

GLENNA SALSBUARY

# Heavenly Treasures

*Encouragement*



*Discovering the  
Sovereign Grace  
of God Hidden  
in the Richness of  
His Word*

# Heavenly Treasures

*Discovering the  
Sovereign Grace  
of God Hidden  
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His Word*

GLENN A SALS BURY



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## *Dedication*

To the great saints of old who loved the Word of God with all their hearts.

To Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892), England’s “Prince of Preachers” whose *Morning and Evening* devotionals have fed my spirit for more than four decades.

To the apostle Paul, whose writings reveal the mystery of grace and whose grasp on the sovereignty of God is unparalleled.

To the Holy Spirit, the One Who leads us into all truth and anoints our minds and hearts with understanding.

To the Lord Jesus Christ, Who called me out of darkness into His glorious light and gave me a hunger for His Word.

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## *Encouragement*

*And we know that God causes everything to work  
together for the good of those who love God  
and are called according to His purpose for them.  
For God knew His people in advance, and He chose them  
to become like His Son....*

*—Romans 8:28-29a NLT*



# *Our Lives are in His Hands*

*Our lives are in his hands,  
and he keeps our feet from stumbling.*  
—*Psalm 66:19 NLT*



Do you sometimes feel like you are “stumbling” along in life? With all we may know about the Lord’s faithfulness, it seems we can easily be moved off the sure foundation of peace and trust in Him.

The apostle Paul said, “He is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and exist” (Acts 17:27-28 NLT). Every day, each moment, we are living in Christ. He is leading us; He is directing our footsteps; He is protecting us—even from ourselves and our own inadequacies.

“The Lord is my shepherd. I have everything I need.... He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to His Name” (Psalm 23:1, 3 NLT). Perhaps we need to set our eyes more often on the Shepherd and not so much on the path!

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David, the psalmist, understood how important it was to count on the Lord's leadership and protection. In another psalm we read, "From the ends of the earth, I will cry to you for help, for my heart is overwhelmed.... You are my safe refuge, a fortress where my enemies cannot reach me" (Psalm 61:2-3 NLT).

Our daily "enemies" are often confusion, depression, self-doubt, irritation, and even a sense of being simply overwhelmed. These very emotions are joy-stealers from Satan himself. His goal is to fill us with emotions that move us off our faith foundation.

In fact, whenever our inner peace is disturbed we can be certain we are under Satan's influence. Paul tells us how to live each moment. "Always be full of joy in the Lord.... Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything...! If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:4, 6-7 NLT).

*Lord, help us! Our lives are in Your hands; we need help remembering these realities.*



# *Stand Still and See the Salvation of the Lord*

*But Moses told the people, Don't be afraid.  
Just stand where you are and watch the Lord rescue you....  
The Lord himself will fight for you.  
You won't have to lift a finger in your defense.  
—Exodus 14:13-14 NLT*



The Lord's ways are truly not in accord with our human approach to our challenges and problems.

In the situation described in Exodus, the Israelites whined and complained about their predicament. The Egyptians were chasing them, and wilderness life was miserable. The Lord's response to their desperation? "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.... The Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Exodus 14:13-14).

The Egyptians, with horses and chariots, were in hot pursuit of the Israelites. They were so close the Israelites could see them. The Israelites were on foot with no armor of any kind.

After telling them to stand still, the Lord's next words were, "Tell the people to get moving" (Exodus 14:15 NLT). Isn't this

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a classic picture of our daily dilemma in attempting to live the Christian life? We know we are to “rest in Him”; we are to “wait upon the Lord”; we are to “stand firm in the faith.” But we have to get up and get moving every single day. We have to make critical decisions; we have to earn a living; we need to have wisdom for our children. So how do we both “stand still” and “get moving” at the same time?

The answer lies in the realm of the Spirit. Human wisdom cannot solve this puzzle. Something miraculous must occur for both of these actions (stand still/get moving) to take place at the same time. The Spirit of God comes into our hearts and minds with the gift of “blind faith.”

In other words, in our hearts and minds we “stand still.” We stop trying to “figure things out” or “get a plan” or “weigh all the pros and cons.” Emotionally and mentally we just “stand still” and expect to “see the salvation of the Lord.”

In the Exodus passage, the Lord told Moses what to do to facilitate getting the Israelites to move. (Remember, they were paralyzed with fear. The Egyptians were chasing them from behind and the Red Sea was in front of them.) The Lord’s words to Moses in the midst of this impossible situation were, “Use your shepherd’s staff—hold it out over the water and a path will open up before you through the sea. Then all the people of Israel will walk through on dry ground” (Exodus 14:16 NLT).

Don’t you wonder what Moses thought about this “solution” to what seemed like an insurmountable set of problems? There was no human logic in the directive Moses received. Moses simply had to believe God knew what He was doing. Moses acted upon “blind faith” and the Red Sea parted.

*Stand Still and See the Salvation of the Lord*

There are theological arguments about the fact that true faith isn't "blind" because the believer knows and trusts the character of God. Fine. But we still experience being "in the dark" without any human understanding about what may be unfolding in our lives.

Our only response is to get up each day, make decisions, walk through our circumstances, and "stand still" mentally and emotionally, in the knowledge that the Shepherd's staff is opening the way for us.

*Oh Holy Spirit, open the eyes of our hearts and minds. May we see that You are omnipotent, sovereign, and powerful over every circumstance in our lives.*

# *Redeeming the Time*

*Redeeming the time...for the days are evil.*  
—Ephesians 5:16



Often when we read an exhortation in the Scripture we cringe inwardly. We are well aware of our failure to measure up to whatever we think the ideal Christian life should look like. However, Satan really has deceived us about the purpose of the exhortations, those calls from the Word that encourage us to change our behavior or focus our actions and thoughts in new directions.

The enemy has convinced us that every call to change our behavior is a requirement we must fulfill to receive more of God's blessings. And our flesh cringes at requirements. We don't like being told to change. Our response usually takes one of three possible paths. Either we rebel in our flesh and simply ignore the Word of God, we feel guiltier than usual and still do not

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change, or the disciplined among us may actually set some new goals and change behavior for a period of time.

But the truth is that behind each of the Lord's exhortations (His call to change or to act in a new way) is His Fatherly heart of love. He knows what will create for us the greatest joy, peace, safety, health, and happiness. For example, when He says, "Do not steal," He is encouraging us to avoid the pain and trauma of incarceration.

God is not saying, "I'll like you better if you don't steal." Absolutely not! He has paid for our sins. He has called us to be His own if we are alive in the knowledge of Christ. Like we do as earthly parents, He provides His children with practical direction for living what He knows is the most meaningful life.

Recognizing these facts, let's examine the exhortation to redeem our time. The Greek words enhance our insights into this passage. The Greek word for redeeming is *exagorazo*, which literally means "to acquire out of the forum." The *agora* was the marketplace, the forum, where daily supplies were purchased in the heyday of the Roman world. To redeem, then, is to buy up something of value.

Paul then told us what to buy. He wrote, "Redeeming the time..." in Ephesians 5:16. The Greek word for time used here is *kairos* and it means a fixed time or season. To use the marketplace metaphor, it is as if Paul were saying this is the season for avocados. It won't always be avocado season. There will be a time when they are no longer available. So now is the season to buy up avocados. In our verse, now is the season to "buy up" time.

Then Paul told us why there is an urgency in redeeming time. "For the days are evil." The term "the days" refers to a particular period of time. We read, "As it was in the days of

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Noah,” “There was, in the days of King Herod,” etc. Paul told us that the times in which we are living “are evil.” The Greek word for evil is *poneros*. It actually means “the evil one.” Jesus taught the disciples to pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13). He actually said, “Deliver us from the evil one.”

Satan is the god of this world. Literally all that is unfolding around us is tainted by his deception and his war against the saints. The Lord, of course, reigns sovereign over all. Yet Paul reminded us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, that there is a reason to consider the reality of the times in which we live.

How do we redeem the “time” while we are in Satan’s territory and we still have some time in our lives? Only the Lord Himself can answer that for each of us. Perhaps we can simply weigh how we “spend” the time God has given us. Are we investing or spending our time with activities that remind us of the Lord’s love and grace and coming reign on earth? Or do we end up being depressed, worried, frustrated, or irritated over the news from Satan’s realm? Perhaps we end up forgetting that the Father has a perfect plan and is working all things together for His good.

In Ephesians chapter six, Paul gave us some practical, Spirit-anointed wisdom on this topic. He summarized, saying, “Take unto you the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day” (Ephesians 6:13).

If we are being tossed about with fear, confusion, or doubt, perhaps our loving Father is encouraging us to invest our time in new ways during this season of our lives.

*Speak to our hearts, oh Lord. Give us an awareness of how we are investing the days, the time You have given us.*

# *Christ Alone is Our Strength*

*Without me, you can do nothing.*  
—*John 15:5*



The Lord spoke these words to His disciples as He was preparing to be crucified and ultimately ascend into heaven. Many scholars believe He shared these words at the Last Supper.

The Savior must have considered this to be crucial information for His disciples to know and live by as they survived in the world as believers. The Lord made this statement in the midst of His metaphor of the Vine and the branches. The branches certainly cannot exist if they are cut off from the vine itself, the root of the plant.

The Greek word for without is *choris* and it means, literally, apart from. James, the apostle, used this same word when he wrote, “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). By that James means that true faith results in good works, just as grapes are a

result of the life in the vine feeding the branches and producing fruit. Grapes are the natural result of living grapevines. So anyone who claims to have faith in Christ but who bears no fruit is actually a dead branch, not connected to the true Vine.

The Lord encourages His followers to look to Him, the Vine, for their complete supply in all things. “Apart from me you can do nothing.” The Greek word for do is *poieo*, which means to work in the sense of creating something. The Lord, for example, says we are His workmanship, His masterpiece or “poem,” a result of His work, not ours. And all good work—all that is done by us as believers—will only have value if it is He Who accomplishes the work through us.

The Lord leaves no room for doubt on this subject. He says that apart from Him we can do nothing. Again, the Greek word for nothing is *oudeis*. Literally it reads, “You cannot do not even one good thing.” There is a double negative in this statement. No, not one good thing!

So what does this mean for us on a daily basis? How are we to respond to the Lord, knowing that only He can ever accomplish anything of value in our lives?

Perhaps it means we should look up more often. We tend to look inward, trying to analyze what we should be doing, what we wish we were doing, what we ought to have done, what we have failed to do, and sometimes longing to figure out what to do that might be of value in the kingdom. Sound familiar?

Yet the Lord is giving us a platform, a foundation for peace. He says we have been cleansed, sanctified by His Word (John 15:3). Therefore, we are in Christ, we are abiding in the Vine because we are believers. The Greek word for abide is *meno*, which means to remain or continue. We continue, remain,



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abide in Him because He has promised to keep us safe in Him (Jude 24).

He then simply states that He will produce fruit in us. “He that abides in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit” (John 15:5). Therefore, we can look to Him, by faith, knowing He is at work in us, accomplishing and producing all the works that have been ordained for us individually (Ephesians 2:10).

*Lord, give us grace to believe Your promises. Lift our eyes from our own flesh, our own mental gymnastics, and fasten our hopes on You alone.*

# *The Joy in Trusting*

*O Lord Almighty, happy are those who trust in you.*  
—*Psalm 84:12 NLT*



Isn't it amazing that Satan's primary activity in this world is to keep us from trusting the Lord's plan, the Lord's timing, the Lord's answer (or seeming lack of answer) to our prayers? Once again, the Hebrew word for trust is *batah*, which means to have confidence in the Lord's revealed Word to us, to confide in Him about our needs, wants, desires, and then to have confidence in His way.

The reformer Martin Luther wrote, "All my desires have not been gratified, but thy love denied them to me when fulfillment of my wishes would have proved my ruin or injury." The Lord alone knows the end from the beginning. His Word tells us that He loves us as He loves His Son if we are alive in Christ. His plans for us are "for good and not for disaster, to give us a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11 NLT).

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But we are often blinded by the ways of the world. For the world offers “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life...but the world will pass away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” (1 John 2:16-17). In this world of darkness, Satan’s kingdom, we will never experience peace or satisfaction, especially when we get sidetracked from walking with a singleness of purpose in Christ.

Another Puritan writer, David Brainerd, described this reality. He wrote, “Thy never-failing providence orders every event, sweetens every fear, reveals evil’s presence lurking in seeming good, brings real good out of seeming evil, makes unsatisfactory what I set my heart upon, to show me what a short-sighted creature I am, and to teach me to live by faith upon thy blessed self.”

David, the psalmist, knew by experience that the only place of joy and gladness was in the Lord’s presence, leaving behind the false pleasures and temptations of this world. “Happy are those who trust in you.” The Lord Himself explained, “Your eye is a lamp for your body. A pure eye lets sunshine into your soul. But an evil eye shuts out the light and plunges you into darkness” (Luke 11:34 NLT).

*Oh Lord, give us eyes for You alone. By Your Spirit give us a holy fear of Satan’s beguiling lies that steal our peace, our joy, our gladness...and wound Your heart of love.*

# *Open Doors and Closed Doors*

*Behold, I have set before thee an open door,  
and no man can shut it.*

—*Revelation 3:8*



Do you sometimes feel as if the doors in your life experience are shut? An open door often signifies hope, opportunity, direction, adventure, new horizons. Closed doors can produce the opposite emotions: hopelessness, lack of purpose or direction, even a sense of lostness or abandonment.

The Lord specializes in opening and closing doors. In fact, we are told, “He opens doors, and no one can shut them; he shuts doors, and no one can open them (Revelation 3:7 NLT).

Have you been pushing on some closed doors? Or have you been waiting on the Lord to open the right door? In God’s grace He shuts some doors. He knows which door you or I should walk through. And He protects us by keeping some doors closed.

## *Open Doors and Closed Doors*

It is interesting to note that the ark designed to protect Noah's family from God's judgment had only one door. And this door was cut into the side of the ark. "And the Lord said unto Noah 'Come thou and all thy house into the ark'...and the Lord shut him in" (Genesis 7:1, 16). Noah received clear direction when the time was right. He was led through the open door. And then that same door was firmly shut to those who must have been pounding on it later.

In the gospel of John, Christ proclaims, "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved" (John 10:9). Christ is the ark of our protection; this door was opened by a cut in His side (John 19:34). As we enter into Him by faith in His Word, we have entered into an eternal relationship with the One Who is in charge of all doors.

We are the sheep; He is the Shepherd. He does the leading; we do the following. Sheep don't even know how to find doors. They would starve to death or be eaten by wild animals if left to themselves. The Shepherd knows the hopeless condition of abandoned sheep. He "calls his own sheep by name and he leads them...he walks ahead of them, and they follow him...where ever they go they will find green pastures.... I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep (John 10:3-4, 9, 14 NLT). The sheep trust the Shepherd to lead them through the open doors to the green pastures.

Sometimes we even feel locked up, trapped behind closed doors. The Lord's disciples experienced this after Christ died. On Sunday evening they were huddling in the upper room. They were living in fear because of the religious Jews. The doors were shut. "Suddenly Jesus was standing there among them! 'Peace be with you' he said. As he spoke, he held out his hands for them to see, and he showed them his side" (John 20:19-20 NLT).

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Closed doors are not a problem for the Lord. What is His message to those of us who are feeling trapped or fearful? Be at peace. I am here with you, even behind what may appear to be closed doors in your life.

And just in case the disciples missed this word of encouragement, the Lord repeated this lesson eight days later. Once again the disciples were together and “the doors were locked” (John 20:26 NLT). “Suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. He said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer’” (John 20:26-27 NLT).

The One Who is the Door invites us to trust His wounds and the cut in His side as proof that we can be at peace. He will open and close the doors in our lives. He is the Shepherd Who laid down His life for His sheep. And He knows our names.

*Thank You, Lord, for being in charge of all the doors in our lives!*

# *Fullness of Joy*

*In thy presence is fullness of joy.  
—Psalm 16:11*



Have you ever pondered over the magnificent (but impossible to grasp) fact that Abraham ate lunch with the Lord face to face? (Read Genesis 18 again.) Can we comprehend that Adam walked and talked with the Lord in the garden of Eden? (Genesis 3:8-24). Or perhaps even more amazing is that some of the disciples sat with the Lord in His resurrected body and ate the breakfast Jesus had cooked for them (John 21:1-14).

Isn't there something in us that thinks it would be incredible to actually be in the Lord's very presence? The staggering, incomprehensible truth is: we are in His very presence if He lives in us by faith in His finished work. The Lord explained this reality to the disciples as He prepared to leave them without His visible presence. He said, "The Father will give you another

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Comforter who will abide with you forever. And He will dwell with you and in you” (John 14:16-17).

The Greek word for another is *allos*, which means literally “one exactly like” the first one. If the Comforter was different from Christ Himself, the Greek word would be *heteros*, another, of a different kind. This tells us two things. One, the Holy Spirit is God Himself, just as Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. It is clear confirmation of God in His fullness, three in one. Two, this tells us that God Himself dwells in us and we dwell in His very presence. Right now. In this moment!

David knew that in His presence was “fullness of joy.” Jesus told the disciples that His ascension and His coming to dwell in us by the Spirit was so that our “joy may be full” (John 16:24). Do we actually believe or remember that we are living in the actual presence of the one true God, the King of the universe?

Perhaps we can learn from David how to experience the Lord’s actual presence. In Psalm 95:2a David wrote, “Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving.” This is a wonderful means for accessing the reality of being in His presence. Just begin thanking Him for all He is to us. He is the Truth. He is the Supplier of all things—food, shelter, family, birds, flowers, trees, colors, music! Thank You, Lord, for all You are.

“Let us sing Him psalms of praise” (Psalm 95:2b NLT). The Lord’s presence is also accessed through singing to Him. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:18-19 (NLT), “Let the Holy Spirit fill and control you, then you will sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, making music to the Lord....”

*Lord, may we continually be aware that we are standing before You, in You, in this holy temple, in the body of believers. Then our joy will be full!*



## *God Directs Our Steps*

*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself:  
it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.*

—*Jeremiah 10:23*



Somehow the saints of old seemed to grasp the sovereign power of God. They were very aware that God alone reigns over every detail of our lives. And He is orchestrating all those details together for His glory.

Those saints of old apparently had many of the same annoying and sometimes gut-wrenching distresses we have today. Job, in his horrific agony, cried out, “Let the day wherein I was born perish” (Job 3:3). “Why died I not from the womb?” (Job 3:11). “For my sighing cometh before I eat” (Job 3:24). Job definitely had some very bad days. He experienced hopelessness.

Yet the ultimate hope Job had was his solid belief in his future in Christ. He confessed, in the midst of his testing, “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day

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upon the earth...in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25-26). And he believed God was in all the details of his life. “Doth not He see my ways and count all my steps?” (Job 31:4). Job’s solace was his awareness of God’s sovereign reign over his life.

The wisest man who ever lived, King Solomon, had family problems, political problems, and personal agonies. He wrote, “A man’s heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps” (Proverbs 16:9). Solomon, in his wisdom, spoke again and again of our utter dependence upon the Lord’s plans. “The Lord hath made all things for Himself: Yes, even the wicked for the day of evil” (Proverbs 16:4).

King David’s greatest comfort and joy as in remembering the character of his Savior. “Thou art my hiding place; Thou shalt preserve me from trouble” (Psalm 32:7). For the Lord “forsaketh not His saints; they are preserved for ever” (Psalm 37:28). “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord...none of his steps shall slide” (Psalm 37:23, 31).

Surely we all struggle with our failures, sin, distress, frustrations, and the all-too-frequent condition of wondering where we are and what we are doing. The greatest (and only) comfort we have is to realize that God in His grace has ordained our steps.

*Lord, it is not in us to direct our steps. We acknowledge Your wisdom and Your worthy plan for our lives. Help us walk by faith in Your faithfulness as You direct our paths (Proverbs 3:5-6).*

## *Arise and Shine!*

*Arise, shine; for thy light is come,  
and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee...  
darkness covers the earth...  
lift up your eyes and see....  
—Isaiah 60:1-4*



The Lord has brought “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” to those of us who are born anew in Him (2 Corinthians 4:6).

As we continue to walk in Him we are transformed, day by day, by His light. “We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18 NASB).

What did Paul mean when he said we have an “unveiled face?” He explained this as the removing of the blindness that prevents us from seeing the Lord’s glory. He compared it to the veil Moses wore because his face so shone with the glory of God that the people of Israel could not bear to look upon

him (2 Corinthians 3:7-9 NLT). However, this veil can now be removed through faith in Christ. Since we are believers, the light of the gospel has come to us, we have been granted repentance (2 Timothy 2:25), and the glory of Christ is shining out of us.

Paul also described us as “beholding in a mirror the glory of the Lord.” The Greek word for beholding is *katoptrizo* and it actually means reflecting. In the New Living Translation it says, “And all of us have had that veil removed so that we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18 NLT).

What Paul said here has a fascinating, double-edged meaning. We have seen the light; this light is in us. So we are being changed “from glory to glory by the Spirit.” The light shines brighter and brighter as the Spirit enlarges our understanding of “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Paul also pointed out the way this change is being accomplished. As we reflect on the Person of Jesus Christ (behold Him), His image is seen in us!

Sometimes we attempt to “grow” in our Christian life by “techniques” we feel will help us be a better spouse, a more faithful student of the Word, a better pray-er, a more patient person. Often this only leads to an outward “shaping up” of our flesh, our self-life. Whenever we are “looking in the mirror” to see if we are shaping up, we are not looking at the glory of Christ.

True inner change occurs in our spirit as we simply look at the glory of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. As C. H. Spurgeon says, “We enjoy the blissful consequences which are ours because we are in Christ. These consequences which flow to us include His perfect obedience, finished atonement, resurrection, ascension,

*Arise and Shine!*

intercession as well as His dominion over all principalities and power.”

God Himself “has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). We are to rest in His Person, remembering that, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). We are called to behold His glory, His life in us, not our own self-life. “And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20). The Son is the Author and Finisher of our faith. And transformation—the increase of His brightness in us—occurs as we behold His life, His Person.

*Father, let Your light shine in us and through us!*

# *Never Separated from Christ*

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?  
Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution,  
or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?  
—Romans 8:35*



This is a very critical question for most of us. When we are totally stressed over our circumstances or our unfulfilled needs (wants?), we feel pretty separated from the Lord's love, don't we? Yet these are the moments when we need to run into His arms, to hide under His wings of love and protection.

The apostle Paul listed seven situations or conditions that can cause us to feel separated from the Lord. First is tribulation. The Greek word is *thlibo* and it means to have troubles or afflictions that make you feel boxed in, trapped. Next he mentioned distress; the Greek word is *stenchoria* and it means to have anguish over your circumstances. Persecution, of course, is the experience of being pressed by others for whatever reason. Famine and nakedness are conditions in which many believers around the world

## *Never Separated from Christ*

find themselves. A peril is a danger of any kind—financial peril, danger to your physical well-being, domestic abuse, serving on the battlefield, fires, floods, hurricanes, shipwrecks, car accidents, etc. The sword represents life-threatening situations, especially related to battle.

Can you find yourself in a situation represented on that list? Paul was personally experiencing all seven of those challenges regularly. And it was Paul himself who, because of his own experience in Christ, answered the question he had raised. “Who (or what) shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

He wrote, “I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

Paul actually added ten more items to the list of what might cause us to feel separated from God’s love. He was convinced that not one of these seventeen situations can ever separate us from the love the Father has for His own. Nothing, absolutely nothing in our lives (not sin, not failure, not lack of prayer, etc.) can separate us from His love and mercy. Neither the angels nor the demons can keep us from being in the center of His love if we are alive in Christ.

Paul described God’s love in such a dramatic way because he wanted us to live in the moment-by-moment awareness of the Father’s never-ending love for us. “If God is for us, who can ever be against us?... Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for His own?” (Romans 8:31, 33 NLT).

Perhaps our greatest challenge in living a triumphant, joy-filled life is that we ourselves are against ourselves! We condemn

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ourselves, accuse ourselves, and feel unworthy of God's love. We often walk in unbelief, failing to embrace these incredible truths from His Word.

May we dare to believe Him! May we run into His loving arms every moment of every day, in every circumstance.

*Oh Lord, help our unbelief. Give us eyes to see You and give us freedom from our preoccupation with ourselves.*



# *Only One Thing is Needful*

*Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,  
and I will give you rest.*

—*Matthew 11:28*



What an invitation! To think that there is someone who can dispense the gift of rest! The Lord tells us very clearly what steps to take to experience this reality of rest. “Come unto Me.” There are many different Greek words for come. This one is *deute*, which actually is an insistent, one-word call. “Here!” or “Hither!”

The Jewish disciples had practiced law-keeping and good works all their lives as a means of trying to win God’s approval. Christ is teaching them an entirely new way of living. And His message is desperately needed in our lives as Christians today. We are still under the false assumption that our striving to improve and our works of service will gain us points with God. Oh, we may not say we believe that, but we often live exhausting lives,

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focused on activity. We are busy earning a living, taking kids to school, serving in church, making time for friends, keeping up with daily chores, etc. Yet we often are not focused on the One in Whom we find rest.

The Lord is speaking about the labors of life here. “All ye that labour...” He is not talking about salvation. He is talking to those who already know Him. He is teaching them how to experience rest in the midst of a life filled with toil and “heavy” burdens. His invitation is to “all” who are seeking rest.

The Greek word for rest has its root in *anapa*, which actually means to “cease again.” It is as if the disciples knew the source of the rest and needed to remember and return to the place of rest, which, for us, involves remembering we are in Christ.

Interestingly, one of the Hebrew words for rest is translated *Noah*. The Matthew passage in Hebrew would be, “Come unto Me and I will give you Noah!” Now Noah was a believer who lived and toiled and was burdened by the world around him. The Lord said to Noah, “Come, thou and all thy house into the ark” (Genesis 7:1). In the Scripture the ark is a picture of Christ Himself. The Lord actually invites Noah “in” to where He Himself is! God’s call to Noah was “Come,” which means the Lord was telling Noah He Himself would be in the ark. Noah and his family of believers rested in the ark, at peace, while all the world outside was suffering and dying. The picture reminds us that we are in Christ. He is accomplishing His purpose in us. We can rest in that fact.

In the Matthew passage Jesus goes on to say, “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of me.” Each of the Jewish rabbis or teachers

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of Judaism had a specific focus in his individual teaching. And his disciples, those who were “yoked” or connected to a particular rabbi, practiced or valued that particular focus or emphasis. Jesus, as a Jewish rabbi, a teacher, is saying, “My yoke—my teaching—is easy. It produces rest. He does not say, “Learn this doctrine or do these good works or get your life together!” Rather, He says “Learn of Me.”

You will recall the Mary and Martha story (Luke 10:38-42). Martha was busy serving (and resenting doing all the work!) and Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His Word.” Martha wasn’t doing something “wrong,” but the Lord saw her heart. Jesus said to her, “Martha, Martha, thou art careful (anxious) and troubled (agitated) about many things.” Does that describe us when we are not “resting in Christ?”

The Lord is teaching about the condition of our hearts. Martha’s heart condition, in her busyness, was one of being anxious, troubled, agitated. The Lord then says to her (and to us), “One thing is needful....” Wow! Don’t we want to know what the “one thing” is? He tells us, “Mary has chosen the good part which shall not be taken away from her.” On what had Mary chosen to focus? On learning of Christ. She sat at His feet and “heard His Word.”

A little voice in us says, “Well, if I sat ‘at the feet of Jesus’ all the time, who is going to cook the meals and do what has to be done?” That is the “world’s wisdom” speaking in us. When Christ was with the five thousand who needed to be fed and there was little food, He provided in the practical realm, miraculously. The greatest joy of the daily life in Christ comes as the Spirit teaches us that the Lord is enough. He is able to do “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think...” (Ephesians 3:20).

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So, even as we walk through our daily responsibilities, we rest in His abundant supply.

*Lord, we hear Your words, "Come to Me." By Your spirit may we learn to rest in Your life, Your work, Your purpose, Your faithfulness.*

## *Kept by our Father*

*I pray for them which thou hast given me....  
Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom  
thou hast given me...that they also may be one in us...  
and the glory which thou gavest me I have given them.  
—John 17:9, 11, 21-22*



The prayer of God the Son to God the Father in John 17 is simply thrilling. As we read Christ's words we realize that He, the Lord of creation, has made some incredible, miraculous requests to the Father on our behalf.

The Father and the Son are always in agreement because the Son knows the mind of the Father. Therefore, we can be assured that the Son's request on our behalf will be granted!

We will be kept by our holy Father. He will preserve us, never allowing the evil one to snatch us out of His hand (John 17:15; John 10:28-29). He will never allow anyone to speak evil against us at the day of judgment (Romans 8:31, 33).

It is His power that keeps us safe, day in and day out. "...who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5).

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The Lord also has requested that His joy might be fulfilled in us (John 17:13). We may experience only bursts of intermittent joy in this life. Yet we will ultimately experience pure, uninterrupted joy forever. “In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11).

We will be sanctified by the Father because the Lord has requested this (John 17:17). This means that the Father Himself is certain to bring us to heaven, holy and blameless.

Perhaps the most exceptional request Christ has made is that we be one with the Father and the Son! We have been given the same glory that Jesus Christ has been given by the Father (John 17:22). And the Father loves us in the same way, to the same degree, with the same infinite abundance with which He loves His only begotten Son (John 17:23). In fact, John tells us that we are the sons of God right now and that when He appears again “we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2). Certainly our finite minds cannot yet begin to comprehend the riches of these glorious truths.

*Lord, grant us in Your grace the ability to comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of Your love for us.*

# *Saved from the Wrath of God*

*Much more then, being now justified by His blood,  
we shall be saved from wrath through Him.*

—Romans 5:9



The apostle Paul never ceased being amazed at the incredible, miraculous blessings that are ours if we are in Christ. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul again and again described the specific elements of God’s grace and mercy that are ours as believers.

In Romans chapter five Paul explained that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). And then, as if that weren’t enough, he described the “much more.” We have been justified by His blood, made righteous in God’s eyes, and therefore, we are protected, saved from the wrath of God. This is another incredible aspect of what it means to have had Christ die for us while we were yet sinners! Paul wanted us to grasp the ramifications of this truth.

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The Greek word translated as wrath is *orge*, the basis for our word orgy. This word is a description of the uncontrolled, incomprehensible, devastating anger of God. There is a time appointed by God when He is going to completely and totally unleash His anger on man's sin. Paul said Christ has "delivered us from the wrath to come" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). He said that "God has not appointed us to wrath" (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

The apostle John also described "the great day of His wrath" (Revelation 6:17); he spoke of "the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" that is going to fall upon unbelievers (Revelation 19:15). The believer has escaped this horrific wrath of God scheduled to come at a time already appointed.

Paul continued in Romans and exclaimed, "Much more... we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:10). This is a truth that often escapes us as believers. We may understand that we have been saved from the penalty of sin through Christ's death. But Paul said "much more" we have been saved from the penalty of sin by Christ's life. What does that really mean? Why did Paul think that this is a "much more" truth?

Paul reminded us that Christ is alive, right now. He is eternally alive. He is sinless, perfect before the Father. And because we have been raised up from the deadness of sin, we have been made eternally alive in Christ. In the here and now, every single moment of our lives on earth, we are counted as perfect and sinless in His eyes. "I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God..." (Galatians 2:20 NLT). This is the key to living the joyful, radiant life of a believer. We are counted as righteous every single day, even when sin and failure overtake us!



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Paul continued to be thunderstruck by the greatness of these realities. Again in Romans 5:15 and Romans 5:17, he told us that though sin once reigned in us, “much more” the grace of God (and the gift of grace, Jesus Christ) has been shed on us abundantly. Because of the “much more” of grace, we will reign with Christ forever, clothed in His righteousness. And we have been saved from the wrath that is coming.

*Oh Lord, by the power and revelation of Your Holy Spirit, open our eyes to see the manifold aspects of Your “much more” grace in our lives. And we give You praise for having delivered us from Your wrath.*

# *Not of this World*

*They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.  
—John 17:16*



The Lord makes this amazing statement about us as believers. He says that in exactly the same way He is not a citizen of earth, we are not citizens of this planet. I wonder what would change in our lives if we really understood this and believed it and walked accordingly?

The Greek word for world in this passage is *kosmos*. It refers to the arrangement of the world as it now stands. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 we learn that Satan is “the god of this world.” In that passage the word translated world is *aion* which means age or eon. In other words, at this time in history, during this age, Satan rules over the cosmos. This is his realm. We are, as believers, aliens in a foreign environment.

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The Lord declares again and again that the saints, those of us who know Christ, are from another realm. We are part of a heavenly cosmos, a completely different “arrangement,” in perspective, in purpose, in truth, and in what satisfies us.

Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). Therefore, the current world order is based entirely on deception. The god of this world continually teaches that in this world you can be happy if you attain enough money, marry the right person, achieve enough notoriety, gain enough power, or become attractive enough.

The apostle John gave us the Lord’s perspective in 1 John 2:15-17 NLT. He wrote, “Stop loving this evil world and all that it offers you.... For the world offers only the lust for pleasure, the lust for everything we see, and pride in our possessions. These are not from the Father. They are from this evil world. And this world is fading away, along with everything it craves....”

The Lord’s desire for each of us is to experience peace, joy, and purpose in Him. He wants us to enter into the “peace that passes understanding” (Philippians 4:7). As Christ prepared to leave this cosmos and return to His heavenly world, He said, “I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn’t like the peace the world gives” (John 14:27 NLT). He invites us to live in that peace by setting our minds on who we are in Him and intentionally protecting our minds and hearts from the deception and temptations abounding in the world.

When we experience anxiety, worry, depression, frustration, anger, and temptation, it is a result of viewing our current circumstances from the perspective of this world. We are measuring our life experience by the expectations of an “ideal” life that this world proclaims to be satisfying and ideal. Yet the

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Lord Himself has told us, “Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33 NLT).

We can expect trials, tribulations, disappointments, and challenges because we are in enemy territory. But the war has been won. We can rest in the fact that the Lord is working His life in us in preparation for translating us, ultimately, into the heavenly cosmos. Meanwhile, our peace, while on this planet, is attainable only by viewing our lives with the mind of Christ, from His perspective. “Set your mind on things above” (Colossians 3:2). The word *set* in that passage means to have a fixation!

The Lord’s brother, James, wrote, “Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything” (James 1:2-4 NLT).

*God, grant us eyes to see this world as the enemy’s realm. Give us a mind set on Your realm alone.*

# *The Mystery of the Universe*

*Oh, righteous Father, the world doesn't know you, but I do;  
and these disciples know you sent me.  
And I have revealed you to them and will keep on revealing you.  
I will do this so that your love for me  
may be in them and I in them.*  
—John 17:25-26 *NLT*



Being entrusted with a secret is important. And most of us are fascinated with mysteries. We have an innate desire to penetrate into hidden truth. The greatest mystery, the most incredible secret of the universe, has been revealed to those of us who know Christ.

In Matthew chapter 13 the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke in parables when He talked to the multitudes. Here was Christ's answer: "You have been permitted to understand the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven, but others have not" (Matthew 13:11 *NLT*).

The apostle Paul was astounded to discover that the mystery of the universe had been revealed to him and to all believers. He wrote, "God's secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is

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a plan centered on Christ, designed long ago according to his good pleasure. And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth” (Ephesians 1:9-10 NLT).

The secret of the universe lies in the fact that God has revealed Himself in a Person. No one has ever seen God the Father. The secret is that God the Father has revealed Himself. He can be seen and known in His Son. “No one has ever seen God. But his only Son, who is himself God has told us about him” (John 1:18 NLT).

Jesus carefully and repeatedly revealed who He was to His disciples. He said to doubting Thomas, “If you had known who I am, then you would have known who my Father is. From now on you know him and have seen him!” (John 14:7 NLT). Then Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied. Jesus replied, “Phillip, don’t you even yet know.... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:8-9 NLT).

What is the practical significance for us, as believers, to know this incredible revelation—that Jesus Christ is God? It means that we alone have access to the throne of God’s grace; we alone are free from the wrath of God which is coming on the world; we alone can stand on the promises of the Word of God; we alone can know that all things work together for good in our lives.

God the Father refuses to even hear the prayers of those who are not His children by faith in Christ’s shed blood (John 9:31), those are the children of darkness, children of the world (1 Thessalonians 5:5). But we are not of this world. We are not

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earth dwellers. We are recipients of the knowledge that comes only by revelation, given by the Holy Spirit.

*Lord, reveal anew to us the miraculous privilege we have of knowing You. May we treasure the revelation and abide in Your promises to us day by day.*

# *Stand Fast!*

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith  
Christ hath made us free....  
—Galatians 5:1*



The entire concept of freedom, of liberty, was foreign to many in the first century. In the Jewish religion, people constantly suffered under the bondage of attempting to keep the ten commandments plus hundreds of other civil laws. Failure to keep those had dire consequences, including stoning to death, thirty-nine lashes, etc. And in the pagan Roman world, slavery abounded. Only the wealthy Roman citizens had any appreciation for freedom. And the general population was under the rule of Rome.

The apostle Paul recognized that he was teaching earth-shaking truth to the Christians, many of whom had lived under the Jewish law their entire lives. Others were slaves who could not really even grasp the concept of freedom.



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Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians in an attempt to educate them, again, on what it means to have been set free by Jesus Christ, never again to have to try to earn God's favor through keeping the Jewish law.

The Greek word for liberty is *eleutheria*. It is the very same word translated as free, *eleutherio*. In the New Living Translation we read, "So Christ has really set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law" (Galatians 5:1 NLT).

Do you find yourself asking, "How does one stay free?" Freedom is an elusive concept. Somehow it seems we only know we are not living freely in Christ when we find ourselves living "under the law." What are the signs, the clues, that we have returned to the bondage of living by the law? They include self-condemnation, a focus on self-effort, striving to break bad habits or do good things, judging others for their sins, and measuring our standing with God by how well we have performed our Christian duty, which often spills over into our prayer life, church attendance, tithing, Bible study, etc. In contrast, the signs or clues that we are living in liberty include a joyful spirit, a desire to praise the Lord at every turn, an awareness of His presence, an overflowing love for others, a longing to know Him even better, and a bubbling desire to tell others about this life in Christ.

Where are you? Where am I? It seems we are constantly pulled into "performance Christianity." Or we are pulled into succumbing to the bondage of sin, which includes all the things the law forbids: anger, jealousy, adultery, gossip, fornication, murder, and backbiting. Notice that those sins are all of equal

weight, i.e., they are sins. Sin is any activity not springing from the Holy Spirit at work in us.

The apostle Paul told us there is another place in which we can live. We do not have to live in the pull of our proud, fleshly striving to be good. Nor do we have to suffer in the misery of our sinful, fleshly acts. Remember, we are, in our new creation, free from sin. It is the flesh in which we still dwell that acts up! Paul had this very struggle himself. That is why he could give us the solution. He described his own struggle in Romans 7. “I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned.... When I want to do good, I don’t. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. But if I am doing what I don’t want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it.... Who will free me? The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:18-25 NLT).

What was Paul saying to us? What did he mean, “the answer is in Jesus Christ?” He gave us more clarity as he explained to the Galatians about how to stand in freedom, in liberty.

Paul said if you are in Christ it doesn’t matter if you have been circumcised or not circumcised, having kept the law or been pagan. What matters is faith, your faith in the work of Christ, your righteousness which is a result of your faith in Him, in His life. If you are in Christ you are in His life, by the power and work of the Holy Spirit, so consciously live in that realm, the realm of the Spirit, by believing, having faith that “the life you now live you live by the faith of the Son of God” (Galatians 2:20). His faithfulness counts for you. Look to Him. Do not “frustrate the grace of God” by trying to shape up or please God by your own self-effort. Simply believe that your life is in His hands; the Spirit is at work in you. “For it is God who works in

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you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). “The just shall live by faith” (Galatians 3:11).

Faith is a gift from Christ, Who is the Author and Finisher of our faith (Romans 14:23; Hebrews 12:2).

We stand fast in freedom by simply believing the fact that Jesus Christ has done it all. His life lives in us—He, by His Spirit, is accomplishing His promises in us. This is the meaning and the means of being set free.

*Lord, we praise and thank You for setting us free.*

# *Affliction for a Season*

*There is wonderful joy ahead,  
even though it is necessary for you  
to endure many trials for a while.*

—1 Peter 1:6 NLT



It is interesting to realize that metal—steel, for example—is continuously tested until it is strong enough to serve in the role for which it was designed. Metal is not tested for the purpose of breaking it. It is tested and refined to make it strong so it won't break under pressure.

The parallel can be drawn in our experience as saints here on earth. The Lord, the great Refiner, is testing our mettle, strengthening us for the future for which He has designed us. So Peter encourages us to “endure” for a season because the end result is going to be awesome!

In the King James Version this verse reads, “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.” It is fascinating to

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consider the phrase “for a season.” The Lord has a time schedule, day by day, season by season, for accomplishing His perfect will for our lives.

We are familiar with the words of the wisest man who ever lived, Solomon, King of Israel, son of David and Bathsheba. He told us there is “a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to get, and a time to lose” (Ecclesiastics 3:1-8). What season are you in? God’s Word promises that seasons in our lives will change. He has a rhythm in mind for each of us. The pressure comes and the pressure goes and we become warriors of the faith through the process.

Paul wrote to Timothy and encouraged him to “be instant in season and out of season.” In other words, he told Timothy to stand solid both when the times are good and when the times are not so conducive to faith.

Paul knew what it was to experience severe trials and testings, yet he wrote, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). Paul saw the reason behind the trials of this world. They produce in us “immeasurable great glory that will last forever” (2 Corinthians 4:17 NLT).

Paul also explained how to cope with our trials and testings by seeing our circumstances with the mind of Christ, from His perspective. Paul wrote, “We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

The Greek word for temporal is *proskairos* and it means “for a season.” Our key for living day by day in His peace is to look at what is unseen, not at our circumstances. And in His time,

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all will be well. “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven” (Ecclesiastics 3:1).

*Father, we long to see past our current trials and struggles and pain. Give us grace to endure and the eyes to see Your hand in all.*

# *The Path of Life*

*Thou wilt show me the path of life.*  
—*Psalm 16:11*



How many times do we find ourselves longing to know what path we should take? Sometimes we long for the Lord to write the answer on the wall. “Here is where you are to go” or “This is what I want you to do.” Yet the Christian life is about walking by faith, not by sight. We have the Light of the world leading us; and He knows the path we are to be on, day by day.

In 1637 William Austin, a Puritan saint, provided some amazing insights into what the psalmist is telling us. Austin observed, “There are four things to be noticed here: A Guide; A Traveler; A Way; A Life.” The Guide is the Lord Himself. There is only one Guide to Whom we are to look for our direction. The Guide will show me, the singular traveler, the way. And this way leads to life.

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It is interesting that the Scripture regularly describes us as travelers, as “strangers in a foreign land” (Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11). It is easy to become lost when we are in foreign territory. We need a guide who knows the terrain and what lies ahead.

David, the psalmist, was very confident in his Guide. “Thou wilt show me . . .” David’s life was filled with challenges and perplexities. On one hand the Lord had called him to be king of Israel. Yet King Saul was hunting David down to kill him. He was often living in dark caves in the wilderness. Nevertheless, he confidently said, “Thou wilt show me . . .” Lord, give us such expectant faith!

Notice that Jehovah will show us the path. This is not a freeway, or a highway, or even a road. It is a footpath; a narrow path that requires walking, one step at a time. The Lord seemed to be saying something similar to His disciples. “Narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14). This path has a destination. The destination is life and only those who have the Guide will reach the destination.

It is significant that the traveler seems to be traveling alone with only the Guide’s presence. There is a sense of loneliness, a kind of solitude. No others seem to be present to cheer or to give advice or direction or encouragement. When we experience our greatest faith challenges, we often feel quite alone. This is when we most need to lean on the Guide for conversation and confidence.

The other path is wide and broad with many travelers on it. Lots of company. Lots of advice. Lots of entertainment. That is the path that “leads to destruction” (Matthew 7:13). No wonder we sometimes feel as if we are “missing all the fun” or “missing



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all the money” or “missing out on life’s pleasures.” The crowd is some place we aren’t!

The path we are on, if we are in Christ, is the path, the way, that is true life. We are walking in the way. This was what the Lord was revealing when He said, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). He is both the Path and the Life. We are both in Him and with Him on the walk if we know Jesus Christ to be Jehovah, the long-awaited Jewish Messiah, “Immanuel, God with us” (Isaiah 7:14). This is the truth; this is eternal life (1 John 5:20).

David knew the destination was an eternal, joyful life. He finished his thought, “Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy.” Despite feeling alone, confused, or lost in the world, the traveler knew the destination and trusted Jehovah for the journey.

*Help us remember the destination, Lord, and trust You on the path.*

## *Living the Faith Life*

*And the Lord said unto Moses, "Is the Lord's hand waxed short?  
Thou shalt see now whether My word shall  
come to pass unto thee or not."*

*—Numbers 11:23*



The Lord has given us every kind of promise about His faithfulness to us personally. He has clearly proclaimed that with Him all things are possible. He has declared Himself to be our Shepherd, leading us into righteousness, protecting us from evil, supplying our “green pastures.” Yet, like Moses, we doubt Him; we continue to whine, complain, question, and agonize.

Moses had seen the Lord do miracles. He had witnessed the pillar of fire leading the Israelites; he had experienced the daily supply of manna; he had seen the angel of death pass over the homes of the Israelites in Egypt. He had visibly had God’s glory settle on him. Yet when the Lord said He would supply fresh meat for perhaps two to three million Israelites, Moses told the Lord it was impossible (Numbers 11:21-22).

## *Living the Faith Life*

What about you? God has promised to supply our needs. Yet when we see that our situation is hopeless, we give up on His faithfulness. We, of course, are looking at the sufficiency (or lack of sufficiency) in the visible realm and help is not on the way. In fact, from our perspective, it is often too late. We have reached a place financially, emotionally, physically where our circumstances are now truly hopeless. We have now fully indulged in unbelief.

Charles Spurgeon, the great English preacher, wrote, “The ground of faith is not the sufficiency of the visible means for the performance of God’s promises, but rather the all-sufficiency of the invisible God, who will most surely do as He hath said He would.”

The life of faith is the life the Lord is constantly teaching us to live while we are here on earth. The ultimate life of faith would be living with no hopes placed in our visible circumstances or in the creature comforts or in human supply, including our own capability and self-effort. We would be, every moment, saying with King David, “My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation” (Psalm 62:5-6).

However, we are learning to live by faith. Perhaps we need to embrace our current situations as gifts from Him. His purpose is being accomplished in us. We are being trained to learn to walk, not by sight, but by faith in His faithfulness.

*Father, help us believe that Your Word will indeed come to pass and to know that Your promises are to be relied upon in every circumstance.*

## *No Favoritism*

*For there is no respect of persons with God.  
—Romans 2:11*



The world has a measuring stick for almost every category of living. For example, it is better to be rich than poor. It is better to be attractive than unattractive. Good grades get accolades; bad grades don't. This carries over into spiritual "measuring sticks." Famous Christians or "gifted" Christians must be more valuable than nobodies. People who give lots of money to the church or to missions must be more loved by God. The more Bible verses you know, the more God must bless you. The less you pray, the less God loves you. The more obedient you are, the more God respects and loves you. Does any of this sound familiar to you?

The Jewish leaders of the first century believed that this was exactly the way God worked. The more laws the Pharisees kept,

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the more verses they memorized, the more they kept themselves “separate” from the unclean, pagan Gentiles, the more they thought God favored them and would give them a place of honor in His kingdom.

The Scripture teaches the very opposite. God told Samuel, the prophet, that David, the young shepherd boy, was to be king. “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).

As Paul wrote in Romans, “For God does not show favoritism” (Romans 2:11 NIV). Here he taught the truth that the Lord loves pagan Gentiles who believe, just as He loves law-keeping Pharisees who come to Him by faith. The actual Greek word behind this English word favoritism is *prosopolepsia*; God has no acceptance of faces i.e., our outward performance or good works.

Peter discovered this truth when he was called to share the gospel of the grace of God with Cornelius, a Roman centurion who was not a religious Jew. “Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism....’” The circumcised believers [religious Jews] who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles (Acts 10:34, 45 NIV).

How might this truth (that God does not accept faces) encourage us as believers? Perhaps it helps to recognize the Lord looks at our hearts, not our faces. Rather than evaluating our lives by our performance or our efforts, we need to examine our heart condition.

The Lord said, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). “Out of the abundance of the heart

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the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things.... For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matthew 12:34-35, 37).

What does it mean to be “pure in heart”? What does it mean that we will be judged by our words? Remember that Jeremiah the prophet told us, “The heart is desperately wicked...” (Jeremiah 17:9).

The key to understanding these Scriptures is found in Ezekiel and in Romans. Ezekiel told us that the Lord Himself has to create a new heart in us. “A new heart also will I give you” (Ezekiel 36:26). And when God gives us a new heart, a transformation occurs. “For if you tell others with your own mouth that Jesus Christ is your Lord, and believe in your own 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 LB). Our hearts are made pure by believing in Christ’s death and resurrection and the Lord Himself has to give us the gift of faith and create the new heart before we can believe. “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3 NIV).

Again, how might we be encouraged by knowing that God is no respecter of persons, that He doesn’t “accept faces?” We can know that He alone is good; He alone is truly rich; He alone is the One Who ordains our gifts and talents; He alone calls us, individually, to serve in the precise way and place that fulfills His purposes.

For example, the thief on the cross believed in his heart just moments before he died. Yet he is of equal value and equally loved in heaven as the disciples whom Jesus called, who healed

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the sick and were, in some cases, martyred for their faith. How can this be? Because God is love; His plan is perfect; and He has ordained what our assignment on earth will be (Ephesians 1:11, 2:10).

These truths bring freedom, liberty, and peace into our lives as we meditate on them. We can give up “striving” to be more spiritual; we can give up measuring our lives against someone else’s life; we can let go of envy and jealousy; we can quit focusing on our failures; we can let go of pride and self-righteousness and judging others. Why? Because all that is important to the Lord is the condition of our hearts. And He alone can change hearts.

*Lord, help us not to focus on faces, even our own face. Rather, “Let Your light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6 NIV).*

## *Life Eternal: To Know God*

*And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee,  
the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.*

—John 17:3



The Savior, in His prayer to the Father in John 17, makes it very clear that “the way to have eternal life” is to know the Father and His Son (John 17:3 NLT). An interesting question is: What does it mean to know God? If we had asked Saul the Pharisee, a Jewish leader who knew the Torah and worshipped God, “Saul, do you know God?” his answer would have been a resounding “Yes, of course!”

Yet it was this very religious, Bible-teaching, law-keeping Saul who was confronted by God Himself on the road to Damascus. And the very question Saul asked was, “Who art Thou, Lord?” (Acts 9:5). Saul did not know God. He was simply following a religious belief system.



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The apostle Philip, one of the first disciples to be called, walked with Jesus for three years, listened to Him teach, even brought others to hear the Lord (John 1:44-51). Yet it was Philip who said, “Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied” (John 14:8 NLT). The Lord answered, “Philip, don’t you even yet know who I am, even after all the time I have been with you? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:7 NLT).

What does it mean to know God? The Greek language provides some helpful insight. Two primary words are translated as *know* in the New Testament. They are *ginosko* and *oida*. The latter, *oida*, is a subjective, intuitive awareness that involves no real focus. For example, we know the sun will rise in the morning, though we might be hard pressed to explain it astronomically. What we know in this sense lacks reflection or any real effort.

The word *ginosko* is an objective knowing. It means to have acquired knowledge by firsthand experience. This kind of knowing involves a sense of focus, true attention that results in grasping an in-depth understanding. In John 17:3 Jesus uses the verb *ginosko* when He says that the way to eternal life is to know the Father and the Son. There is a deep sense of intimacy in this kind of knowing. When we read that Joseph “knew” not Mary, the word *ginosko* is used.

Once Saul the Pharisee truly came to know God, his entire relationship with his Creator changed. Saul became Paul; he now knew the name of God. When he asked, “Who are you?” Jesus answered, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest” (Acts 9:5). He experienced a firsthand encounter with the Lord!

Doubting Thomas, who also had “known” the Lord for three years, finally touched the resurrected Christ and suddenly truly

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knew Him. The Lord invited Thomas to come close and place his hands on His wounds. Thomas, at that moment, knew Him. He exclaimed, “My Lord and My God” (John 20:28). He had entered into an intimate knowledge of the Savior.

Perhaps one of the most significant truths for us is found in Philippians 3:10. The apostle Paul had known the Lord for more than twenty years when he wrote this letter from his prison in Rome. He said that nothing else mattered in his life except “that I might know [*ginosko*] Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.”

What a calling! What a goal! What a focus! What a worthy endeavor—to know the infinite One. We will never plumb the depths, but we can ask for greater revelation from the Spirit Who dwells in us. The apostle Paul remained focused, every hour of every day, on knowing Him more fully.

*Lord, we want to know You intimately and have a personal relationship with You that involves a deep and true comprehension of Who You really are.*

# *When the Lord Doesn't Answer*

*I called Him, but He gave me no answer.  
—Song of Solomon 5:6*



One of our greatest “faith testers” is to ask the Lord for help, call out to Him for relief, or long for a sense of His love and presence...and receive no answer. The result of the Lord’s seeming silence in our lives is often depression, hopelessness, frustration, or even a feeling of our own “unworthiness” as the reason for His lack of response.

However, the fact is: the Lord does hear our prayers! As C. H. Spurgeon wrote, “God keeps a file of our prayers...they are treasured in the King’s archives.” David, the psalmist, who had so many severe testings of his faith wrote, “You record my wanderings; put my tears in Thy bottle...” (Psalm 56:8). King David had confidence in the fact that the Lord was keeping a loving eye on all his trials and was lovingly valuing every agonizing tear

David shed. He survived his worst moments because he knew, by faith, that God had His hand of love and mercy on him, in spite of the critical circumstances David faced.

It seems that one of the methods the Lord uses to expand our faith is to test us—allow experiences or situations in our lives that may appear desperate, even hopeless, to us. The agony of the patriarch Job is the classic example of this. Job was a true saint, mature in his faith, a wonderful man of God, a caring father and husband. The Scripture tells us Job was “perfect and upright,” one who feared God and shunned evil (Job 1:1). Yet the Lord gave Satan permission to test this saint to the utmost. Nevertheless, at the end of this saga we read, “So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning” (Job 42:12).

Some of our unanswered questions in the midst of trials are “Why, Lord? What’s the point? Couldn’t You just give us a simple answer? Why these painful, uncomfortable circumstances?”

This side of heaven we may not know the answers to these questions. But we have been given some clues as to why God uses this faith-building method. Faith is about believing what cannot be seen. Saints are those who demonstrate the reality of Christ’s existence by walking through agonizing human circumstances with peace and joy because our trust, knowledge, and understanding are based on what we know to be true in the invisible realm. Thus, we are lighting the way to saving faith for those who have not yet come to Christ.

But we must learn how to see the invisible ourselves before we are lighthouses of peace and joy. We are taught, by the Lord’s sovereign hand, how to become “partakers of His divine nature

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by having to rely on His exceeding great and precious promises”  
(2 Peter 1:4).

*Lord, help us embrace our circumstances as Your means for enhancing Your light in and through us, helping darkened eyes see into the invisible realm by faith.*

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