselves.

But were we thinking about the consequences of our choices? No. Emphatically no! We were not. We were just happy because we thought we were free to make our own choices about things pertaining to our lives. Important things, I might add.

That's how most of us started out. We did not understand that, in order for things to go well for us, our will and choices would have to line up and be in agreement with God. "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" (Amos 3:3, NIV)

Eventually, we will have to make a choice about our eternal state. With all the choices that we make, this will be the most important, by far. We are pilgrims on this earth; we are not settlers. During the time we have on earth, we have the opportunity to make right choices. Where do we choose to spend eternity?

One of my grandsons said something to his mother one day that she often said to him. "Mom, you need to go to your room and think about what you just did." So often, that is what we need to do: Go to our rooms

and think about what we are contemplating doing. It would in the end save us a lot of heartache and sorrow. Freedom of choice! We have plenty of that. We need to **Consider How Our Options Significantly End.**

Being able to make our own choices can be a blessing or a curse, because what we choose to do everyday proves to be life or death. We make the choice.

Freedom of choice! What a responsibility! Without the freedom to make choices, we would be robots, programmed to do someone's bidding.

The LORD placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the LORD God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die." (Genesis 2:15-17, NLT)

They chose to do it their way. See where it got them—and us.

When choosing, we should stop and think about the consequences of our choices. However, we seldom do. I have to tell you, I have not always chosen wisely. I have become more selective in my choices, taking into account what the outcome could be.

Now, I know how important it is to seek God's will in my decision-making. I've learned that we need to consider how our choices will affect our life and the lives of others around us. We can't undo some things. We can't un-ring the bell or un-spill the milk.

"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live." (Deuteronomy 30:19, NKJV)

And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:15, NKJV)

Have you ever thought about what would have happened if Sister Eve had gone to her room and thought about what she was about to do? Have you ever thought about what would have happened if Brother Adam had been obedient and not listened to Sister Eve? Not a day passes that we don't have to make a choice, so go to your room, think about it, and choose wisely!

Clearly Having Options I Can Express

POSITIVELY A TEST IN ENDURANCE NOTHING COMES EASY

Do you ever wonder why when you get in line to pay for something the line comes to a halt? That happens to me quite often. The clerk has to leave her station for a price check, or the person in line ahead of me is just plain slow. Rarely when I'm finished with my shopping can I walk right up to the cash register, checkout, and go. All those times when that doesn't happen teach us patience. We can't do anything but wait, anyway, if what we are doing is important. So let's learn to take advantage of the opportunities we are given to learn this valuable lesson. Yes, let patience have her perfect work.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."
(James 1:2-4, NKJV)

Every day we can expect something to test our faith, and if we let it do its work, we will grow in patience. I'm trying to learn in the small everyday things, like waiting for a train to pass. I learned to keep a book to read in the event that I find myself having to wait.

While waiting in line for service, I pray for the people around me. I begin to look for opportunities to engage with people so that I could speak a word into their lives or so they can bless me somehow. There are so many ways that we can learn patience if we just stay still and wait.

We're not impatient with just our time. We can be impatient with people in general or a particular person, projects, driving in traffic. In my case, until I learned better, I was impatient about my loved ones coming to the Lord.

We can learn to wait on the Lord in a myriad of ways. One time when I was displaying some very serious impatience, I thought of this Scripture: "By your patience possess your souls." (Luke 21:19, NKJV) By standing firm, you shall live.

Patience is a fruit of the Spirit, and I'm convinced that only the Holy Spirit can do the work of perfecting the fruit in us. We are told that

"Love is patient and kind." (1Corinthians 13:4a, ESV)

To become patient, we learn to be steadfast and to endure. If we are consistent in our behavior, people will begin to take notice. Let us draw people to the Lord because of our good fruit. In other words, we are meant to portray the characteristics of the Lord. We are to do the same things on earth as it is in heaven. We learn to patiently wait for the promises of God, for He Who has promised is faithful. Moses endured because he was able to see Him Who is invisible as visible.

No, we don't like waiting, but we must do so if we are to learn patience. Patience is the act of calmly waiting—stressing calmly—for what is expected. Most of our waiting is not calm. Most of the time we gripe, murmur, and complain, which, by the way, does not please the Lord.

We pray, "Lord give me patience." We then get a test, and if you are like me, sometimes we blow it. We have so many opportunities in the course of a day to practice patience, we just need to become aware of them and put it into practice. Not to worry though, we will always get another opportunity to get it right. There will always be another test. We keep getting to try all over again. We can't flunk out of God's school.

Positively A Test In Endurance Nothing Comes Easy

RELEASE EVERY SITUATION TOTALLY

We have seen the young mothers with a sling over their shoulders to carry a baby. The sling keeps the baby close to the mother as she goes about her daily chores. The baby is safely bound to the mother and passively involved with everything the mother is doing. However, their passive involvement does not require them to exert any energy. The baby is totally at rest, not worried about a thing. In fact, the baby doesn't know how to worry. The baby is totally confident that it is being supported and cared for. Secure in the mother's love, the baby is not afraid of anything. The baby doesn't have a care; it is along for the ride.

Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words (W.E Vine & Merrill F. Unger, Thomas Nelson, 1996) defines rest this way: "cessation, refreshment, rest, to make to cease."

Christ's rest is not a rest from work, but in work, "not the rest of

inactivity but of the harmonious working of all the faculties and affections—of will, heart, imagination, conscience—because each has found in God the ideal sphere for its satisfaction and development." (J. Patrick in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, James Hastings, Hendrickson Publishers, 1963)

So the rest I am speaking of here is not merely inactivity. It is a cessation of our activity; in other words, an ending of our always trying to work out our own problems, of being in the drivers' seats of our lives, of not trusting God with the details of our daily lives.

We are to cease from our activities, to be free from whatever wearies, worries, or disturbs us. We are to be quiet before the Lord. Rest is to "Be still, and know that [He is] God." (Psalm 46:10, ESV)

To rest in God, we must rely on Him. I like the root meaning of the word rely: to bind again, hence, to bind strongly. So we are to be bound strongly to Him by trust and confidence, just as the baby is bound tightly to the mother by the sling over her back.

God has never stopped working. He finished that portion of His work that was creation. He was pleased and satisfied with what He had done, so He rested. God was pleased and satisfied with what Jesus had done, and through His atonement, we can rest. We can cease from our works because the work is finished. "Jesus said, 'It is finished.'" (John 19:30, NIV)

Our works are no longer the basis for our righteousness. The Scripture states: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." (Romans 10:4, KJV)

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. (Hebrews 4:1-3, KJV)

After reading this passage of Scripture, I can see the seriousness of our coming to a place of rest in God. If the Israelites were disqualified, the same is awaiting us if we do not come into that state of rest. They did not enter because of unbelief.

"SINCE ALL this is true, we ought to pay closer attention than ever to the truths that we have heard, lest in any way we drift past [them] and

slip away." (Hebrews 2:1, AMP)

We are told to come to the Lord and we will find rest for our souls.

"Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."
(Matthew 11:28, NIV) I believe we will be held much more accountable
than the Israelites because of the finished work of Jesus on the Cross.

We don't have to labor anymore. We need to learn to believe, so if you
have a need to labor, just labor to rest. We are being challenged here to
realize the absolute necessity of avoiding the mistakes our forefathers
made.

We need to remember the things that happened to them can and will
happen to us if we do not come to that place of rest that we have been
called into. Let us learn from the Scriptures, which are given to us as an
example. (1 Corinthians 10:6)

Release Every Situation Totally

WHY OPPOSE REST REFRAIN YOURSELF

Before I began to really trust the Lord, my imagination would take me to
places I did not need to go. Particularly, when one of the children would
go out without me, I imagined all sorts of things that might happen.
Unfortunately, I let my mind run rampant. Thank God, none of the
catastrophes I imagined ever happened.

Worry is a terrible habit to get into, for it gets us absolutely nowhere.
Most importantly, we should understand the root of it: fear. Worry keeps
us from having the peace and rest that we need, that we can have when
we know that our times are in God's hands. (Psalm 31:15)

We are to rest, and instead we worry—the exact opposite of what we
should be doing. We ruminate and waste precious time. We go over and
over the same thing in our minds, when we should be going over and
over the Scriptures.

The Bible tells us to, "Trust in the LORD with all [our] heart, And lean
not on your own understanding; In all of [our] ways acknowledge Him,
and He shall direct [our] paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6, NKJV)

Worry means to strangle or choke, to torment, to subject to persistent or
nagging attention or effort, to afflict with mental distress or agitation, to

make anxious, to feel or experience concern or anxiety, to fret. In other words, no peace! None of that sounds good, does it? So why do we worry? Because we do not rest, believing in the finished work of Jesus.

Worry is contrary to what the Word of God tells us. It is resisting the truth and accepting a lie. In total contrast, we should trust in the Lord, resting in His promises, no matter what. Worry is exactly what some people have said: It's like sitting in a rocking chair, just rocking, going nowhere, just a waste of time. It's energy spent doing something nonconstructive and nonproductive. When you get done rocking you are still sitting there, in the same place. You haven't gone anywhere, just made a lot of movement. Remember what we read about rest.

We cannot worry and have faith at the same time. We have to do one or the other. If we believe, we will not worry, and if we worry, we do not believe. It's a simple fact. Do we not know what to believe or who to believe? So then, that raises another question: Who will we believe? We have to choose to believe what the Word of God has to say to us and about us, or we will believe the enemy of our souls.

"Do not fret or have any anxiety about anything, but in every circumstance and in everything, by prayer and petition (definite requests), with thanksgiving, continue to make your wants known to God." (Philippians 4:6, AMP)

I challenge you to read Matthew 6:24-34 and Hebrews 4 (very important reading). We are not fatherless children, and we misrepresent our Father when we are bogged down with cares and concerns. Let's STOP IT! NOW!

"You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You." (Isaiah 26:3, NKJV) What are your thoughts? What are you imagining? Rein in those thoughts. You can do it. You have been commanded to! God doesn't require anything of us that He has not equipped us to do. We can do it. Don't worry. Trust God, and be happy.

Why Oppose Rest Refrain Yourself

ACTIVITY DEvised VERY EFFECTIVELY REFUTING STATED INTENTION TOWARD YOU

I remember a time when my children were very young. They were napping one day, and I decided to take a nap along with them. I had what I call a talking dream, in which I don't see anyone. I just hear voices. This particular time, I heard two words over and over in my head as I slept. They were being spelled out. "Not adversary, but adversity."

I awoke, got up, and got the dictionary. Adversary means an opponent, one who strives against us, an enemy, and also opposite to. Adversity means unfavorable circumstances, misfortune, calamity, disaster, ill-fortune, bad luck, catastrophe, mishap, affliction, trouble, distress, trial, woe.

Adversary refers to a person. Adversity refers to circumstances, something going on around me, not in me. I learned that I don't need to fight our adversary, the devil, for he has already been defeated. What I do is submit to God, resist the devil, and he will flee. (James 4:7) Then I stand; I am the "amen" to what Jesus has already accomplished on the cross.

People are not my enemy; neither is adversity. Actually, it can be my friend if I embrace what God wants to accomplish in my life. When adversity comes, we blame, complain, or turn on each other. (Psalm 34:19) This is exactly what the enemy of our souls wants us to do. He delights in our fighting each other. His ploy is to make us doubt the Word of God. He is the enemy.

After a while, and after much adversity, I began to understand more and more the meaning of the dream. "Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble." (Job 14:1, NIV)

"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."
(Proverbs 17:17, NIV)

I can also remember another time when I was experiencing some difficulties and the Holy Spirit gave me this verse: "If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses?" (Jeremiah 12:5a, NIV)

When I had first believed on the Lord and did not know much Scripture, I remembered a song that told us to expect some rain along with the sunshine. I figured out after a while that all sun and no rain creates a desert, which I'm sure I wouldn't like, either.

My husband served in the military, and the Lord showed me many similarities between being in the military and being a Christian. We signed up, and we are no longer our own. Some of us are like recruiters.

We tell the ones we're witnessing to all about the benefits, and we fail to mention that they might have to fight in a war. The newly saved have entered a war zone; they have a real enemy now. Before, he was killing you slowly. Now he wants you dead without delay. But remember, God has good plans for you.

Adversity comes to test our faith, to see if we really believe what the Scriptures say, and if we endure and trust God. When we decide to follow the Lord, we become a prey. (Isaiah 59:15a) We can expect opposition when we enter a war zone.

We can either believe God, or we can believe our circumstances. This is only a test. This is not an actual emergency. It's a testing of your faith. We have the "Greater One" living in us. (I John 4:4) Nothing can separate us from His love. (Romans 8:31, 38-39)

Throughout Scriptures we can see that God can be trusted. We need to understand God allows the adversity that comes into our lives because He is perfecting us. "The steps of a [righteous] man are ordered by the LORD." (Psalm 37:23, KJV)

Activity Devised Very Effectively Refuting Stated Intention Toward You

ALREADY FORETOLD FOR LIFE ISSUES COUNTLESS TROUBLES INTERRUPTING OUR NORMAL STATE

Unfortunately, some of us don't know that Scripture foretold that we will suffer afflictions. Believe me—it really is in the Bible. Knowing that we will have difficulties, it is a good idea for us to know some things that will help us in challenging situations. Find out what your inheritance is; know what has been promised to us.

One day while in the midst of a traumatic situation in my life, I came home, barely making it through the door, feeling as if a knife had been put into my chest. Finally, in a place where I could release all the pent-up emotions, I began to sob, clinging to the doorknob. I heard, "I beg your pardon, I never promised you a rose garden. Along with the sunshine, there's gotta be a little rain sometimes." (Words from the song "Rose Garden" by Joe South) Believe me, at that moment I burst into almost hysterical laughter.

I was a baby in Christ. I did not know the Word, but the Teacher, the Holy Spirit, led me that night to this very Scripture: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all." (Psalm 34:19, NKJV)

I also began to realize how much God loved me.

And have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, "My child, don't make light of the LORD's discipline, and don't give up when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child." (Hebrews 12:5-6, NLT)

You cannot know how important this was to me in that period of my life!

This was to set the framework and the foundation of my trusting God. I began to realize that I needed to know the character of God. God is good, and He only means good for us. He doesn't make bad things happen to us, but He does allow things to come into our lives. If the problem gets to us, it had to come through Him first. He will use it to work things together for our good in that particular situation. Because we love Him, we are being molded into the image of His dear Son, Jesus.

Nothing comes as a surprise to God. Think about it. If anything could surprise Him, He would cease to be God. Remember, all our days were written in a book before there ever was one. (Psalm 139:16)

I began to sense that the Lord was much more interested in my character than in the circumstances I faced. Although I didn't like the circumstance, it certainly served its purpose in my life. David said: "It is good for that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." (Psalm 119:71, KJV)

"FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons." (Hebrews 12:6-8, NASB)

This Scripture was instrumental in me grasping the truth of God's love for me. If I had not gone through those troublesome times in my life, I do not believe I would be where I am today.

"When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future." (Ecclesiastes 7:14, NIV) Getting into the Word is crucial for our spiritual growth. Always, when reading the Word, ask the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of your understanding.

It helped me when I knew that I was not just going through suffering without a reason. Knowing it was foretold and that I would be delivered gave me hope. Knowing that I was loved was paramount.

We plan, but God always knows His ultimate plan for us. Things work out to that end for us if we will cooperate with Him.

Countless things will come into our lives that we did not plan, and the plans we make will be interrupted. How many times have you said or heard someone say, "I didn't sign up for this." That's life. "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." (Proverbs 16:33, NIV)

We have to trust Him when the unexpected—to us—comes into our lives. Nothing is unexpected to God. Yes, we need to make plans, but always remember that He knows the plans He has for us, and they are good and not evil to bring us to our expected end. (Jeremiah 29:11)

In the movie by the same name, Forrest Gump stated, "Mama said, Life is like a box of chocolates; you never know what you're going to get." We don't know what we're going to get, but we do know that God is good, and everything that happens to us is for our good. Afflictions are part of the things that God takes and works together for our good.

Already Foretold For Life Issues Countless Troubles Interrupting Our Normal State

DISBELIEF OF UNERRING BIBLICAL TRUTHS

Doubt is to be uncertain about someone or something, to have no confidence, to have a distrust of someone or something, to consider something unlikely. Doubt, like faith, is a matter of the heart.

"Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him." (Mark 11:23,

ESV) Believe that what He says will come to pass, being in total agreement with what God has said.

"And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." (Hebrews 11:6, ESV)

I really don't know how you can have a meaningful relationship without having truth or trust. To receive salvation we are told:

"That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, 'WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.'" (Romans 10:9-11, NASB)

In the Garden, the devil planted a seed of doubt about the validity of God's Word in Eve's heart. Planting doubt is the devil's job. Ours is to seek truth and believe. "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:13, NKJV)

"God is not a man, that He should tell or act a lie, neither the son of man, that He should feel repentance or compunction [for what He has promised]. Has He said and shall He not do it? Or has He spoken and shall He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19, AMP)

For me, this was the clincher, a decisive fact in helping me to trust the validity of God's Word. Some things truly have to be foundational truths for us. Having faith is one of them. You cannot doubt and have an intimate relationship with the Lord, because, if you doubt, you don't believe words He speaks to you.

What if I constantly doubted that my husband loves me? He would feel sad because he wants only good for me, and in the best way he knows, he has proven his love by his actions.

How do you think Jesus felt when Thomas wouldn't believe until he saw and touched Him?

"But Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples kept telling him. 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said to them, 'unless I see in His hands the marks made by the nails and put my finger into the nail prints, and put my hand into His side, I will never believe [it].' Eight days later His disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, though they

were behind closed doors, and stood among them and said, 'Peace to you!' Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach out your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand and place [it] in My side. Do not be faithless and incredulous, but [stop your unbelief and] believe!' Thomas answered Him, 'My Lord and My God!' Jesus said to him, 'Because you have seen Me, Thomas, do you now believe (trust, have faith)? Blessed and happy and to be envied are those who have never seen Me and yet have believed and adhered to and trusted and relied on Me.'" (John 20:24-29, AMP)

Thomas could not believe without seeing and touching. He could only believe if he saw and touched. He relied on the sensory perception. I don't think that Thomas had as yet received the Holy Spirit. We have no excuse because we have the Holy Spirit to teach us and guide us and help us in our unbelief. Jesus did not leave us alone, He sent the Holy Spirit to be our Helper.

I don't know about you, but I do not want to be found doubting. We can get into a lot of trouble when we are uncertain about the truths that we have heard.

"But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do." (James 1:6-8 NLT)

There is a verse in Revelation that again put a clincher in my spirit about fear, but it also refers to unbelief: "But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." (Revelation 21:8, NLT)

Disbelief Of Unerring Biblical Truths

TINY ORGAN NEGATIVELY GENERATING UNCONTROLLABLE EVIL

"The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit." (Proverbs 18:21, NIV) As I read this again after so many

times, I couldn't help but think that we don't really believe this. If we did, we would be mindful about what is coming out of our mouths.

Everything that God has made was made with a purpose. The purpose for the tongue is to praise, honor, and glorify God. The power is in your tongue. When we don't use our tongues for their purpose, there is no power in our lives. We are on a wrong course.

"We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. Likewise the tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison." (James 3:2-8, NIV)

If we can control our tongues, we can control ourselves in every other way. Wow! Selah. Pause and think on that. That's saying a mouth full. Our tongues chart the course of our lives. Our tongues determine where we go and how safely we arrive there.

No one can control the tongue, save the Holy Spirit, only as we yield our tongues to him.

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been bought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness." (Romans 6:12-13, NIV)

Many Scriptures describe the tongue as deceitful, flattering, evil, proud, wicked, and froward, to mention just a few of the adjectives.

Have you ever asked yourself why your life is moving in the direction it is going? Maybe you should examine your tongue. We have all spoken inappropriate words and ideas. Most of us still do, but that is not the course that we want to chart. Let our prayer be: "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips." (Psalm 141:3, NASB) Amen.

Tiny Organ Negatively Generating Uncontrollable Evil

TINY ORGAN NOW GIVING UNENDING EXALTATIONS

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." (2 Corinthians 5:17, NASB)

"He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear and will trust in the LORD." (Psalm 40:3, NASB)

The Lord gave me the acrostic for song: SIGN OF NEW GARMENT. When we are saved, we have a new way of thinking, therefore, a new way of talking. We use our tongues in a positive way, for their purpose: To sing praises to the Lord.

As we saw when we looked at the negative side of TONGUE, it charts the course of our lives. We are created to be the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:14)

We are to get to know Him so that we can boast and brag about how big our God is instead of magnifying our problems. He loves to show off on behalf of those who trust in and boast on Him.

We can also have a word for those who are weary and in need of hope. Our mouths should speak encouraging words. Let's not let our tongues be like daggers, ripping people up and down or apart.

I'll never forget what my youngest son said to me one day. "You beat me. You just beat me up all the time." I replied to him that I did not. He said, "You do. You beat me with your words." That was a wake-up call for me about how I use my words, mouth, and tongue.

Just think where we would be in our lives if we ordered our speech right. I know I have been so convicted just by writing this. I do so want the Lord, by the Holy Spirit, to do a new thing in my life with my tongue. Time is winding up for us to get things right in our lives. Let us agree with God about our condition to allow change to occur for us so many will fear and put their trust in the Lord.

Scripture tells us to give the sacrifice of praise, but we would much rather moan and complain. This has been one of the greatest challenges of my walk: Keeping my mouth shut at the right time and opening it

when I should. I pray to be quiet and listen more. I confess before you and God, this has to change.

"Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it." (Psalm 34:11-14, NIV)

Here are a few more important Scriptures on the subject of the tongue:

"When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise." (Proverbs 10:19, NIV)

"A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue." (Proverbs 17:27-28, NIV)

"But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken." (Matthew 12:36, NIV)

Above all, remember, our tongues chart the course of our lives.

"Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name. 'They will be mine,' says the LORD Almighty, 'in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.'" (Malachi 3:16-18, NIV)

Tiny Organ Now Giving Unending Exaltations

MECHANICALLY OPERATING UNVEILING THE HEART

Have you ever stopped to think that you have two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and only one mouth? What would we do if we had two? Get into twice as much trouble. For, oh, what trouble this one mouth gets us into.

The Bible has so much to say about the mouth, which is why we should be extra careful about it being in operation all of the time. It has

certainly been a problem for me in my journey. It would behoove those of us who have problems with the mouth, tongue, and lips to get into the Word and do a thorough study on the subjects.

We are so flippant about what comes out of our mouths. Do we realize that we will have to give an account for every idle word that we have spoken? And, at the end of the day, is it worth all the talking? Think about the times that we have given someone a "piece of our mind?" As if we had a piece to give.

Another favorite is, "Oops, I didn't mean that." We probably do not realize what is in our hearts. (Jeremiah 17:9-10) Maybe we don't understand that whatever comes out of the mouth comes from the heart. (Matthew 15:18-19) Because we don't know the severity of what we are doing, we're in ignorance and careless with our words!

Have you heard the saying, "Ignorance of the law does not excuse you from the penalty of the law?" We are without excuse. The Lord says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (Hosea 4:6a, NIV)

We must guard our hearts, for the mouth tells on the heart, because the heart has stored information that the mouth is just waiting to reveal.

Jesus replied, "You too? Are you willfully stupid? Don't you know that anything that is swallowed works its way through the intestines and is finally defecated? But what comes out of the mouth gets its start in the heart. It's from the heart that we vomit up evil arguments, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, lies, and cussing. That's what pollutes. Eating or not eating certain foods, washing or not washing your hands—that's neither here nor there." (Matthew 15:16-20, MSG)

There are so many Scriptures instructing us on the use of our mouths. I have had a lot of trouble in this area. I have come to realize that I can't get into trouble talking about the goodness of the Lord. I have decided that is what I will do. If what I say is not gracious to the hearer, I do not want to say it. I want to use my mouth for one purpose only—to glorify the Lord.

Have I completely gotten it all together yet? No, but God knows that I am just dust, and He has patience with me. God is not finished with me yet. My prayer is: "Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips." (Psalm 141:3, NIV)

"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the

overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:33-37, NIV)

Does this get your attention? It does mine.

Mechanically Operating Unveiling The Heart

POSSESSES OPERATIVE TOOLS TO EFFECTIVELY REFINE

A potter is a skilled person whose occupation is to make earthen vessels from a substance called clay. The potter always has power over the clay. The potter never intends to produce a marred vessel. He determines what the vessel will be, how it will look, and how it is to be used.

"You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?' On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?" (Romans 9:19-21, NASB)

The wheel would be the surrounding conditions—what we call circumstances. When we find ourselves on the wheel, we need to stay on the wheel. When things seem contrary, and we find ourselves uncomfortable in the adverse conditions around us, be assured God is molding, rolling, and cutting away the excess. Believe me—He possesses the right tools to refine us. He is using whatever method necessary to mold us into the image of His dear Son, Jesus. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10, NIV)

What are the tools used to make the vessel? Besides the potter's wheel, there are shaping tools, rolling tools, cutting/piercing tools, and the finishing tools. The potter's most basic tool is his hand. The process is much slower and more gradual when done by hand, but it offers the potter a higher degree of control over the shaping of the vessel.

"But now, O LORD, you are our Father, we are the clay, and You our potter; and all of us are the work of Your hand." (Isaiah 64:8, NASB)

The potter's purpose is to produce a vessel fit for the Master's use. We determine by our willingness to yield how long the process will take. "Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work." (2 Timothy 2:21, NASB)

The Potter has the power. He shapes and molds as He wills. We are to be yielded vessels in the Potter's hands. When we want to question God as to the whys in our lives, let us remember this. "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction." (Isaiah 48:10, NKJV)

David states, "I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me." (Psalm 119:75, NKJV)

Possesses Operative Tools To Effectively Refine

CLEAR LESSON ABOUT YIELDING

Clay is an earthly material, plastic when moist but hard when fired, used in making pottery. It is earth or mud. Clay is scooped from the earth's surface. It is in fact the mortal human body.

"There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven." (1 Corinthians 15:44b, 46-47, NKJV) There is a lesson to be learned here. We can observe the natural to aid us in understanding the spiritual.

We are mortal human bodies, made from the dust of the earth. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (Genesis 2:7, KJV) We are clay in the Potter's hand and would be wise not to argue with our Creator.

What sorrow awaits those who argue with their Creator. Does a clay pot argue with its maker? Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, "Stop, you're doing it wrong!" Does the pot exclaim, "How

clumsy can you be!" How terrible it would be if a newborn baby said to its father, "Why was I born? Why did you make me this way?" This is what the Lord says—the Holy One and your Creator: "Do you question what I do for my children? Do you give me orders about the work of my hands? I am the one who made the earth and created people to live on it. With my hands I stretched out the heavens. All the stars are at my command." (Isaiah 45:9-12, NLT)

"Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand." (Isaiah 64:8, NIV)

As the earthly potter sits at his wheel and begins to squeeze, press, pinch, and mold, he would be shocked if the clay started talking to him, saying such things as: "What color you are going to make me? Can I trust you to place me where you can use me? How long am I going to have to stay on this wheel?"

As His vessels, we are not to tell the Potter how we are to be made, where we are to be placed, or how long we will be on the wheel. As we yield and are pliable in His hands, we bring Him glory.

Clear Lesson About Yielding

BEARING REQUIRES ABIDING NOW CONTINUE HANGING

The function of a branch is to hang and bear fruit. The branch is part of the tree, the trunk being the vital part. The branch gets its nourishment from the roots and the trunk of the tree. A branch that is cut from the tree cannot survive on its own.

Once a branch has been removed from its source, it becomes a stick, a dried twig good for nothing except to be thrown into the fire. We need to always remember that we are branches. Like branches from a tree, we can't survive disconnected from the Vine. We will die.

Have you ever heard a branch do or say anything? I haven't, and I pray to God that I never will. A branch just hangs, blows in the wind, and produces fruit in the season it should. Branches don't converse with the other branches and get them all disgruntled. They don't complain and grumble. They do what branches are to do: abide. They stay attached and bear fruit (see John 15:5).

In order to bear fruit, trees must be pruned. Pruning maintains the size and shape of the fruit, maximizes fruit production, and improves the quality of the fruit. Pruning makes the branches flourish. (John 15:2)

A tree can take a lot of harsh treatment and rise back stronger than ever, with its leaves always reaching toward the sun. Sometimes in a storm, the branches of a tree can be bent all the way to the ground, yet the branches survive. When the storm blows over, they bounce right back.

Most of God's creation does what He created it to do. The exception is people; some of us still haven't figured it out yet. Birds fly and sing. The sun shines and warms. Whatever they were created to do, God's creatures do it.

We're living and breathing beings, and most of the time we pretty well do whatever we like. Think of yourself as a branch. Like branches, we are to yield to the Master's plan for our lives. We just hang out being us and believe that He is in control of our lives. Our lives are in Him. Apart from Him, we are nothing and can do nothing.

The Lord is our Source, our Life. We are nourished by Him, the trunk of the tree! If we continue to abide, we'll begin to bear fruit. He is the Vine, and we are the branches.

As Christians, we have to take a stand that no matter what, we will not be moved. We need to make the same kind of commitment that we make when we say "I do" in a marriage. We are in it for the long haul. We must remain, stay put, wait, and stand.

We must not be moved. Circumstances and situations will come and go, but the Word of God will always stand. If we're committed to do our part, God will certainly do His. To stay put, stand, stay in the same place, does not mean that we do nothing. We resolve in our hearts that we will not lose faith. We will endure, and we will believe the Word of God. No matter what we see, hear, or feel, we will not be moved. Our walk is a walk of faith. We don't rely on our sensory perceptions.

I see the branch as a symbol of the way we are to be yielded. It says we have given up control of our lives. It shows the flexibility of our life. God's discipline prunes us like the gardener prunes a tree. The gardener prunes with a knife. God allows adversity and uses the Word to cut off everything in our lives that is not like Jesus, "because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." (Hebrews 12:6, NIV)

God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love

God and are called according to His purposes for them. (Romans 8:28) Are we willing to hang in there and trust Him when we don't know when or where the storms are going to come? When the wind blows fiercely? When we are afraid? Will we hang in there when it seems to be all rain and no sunshine? Can we trust Him in the adverse times as well as the good times? Will we hang in there clapping our hands and giving Him the sacrifice of praise? Will we sing to Him a new song? Can and will we trust Him when just hanging out there makes us vulnerable?

God promised that He will never leave us or forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5) Let us remember this one thing: Disconnected branches don't make it; they wither and die! Keep an eye out for broken branches and see for yourself what happens to them. Do not leave Him or forsake Him for He is your life. You cannot make it on your own. Don't branch out doing your own thing. Hang in there, and abide that you might bear much fruit.

Bearing Requires Abiding Now Continue Hanging

FULFILLED APPETITE LOST LIFE

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:15-17, NIV)

Eve was deceived; Adam plainly disobeyed. Eve chose to believe that what the devil told her had more truth in it than what God had told them. She did not realize that they had all of the good there was, and she did not know anything about evil.

The devil convinced Eve that God was holding out on them, that the Lord was keeping something from them. So she ate of the fruit and gave it to her husband. He ate it—and there goes the story of The Fall.

Adam and Eve failed to obey the command that God had given them. They decided to branch out on their own and become equal with God in their knowledge. They failed at that, but they succeeded in separating themselves from God and plunging all their descendants into the depths of utter darkness.

We still are not smart enough to know the difference between good and evil. Satan comes to us with insinuations to make us doubt the validity of God's Word, never letting us in on the consequences of our choices. Like Adam and Eve, we can go from life to death, light to darkness, and highest to lowest.

Most of us have no idea of the height that we fall from or the depth that we fall to. Adam and Eve were literally and immediately disconnected from God. They were out of touch with Him and died spiritually. They no longer had a covering. No longer in fellowship, they were indeed lost. They lost their greatness, their innocence, their childlike dependence upon a Father who loved and cared for them. They lost their inheritance. They lost their privilege as children of God, lost the intimacy that they had shared in the Garden. They were alienated, living apart from God. They fell into spiritual ruin.

Let's take a look at the word fall. Webster's Dictionary gives these definitions: to drop; to lose dignity, character, or the like. To come to pass as if by descending or to cease to be erect. To stumble or to be entrapped, as, to fall into error, to die by violence. To be captured or destroyed; to subside, abate; decline; to ebb, as the tide. To decline in activity, strength, or price. To become or appear dejected; to recede or retreat. Downfall or destruction. To lapse from goodness, spiritual ruin.

Think about separation—the kind that comes about by divorce, the ripping and tearing. On that fateful day in the Garden, Adam and Eve were violently separated spiritually from God. No, they couldn't see it. No, they didn't immediately fall over and die, but die they did. Their very lives were taken. It was as if their clothes had been ripped off. They had no covering; they were exposed to all the elements, reduced to operating by their natural instincts. What a tragic story.

The fruit was not the issue in the Garden of Eden—their disobedience was. The Fall happened because they had been told not to eat of the fruit, and they disobeyed. They had been clearly told what would happen if they did. "You will surely die." (Genesis 2:17, NIV) The serpent came at them with, "You will *not* surely die." (Genesis 3:4, NIV, italics mine)

There it is: What is it that God is telling me that I don't understand? As we know, they did surely die—and immediately. They **Disconnected Instantly, Ending Dependency** on their heavenly Father. No, they did not drop over physically dead at that very moment. The death couldn't be seen on the outside, because they died spiritually, which was pivotal to their very being. They ended the intimacy they had with God, and their

physical bodies started to decay.

Now, that was Adam and Eve. What about you and me?

As descendants of Adam and Eve, we inherited their sin nature, for every seed reproduces fruit after its own kind. (Genesis 1:11) We came into the world as enemies of God, our nature tainted with sin. We have to determine in our minds that we will not continue to fall every day. If we will not obey or adhere to the teachings of Christ, we are in fact in a fallen state, still.

We make choices every day that put us on the same level and playing field of the original story of Adam and Eve. If I am not mindful, I find myself compromising and trying to find an escape clause for something that God has spoken to me about.

Let's not make the same mistake over and over again. That situation in the Garden was all about being disobedient to what they had been instructed. We are not smarter than God. God is God, and we are not. He is the Potter; we are the clay. We wouldn't know a good day from a bad day. The best thing for us to do is to stay in a dependent state. Let's just trust and obey.

Fulfilled Appetite Lost Life

STANDARD INTENDED NULLIFIED

Sin is breaking God's law, falling away or coming short of a mark. It is doing anything contrary to what God has told us to do. If we shoot for the bull's eye, anything short of that misses the mark. Whatever else we might hit, if we didn't hit the bull's eye, we have come short of the mark. We might think we got a good score, but we missed the mark.

God's intended standard is just plain obedience, rather than being in total opposition to what He commanded us to do. Sin is having a **Self-seeking Independent Nature**. The Scriptures tell us, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, NKJV). Adam introduced sin into the world, and we inherited the sin nature. Even so we are individually responsible for our choices and actions. "Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right." (Proverbs 20:11, NIV) "There is a path before each person that seems

right, but it ends in death." (Proverbs 16:25, NLT) Adam and Eve thought they knew better than God, or at least that they would know just as much as God if they ate the forbidden fruit. We sin when we think we know what is best for us rather than following the standard that God set for us.

We need to understand the ramifications of sin, for sin separates us from the presence of God. Jesus had to leave Heaven and come to earth to bridge the gap. Sin caused the Son of God to be separated from His Father at the moment all of our sins were placed on Him.

When we sin, we put ourselves in the place of God. We think we know better than Him, when He clearly tells to avoid something that isn't good for us. Perhaps it's not that we don't trust His judgments as much as it is that we don't respect His judgments.

There are sins of omission—things we need to know but didn't bother to acquire the knowledge of. If we drive 50 miles an hour in a 35 mile-an-hour zone, we will still receive a ticket even if we didn't know the speed limit was 35 miles an hour. As drivers, we are obligated to watch for speed limit signs. Not knowing the law is no excuse for breaking it.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." (Hosea 4:6, NASB) We don't ever want that to happen!

With our Self-sufficient Independent Nature, we tend to do what is right in our own eyes, doing what we want, when we want, not answering to anyone else. We like to say, "I did it my way."

"Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" (Genesis 3:4-5, NKJV)

They may not have found out the difference between good and evil, but their eyes were certainly opened—opened to things that they only had information about and couldn't do a thing about and to things God never intended them to know or experience. What a lie. Unfortunately, the lie still lives, for we still think we will be like God, knowing the difference between good and evil.

Standard Intended Nullified

BEWARE ROAD OFFERS ATTRACTIVE DISTRACTIONS

In this nation, we live in a wide-open, spacious, far-reaching country. We can do what we want to do when we want to do it, any time we want to. We enjoy unlimited possibilities and don't have to answer to anyone. But this leads to destruction. We are in the far country and need to come home. We are squandering our inheritance.

Satan wants to make destructive things look attractive to us, so that we will want them more than we want what is good for us. He sets a trap with distractions to derail us. The more we get of things that are not good for us, the more we want.

Have you ever eaten so much junk food that you had no taste for anything nutritious? I have, and it's hard to get back on track to eating the foods that we need to fuel the body rather than just something that tastes good and tickles our palate.

When faced with temptations and distractions, we should not be a people pleaser or part of the herd mentality syndrome. We will find no safety in numbers here! Don't desire to be in the in-crowd so badly that you are willing to go over the edge with everyone else.

God has given us the task of reconciling people to Him. For Paul says in the Scriptures:

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:18-21, NIV)

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it." (Matthew 7:13, NIV)

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." (Proverbs 14:12, NIV)

As mentioned earlier, we can sometimes see a word within a word. Here we have road within broad. Which one will you take?

Beware Road Offers Attractive Distractions

NO ALTERNATE ROAD (ROUTE) RIGHTEOUSNESS ONLY WAY

"But the gate is narrow (contracted by pressure) and the way is straitened and compressed that leads away to life, and few are those who find it." (Matthew 7:14, AMP)

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12, NIV)

We have all heard people say: "I believe all roads lead to God." Wrong, wrong, and wrong again. All roads do not lead to God. Jesus is the only way to God. Some of us do not want to accept Jesus, but He and God are a package deal. They go together—we can't have one without the other.

He is the door that we must enter to have access to God. The only way to God is through Jesus, for He said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6, NKJV)

We can differ on many subjects and rightly so, but not on this subject. Jesus is the only way to God and that road is very narrow. There is no other name or no other way, PERIOD!

We are speaking of narrow in contrast to broad. Broad means there is a wide range. Narrow is restricted or limited in extent or space. The road is restricted, and there is no alternate route. Jesus is the only way. That narrow road has an arrow pointing to a sign that reads: "Jesus: the Only Way."

There are only two roads: the narrow and the broad. The narrow road leads to eternal life. The broad road leads to death and destruction. Jesus is the only way to salvation; He is the only way whereby we might be saved. He is the door we have to go through to get to God. If this seems repetitious, it is meant to be. For only by repetition will the truth be learned. Which road will you choose?

No Alternate Road (Route) Righteousness Only Way

GOD'S ONLY SON PURCHASED ETERNAL LIFE

After The Fall, there was a breach in the relationship Adam and Eve formerly had with God. Sin separates. "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:22, KJV) "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Hebrews 9:22, NIV).

"Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.' Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.'" (Hebrews 10:5-7, NIV)

Jesus came into the world with a mission, and He set His face like flint to be obedient to His purpose. We were like lost sheep needing a shepherd.

The Gospel gives us Good News.

"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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." (John 3:16-18, NIV)

God's Only Son Purchased Eternal Life. That is indeed a Message in a Word. The Good News for us is the revelation of the finished work of Jesus on the Cross.

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17, NIV)

We are made right in God's sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done. News flash!

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man some might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how

much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when 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! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." (Romans 5:6-11, NIV)

This is the gospel: **God's Only Son Purchased Eternal Life**. It is the message of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. It is the message that salvation can come no other way than through Jesus. He is the way, the truth, and the life. There is no other Savior, He is the Door. The Gospel reveals that salvation is received by faith because of the sacrificial death of Jesus. Christ is All in All, and we have everything we need in Him.

God's Only Son Purchased Eternal Life

REVERSE ENEMY'S PLAN EXIT NOW TURNAROUND

The inspiration for this acrostic came about as I was driving down one of the major freeways in our city. I took an exit and came upon a turnaround, one of many conveniently located at nearly every major exit. If we are going in the wrong direction, if we have missed an exit, or if we need to get to the opposite side of the freeway, we take the nearest exit, follow the turnaround, and go in the opposite (right) direction.

This is what repentance is all about. It is a profound change. We stop, do a deliberate turnaround, and begin to go in the opposite (right) direction. We make a conscious turn from wrong, being deeply sorry for sinning against Him, and deliberately resolve not to continue in the direction we were going.

Exit means a departure, a way out of a place. We are to depart from sin and go on a different course. Turnaround means a reversal of one's course, attitude, or position; a change or reversal. The word now means at the present time, this present moment. **NOW!**

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV)

The enemy also has plans for you. He plans to steal, kill, and destroy

you. He wants you to have disaster—with no future and certainly no hope. His ultimate goal is to do away with you permanently. Thwart his plans; don't agree with him about his destructive plans for your life. REPENT! NOW!

John the Baptist went around preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. He had the unique privilege of introducing Jesus to the world. He was the forerunner of Christ, saying, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" For this is He who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord: make His paths straight.'" (Matthew 3:2-3, NKJV)

Too many people have not come to a place of repentance. We can't just decide to be saved. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:44, NIV)

I had a praying mother. I know of the convicting power of the Holy Ghost. At times in my life, I was so convicted that I could hardly stand it. The presence of the Lord felt so heavy on me that I cried. As a child, I had heard my mother praying for us children. I didn't have to wonder long why I couldn't be like everyone else.

Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians and told them he had regretted an earlier letter that brought them sorrow. However, he no longer regretted that he had sent the letter because the sorrow led them to repentance. He said, "For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death." (2 Corinthians 7:10, NASB)

"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:10, NIV) Don't you just love the Scriptures? There is a celebration in heaven! Once again the enemy's plans have been thwarted.

He is a liar, and, in fact, the father of lies. No truth will ever be found in him. The Word tells us to pray for the lost, "that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will." (2 Timothy 2:26, NKJV)

"I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2b, NIV)

Reverse Enemy's Plan Exit Now Turnaround

SALVATION AVAILABLE VERSUS ETERNAL DAMNATION

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:16-18, NASB)

"He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.'" (Mark 16:16, NIV)

God granted us the gift of free will. He will not coerce us into doing anything we are not willing to do of our own volition. He created us, loves us, wants the very best for us, and longs to have an intimate relationship with us. Yet we can make the choice to love Him in return or to reject Him. It's our choice. We can go to hell, if that is what we choose to do.

When He said, "It is finished," that meant He had met the requirement for sin and justice had been served. Now it is up to us, the whoevers of John 3:16, to come, to believe, and to receive.

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

Isn't it amazing that God would make a people who oppose His plan, and, because He is a Holy God and sin separates, He had already devised a plan whereby we could be made right with Him? Yet He wants us to come to Him because we have chosen to do so. He wants us to love Him with all of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength.

Every day, we choose life or death. Joshua told the people, "And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the

LORD." (Joshua 24:15, NKJV)

Salvation is a gift, and we have to be one of the whomever who believe it and receive it. If we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be saved.

Someone can give us a gift, but if we don't receive it and open it, the gift provides no benefits. Jesus died for the whole world, but individually we have to come to Him and acknowledge it. We are not automatically saved. We were born into sin, and we have to be born out of it.

We have to repent and be born again.

Recently, I told my neighbor about a conversation I had the previous night with a person who had cut his hand and had an infection. He needed to go to the doctor and get treatment, but instead, he kept going on and on about what he needed to do and listening to advice from other people. Only the doctor can prescribe the correct medication for an infection. The patient does not need to self-medicate. He needs a doctor to treat his infection.

An infection is the physical equivalent of sin, which is spiritual. Infection affects our blood, which is its mode of transportation. Life is in the blood. "For the life of the creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life." (Leviticus 17:11, NIV)

Jesus was the spotless Lamb, slain from the foundation of the earth. He is our Physician. Often, we will not go to the Source for our spiritual sickness. Like the man with the infection who wouldn't get medical treatment, we doctor on ourselves and try to fix the problem ourselves.

Jesus said that well people don't need a doctor; sick people do. (Matthew 9:12) He came to save us and to heal us where we are hurting. If you could heal yourself, Jesus would not have had to die.

We each have to accept the fact that we are sinners, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23, NKJV) We have to turn from our sin and believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and receive Him as Lord and Savior of our lives.

But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in

him will never be put to shame." (Romans 10:8-11, NIV)

Jesus said: "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and out, and find pasture." (John 10:9, NIV)

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." (Hebrews 4:7b, NIV). Repent and be saved. We have a saying at our church:

"It's as easy as ABC. **A**ccept the fact that you are a sinner and need a Savior. **B**elieve in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. **C**onfess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

We always have a choice.

Salvation Available Versus Eternal Damnation!

RECEIVE SALVATION VERIFY PUBLICLY

"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." (Romans 10:9-10, NIV)

Making a public confession of our conversion experience helps to solidify our faith. It is not a good thing for you to be the only person to know you are a Christian. It leaves too many open doors. We need to become accountable to someone when we confess our belief in the Lord. To make a confession with your mouth seals the belief in your heart. It's not what you feel, it's what you believe; and saying it declares it to be true.

I never have understood why we are asked to "bow our heads and close our eyes" when, at the end of the sermon, people are asked to come forward. I hope it's for reasons other than that the people coming forward don't want to be seen. We should be praying for those coming forward, but we should also be celebrating.

Everyone else is coming out of the closet. Why not Christians? God doesn't have any secret agents; we do not need to be undercover brothers and sisters.

The Word tells us to "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." (Psalm 118:1 NIV) "Let the redeemed of the LORD

say this—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe, those he gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south." (Psalm 107:2-3, NIV)

"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." (Matthew 10:32-33, NIV)

Faith is bold and needs to be confessed publicly and not ashamedly. The Lord expects us to make our faith public knowledge. We are baptized to declare to the world that a change has taken place in our life. We are now dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV)

Receive Salvation Verify Publicly

GIVEN RESOURCES ABSOLUTELY CANNOT EARN

We leave home five days a week, drive through the maze of traffic, get to our jobs, and work hard. Consequently, we expect to be paid at the end of the pay period. When we receive our paychecks, we certainly do not regard them as gifts, because we worked hard for them. In fact, all the material things we have, we acquired by working hard. "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation." (Romans 4:4, NIV)

We have been taught to work hard, get a good education, and to better ourselves in every way that we can so that we can earn a decent job and get good pay. We tell our children, "You don't want to be another statistic; you need to be an asset to society." We need to learn to stand on our own so we don't need to have someone caring for us for the rest of our lives.

Therefore, we find it somewhat a paradox when we learn that grace can't be earned. In the Greek language, grace is *charis*. It means a gracious favor or benefit bestowed, and at the same time it means the gratitude appropriate to the grace received. (*Zondervan Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, Lawrence O. Richards, Zondervan, 1991). Grace is unearned.

Because we are so accustomed to working and achieving our own success, we do not understand grace. First, we are somewhat suspicious of someone just giving us a gift for no reason at all. We've been taught that nothing comes free. I've taught that to my own children. Sometimes we get a phone call telling us that we have won something free. We don't believe that, and, unfortunately, we are right more times than not.

Yet, we can do nothing to earn grace. Normally, if we want something, we have to work for it. So we wonder why we are being given something we did not and could not earn. That is grace. We do not deserve it, we do not have to work for it, and we cannot earn it.

I read a book some years ago that is now out of print: *Grace Plus Nothing*, by Jeff Harkin (Tyndale House Publishers, 1992). What an appropriate title. We can add absolutely nothing to grace. We receive it or we don't.

We receive it when we accept the finished work of Jesus on the Cross. He said, "It is finished!"

"Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." (Romans 10:4, NIV)

"However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." (Romans 4:5, NIV)

I will never forget the day that I finally got it—at least a little bit. We do not have to work for our salvation or to keep our salvation! It was indeed a revelation to me. The little book *Abide in Christ* by Andrew Murray also helped me better understand my relationship with the Lord. My work is to believe and to receive, for grace has to be received.

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:4-10, NIV)

I can truly understand the dilemma that we find ourselves in. I had to realize that in order for me to be saved, I have to believe. Also, in order for me to stay saved, I have to believe. The concept is freeing, yet

sometimes hard to grasp. I can no more keep myself saved than I can save myself.

Jesus paid the price for our redemption. He did it. If we could have done it ourselves, He would not have had to die. Grace is a free gift, but it is not cheap. It was the precious blood of Jesus that secured our salvation.

As with any gift, we have to receive it. Ignoring the gift would amount to someone giving you a gift that you set aside and never opened. So it is with the gift of grace. We have to believe it and receive it, knowing that it is indeed a gift and cannot be earned.

Given Resources Absolutely Cannot Earn

CHRIST RECONCILED OFFENSES SPOILED STRONGHOLDS

Jesus came to die. He knew what His mission was: to line up our wills with the will of God. Sin separates, and we were separated from God. Jesus came to bridge the gap and give us the privilege of being put back in right relationship with God. The cross is an instrument of death; there is no other reason to carry a cross other than to die on it.

Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission for sin. Jesus, who was the Only One qualified, had to die to pay for our sins. We were the guilty, and He was the sacrifice. He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Until we come to an understanding of what really happened on the Cross and our identification with it, we will forever be in a state of confusion.

"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:4-5, NKJV)

The Cross was Christ's atoning work for us. He had done nothing to warrant His death. He substituted His spotless life and shed His blood for us. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21, ESV)

The Good News:

"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." (Colossians 2:13-15, ESV)

When Jesus died on the Cross, the veil was torn in two; we now have access to God. Satan has been defeated. May our lives be the "Amen" to that!

Christ Reconciled Offenses Spoiled Strongholds

DYING EVERYDAY NECESSITATES YIELDING

To deny means to refuse to recognize or acknowledge, to disavow, to decline or grant. To restrain oneself from indulging in, to give refusal to. In other words, just say "NO!"

Can you see how there can be a play on words here? We will not yield to the temptation of our flesh. We will yield to the dying of our flesh in order that we might live.

In this sense we are using the verb form of yield: to give up your rights to, to change a course of action, to let something go. **Dying Eliminates Namely You!** To deny means yielding to the dying process, saying "No" to those parts of you that you think you have a right to. We don't deny only material things. We deny attitudes, habits, desires, and plenty other things.

God wants change to our character, not change to our personality.

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.'" (Matthew 16:24, NKJV) Denying ourselves means taking up all of our oppositions, all of the things that are thwarting the purposes of God for our lives.

Have you realized, as I have, that something is wrong? We are supposed to have died with Christ and to be seated with Him in the heavenly places. Some of the things that we do are not appropriate for someone who is supposed to be dead. To die means to cease existing, to become dead, to expire. To cease existing, especially by degrees.

This is the dying process. It is to experience agony or suffering, suggestive to that of death; to be destroyed. To deny ourselves means that we die to our wants, desires, our attitudes. These are the things that are to cease to exist. It means to be emptied of the self-life.

It's not we, but Christ—more of Him, less of us. Not our wills, but His will be done in our lives. "Jesus replied, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, 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.'" (John 12:23-24, NIV)

We give up our lives so that the life of Christ might be seen in us. We die to ourselves, so that we can truly live. What do people see when they look at us? Is it more of Jesus and less of us or more of us and less of Jesus?

Are we in a process of dying daily? If so, we are doing what we will eventually have to do—let go of everything. I witnessed that with both my parents when they expired. We need to be in the process of letting go of all the things that are not pleasing to God before we physically expire; it will make the final process easier.

"Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be indeed dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lust." (Romans 6:11-12, NKJV) The word "reckon" means to consider, count, calculate, regard, to think, to suppose, deem. My definition: Act as if it is so until it becomes so. I have had to make drastic changes in my life, and at times I felt as if I were wearing my shoes on the wrong feet. I had to keep wearing them until they began to fit.

"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:35-37, NKJV)

In the end, we will either live to satisfy ourselves or delight to do His will. Which will it be?

"He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30, NKJV)

"Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God." (1 Peter 4:1-2, ESV)

And does it ever hurt when we don't give in to our wants and desires. Whenever you want to do that little thing you do, think: Dying Everyday Necessitates Yielding—and not to temptation either. Just say "No" to self.

Dying Everyday Necessitates Yielding

SHARING TESTIMONY OPENLY REGARDING YOURSELF

My former pastor delivered a mini-sermon entitled, "This is My Story; This is My Song" about the song "Blessed Assurance" by Fanny Crosby. So many times when we are in the middle of our story, we can't possibly think of it ever becoming a song, but God wants to take our story and turn it into a song. He wants to take our mess and turn it into a testimony or a message.

Coming to the realization of the purpose that God has for our lives makes all the difference in the world. It's not about us. Paul said, "And I am convinced and sure of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ [right up to the time of His return], developing [that good work] and perfecting and bringing it to full completion in you." (Philippians 1:6, AMP)

What is your story? Where did God bring you from? Don't be ashamed of where you have been or what you have done. It was all a part of the "all things working together" to get you where you are now. All of your wanderings were to bring you to the place you are in. We don't care for many of the things we have done, but we did them. They can't be undone, but God can restore those years to us. (Joel 2:25)

For those of us who had to come the long and rough way, we could say we were creating our testimony—and do we have one! Some of us wouldn't listen, so we had to be taught the hard way. We went to the school of hard knocks, that is, experience—which is not the ideal teacher. Personally, I wish I had listened.

Your testimony can be used as a meaningful witnessing tool. It opens the way for you to share what God has done in your life and what He can do in the lives of others. Your story can give hope to others when they are in the midst of difficult times in their lives.

We all have a story. Let God take your story and use it for His glory. Don't ever be ashamed or afraid to share what God has delivered you from. Someone needs to hear about your journey and how God brought you through it. Your story may well be encouragement for someone else to turn their life around. Let God continue the work in you so that you can start—or continue to share—your story and help someone along the way.

We must be aware that in all of our sharing, the strongest testimony we have is the fragrance that we leave with others in our daily lives. If it had not been for the Lord on our side, we can all say, "Where would we be?"

Sharing Testimony Openly Regarding Yourself

SIGN OF NEW GARMENT

Do you want to know what the new garment is? I am referring to the garment of praise. That's a new song, not just the same old song in a different place or time.

Yes, praise is one of the signs that something new is going on in our lives. We have acquired a new garment. Hallelujah! The Lord said he would surround us with songs of deliverance. "You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah." (Psalm 32:7, NIV)

"Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy." (Psalm 33:1-3, NIV)

We can have a different song. We have the ability to change the tune. Before we were born of the spirit of God, we complained and murmured. In other words, we sang the same old song.

Now that we are born again in the Spirit, we have so much to be thankful for. The Lord said He would put a new song in our mouths, a song of praise to our God. Remember, we are new creations, with a new song. We can't be new creatures with the same old song; that doesn't match.

We are to praise Him from the rising of the sun to the going down of the

same. In other words, rise praising Him, go to bed praising Him, and praise Him all the time in between. "Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth. Sing praises to the Lord. Interlude. Sing to the one who rides across the ancient heavens, his mighty voice thundering from the sky." (Psalm 68:32-33, NLT)

"Sing a new song to the LORD! Let the whole earth sing to the LORD! Sing to the LORD; praise his name. Each day proclaim the good news that he saves. Publish his glorious deeds among the nations. Tell everyone about the amazing things he does." (Psalm 96:1-3, NLT)

Wouldn't it be wonderful if people joined the family of God because they saw us praising the Lord? Our complaining won't attract, but our praise will. God said if He would be lifted up, He would draw all men to Him. Praise Him; we were made to be the praise of His glory.

"He has put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many shall see and fear (revere and worship) and put their trust and confident reliance in the Lord." (Psalm 40:3, AMP)

Sign Of New Garment

SPORTING EXCLUSIVE LIFESTYLE FAVORING INDIVIDUAL'S SOLE HAPPINESS

Selfishness means being concerned with one's own welfare excessively or without regard for others. We are all guilty of being selfish in one way or another. It's part of our fallen nature. But when we come into the knowledge of truth about a subject, then we are responsible for it. Selfishness is by far one of the worst enemies we have. The word itself, denotes Me, Me! You know the tune. We sing it all the time. We're like the advertisement for a hamburger chain: "I'll have it my way, thank you."

We know the end result of being interested in only ourselves—how we can please ourselves, how we can better satisfy ourselves.

Marriages and relationships on the whole are ruined by this one behavioral pattern. Relationships fall apart when one person is concerned only about their personal interests, needs, and desires, always seeking their own advantage.

This is not to be the behavior of a child of God. Scripture tells us: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:3-4, NIV)

The Word also tells us that love does not seek its own. (1 Corinthians 13) Christ gave us the perfect example of love when He laid aside His heavenly glory and took on the form of flesh and came to rescue us from our destruction. We need to be able to look beyond our own interests and desires and be concerned for others. We were put here to learn how to share ourselves with other people.

It's hard for us to give up the *me* syndrome. Unfortunately, we were born that way; we came by it naturally. But remember, we can have a new nature. We will not support the enemy, whose agenda is to steal, kill, and destroy. Let's behave in a way that brings about unity and harmony, doing those things that please the Lord.

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." (1Corinthians 13:11, NKJV). Selfishness is a childish thing. Put it away. Let's get on with sharing.

Sporting Exclusive Lifestyle Favoring Individual's Sole Happiness

COVERTLY OBSERVED VICARIOUSLY ENVIOUSLY TAKEN

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's." (Exodus 20:17, NKJV) Covetousness comes about from the eyes and the heart. The real problem is the heart, and we are told, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." (Proverbs 4:23, NIV)

We will always have something before our eyes that appeals to us. What we do and think with what we see determines our behavior. Greed means we are not content with what we have. We want more and more and more. However, we have been told to be content with the things we have. (Philippians 4:11-12)

Job said: "I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?" (Job 31:1, NKJV) Covetousness always starts on the inside; it's a heart problem. We have to be careful not to let our eyes get us into trouble. Let us pay attention to what we let our gaze rest upon. Don't let a glance become a gaze. That will take you places you don't want to go.

King David gives us an example of how a glance leading to a gaze can get us into trouble.

"One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, 'Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?' Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, 'I am pregnant.'" (2 Samuel 11:2-5, NIV)

We know the rest of the story. The Bible shows us how this one act affected lives for years to come. When we choose the act, we suffer the consequences.

Another example is King Ahab, who coveted property that belonged to a man named Naboth.

"Some time later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. Ahab said to Naboth, 'Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth.' But Naboth replied, 'The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers.' So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.' He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat. His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, 'Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?' He answered her, 'Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, "Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place." But he said, "I will not give you my vineyard.'" Jezebel his wife said, 'Is this how you act as King over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.' So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him." (1 Kings 21:1-8, NIV).

Read the rest of the story to see how all of this ended for Sister Jezebel and Ahab, the king of Israel.

In both of these instances, coveting lead to someone's death. We need to be aware of what is simmering in our hearts. Run before you commit an act of any kind—an instance of not taking thoughts captive. We have played out in our minds things that should never happen.

We constantly need to ask God, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24, NIV)

Love does no harm, so why should we want something that belongs to someone else? If we love our neighbors as we should, we will not covet what they have.

"Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not commit murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." (Romans 13:8-10, NIV).

Covertly Observed Vicariously Enviously Taken

IMPROPER DISPLAY OF LOVE

You probably don't have any of the well-known objects used for worshipping idols in your house. You would never think of putting them there. But beware, for we have erected a lot of people and things in our lives that are akin to idol worship.

"You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep my commandments." (Exodus 20:3-6, NKJV)

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols (false gods)—[from anything and everything that would occupy the place in your heart due to God, from any sort of substitute for Him that would take first place in your life]. Amen (so let it be)." (1 John 5:21, AMP)

"You must worship no other gods, for the LORD, whose very name is Jealous; is a God who is jealous about his relationship with you." (Exodus 34:14, NLT)

Although we would never think of having idols in our homes or lives, many of us do; our money, children, possessions, television, and jobs can become idols. Whatever it is that takes the place of God in our hearts has become an idol to us. Have you ever thought of the fact that you can make your thoughts an idol, too? I'll confess—I've been guilty of that. You might be interested in reading Isaiah 44:1-20.

Let us examine our hearts to make sure that there is nothing occupying a place in our hearts that is to be reserved for God alone.

Improper Display Of Love

Improper Display Of Loyalty

PETITION RIGHT AND YOU'LL EXPERIENCE RESULTS

Jesus gave us the model for prayer. The Lord's Prayer is not just a prayer prayed by the Lord, but a model for praying.

Here is a Scriptural reference on how *to* and how *not to* pray:

"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore, do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him." (Matthew 6:5-8, NKJV)

Jesus gave us this model for prayer:

"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:9-15, NKJV)

Although we call this the "Lord's Prayer," it is not so much a prayer prayed by the Lord as it is a model for us to use when we pray.

Here is an example of praying to receive results:

"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." (1 John 5:14-15, NKJV).

As a follow-up to this verse, read James 1:5-8.

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done." (Philippians 4:6, NLT)

Now, I have by no means exhausted the Scriptures on the right or wrong way to pray. This short devotion couldn't contain them all, but I challenge you to research more Scriptures about prayer for yourself. Mainly, we should be like the little ones. They are like parrots, repeating everything we say. Let's take a lesson from them and repeat what God says.

Petition Right And You'll Experience Results

The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it. (Psalm 68:11, KJV)

About the Author

Margaret A. Blincoe is a dearly beloved child of God who basks in the knowledge of God's love. She has reciprocated with passion that love for His Word and His people. Margaret was birthed into a ministerial family of pastors. At an early age, she married an Air Force Sergeant who made the military his career. They traveled extensively stateside and abroad. Her travels greatly broadened her view on people and the world. Margaret resides in San Antonio, Texas, with Thomas, her husband of 46 years. They have four grown children and eleven grandchildren.

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