

THE  
CRUCIFIED  
LIFE

The Doorway to the Abundant Life

By Bruce Montroy

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Spear Ministries, Inc.  
P.O. Box 161  
Prescott, AZ 86302

First Printing - January, 1990

Commercial Printing - 2007 Xulon Press  
ISBN 978-1-60266-090-8

This Revision - January, 2011  
For Prescott Life Church Adult Sunday School

*Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Stretch out the **spear** that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand." And Joshua stretched out the spear that was in his hand toward the city.*

*Joshua 8:18*

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## THE DOOR TO THE ABUNDANT LIFE

Little King Sarx was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. At a young age he developed a strong appetite for the power he had over his realm. When he cried out his orders, the servants came running. Occasionally he would feel a wet, warm sensation around the middle of his body, followed by a clammy, cold irritation. He discovered that all that was required was a certain pitch to his voice as he signaled his attendants. They would appear with cloths in hand and rearrange his clothing to make him once again feel comfortable.

Sarx was reassured of his centrality in the place where he was being raised. Big and small servants would smile at him, make strange sounds (as though he didn't understand English!), and seek to entertain him most of the time. As will happen, servants sometimes slack off (it's hard to get good help), however, he would merely have to lift his voice in a summons. This worked during the day as well as in the middle of the night watch.

As he grew older, this small monarch became more tyrannical. Unbeknown to him, there was a phantom character who would whisper into his ear all sorts of surveillance information about his servants. You see, as Sarx grew in size, he found it increasingly difficult to summon his servants. And in fact, they were at times downright rude to his royal highness. At such times, this phantom (for such he must be, as he was never seen) whispered into the king's ear that the servants were disloyal. Sedition was suspected.

The smaller servants had become antagonistic, for the most part. At times, they would object when his eminence dared to interrupt their idle play and inspect the toys with which they busied themselves. The phantom voice told Sarx what the real problem was. They were rejecting his lordship. With few servants remaining loyal to him, he had to be very careful how he responded. When certain big servants were present, he could release his creativity in a kind of prone dance. If he flopped around on the floor while singing a loud mournful cry, his big servants would force the smaller, seditious servants into

compliance. It was a lot of work for Sarx to do this, but one has to do what one has to do to maintain control in his kingdom.

Because the aforementioned tactic did not produce adequate results with certain of the big servants, he was left to devise an alternate plan. If he would retreat to his private quarters and put on an appearance of dejection, he could soon have the more compassionate big servants once again at his service.

Sarx was, after all, a man of mercy, so on occasion he would get his servants to conform to his desires by indulging their fetishes. One big servant would pick him up and smother him with kisses and hugs and affirm his worth when he gave in to her petitions. He didn't much care to have to do this on a regular basis, because it made his kingdom seem less stable. "If you indulge servants too much, they can grow to expect it," so the phantom said.

The rebellion grew worse. Sarx would never forget the awful day one of the big servants, in an obvious fit of derangement, picked him up and began to inflict pain on the back of his lap. This was intolerable. But tragedy added to tragedy. No one could be summoned to his assistance. His loyal big servant was away at the moment, and this rebellious servant had seized the moment for mutiny! But his friend the phantom was there to explain this treachery. "They don't like you," was the insight. Those were hard words, and it would not be the last time Sarx would hear them. They became the phantom's diagnosis for most of the unpleasant experiences that seemed to come faster and faster.

As the king would meditate on the advice, "They don't like you", he found a funny feeling arising inside. He felt lonely, aloof, stranded. He would later learn that this sensation was called depression. It was ugly. He began to detest the gloomy times, but they seemed to be the constant result of these rebellious uprisings by his servants. If only they would cooperate with his instructions, there would be peace in the kingdom. If only...

Insult was added to injury. The big servants plotted together one day to send Sarx away during the day to a prison camp, a fenced city, where hundreds of small servants were cajoled and corralled around by a bunch of big servants called teachers. The experience was

mortifying, because no one there was the least bit interested in Sarx's right to rule or even that he was a king. The humiliation was staggering. They expected him to act like one of the common little servants.

The days in the concentration camp seemed to drag on forever. At times, out in the recreation yard, always under surveillance of the big servants, some of the mean little servants would mock him and use derogatory terms to describe his royal highness. As could be expected, the phantom was there to remind him that these creeps didn't like him, but that was OK, because they were just servants and he would show them someday who was boss. The phantom didn't have much to say that was positive about these rebels, but when he told him how great Sarx was, it always provided a measure of inner warmth. They became closer friends.

It was one summer when the king was almost as big as the big servants that he was sent to the mountains, to a special retreat. He was promised that it would be an enjoyable place, unlike the concentration camp. And so it turned out to be. In the afternoons he would go boating or hiking or swimming with the little servants, and at night there were meetings in the council chambers. The activities during the daytime were more enjoyable than similar recreations back at the concentration camp. Maybe it was because the servants here, both small and large, were a kind lot. They genuinely seemed to care about his majesty's well-being.

At one of the evening councils, a big servant talked from a large black book and told the assembly about a person who had lived long ago, but had met with an untimely death. This person, the only Son of the Great God, had allowed His life to be taken instead of the peasants'. He rose from the dead and, in His new condition, was offering what the speaker said was eternal life! "What do I have to lose?" thought Sarx. "Maybe this Jesus God can help me restore law and order to my disheveled kingdom."

The big servant asked those who wanted to encounter this God man to stand up. Before he knew what he was doing, he had stood to his feet and another big servant was guiding him to a room where the two of them asked God's Son to come into his heart.

Things got better immediately. The sadness that used to be a continual companion was gone, but then the phantom was gone too! Or so he seemed to be. The invisible phantom had backed off and was silent. He was not far away, but for a season he was quiet.

Instead of the phantom, Jesus was now standing next to him. Though he couldn't see Jesus, he knew He was there; he could feel this new friend nearby.

After returning to his castle, Sarx enjoyed a season of relative ease. Things didn't seem to be so bad. The phantom's absence, and lack of negative input about the still stubborn servants, kept the depression to a minimum.

About a week after the mountain experience, there was a particularly ugly confrontation with one of the small servants. Soon the big servant who could never be trusted was upon the scene. Guilt was dumped on Sarx. The verdict was pronounced in kangaroo court fashion, and sentence was passed. The king was confined to quarters. This was all a mistake. His intentions were pure. All a mistake!

While incarcerated, the king heard a low, familiar voice. The phantom was back, but not in his usual place. Before, he seemed to be inside his head, now he was over on the left and outside. But the comfortable tones were reassuring as ever. The old friend reminded him that there was no one he could count on in the castle who was loyal to him. They had rejected his rulership and he must therefore reject them. There was no other hope. The phantom then began to incriminate his new friend. This Jesus was not to be trusted. After all, when he needed Him most, He let him down. Maybe the phantom was right. After all, Jesus didn't argue back.

Sarx discovered an interesting phenomena. When he listened to the phantom, Jesus seemed to disappear. If, on the other hand, he would turn to Jesus and just talk to Him, the phantom would disappear.

\* \* \* \* \*

Growth had taken its toll on Sarx. He was seemingly evicted from his castle, and all because he had found a queen whom he married. He

was told he would have to find another castle, his own palace. After all these years, the big servants had finally gotten rid of him he knew it, they had wanted this all along.

Jesus and the phantom moved, along with Sarx and his bride, and the one-sided badgering by the phantom continued. One thing disturbed Sarx. The phantom was always exposing disloyalties in the queen. As he pondered them, it always came out that the phantom was right! When the queen was confronted with her faults, she would get defensive, and Sarx would many times have to retreat and wait for the phantom to give him more information before trying another corrective training session. The saddest day of his life was when Sarx came home and found an empty house and a note on the table. The queen had abdicated. Her diatribe was none other than biased assertions that revealed her lack of loyalty to Sarx's kingdom! But, man, did he miss her.

The phantom became his closest friend. Jesus was probably around, but it had been so long since Sarx talked to him. No doubt He was off in a back room somewhere.

The phantom wasn't the greatest friend a guy could want; he seemed more fickle lately. One minute he would point out some of Sarx's shortcomings and suggest he was hopelessly at fault. He didn't like this turn of events because this sensation of guilt made him feel out of control. Sarx preferred the times when the phantom, with clear accuracy, would reveal where others made their mistakes. And sure enough, as you thought about it, they were wrong. After all, Sarx was a king, and kings are to be respected!

The phantom talked louder, especially when they would have a few drinks together. The invisible partner almost became visible a few times when Sarx had more drinks than he should. At such times, the phantom's advice was hostile, downright mean. But, as he said, they deserved it; after all, didn't they know who they were dealing with?

The pain grew. The old servants had alienated him completely. They sided with the queen and said Sarx was the cause of the problems. They always sided against him. They never did like him. "If they reject you, you must reject them," so said the phantom. But one day, it was more than Sarx could take. The phantom was not there.

The pain raged inside. He stumbled into his bedroom and loaded his revolver. There was no other way. Sarx could only see darkness and it hurt.

As he raised the gun to his temple, his eyes caught the glimpse of a figure off to his right. It was Jesus. He could see Him, well, not actually, but as one sees a dream or vision, and Jesus had a serious look on His face. Sarx lowered the gun and turned to Jesus. There was so much that Sarx wanted to say to Jesus, like "Where were You when I needed You?" But he couldn't speak.

Jesus raised His hand in a gesture pointing to His right. There was a large cross. Jesus said, "Sarx, if you're going to throw your life away, why not give it to Me?"

"But I let You down. I failed You so many times. How could You want this worthless life?"

Jesus responded as though He had all the time in the world, "Sarx, you have been holding on to a lie. You have lived your life as though you were a king, but the truth is that I made you to be a servant. You thought the people around you were your servants, sent to do your bidding and cooperate with your plans. But I made you and placed you in life to be My servant to them.

"My plan is for you to yield to Me, to die to your kingship, and to become My servant to others. You don't have to be right. You don't have to have things go your way. All you need is to serve Me and I will bless you abundantly. You will find what you have been looking for all your life abundant life as you follow Me!"

"But Jesus," Sarx stammered, "the phantom told me You really didn't care."

"Son, the phantom is your adversary. He is the first rebel of the universe the Devil! He always accuses others to My children and helps them defend themselves. This is how he most effectively divides homes and kingdoms. His suggestions of self-pity have led you deeper into the trap of depression and despair. He wants only to destroy you."

There was a pause, then Jesus continued, "What is that in your hand? And who told you that it would end your troubles?"

Sarx was silent. He knew Jesus was absolutely right. He had been such a fool to receive the accusations against everybody. How could he have been so stupid as to believe that the problem was always someone else's fault?

He fell at Jesus' feet. He wept, he sobbed. He begged for forgiveness. Yet Jesus stood motionless.

Through his tears, Sarx lifted his eyes up to Jesus. The true Master stood, with tears streaming down His cheeks and a smile of love that caused sunshine to break into the drape- drawn room. Jesus made no sound, but only motioned to the cross on His right.

As Sarx looked, a door opened at the foot of the cross. He could not see anything through the open door, but over it was a sign that read, "Servants Only." Sarx knew that he must pass through the small door, but it was so low that he would have to crawl to make it.

As he started toward the door, Jesus said firmly, but lovingly, "The price to enter is death... servanthood. You must take up your cross and follow Me. You will have no rights, no kingdom. You cannot ponder how others mistreat you or that you deserve better. You will be required to yield up your rights as an offering to Me. You will have to bring every thought to Me, and I will make all calls of fair or foul. You will not be able to judge others or their motives.

It will be a living death... death to your needs, death to your wants, and death to your future. You will be required to consider this moment when the phantom returns with his divisive advice. You must proclaim that you are dead, crucified with Me, and that it is no longer you, but Me, Jesus Christ, alive in you."

Something life changing happened that day, as the Kingdom of Sarx, or the flesh, died and he entered into a life hid in Christ. The queen returned, and was treated more as a queen than as a slave. He now laid down his life for her, instead of insisting on things going his own way. His family returned, and was clearly seen for what they were, friends, not servants. And best of all, when the phantom returned with his full display of ghastly gossip and accusations, our new man turned on him with the freeing declaration that "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I, but Christ, and the life I

live, I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me!"

As long as the new man reckoned every event in life in light of the door at the foot of the cross, he prospered in his soul. The enemy phantom came around less and less as he discovered the new man's seriousness in living the servant life, the crucified life, the life hid in Christ!

## LIFE IN THE CASTLE

We left King Sarx on a good note. He entered into a transaction that set him free to begin enjoying life, instead of surviving. As a race of fallen humans, we spend much of our time trying to survive, all the while God meant for us to enjoy an abundant life! We are basically into doing things backwards. God would have us go one way, and our natural tendency is to go the opposite. If we try to survive, we will lose what we really need. If we let go and allow the Master to control our lives, we will always win in the long run.

Kings live in castles, don't they? I want to use a picture of our life being like a castle, to show how we can misuse the natural instincts of survival and self-protection. When everything seems to be going well, we are free to let the drawbridge down and go out and mingle with the peasants and other kings from neighboring castles. If we feel threatened, we will retreat to our castle and pull up the drawbridge. The gates are shut. We're safe once again. When we're small children at play, these self-defense measures can be as simple as taking our marbles and going home. A little later in life, it may be an outburst of anger, followed by running to our room and throwing our self on the bed for a good cry.

Farther down the line, a threatened survivor might run off to "find himself" (apart from his family and responsibilities); or she might run home to mommy, leaving the trauma of marriage far behind. It appears as though we need a safe place to run to until the danger passes. The danger is usually something we perceive as a threat to our maintaining control. When an infant is hungry, he is out of control and will use crying to regain control. When a girlfriend snatches away one's Barbie doll, the youngster feels out of control. Her royal highness may mount her steed and, armed with her lance, attack the opponent who has threatened her realm. If the opponent is too powerful, the ripped-off sovereign will hightail it to a neighboring

castle, most likely the Queen Mother's, and plead for intervention. In adult life, the courts and lawyers replace moms.

Not all kings and queens are created equal. Some are strong aggressors. They spend their lives making raids on neighboring villages. They will enslave all they can. They are happiest when everyone bows to their wishes. But life is not kind to these self-centered scoundrels. There is usually a bully somewhere who is a bit stronger than they are, and as the wicked stepmother in Snow White, they cannot rest knowing that they are not the fairest (or toughest) in the land.

If you watch this type of personality, they make everything a game of winner-take-all. They must come out on top in every argument. If they ever have to compromise, they devise a way to make the peasants pay!

There's not a whole lot we can do with tyrant kings. But rest assured, life will level their castles as they have done to so many others. To resist them directly, or try to correct them, is to become their next project for destruction.

The teenager who is driving his parents up a wall may be one of these strong controllers. He has outgrown the need for his parents (or so he thinks) and he must push them off his castle lawn. When he feels he is losing control, he will bully them around with embarrassing behaviors that they seemingly can do little about except get angry or depressed. Time will step on him as he has stepped on others! If the parents survive his insurrection, they will probably be asked to come to his rescue one day as he is overpowered by someone or something bigger than his tyrant-power can handle!

People who are always trying to control others with anger, sickness, intimidation, depression, pity, guilt, pseudo-spirituality, etc., will never be able to enjoy the kingdom they are striving madly to obtain. As they sacrifice the feelings and needs of others to obtain their desired goals, they will hit the wall Jesus talked about.

When Peter heard His Lord telling of the coming crucifixion, Peter got quite upset. How can anyone ever amount to anything in life if he lets the world crucify him? Peter informed Jesus that as long as old "Rocky" was around, no one was going to do such a thing to his

Master! Jesus told the disciples in response to this "self-protection" scheme:

*To save your life is to lose it, and to lose your life for  
My sake is to gain it.*

When aggressive people push us easygoing folks, we have a strong built-in protection device that automatically goes into operation. We usually see their push as a threat to our survival. This is further complicated by the fact that we do not see life as it really is. What we judge as aggression may merely be their poor attempt at communication or survival. Even when someone is invading our space, it is very hard to obtain an objective picture of what is actually taking place, because we all see life differently.

Most of the time, there are three different pictures before us. **First**, we see an actual event, which if simple enough, can be objectively reported. If we see an apple on the brown table, all may agree. However, life is complicated by our past. We could say that each of us is looking at life through filters or colored glasses. We rarely see anything as clearly as it is. For instance, we might have a room full of produce buyers looking at the apple on the brown table. Ask each one what they see, and I'll bet few respond with, an apple on a brown table. To one it is a McIntosh, to another it's a Jonathan. To complicate the matter, call in some furniture appraisers and ask them what they see. Their trained eyes see some things hidden from my layman's eyes.

My point is, rarely in life do any of us see things in a purely objective sense. Either we will argue on the quality of an object (like the apple), or its relative size (the apple is just right), or even what kind it is!

Who is right when we all view life through different filters? One employee may think the boss is great, because he is just like her uncle and she got along well with her uncle. Another worker thinks the boss is unbearable, because he reminds her of her ex-husband! Neither sees the boss as he sees himself.

How can we compare situations that are highly subjective and emotionally dynamic to us? It's extremely difficult for us to be objective, and if we act as if our viewpoint is the only valid one, we will multiply our troubles. Our past pains, hopes, etc., put weird glasses on us, and seeing through them makes objectivity almost impossible – this is the **second** picture. Inner healing and personal maturity can aid in reducing our prejudices and perceived notions, but even the best of folks still "see through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12 KJV).

Will you agree with me that there are at least two different pictures before us, the actual event or object, and how we perceive it? Now, add to this confusion a **third** picture, how we think things "should" be.

Nowhere is this as varying as in what constitutes a clean house. A neat freak will argue to her last breath with a laid back slob over what constitutes the house being "clean." Who is right? What makes one person's picture or standard better than another's? We may not agree on the pictures in our heads of how things should be, but many risk their lives on the fact that their picture is the right one.

You've experienced these three views, I'm sure. Let's say a friend insists you try the new restaurant in town. They promise the best tasting food of your entire life. You come away from a disappointing dinner, scratching your head, wondering if your friend has taste buds that work! We could send in a chemist and have him analyze the food. He would give us a computer printout of the exact ingredients; this is the first picture. Our assessment of the food is biased by our filters (especially if the cuisine is our "specialty"); this is the second picture. We know in our head what the food should really taste like; this is the third picture.

These three different pictures are not that big of a deal in most situations we face. What makes for confusion is when we view an event as threatening to our survival. A family member may not have meant anything personal by his remark, but our perception, compared to the ideal picture in our head, produces great pain.

A wife may have a theoretical picture of a husband who is always there for her. He "should be" soft and warm, comforting her through the hard times of life, even when he's had a bad day. Her picture of

"husband" does not allow for him to be tired and grouchy. When he comes short of her ideal, tension begins to rise inside her castle. She may draw up the bridge (depression or silence), or she may throw something at him from her castle wall. He stands there wondering what's wrong and she gets madder, feeling he should know what her mental picture is.

Our survival instinct makes us very biased and clouds an already fuzzy picture of the facts. My perceptions will cause me to react to a different situation than the one you're seeing, and one that may be very different to an objective bystander. Counseling becomes a delicate process of untangling the three different pictures we all struggle with.

How do you solve a problem that may not exist anywhere except in someone's mental perception?

Successful human relations come about as we try to lay aside some of our filters and attempt to see life from another's perspective. Isn't this more or less the Lord's intention in the Golden Rule? But how do we, basically survivors, do this?

After you've lived long enough, you probably have few idealistic pictures left in your head. Life has a way of making realists out of us, or at least tarnishing our glitter. Some strong people continue to push upstream in pursuit of the pictures in their head of how life should be. It may cost them a heart attack or a stroke, but so what, at least they have been able to keep what they "know" is the true picture!

Many of the wars between neighboring kingdoms (such as with some husbands and wives) can go on for years, and the supposed initial cause has long been forgotten. Since the first shot was fired, walls have been reinforced and parapets stocked with necessary ammunition (such as grievances) for retaliation. As the survival walls thicken, love emaciates.

True love flourishes in an atmosphere of acceptance, openness, and vulnerability. Therefore, self-protection actually becomes a tool the enemy uses against us. Survival-thinking warps our already distorted picture of life.

Most little kings are not overly aggressive, and will spend their lives between trying to have a picnic on the castle lawn with their neighbors and running into their castle when a threat to their control appears. Protecting self by pulling into our castle seems the smartest thing to do, but it gives our neighbors confusing signals. They assume we are rejecting them. Strangers can usually care less, but close friends and family members take offense when they feel we are rejecting them or their efforts to help.

I believe many of our responses of self-protection, that are very sane and sensible to us, are perceived as rejection or as a personal affront by others. Many wives are merely asking for reassurance from their husbands, but the crossed signals are perceived as demands that will hinder his survival. The tired husband sees her subtle requests for attention as a threat to his recuperation. As she presses him to "communicate," he may pull further inside his walls of protection, feeling that an additional outlay of energy could be fatal.

Alcohol and drugs can produce a fantasy land where the rejected can run to lick their wounds. Their retreat for survival is perceived as rejection by significant persons in their lives, and usually results in another swing around the rejection cycle.

The make-believe world of TV and romance novels can construct castles in the sky where the rejected may go to hide. While in la-la land, their departure is seen as rejection from the folks who provoked their retreat. As rejection breeds more rejection, the world we perceive grows increasingly ugly. Anger, depression, guilt, and a host of games join together in making all the participants as miserable as possible. Why do we run into fantasies? Surely the enemy is the salesman who pushes the trip, but he must appeal to our sense of fear. Survival is probably behind most of it! The absurd end of this cycle is that the more we try to find coping devices to survive the rigors of life, the more others around assume we are rejecting them and therefore reject us, which increases our negative feelings all the more.

Don't forget the phantom. His never-ceasing supply of criticisms and comparisons foster much of the raw material from which we weave our tangled webs of rejection. He is the accuser of the brethren and I think he enjoys his work. Because people are basically selfish,

they enter relationships with less than adequate skills for optimizing relationships; and if that isn't bad enough, the father of lies tries to get them to think the worst about others. He offers suspicions and clouds the vision with perceptions designed to alienate friends.

King Sarx had the phantom to thank for many of his twisted ideas concerning his family members. We must be very careful to not agree with this diabolical madman who tries to make us see and think the worst of others.

To put this all together, if we perceive someone is rejecting us, and we have a picture in our mind that they should be treating us differently, we are already experiencing frustration. Now add to this the negative advice from the enemy. No wonder people act crazy. It's as though they are saying:

I perceive you are rejecting me; I have a picture in my head that you should be making me feel very important; and, someone or something is telling me that you aim to hurt me on purpose.

When these feelings build, we can experience a sensation of being overwhelmed. The phantom suggests we throw in the towel or powder someone's cookies or run away. He has a lot of advice for us when we hurt but it's all bad! If we could take away the need to survive, or as King Sarx learned in the last chapter, yield up our life, then the enemy would be shut down from the very start. This is why Jesus said that if we seek to save our life, we will lose it, but if we will lose it for His sake, we will gain it!

Feeling like we need to survive (need our castles) becomes the fishhook of the devil that catches us every time. Rejection only works with someone who is a survivor, not with someone who agrees with Galatians 2:20,

*For I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I, but Christ...*

The phantom comes to one who is crucified with Christ and tells him that so-and-so is rejecting him; whereupon the believer replies, "So what! I don't have any rights, I'm dead to that nonsense!" Dead people don't have to survive! This is the power of the Crucified Life!

Rejection doesn't get a chance to ferment its poison in our bodies if we run to the cross instead of into our castle! Even our perceptions, tainted as they are, are powerless to produce pain as we tack them on the cross. I see through a glass darkly; so, therefore, I must yield up my every perception to Jesus.

It's no longer how I see life, but how Jesus sees life that counts!

The pictures in our head that generate frustration are to be taken down and laid at the Master's feet. Who says life should go the way we picture it should go? With yielded pictures, peace flows freely.

The pain we experience from distorted pictures is not what God had intended. As our Master, He wants us to check in with Him before we dream up great expectations. He uses our needs to make us dependent on His love and grace. We need Him by design. We will only find total inner peace and purpose when we rest in His divine provisions for us. He allows the painful perceptions we experience to dissuade us from ever thinking we can be happy apart from Him. Some ego-centered castle dwellers get angry with God for not making them complete in and of themselves.

Anger over roadblocks to how we think things should go can lead to rebellion, if we're not careful. "It's not fair" is a common response when our "shoulds" just don't cooperate! We know God is ultimately in control, therefore, the typical response is... "I'll show Him! See if I read my Bible or go to church." Like we're really hurting Him!

Saul of Tarsus had a mental picture that Christians were threatening the survival of the Jewish faith. What's a guy to do? Why not kill them! Saul was pouring out tremendous amounts of energy as he persecuted Christians, because they didn't believe like he thought they should. He probably felt rejected in life and was seeking to impress someone by his violent behavior. God used the inner pain of

Saul to drive him into the waiting arms of Jesus. God didn't want to destroy Saul; He wanted to love and accept him.

Saul finally gave up on the rejection cycle and received God's unconditional grace. Saul's survival went out the window and in its place was total inner contentment for the first time in his life! Why survive when you can abide? The Crucified Life is hiding in the secret place of the Most High God.

The trials of life were designed to refine creatures with a free will, who, out of a heart full of love for God, will trust His "bigger picture!" Such individuals will make a fitting bride for His Son. The plan was designed to detect those who wanted God's love, even at great personal cost! Our castles, on the other hand, offer a poor substitute for God's "eternal" protection – His secret place.

There are two different issues before us. The **first** is how can we be freed from prisons of our own making, deep in the heart of our castle of self-protection? **Secondly**, how can we help others get out of their self-protection traps. The incredible peace that comes from the Crucified Life gives off the "Aroma of Life" (2 Corinthians 2:14). When we demonstrate by our "self-less" love that Jesus is the reason, others will be more likely to venture out of the dismal Dungeon of Coping-devices!

## TEARING DOWN THE WALLS

Rahab was bound by her trade to live on the castle wall of Jericho. Her vocation was less than noble; she gave what was supposed to be love, for a price. Many people, though not engaged in such a vulgar pastime, offer a similar swap: "I'll give you a token of love if you give me what I want." We could call this a prostitution of real, sacrificial love. This kind of bartering traps us behind castle walls, and makes us prisoners of a substandard quality of life.

Rahab knew there was a better way to live. When she heard there were Israelites camping close by the city of Jericho, she found herself longing to be part of such a group: successful, in control, and free! When a couple of spies from the Israeli army came to her door, she saw her chance. They were quickly received and protected. She asked them to remember her when they took the city in war, because she had heard about the greatness of their God, Jehovah. A deal was struck. She had jeopardized her life for them, so they offered her protection. The sign of their covenant was a scarlet cord that was to be displayed in her window.

The cord reminds us of the scarlet blood that God used to purchase our redemption. The cord hanging from the window on the wall of the city is a picture of the cry of the penitent sinner, "Come rescue me."

The process of breaking down the walls of Jericho was totally of God. All the army of Joshua had to do was to march around the city for seven days while the trumpeters blew and priests carried the ark of the Lord's presence. They were to remain silent except for the priestly worship. I see this constant circling of the city (the problem) as a graphic reminder that **GOD IS IN TOTAL CONTROL**.

With this knowledge, one can emerge from his hiding place. Only if one stronger and more loving is in control dare we risk making ourselves the least bit vulnerable. But most people do not trust God;

after all He let their favorite pet die, and He didn't heal Uncle Seymour, and why doesn't He stop all the problems in the world?

When it gets through to us that no one ever has or could love us as much as this Great Jehovah, we will yield our walls (and wills) up to Him. At the sound of His name, our knees will bow and our castle walls will come tumbling down. Our prison of captivity (safety walls become a dungeon) will be traded for life on the move with the Army of God! Instead of making a place for ourselves by selling ourselves, we become the bond slave of the Lord.

### **HOW DO YOU SPELL RELIEF?**

How do I find relief from the threatening experiences of life? First, let's ask, "Why are they threatening?" Is it because someone is trying to take away my control? Is a pushy, dominant person causing me to have to work overtime to keep them from squashing my personality, my castle?

Do you catch yourself getting angry when you suspect someone is trying to manipulate you? What is your typical response? For most of us, we either fight back (resist outwardly), or pull into our shell (resist in our mind). If the carrot the person dangles in front of us is appetizing enough, we might go along with their manipulations.

If I fear losing control of my life to someone else, then I have only one solution...turn control of my life over to the King of kings. As I yield my life to Him, He will show me how to respond in such a way that keeps me from pulling into a shell or launching a counter attack. **MY FLESHLY RESPONSES WILL TYPICALLY BE SELFISH.** When I turn to the Master first, He will be free to show me if I should take the name of Jesus as a sword and repel the enemy (Ephesians 6:12 ff. – principalities and powers, not flesh and blood). Or, instead of a sword, He may have a cross that I need to take up. We must be careful, because not all battles are won the same way. The ornery person you'd like to chase off with the power of God may be another Saul of Tarsus, waiting for Ananias to take a chance and minister to him.

How can we help others get out of their castles, castles bound to be destroyed? If we try to save others from their prisons of self-centeredness by pulling, pushing, manipulation, haranguing, etc., all we'll do is stimulate further wall building. Instead of getting them to "see the light," they will probably retreat into their dungeon of self-protection. We see this all the time with pushy parents of troubled teens, and nagging husbands and wives. We push and they push back; we pull and they pull back.

There are many ways we humans push and manipulate to "get" others to respond the way we think they should! The most common means used to straighten others out is criticism. We dress this up as "constructive criticism," but the truth is, most criticism is perceived as rejection. Would it hurt your feelings if I suggested that you can do little, directly, to "straighten out" those closest to you? People resent being criticized, and most of our helpful suggestions are depicted by others as none other than judgements. What they hear is, "Do it my way, stupid!" Most criticism, even constructive criticism, is perceived as rejection.

We hate being talked down to. It makes us feel like the other person is in control and we're out of control. Human nature resents being out of control! Who do you have the hardest time receiving criticism from? Why do you think their criticism irritates you? Could their criticism be a cross the Father wants you to pick up?

Who resents your "insights" the most? See if you can catch this will-against-will scrimmage in others, in response to your "insights." It's easier to see the cross that others need to take up; but don't forget, this is about us growing in Christ – first and foremost. And many times, if we're honest, what "bugs" others has lessons in it for us.

Correction is a very touchy matter for parents as their children grow older and develop independence in their thinking. Add to this the phantom's efforts to make the children see the parent as an opponent, rather than the one who probably loves them the most, and what do you have? War!

What can be worse than parents and children locked into an ego-against-ego struggle, castle-against-castle drama? Try this: a step-

parent trying to correct a step-child. The new adult is perceived as none other than an interfering intruder. To comply with the step-parent is degrading enough, let alone when they use superior tones and smug threats. The ironic thing is that the struggles we see within homes are very similar to personality clashes that will be encountered at school, in the market place, and in the job force. To gain mastery over ego collisions in the home is to gain knowledge that will lead to success in future relationships in life. The home is a Crucified Life “Boot Camp” for we that are serious about serving Christ.

Perhaps the story of Rahab can give us some hope for getting the good guy out of the castle headed for destruction. Joshua, following God's orders, merely marched around the city for seven days and seven times on the seventh day. The only noise heard was the sound of the priest's trumpets, probably playing a praise song. No one was to lift their voice until the time for the final shout.

There is probably no better advice for folks desiring to minister to those closest to them, than this:

Keep your comments to yourself and surround the person with prayer and encouragement.

What are we going to have to believe about God if we're to truly flow in praise as we march around our “Jericho” problems in silence? For some, to be quiet is quite a cross to bear. As we surround situations, we need to be thanking Father God that He has everything in control and according to the promise of Romans 8:28, He'll work it out for the best of those He's called and that love Him. This truth will have to be more real to us than the circumstances we see with our physical eyes.

As we keep our focus on the living God and His abilities, it will be easier to flow in praise and this, in turn, will foster an environment where change is far less threatening. We humans are freest to make serious personality changes when we feel safe. Praise puts us in the Secret Place of the Most High God where His grace provides total acceptance. Praise helps us focus on God's abilities instead of our

inabilities. Risk of change shrinks in the shadow of the Almighty. The Cross of Christ may mean death to my selfish kingdom, but it also totally covers my disabilities and provides a protective power the world knows nothing about.

Would you be more willing to open your castle to someone who was always hot under the collar, or someone who was kind and thoughtful? Someone who was pushy, or someone who gave you plenty of space? Someone who could care less about your opinions, or someone who was actively laying their life down for you? Would you open yourself up to one who was always criticizing you, or someone who was always supportive? Guess which kind of person the Cross prepares us to be – that we might be Ambassadors for Christ.

If someone could get only one message through to you down in the dungeon of your castle, what would convince you to throw open the doors to them? We must become "safe" to those we are seeking to rescue! True love, God's kind of compassion, will be required to convince the fearful to venture out once again from their walls of safety.

The rejection cycle must be broken by acceptance, and it must start with us giving acceptance to those around us. Rahab sacrificed her life to gain it. She became a slave of the spies and thus became a free person. She survived by surrendering. She is a picture of the power of yielding to God. The piles of rubble left behind after the walls of Jericho fell are a testimony to what self-protecting survivors can expect. If you seek to save your life, you will lose it. If you lose your life for Jesus' sake, you will gain it! The message of Rahab's story is that she saved her entire family by jeopardizing her own life.

## **PERCEIVED REJECTION**

For King Sarx in chapter one, when he went past a certain time in his life, he began thinking everyone was against him. This breeds a mild form of paranoia: someone's out to get me! It may be that someone is out to get me, but more likely than not, it's a case of poor perception. There are enough bad guys out there in life that we can't relax and trust everybody; but to walk around fearful that everyone's

out to get you is to respond from a destructive survival mode. We need enough sense to separate between exploiters and friends that are struggling to survive.

Usually our out-and-out enemies pose little internal conflict for us when it comes to rejection. The bully on the playground that never likes anyone does little to damage our psyche. The nasty Communists or aliens from the backside of the solar system are not to be trusted anyway, so when they reject me, no big deal. Their rejection is not taken personally! What produces great emotional damage is actual or perceived rejection from those closest to us; those we think are supposed to love us!

Let's look at an example of perceived rejection to see how easily we can get confused. A single parent comes home after an exhausting day of work. Her son had to be picked up at preschool, followed by a hurried stop at the grocery store. Feeling trapped at work, mom knows she can't quit her job, and she has no time to look for a better paying position. They enter the door of the slightly cluttered home, which mocks, "Boy, you'd better clean things up around here; you never know who'll drop by!"

She reaches down inside herself to find that extra push to forge ahead and start supper, desiring rather to plop and vegetate for about half an hour. Junior is hungry and whiny, so the sooner the better. And then there's the committee meeting at church tonight. "Shoot! Why did I ever volunteer for that stupid job?"

With tons of shoulds and oughts running around in her head, and exhaustion dogging her heels, she is in less than an ideal state for what happens next.

Junior comes out into the kitchen to refresh his relationship with his most significant person. By clinging to her leg, he is making a statement: "Mommy, I wuv you." Being a little person, and less capable of communication, his verbalization is interpreted as a whine. Mom, at the brink of depleted resources, pushes Junior away and, with a tone in her voice that could wilt the wallpaper, says, "Stop that whining. You drive me crazy. Get out of here, go watch TV or something until dinner is ready."

If you are the mom, you may have read your son's whining as one more person making unreasonable demands on you, a form of rejection. If you were Junior, you have indisputable evidence that mom is rejecting you. But both are wrong. The truth is, they perceived rejection when the other person really wanted love and support. What confusion!

This happens frequently with friends. They get busy and forget an appointment, or to tell us about a special party. If the whole mess was laid out on a table in front of all parties involved, the truth would be that no rejection was meant. This is perceived rejection, and it happens to all of us from time to time. It only becomes devastating when it builds and we take ourselves too seriously. If I have a RIGHT to not be overlooked, yelled at, grouched at, etc., then this perceived rejection is placed on top of the pile of evidence. The enemy, the accuser of the brethren, points to this pile frequently and reminds us that so-and-so is rejecting us. Irritation festers into frustration, frustration grows into anger, and we all know where anger leads.

The accuser's desire is for us to get angry with someone: our self, the rejector, God, maybe everyone. Hate is his weapon to destroy from the inside out. Hate eats us up. It doesn't matter if we hate our self or others; both will accomplish the phantom's goals: kill, steal, destroy! The Scripture warns, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger" Anger kills!

## **REJECTION GOES THROUGH CYCLES**

Our king in the first chapter accumulated enough evidence that he was rejected to make a decision to reject his world. Suicide is what we might call the ultimate form of "you rejected me, so I will reject you!" There are other reasons people take their own life, but rejection is probably involved somewhere. Suicide, I believe, is the devil's master plan. He can't kill us directly, so he tries to trick us into using our own will against our self. If you or someone you know battles suicidal thoughts, please see a Christian counselor. My free book, *Winning the Inner War*, can help expose the real source of this diabolical thinking,

and give you tools for victory. Check out the information in the back of this book to request a copy.

Milder forms of "you rejected me, so I will reject you" are seen in many ways. This is probably one of the reasons some folks can never let anyone else win an argument. To lose is to be beneath others – a reject! Castle walls are erected to keep out the enemy troops of rejection. Fiery missiles rise from the plains of conflict. They scream as they enter our brain: failure... reject! Our walls get higher.

Usually, the only adequate bricks for these walls are words, mental words, words of self-justification. "How dare they say that about me, King Sarx!" Mental fantasies can paint our rejector as a loser, or our self as a poor, misunderstood martyr. When the words are believed, we begin to break with reality. Neurosis starts with a denial of reality, and can lead to psychosis, debilitating mental devices that render us captive to the enemy's lies and a danger to those around us.

Sociopaths are criminals that are like a Rambo seeking to retaliate on the society that has rejected them... "I'll give them what they deserve!" This is the extreme. In lesser amounts, this poison can keep once "love birds" at arm's distance and in a state of survival where suspicion keeps them very touchy. This is the kind of stuff divorces are made of. You rejected me, so I will reject you.

Another form is, "I'll reject you before you can reject me again." The list of games goes on, and so does the heartache, but there is a better way. We need to be "Cross-examined!" A miracle is in store for those who lay all the pieces down at the foot of the Cross and make Jesus the total Lord of their life.

Survival is very selfish. It is the epitome of self-centeredness. People who insist on surviving do not make good heroes. The guys that get the medals are the ones who risk their lives to save someone else. The good lawyers on TV are the ones who risk their careers to save their clients.

Have you ever heard of a marriage breaking up because both partners were more concerned with meeting each other's needs than surviving? Usually, the story goes like this. The wife has always given in to her husband's demands. He is either a bully or a pouter, but just

the same, he's a spoiled brat who must have his own way probably like King Sarx. She takes this through the years until she is told by others one too many times that she is dumb for putting up with him. "It's time to stand up for yourself. Are you going to let him get away with this forever?" Well-meaning friends counsel her to fight back. Their advice hits a tender spot inside. After all, she should be concerned with her survival. She's not a slave or something, is she? Jesus couldn't want her to be pushed around like this. "If you don't stand up for yourself, who will?"

With pressure mounting, she switches from "good mom/ nice wife" mode to survival mode. "It's time for me!" When she makes the decision to stand up for herself and fight for her rights, the enemy volunteers to supply her with a bunch of weapons. I'm sure you can think of what some of these weapons might be.

We don't want to use our foe's foul tools; they're messy. It's not that there isn't a time for us to stand up for ourselves; there is. Jesus didn't lay His life down until it was the right time. The apostle Paul sometimes used his Roman citizenship to protect himself. The Lord warned those He sent out to flee when folks rejected their message and tried to hurt them. There is a time to protect ourself, but only after we've submitted everything to the Master; otherwise we'll end up using the enemy's weapons to fight back. He wants us to strike out at flesh and blood, while the truth is we are wrestling against principalities and powers. To defend ourselves without first submitting to the Father is to likely be tricked into wasting our time fighting the wrong opponent.

A marriage can usually put up with only one King Sarx at a time. When the once compliant wife begins to push back against her dominating husband, there is war in the castle-home. As with most wars, rarely does anyone come out the overall winner.

Shouldn't she stick up for herself? Does God want us to be pushed around all our life? What happens when the rejected tries to out-reject the rejector? Does anyone survive?

Our loving Father in heaven designed marriage to be a Garden of Eden of love, not a Sahara Desert of rejection! God always has a better way of handling rejection. Standing up for my rights is not it!

And buying the lie that, "I'm a creep, so I might as well put up with all this mistreatment," doesn't release the power of God either. Only one thing moves the hand of God: faith working through love!

Out of trust in the only true King, Jesus, I offer my life to Him. This faith-love triggers His Impossible Power. God has a plan for the egocentric husband, as well as the submissive wife. When she responds to Jesus properly, instead of deploying her own attack, He is free to use her to capture the Citadel of Egomom of her husband or set her free from a destructive relationship. God wants the husband humbled more than she, but He wants to use her in a team effort!

I'm not picking on men, just using a common example. Today it seems as many women as men are trying to build their own castles and demand things go their way. We are living in a "me" generation and it seems giving God total control is completely out of the question. I'm confident that every true believer will be brought by the Holy Spirit to a point where they realize their absolute need to take up their cross and deny their flesh.

What do you think could happen if a wife responds properly to the Lord in a bad marriage, yet her husband refuses to yield to the Lord's plan? God has far more options than the phantom will admit. Our foe wants to limit the wife's options and coax her into taking matters into her own hands. When given full reign, Father God can do some pretty novel things; everything from knocking a Saul of Tarsus off his horse, to moving hindrances out of our life.

God's plans will always ultimately work everything together for good for the sincere saint, but they may not be so pleasant to the brat in us. Ego will usually shy away when asked to let go and let God, thinking there must be a better way. God took the rejection of mankind and placed it upon Himself, as the incarnate Son, on a Roman cross! Through death to acceptance, He bought true acceptance. God's foolproof plan is for us to get smaller, to the point where our trust is totally in Him and our confidence is: "If I have a need, God will meet it!"

When we give our rights and our survival over to Jesus He releases what the Bible calls "Resurrection Power." This extreme

power transforms every situation into a victory for us. It's impossible to lose with Resurrection Power! The apostle Paul says it this way:

*That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 3:10,11*

There is a prize awaiting the person who presses past the games of rejection and instead fellowships with Jesus in His suffering. When we are conformed to His death, we allow rejection, actual or perceived, to slay the flesh in us. Our supposed needs are yielded up to the Father, which mortifies our flesh and makes it possible for Him to supply what we truly need.

God performs a miracle in response to our yielding to servanthood – resurrection. In the verses above, experiencing of God's resurrection power comes after we fellowship with His suffering by taking up our cross – not my will Father, but Yours!

I've seen rough, tough husbands melted by the resurrection power of God. The wife will tell how her husband adamantly swore he would never go to church, stop drinking, or some such thing, only to find that when the power of God fell, old mushball husband did just what the Lord told him to do! We need to have more faith in the Almighty God than in fickle people.

When seek first the Kingdom of God, He can use whatever force necessary to set our loved ones free. I enjoy the story in First Kings where wicked Jeroboam, in a fit of rage, yelled "Seize him" for the guards to grab the faithful prophet. As the king's hand went out in the tyrannical gesture, it turned leprous! All of a sudden the angry king was a puffball. The prophet was now in control, all because of the power of God. And speaking of God setting our loved ones free, recall the story of the Exodus! God has some pretty powerful options

that He can use, if we'll trust Him and give Him enough room to work.

If we fight and push because we think God won't protect us, then we're acting out of unbelief, which is sin according to Romans 14:23. We may not want to ask God to fight for us because we feel guilty from an impure heart. We might take matters into our own hands because God may take too long to get involved. This is doubt and unbelief.

There are extreme cases where stubborn people harden their hearts and God's response is to move them out of the picture. God did this with Nabal in First Samuel because he resisted helping the servant of the Lord. God got fed up with rebellious Israel during the reign of the wicked kings and removed them from the scene. If we respond to hostile people with anger and vengeance, we'll mess things up. If we humble ourselves before God, He will settle the score in the most fitting way. He will give them opportunity to cooperate or hang themselves.

Wouldn't it be sad if we took matters into our own hands and blew a fuse, only to discover that what we perceived as rejection was merely our mate's insecurity and inferiority complex? Praising God for others just as they are will trigger a stream of grace and mercy that will flow out to them and minister to their insecurities. As praise tore down the walls of Jericho, so it can tear down the walls others build in feeble attempts at self-protection. As Rahab saved her family by laying down her life, so we can see our loved ones saved by giving our life as a living sacrifice. People will be more apt to come out of their castles of safety when they sense our sincere, selfless love for them. And the opposite is also true; they will retreat deeper into their fortress when they detect that our intentions are selfish.

## INNER HEALING AND DELIVERANCE

The beauty of the life hidden in Christ that was offered to King Sarx is that it accomplishes so much with minimal pain and outlay of energy. The price of taking up our cross is mortifying to our flesh, but it produces benefits that work for us in areas that others will have to hassle over with great travail. Two areas that many Christians struggle with are inner healing and deliverance. The tremendous power of God has actually gone before us in both of these areas accomplishing the great miracle of freedom and a new life, but what if we're not convinced we're a new person? What if we're persuaded that tragedies from the past have messed up our life forever? Suppose we've trained our self to pull back from life and hide in order to survive, will not our enemy be able to easily convince us that God's Word is not true?

Look at what 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us about our past:

*Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

Inner healing, as the world understands it, is what is required for pain from past emotional wounds to be healed. As with sensitive scars from a recent wound, so are those mental scars that result from perceived maltreatment. If you touch my scar that hasn't completely healed, I'll probably yell or jump. If someone touches an area of inner hurt that hasn't been healed, I'll react in a similar way. When we are overly sensitive in an area, or when a particular person can too easily flip our switch, the prevalent diagnosis is: "You need inner healing!"

Reflect back on 2 Corinthians 5:17. Can you see that we have a choice? We can agree with the Word of God, and move ahead with our life, or we can hide behind past "unresolved" issues. Both responses require faith. The first response must believe that God knows what He's talking about; the second believes that our feelings are true. A real problem with the second response is that it typically

doesn't take into consideration the thought-planting activity of the Phantom! He can trouble us with strong feelings as well as harassing, reoccurring thoughts.

Because humans are programmed for survival, we become very susceptible to suggestions of the phantom; after all, he appears to have our best interest in mind. God designed our mind to be able to categorize and file information in such a way that cumulative events from the past can prompt appropriate behavior in the present. For instance, the first time you encounter a rattlesnake while hiking in the woods, your mind associates the sound with danger. This mental capability is meant to be protective. In the future, when you hear the sound of an angry rattler, you will cautiously look around, and proceed with great care. The phantom wants to help by making you afraid of going hiking altogether! If a bush wiggles, he yells "boo" inside your mind.

If a woman was involved in an abusive marriage, and finds herself in a new relationship, the enemy will use this ability of the mind to harass her. If the new man in her life even remotely acts like the last one, the phantom yells, "You'd better get out of here; this guy's just like the last one." The new husband will probably think she is over-reacting a bit, but she will feel strong pressure to run, strike back, etc. How much is it that she needs to be healed and how much is the fact that she needs to run the phantom off? This is difficult to discern and will require much wisdom from God. Hopefully, we will be able, by the end of this material, to discern between fleshly survival efforts, and realistic problems that demand wise evasion techniques.

When a person leaves an abusive, traumatic relationship, they will likely hear, as King Sarx did, the phantom's voice suggesting that, "I'll never let that happen to me again." The phantom does his best to make sure it does happen again. And, he will pump suspicious thoughts into the victim's head to get them to freak out prematurely in new relationships. Friends will advise these nervous, war-torn survivors with stoic advice, such as: "get over the past and get on with your life." Not bad advice if it includes getting on with Jesus and getting rid of the phantom.

You've heard of court cases where a rape victim was made to appear as an immoral person, soliciting the attack. We may boil with anger as the innocent person is publicly embarrassed, but this is exactly what the phantom is doing with every Christian who complains that they need inner healing! Inner healing implies that "I have a problem." After we've come to Jesus for salvation, we're no longer the problem. But, as Mr. Sarx learned, even after we're a new creature in Christ, the phantom will come back to try to steal what Jesus did. If Jesus healed us by faith, the enemy will have to steal it away by faith. Jesus says we're a new person with a new start. The enemy says we're still a mess as he pushes old, hurtful feelings at us as evidence. He points to these feelings and says, "See, you're still a mess because of what those cruel people did to you." This brings us to a point of decision. Jesus says one thing and the phantom says another. Who's right? We know Jesus is, but if we agree with the enemy, or even ponder his evidence, we chance denying the Word, which implies that God is a liar.

Our first response to negative, destructive feelings and thoughts that point to past events must be to deny the feelings and affirm the Word of God. This antagonizes the flesh, so expect some unsettledness in your mind. The survival instinct gets touchy when ignored.

Is it realistic to think that we can override strong feelings with faith? Sure. We can look beyond situations, evidence and hurts, into the unseen world of the spirit, to the throne of God. This is how we were born again. We had to look past our sin to what the Bible said was a fact about Jesus. When we did, Jesus washed us clean, and then our feelings got into line. The last thing was for us to "feel" clean.

Emotional scars from the past may not sound like much of a problem, but the phantom offers the logic that previous suffering is an excuse for inappropriate behavior today. Some men hide behind macho masks, turn into a hermit or run from serious relationships, because of old hurts. Major depression and demonic bondage can be triggered when one believes the phantom's lies that the past has ruined all hope for the future. Feelings similar to what we've endured before are the bait Satan uses to get us to grab his survival devices. If we

obey a spirit of fear that tells us to fight or run, we open ourselves up to demonic control. It doesn't take long for survival behavior to trap a person in obsessions and phobias.

The road called the Abundant Life is only for Christians. Unsaved people need more than inner healing; they need a new life. They must be born again. Psychology seeks to lessen old pain by "understanding" and modifying behavior: adapt, adjust, compromise. Some schools of counseling pass the blame for one's ills to parents or society. The Word of God offers a new start with a clean sheet. This is what makes Christians so excited about people getting saved. Jesus promises to wash the past away and give us a fresh start!

Yes, salvation includes a new life, but we still have the same old enemy. I think there are demons who specialize in digging through the archives of our stored memories to find evidence to try to convince us we're not truly a new creature. We can shut them down quickly by agreeing with Jesus and calling old, hurtful feelings a lie, but it will take getting our eyes off of surviving and onto abiding.

Wives are supposed to be submissive to their husbands, but if the husband acts in the least way like someone from the past who caused hurts or was overbearing, this becomes evidence the enemy can use to generate "pseudo-scar" feelings. She is going to find it virtually impossible to freely give herself to her husband if she buys the lie that she needs to survive.

The husband is to lay his life down for his wife. The Scripture commands him to nourish and cherish her and treat her as the weaker vessel, in love. But if she parrots behavior that the phantom matches up with a dominant female from the past who embarrassed or threatened him, watch out! To push past these feelings, something in him must die! The flesh! Self! The enemy's sales pitch is that this poor, misunderstood guy needs to protect himself. Jesus says, "Let go." The snake says, "Fight, run, do something, show somebody you mean business." To deny the enemy's evidence from the archives of past memories and flashbacks will torment the flesh, but it will release great spiritual power!

Most superficial relationships are "safe" because they are strained through a protective grid by our survival mind-set. Our suspicions

breed in the damp recesses of our dungeons of retreat from yesteryear's battle disasters. We were created to need hugs, but our past hurts can keep others at arm's length. Shallow relationships perpetuate emotional malnutrition, which makes us very susceptible to soul diseases. This alienation cycle must be broken. The cure is to be healed from past hurts by the miracle of the new birth, and then claim the promise of Romans 8:28 and watch as old scars are transformed before your very eyes into beauty marks.

When hurtful, traumatic things happen to us after we become a Christian, we can quickly run to Jesus, obtain His grace to forgive, and by faith, turn the situation over to Him for a good old fashioned miracle! Does it work? Ask the thousands of sincere believers, who, through ages of persecution, found abundant life even in very difficult days. The enemy wants us to strain life through a protective grid that he designed to “sift out future hurts” – supposedly! In reality, it sifts out faith. **God, however, wants us to sift life's rough times through His promises.** He says, in Hebrews 12:11:

*All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

The phantom promises good times, yet produces death. God acknowledges that tribulations are part of life, but that He will use them to make us perfect:

*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

*James 1:2-4*

Think about the different directions the flesh and the spirit desire to take us. The flesh would have us pull into a shell like a turtle "No one's going to hurt me like that again." Totally opposite to this is our reborn spirit-person. The born again part of us is an outgoing servant

of Jesus: "Lord, here am I, send me." We could say the flow of the flesh is inward, like a black hole in space; the spirit is like a river, continually pouring out for the benefit of many others. One is death that sucks life dry; the other furnishes life abundantly!

Aren't we supposed to reflect on past mistakes in order to grow and hopefully avoid history repeating itself? Sure, but be on the alert lest past reflections loom into pain causing harassment. As an example, let's say that it's Monday morning and the coach is going over video coverage from last weekend's game. The Good Coach is reviewing our performance in an effort to improve our overall skills. He is called out of the room for a moment, and in pops the coach from the opposition's team, a sinister man. This evil person proceeds to point out our "stupid mistakes" and then blames them on the numbskull next to us. He soon has the whole room in chaos. When the Good Coach reenters, we're in a pile.

I know that the illustration breaks down at the point of the Good Coach leaving the room, but it does appear that way at times. Actually, its more like He steps behind a one-way mirror to check our responses. You see, **He's more concerned with how we'll respond** to the evil coach, than the fact that the evil coach is working us over. The test is: Will we trust God, and let go of having to be right and look good, or will we scrap and fight in a vain effort to come out on top?

My point is that it's not so much a matter of who's cooking up temptation thoughts, but how are we responding? Are we agreeing with the Lord? Are we on Jesus' side? Are we allowing the past to cripple us today or, are we getting on with our Lord in the new life? Jesus wants us to turn the past into an anthem of praise and thanksgiving because of all He has and will do.

We can come up with a bunch of stupid thoughts on our own, but if we will treat all haunting, hurtful memories as though they are from the enemy, it will be easier to side with the Lord against the flesh. Besides, it's very difficult to determine where the enemy stops and where the flesh starts. The key to winning this war with the "past" is to side with the Word. Do not take credit for negative memories and

flashbacks! After all, if you don't like pain, why would you bring up old painful memories?

If you have an evil, destructive enemy, what would he stand to gain by tricking you into thinking that your past was still a problem? He is like the networks that rerun old TV programs to save the cost of making new ones. Why bother expending energy to rough you up today when all he has to do is remind you of yesterday's failure?

Applying the power of the cross for inner healing uses the timeless aspect of Christ's sacrifice. His work of salvation went backward as well as forward. He died for all sin. Therefore, we can have the confidence that the cross of Christ heals not only my sin of today, but also my sinful, self-protective responses of many years ago.

Emotional scars usually result when we make improper responses to actual or perceived hurtful treatment. I feel that when we make a spiritual response as we go through a trauma, we will not have emotional scars. For instance, it says that when Jesus went through the awful mock trial and crucifixion, He did not answer back, "but entrusted Himself to Him who judges rightly" (1 Peter 2:23). He looked past the ugliness of the cross to the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2).

You may say, "But that was Jesus!" That's right, but He gave us His life to be an example of how we are to live (1 Peter 2:21). He was the only perfect one who ever lived; but, my belief is that if we respond to life's hurts like Jesus did, we would have no scars. This is not to say that traumatic events would be enjoyable, but their residual effect for evil would be curtailed.

I've talked to people who have suffered great tragedies. One individual will take the hard times in stride and say it made them a better person, while another will hide behind the injury and use it as an excuse. One says, "Oh well, that's life," while the other says, "Why me?" The first person did not count himself as deserving preferential treatment, while the second one, like King Sarx, thought that life was supposed to be a bowl of cherries.

Because of what Jesus did on the cross, we can let go of the past. If every sin we committed was forgiven, then we are obligated to forgive everyone who sinned against us. If the blood of Jesus

**separated us from our old sins, it also separated us from the sins done against us.** Ephesians 4:32 tells us that we must forgive others just as God in Christ also has forgiven us! Matthew 6:14,15 warns us that if refuse to forgive others, Father God will not forgive us!

I can just hear someone saying, "Hey, wait a minute, I was only three years old when someone hurt me. How could a three year old child know these deep secrets?"

They couldn't, but that doesn't keep the negative process from producing scars. Actually, parents should be teaching their children that the universe does not revolve around them, and that when bad times come, they must give them up to Jesus and let Him fix them! Children must be taught to forgive. As parents, we'll have plenty of occasions when we'll need to ask for their forgiveness, and will thereby be able to teach them this valuable response.

Someone may say, "I've been told that I'm suppressing old memories, and that I won't be totally healed until they are all exposed and dealt with!"

The suppression of hurtful memories is a protection device that is a gift of God, much like the Old Testament sacrifices. Moses helped sinners "cover" their sin with blood sacrifices until The Blood would come that would take sin away! The blood of animals could only cover man's failures until Messiah would come and by shedding His blood, totally eradicate sin. Similar to this, God made our minds so they could block out major trauma until we could come to Christ and be made a new creation and then learn how to renew our minds with the Word of God.

Some tell us that the subconscious mind will produce unhealthy behavior until the past conflict is resolved. The Bible says we are not wrestling against flesh and blood, but evil spirits (Ephesians 6:12). Which is right?

I've seen people discover all sorts of weird, scary things from their past that had been previously "blocked out." I can't remember any who were suddenly "free" as a new person. What I have seen is more depression, anger, pity, and so forth. Contrariwise, I've watched as people have begun walking out what the Bible teaches, speaking in accordance with God's truth, and repulsing the phantom. Instantly

they are free! I've yet to meet anyone who enjoys digging through old rubbish.

The beauty of the cross is that we can use it as a healing salve with old memories. When a trauma flashback comes to mind, we can reach out to Jesus for help to set the record straight. Look for your reactions rather than how you were treated. Did you quickly forgive? If not, dispense some forgiveness, even if the person is no longer alive. In an effort to survive, did you build castle walls, allow hate to fester or fear to come in? Did you pick up Satan's temptation for self-pity? Vow to get even? Pass judgment on the one hurting you? Instead of entrusting our lives and situations to the Lord, we did the best we knew how with what we had to work with. Some of our wrong responses opened a door to nagging spirits. Their evil voices harangued over and over about how embarrassed we were, how misunderstood we were, taken advantage of, etc., and etc. This is what causes emotional scars; this is what prompts aberrant behavior. Inner voices actually drive some people crazy. Is it the person? The Bible lays the blame on evil spirits!

When you see an old memory in your mind, ask Jesus to step into the picture. See a cross off to the side. Take your past reactions and lay them down at the cross. Thank Jesus for forgiving your less than adequate survival responses. Thank Him that His powerful blood even covered the sins that were done against you. **Yield up your right to not have this past event happen.** Ask the Lord to destroy the pain and release healing. Then, bind the phantom that beat you with the old memory.

## **DO WE HAVE A RIGHT TO SMOOTH SAILING?**

Much of our frustration comes because we feel that, for some reason, we had a right to not have traumatic situations happen to us. Have you ever heard someone say, "Why did this have to happen to me?" or, "Why Me?" We might reply, "Why not?" I don't mean to be cruel, but none of us has a guarantee that weird things won't happen to us. Just because they loved the Lord didn't keep some Christians from being eaten by the lions. "Why didn't God stop it? He's not fair."

Why God allows things to happen is another story, and to accuse Him of not being fair is to fall into a trap similar to Eve's.

Jesus didn't like the prospect of the cross. He asked, "Father, if there is some other way to get this job done, please do it." But, distasteful as it was, He gave up His rights as He prayed, "Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done." If you relive a hurtful memory, yield it up to the Lord. You can tell Him you wish it hadn't happened, but nevertheless, you give it up to Him. "Your will, Father, be done in this memory." Then, as you ask Jesus to release His healing into the hurtful memory, allow Him to do now what He wanted to do the first time provide mercy, grace, healing, and solutions rather than survival.

Jesus does not change the actual events of the past – they're history – but **He can heal our perception of past events**. Phantom-poisoned perspectives caused our pain; new perspectives will reinforce the abundant lifestyle we get to enjoy. The Crucified Life provides the resurrection life. Such a response allows the stresses of life to push us into the arms of our Lord. We yield up our right to have smooth sailing or thorn-free roses! We consider ourselves dead to the need to survive. We celebrate the fact that we are the bond slaves of Jesus and, therefore, He limits everything that touches our life. Whatever cannot be turned for our good is prevented from happening by our loving Master!

## **HOW THE CROSS OF JESUS DELIVERS US FROM EVIL SPIRITS**

Another tremendous benefit Jesus provides in this new way of walking is a painless method for devil control. Both Peter and James tell us to resist the devil and he will flee. Paul lets us in on a great way of resisting the phantom, "Do not give the devil an opportunity."

I chuckle as I consider how I've responded to deliverance in the past. Some folks, who obviously needed to shake off a demon or two, found me more than willing to bind and loose for periods of time, until the unseen force cried "Uncle" and left. I've read stories where some saints have battled with demons for hours. Have you ever wondered

why this is, especially in light of the New Testament examples of casting out the demons with a word?

Demons are somewhat like the old flesh. If you give them attention, the flesh and demons will want more and more of your focus. Not a good thing. If you reckon or consider yourself dead to sin and the pull of demonic spirits, things will change rapidly. The cross says, "I don't need that particular sin or coping device to survive – I lay my life down for Jesus!" But, as long as we give our focus to the negative input from the phantom, we prolong the wrestling match. We give him the opportunity or legal right to harass us!

In Revelation 12:11, we read:

*And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death.*

We hear a lot about using the blood and the Word, but very little about the third part of the prescription given to cure devil problems: *"...and they did not love their life even to death."* **This is the power of taking up our cross.** This shuts down most of the self-protective games our foe typically traps believers with. This calls the demon's bluff. How can you intimidate someone who's not afraid of you? How can you use the threat of the loss of reputation on someone who quickly responds with, "It's no longer I, but Christ"?

I was merely going to have a nice little prayer with one person, when all of a sudden some alien force rose up and demanded I leave "their" person alone. A battle ensued. I, the mighty warrior (ha), equipped with the name of Jesus, made many slashes with the sword of the Word of God, pleading the Blood of Jesus over the individual. I don't know if you've ever had a demon tell you it wouldn't leave someone, but it's the kind of experience that does strange things to the hair on the back of your neck!

After about half an hour of prayer, one stubborn spirit remained determined not to leave my friend. I thought it good to pause for a prayer break, whereupon I was told by the Lord to quit wrestling with the spirit. Once the faith command is given, there is nothing else to do,

unless the victim has given the enemy an opportunity. The individual I was praying for had turned everything over to the Lord, so technically, the demon had no legal basis for remaining. We merely closed in prayer, and the mocking spirit promptly left!

Long drawn out deliverance sessions give the enemy too much credit. He knows when he must leave, so our smartest course of action is to take care of business with God so the enemy has no place in us! Before you say something like, "That would be an all day job for me," or some such thing, consider this. The issue is, "Who is our master?," not "How many times have we messed up?"

Romans chapter 6 tells us that sin should not be master over us, and whoever we obey we will be mastered by. Therefore, if every thought is taken to Jesus, He will reign as the undisputed Master over our life and the devil will have no place in us. All harassing spirits will have to pull out. If I give in to the enemy by playing with the thoughts he bombards me with, he will reign over me in confusion. What will it be, an old rugged cross for my ego, or a rose covered path that leads to bondage and destruction?

Obsessions are from the phantom. Behind an obsession is a lie that there is something I need in order to be happy or to survive. I destroy the enemy's opportunity to torment me with obsessions when I take up my cross by saying, "Father, not my will in this matter, but Your will be done!" Death to my survival, death to the foe's opportunity, but abundant life for me! "Jesus is all I need!"

## **A WARNING ABOUT DEMONS**

Our prideful enemy gloats over attention, even when we fight back with him, so please don't fall into the trap of demon chasing. I believe there are more demons around than we can shake a stick at, but we get into serious trouble when we take our eyes off the Lord Jesus and put them on demons. Remember how Satan had to check with God and get permission before he could lay a finger on Job? You are in a much better situation than Job if you are a believer. You are seated with Christ in heavenly places! In fact, the rules of the game

have been changed: if you put on the whole armor of God and take His shield of faith, you will quench every fiery missile of the evil one.

This being so, then demons are not our problem only inadequate use of the spiritual armor! If you will reflect for a moment, all of the Christian's battle armor has to do with what we've talked about so far. The believer who is dead to sin (therefore no longer I, but Christ) has the breastplate of righteousness already functioning. If Jesus is yielded to as the undisputed Master over every thought that comes to us, then we are girded with truth. Salvation is a helmet for the one who is no longer suffering from a big head (pride), but rather, Christ is in preeminence. Instead of feet shod with army boots of self-protection, our feet are shod with the gospel of peace – not gossip, accusations and retaliation.

If a demon won't leave you alone, you've probably given it an opportunity. After all, they are opportunists! The problem is not so much that something came in to bug you, as much as it is that you left the door open. We can chase the demon off with the name of Jesus, but he can and will soon return. The best response is to find out what you need to do to close the door! Do you have any idea of how you might have left the door of opportunity open? Any survival tricks like lying, manipulating, judging, condemning, being stingy, anger, laziness, procrastination, defending self? What about the old nasty nine such as stealing (time included), immorality (even what you look at), unforgiveness, coveting (something you can't live without), worry, fear, faithlessness, prayerlessness, rebelliousness, disobedience, and such like? Ask the Lord to show you how you left the door open. Close the door by repentance, restitution, and new habit patterns.

If you can't figure out how you gave the enemy an opportunity, then consider the area that you would be most likely to argue about, saying it's not that big of a deal, and that you "have it under control." Some of the enemy's secret entrances are well hidden behind our excuses and rationalizations. For instance, someone you know who has a big problem with unforgiveness insists that they have taken care of it. It's usually the things we protest most strongly about that are entrenched problems.

After you deal with the enemy, quickly return your attention to the Lord Jesus. Don't let this power go to your head. In fact, Jesus told the disciples not to rejoice that they had power over the demons, but to rejoice that their names were written in heaven. We're to be heaven-minded, not demon-minded!

I believe that even deeply entrenched demons can be evicted when a person simply turns over their entire life to Jesus as absolute Master. The person who wants to yield to and serve the Lord, makes an unfitting residence for rebellious, self-seeking spirits. It might be faster to have a deliverance session and kick out all the invaders, but you still have the very important job of filling the swept house lest seven worse spirits come back. The "No longer I, but Christ" mentality produces a spirit-filled home, where there's no room for demons! Besides this benefit, we also get to delight in the joy of the Lord and the power of answered prayer. My, what blessings are ours from letting go and letting God!

## TRADING REJECTION IN FOR ACCEPTANCE

Jesus said that the Phantom's strategy for winning against us was "Divide and Conquer." This is why the Bible says so much about brethren dwelling in unity:

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity... For there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forever. Psalms 133:1-3*

Imagine, blessings forever for learning how to dwell with others in unity. Jesus prayed for us that we would be one as He and the Father are one. So what does the enemy of our soul stoop to in an effort to divide us? Rejection. Something as simple as a funny look from another person we don't know very well and we can feel rejected. Remember in the first chapter how the Phantom pulled this on poor Sarx?

Those early days of grade school probably had you wondering about rejection at times. Then when you started dating, mercy sakes, concern over being rejected was not far from your mind. Marriage is about finding someone who loves you so much and they promise to never reject you. Then along comes the devil, the accuser. He loves to throw suspicious thoughts into our minds and get us feeling that we're in a contest rather than on the same team.

Once we sense we're being rejected, fact or not, the temptation is to play games like we talked about before: pull up the drawbridge, lower our gate and run into our dungeon. Sometimes we can get defensive and lob bombs from our castle walls or shoot sharp arrows of rejection back at the supposed offender. What if we misunderstood the other person and they really didn't mean to reject us. Our negative response will likely make them feel we are rejecting them.

Some people truly will reject us. Fact. What's a mature Christian to do? How can the Crucified Life help us? How big is your God? Can

you see Jesus standing behind the rejecter, looking at you with compassion. He loves us all and He knows what's going inside of other people when they reject us. He knows if they are just having a bad day or if they have been pushed to the breaking point. He loves them and He wants us to give them the benefit of the doubt. Look, He's holding up His nail scarred hands, reminding us that those painful wounds were made for us when we were separated from God.

The Crucified Life has us hold up our hands, look at their lack of piercing and offer them up to Abba in worship. The gift of the sacrifice of praise is precious to Father God. He knows the feeling of rejection all too well and His response was to die for us to provide the new birth, which alone can empower us to love those who dislike us. When we feel rejected we have a choice. The powerful response is to forgive as Jesus did: Father forgive them for the know not what they do. Read through the Epistle of First John. To not love people that we can see means we can't love God who we can't see. Sounds like the Crucified Life is the way to go.

Resurrection power is what Philippians 3:10 promises; not a psychological or manipulative power, but impossibility power. When my ego refuses to play the rejection game and, rather, defers to King Jesus, supernatural power goes into action and can transform a heart of stone into a loving friend.

*“...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death...” Phil. 3:10*

When we trade rejection in and go for accepting others as they are, although it hurts, we join *the fellowship of His suffering*. We die to having to “make others understand” that we're really a nice person and that they should like us. The quicker we stop the mentally exhausting process of debating if we messed up, if they are just a bad person, so on and so forth – the sooner we can get back into the Peace of God. Such a Christ-like response shows the Lord that He can trust us with a greater ministry and His love and acceptance quickly flows into our life. Refreshment!

The Bible says the heart is deceitful. We do not realize most of the time when we are into self-protection. The Apostle Paul wrestled with something he found inside of himself. He said that when he wanted to do good, something lurking inside him would not let him. And when that something inside him wanted to do evil, he couldn't stop it. Did he have a problem or what? Can you identify with him?

*I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good. Romans 7:21*

I, too, have found that evil is present in me, the one who is really a nice guy. You see, the other side of this rejection problem is that we, too, have done our share of rejecting! Our hands are not always clean. If God were to show up all of a sudden and balance the scales of life, we too would be on the receiving end of some of His chastisement! Aren't you glad God doesn't want to "get even", but that He'd rather see everyone grow and mature?

We are set up for rejection. **We are tricked by our enemy into making demands on people that only God can fulfill.** Too frequently the sweet little wife entered into marriage with expectations that no earthly husband could satisfy, especially with her as a wife! We have been poisoned by the world, the flesh and the devil with unrealistic expectations. Coupled with this, most people are quick to grant themselves the benefit of the doubt, yet are prone to question the motives of others when conflicts arise. Everyone seems right in their own eyes. For the most part, humans are a race of judges who have passed down a verdict in their favor but that libels the rest of the world. There's one major shortcoming in such verdicts; the Bible says, "For all have sinned." The whole bunch of us are guilty!

If the "nearsighted" disease of fallen mankind isn't bad enough, there is another complicating factor at work: a phantom factor! There's a story in the Old Testament book of Zechariah of the high priest standing before the Lord's throne. At his side, libeling him to God, is the old devil, the accuser. Tired of all the harassment, the Lord finally says to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you!" (Zechariah 3:1,2).

A similar description is used in Revelation 12:10:

*And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, **who accuses them before our God day and night.**"*

Imagine, day and night someone is pointing out your faults. And, if your faults are being examined, so are those around you. This diabolical foe sticks his negative evaluations into our brains: "Rejects!" He would have us judge everyone around us, as well as ourselves. When we pick up his judgements and speak them to others, they are enabled by this same "accuser" with retaliatory ballistics that will cause us pain.

There is a war going on behind the overt conflict we see in interpersonal relationships. The internal war is against sin, as Paul calls it. The Apostle Peter calls it fleshly lusts.

*Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. 1 Peter 2:11*

*For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.*

*Galatians 5:17*

How much of this is the devil and how much is our old nature, our old self? If Romans 6:6 means what it says, then the inner conflict can't be our old nature.

*Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.*

*Romans 6:6,7*

*Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:11*

The Scriptural truth of the matter is that when we come to Christ, our old self is crucified with Jesus. Verse 11 of Romans 6 warns us not to consider our self alive to sin, but dead to it! Look at Galatians 5:24:

*Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

What does all of this mean? It means that the presence of sin, that war inside that Paul mentioned, is none other than the phantom! It's not us! At least not until we take the incriminating bait that he offers. Satan will speak rejection to us, but it's not our sin until we accept the rejection. He suggests that we "Take revenge." When we act on his input, it's our sin, but just to be tempted is not a sin.

How foolish we are to assume that every thought that flashes into our head is our own doing, especially when the Word says our old nature has been crucified with Christ. These negative, judgmental thoughts concerning a brother are from the phantom. The thoughts that others are rejecting us are likewise from him. However, if we allow them to linger or if we play with them, then, guess what, they become our sin!

The good news for the born-again Christian is that survival and rejection, the by-products of the flesh, are actually alien forces that can be evicted! Because our old nature was put to death with Jesus, most personality flaws are a result of self-survival traps the phantom puts out for our ego! When we consider ourselves dead to the need to survive, we will be able to see the snares for what they are, and make a clear choice to avoid them! The sacrifice of praise opens our eyes.

Some schools of psychology say, that our personality is fixed, as early as at age four or five, and that we can't change it. The Bible, however, expects us to grow and mature and shed childish, selfish responses. Like King Sarx, we will need to stop thinking the Universe should revolve around us. And, as the king learned, this will include chasing away the phantom who bears libeling evidence against those around us.

A key to walking in victory all the time is to treat every judgmental thought, every critical retort, every wicked response as though the devil were standing over our shoulder whispering it to us. Bad reports on others and sharp replies toward people that "have it coming" need to be seen as bait on a hook held by the sinister fisherman. Resist the devil and he will flee. Give him no opportunity. Take every thought captive to Jesus; don't rely on your own shaky abilities.

To walk by faith, we must agree with the Word. Therefore, when a feeling of rejection comes buzzing at us, we should say something like, "Praise God, that's not me, it's the stinky old phantom, and Jesus has defeated him!" This will "reckon" that you are indeed dead to sin and alive to Jesus. We must do this even if the temptation to sin truly "feels" like us! You may have to remind your feelings frequently that it's not your sin until you act upon the temptation.

We can teach our children how to trade rejection for acceptance. Let's say that we've just had to discipline them for misbehaving. What kind of thoughts do you think the enemy will try to sell them? Take a few minutes and tell your child what might "pop" into their mind. Explain how the devil wants to get you fighting with each other. Without making this a scary picture, ask them to simply chase the phantom off and make a simple reply, "Mommy is my friend, and we love each other." To ignore the possible pollution from our foe, is to leave our children vulnerable and a prime candidate for the rejection cycle.

Let's review the example of the mother who overreacted to her son when she came home from work totally exhausted. The enemy was telling her how trapped she was and how everyone was always making demands on her time. As she agreed with him, her anger grew. When her son was perceived as adding to that, she exploded. How do you suppose she felt after she blew up at him? If every thought had been taken to Jesus, and if she saw self-pity and survival as ploys of Satan, she would have been more refreshed to start with. When we feel rushed and pressured, we would usually be better off to stop what we're doing, take a prayer break, and reach out to Jesus for some refreshing acceptance.

Exhaustion drains our emotions and it can make us pull back from any further outlay of energy. In our example, mom needs an energy boost. Focus on what needs to get done, what we should have done, what people might think can be the result of thoughts put in our mind by the harasser. Submitting the moment to the Holy Spirit, breathing Him in, and realigning our focus on Father God – called “waiting on the Lord” – can give us the strength to run and not be weary. The pause gives our physical bodies time to metabolize stored glycogen and recharge us. Thoughts that drain us need to be given to Abba and the phantom chased away.

Every mom knows she is on special assignment to her kids, so the TLC is more important than hurrying to get stuff done – life can wait! Most times a hug, a pause for refocusing can be inserted without the end of the world happening. One-on-one attention, for a few minutes with junior would probably do both a world of good. Dinner can wait a minute, and there will always be more meetings to make. When we are frustrated, we give others substandard attention. They are asking for quality love and we give them a token. We know this all too well when we’re on the receiving end.

I think this is frequently what is behind a spoiled brat throwing a temper tantrum, begging for quality attention. You may hear the parent say, "You're asking for it." The frustrated parent may give less love than the child feels they need, and it can be perceived as rejection "They don't love me," when in actuality they love them extremely!

This same dynamic is duplicated in many marriage relationships. Neither partner gives the same powerful love they did when the relationship first blossomed. Busyness, children, job demands, and a thousand other things creep in and dilute the once focused, selfless love. Their mate can deploy coping devices to gain a better grade love. Some marriage partners learn to do without meaningful love from their mate by getting lost in busy activities at church, helping at school, getting lost in sports, the workshop, etc. Some get lost in fantasy, romance novels, or regrettably, even affairs. Perceived rejection can result in devastating choices.

The servant-mind of the believer crucified with Christ gives the highest quality of love possible and, therefore, meets deep inner needs.

You've heard of kids agonizing that their parents gave them things but not the love they really wanted (most of us want both). The picture of the spoiled brat, with mountains of toys and yet no quality time with dad, is what happens in many adult relationships two people drowning in material things, yet starving because of superficial relationships.

## ACCEPTING PEOPLE, NOT THEIR SIN

The phantom tempts us to reject people who have different scruples than we have. There's something very "pious" about looking down on those who do things we wouldn't think of doing. Again, I think we have help from the phantom! Replace this attitude with:

*Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. Romans 14:3*

Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites, because they put themselves in the position of teachers and yet were unloving and uninvolved with the people they were looking down on. Instead of being servant-leaders (like Jesus), they were prima donnas. But, you don't see Jesus preaching against Roman gods or stating that His synagogue was better than everyone else's. He was here to lift up the Father, not put people down. I'm not saying that false religions are OK or that sin is fine. Hear this: the only way to break the rejection cycle is to find the grace of God through a vital, living relationship with Jesus Christ!

Our doctrine is not made true by embarrassing another person's faith. Truth is truth and it will stand or fall on it's own merit. Truth works. If what we preach doesn't work, then it must not be truth. Most of us would agree that no one has all the truth (except maybe our self), yet, how can we ever be teachable if we spend our time putting others down? I catch myself getting irritated when someone challenges what I believe and I can't think of a good answer immediately. Have you ever experienced this sensation? It's like they are rejecting us. Suppose that's how others feel when we respond negatively to them as though it was important for us to be their judge?

Here are some verses that lay out steps that we should take when we feel irritated with someone and are tempted to argue with them:

*And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:24-26*

The result of responding in love, rather than with rejection, is that we may see the "misguided" set free! Notice in the above verses how God promises to loose these trapped people when we treat them with kindness! This is truly trading acceptance for rejection!

We need to trade man's rejection for God's acceptance. When we don't measure up to another's expectations, as happens occasionally, remind your soul and the phantom that "God has accepted me!" This is one way we walk out the command to "consider our self dead to sin." You can't reject me, for it is no longer I who lives here, but Jesus Christ – total acceptance for rejection.

*Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. Romans 15:7*

People may make fun of us, isolate us, or lie about us. They, of course, are merely parroting the phantom's input. But, what are we to do? Ponder the enemy's lies that come pouring out from his puppets? No, we must not focus on seed-thoughts of rejection. Pull these weeds out and replace them with the truth of God's life-giving seed. We must accept others just as we were accepted. And how was that? While we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8). This is God's plan to eliminate rejection. In the close relationships of life, most people respond subtly to perceived rejection with rejection of one kind or another. Instead, the Lord asks us to substitute acceptance for undeserving people, while they are still sinners! This means that the mom who interprets

the whining from her child as rejection, needs to turn things around with a "love up" time. Pure acceptance is far more important than a full tummy anyway. Perceived rejection is to be overcome with good!

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.  
Romans 12:21*

So, what are we to give back to those we feel are rejecting us? What about "the benefit of the doubt"? They may not really be rejecting us, and this response will save egg on our face!

We need to tap into a powerful spiritual law, the law of sowing and reaping. We'll look at it more in Chapter Seven, but for now, suffice it to say that, as we invest more love into relationships, we'll harvest more love! Tired mom will receive supernatural renewal from a selfless giving of herself, if she can do so without resentment.

Let's try to implement this approach, this trade-off, in the other example of the selfish husband and the wife finally standing up for her rights. When the dominated wife realizes that sticking up for her rights is none other than flesh against flesh, and opts for Jesus power, things begin to emerge. She may discover that her motives have not been as pure as she had thought. Putting up with her self-centered husband may have been an attempt at meeting some of her own needs. Was she playing the game "Good Little Martyr"?

Jesus will be free to share with this gal, when she humbles herself at the foot of the Cross, that He has some incredible resources that can work from the inside-out of her husband. There could have been pride that she was "doing everything." When she recalls the stark truth of Romans 3:23, she will drop all judging, superiority and pride. In true humility, she can leave her husband to God to fix and yield herself up to Jesus to polish and perfect her.

Self-righteous games will be uncovered by the loving Father when we humbly wait before Him. For a season, this woman in our example may feel as though she were a bigger sinner than her husband, as the spotlight of God reveals the deceitfulness of her heart. As she yields to His scalpel, each cut removes fleshly rejection responses, haunting, taunting slogans from the phantom, self-righteous thinking patterns.

The result is that there is more and more room for Jesus to set up His kingdom in her life. With His kingdom comes power! If it's no longer her but Jesus Christ, then soon the husband will find himself dealing with none other than the Son of God, living in the earthly tabernacle of his wife!

Of course, we know that Jesus will have far more success working with her husband than she will. But, have you caught yourself snared in the trap of trying to do God's work in straightening out others, when you still had dirty laundry of your own?

The end result of our example, as the wife's godly responses produce fruit in the husband, is that through the years the husband knew he was less than what he should be, but his wife's fleshly reactions to his failures were used as a form of mental justification. He thought he was justified to pay back rejection for rejection, even if he started it all in the first place. Remember, his heart is deceitful and he can't know it (Jeremiah 17:9). Now, with the wife destroying rejection with acceptance, a new power comes on the scene: Calvary love! The husband, loaded down with tons of soul needs, finds the sweet, irresistible fragrance overpowering. Like water in the desert, this man, dying of thirst, will sell his soul for this liquid refreshment!

Do you believe that God can do miracles? If some ornery man were to walk up to God, do you think His power is such that He could melt the stubborn soul? I do. I've seen Him fall on hard hearts and streams of tears come gushing forth! He can do great miracles. And that is just what He wants to do in and through us, as we yield up our kingdom to Him. When we accept His acceptance and reject the actual and perceived rejections of life, we begin to enjoy what He planned for us, called the abundant life.

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

*Ephesians 2:4-7*

What lies we've accepted. The phantom has filled our minds with thoughts of rejection, the whole time Jesus wanted us to enjoy life, seated with Him in heavenly places! We need to renew our minds with the truth that...

**WE ARE ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED!**

*To the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. Ephesians 1:6*

We are called to trade self-defense for a cross. Jesus said we will need to do this daily. As we offer ourselves up to be a living sacrifice, He will use the Word to renew our minds. The fellowship of His suffering purges the flesh. The war with our enemy will last the rest of our lives, but we can win each scrimmage as we trade ego-building thoughts for Christ-centered ones. Thoughts that put us down or others, are thrown in the trash can and new, spirit-filled thoughts are pondered on purpose!

*But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. Galatians 5:16*

*If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:25,26*

All of this trading of acceptance for rejection does not negate the need to let others go if they no longer want to be with us. If a husband wants to leave his family and chase women, the godly wife will let him go, and get on with rebuilding her life. The Scripture says, "If the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; **the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases...**" (1 Corinthians 7:15). Jesus, speaking in the context of witnessing, said to leave and kick off the dust on your feet when others reject you. We're not usually

commanded to stay and force ourselves on those who don't want to be with us. If they reject us in this manner, we must return love and acceptance, but not force our wills, goals or plans on them. I believe that if we can catch hold of trading acceptance for rejection before situations become too serious, we can salvage most relationships.

When the relationship has passed beyond either mate's ability to soften, there is nothing to do. This may be the kind of sin that the Apostle John warned us not even to pray for (1 John 5:16). This subject requires much more prayer, consideration and wise counsel. Jesus said that Moses gave the divorce laws of Deuteronomy 24 for just this reason, hardness of the heart (Matthew 19:8). We can't push ourselves on someone who doesn't want us; God surely doesn't do that Himself.

## OUR OWN GETHSEMANE

We may find ourselves in a garden. The lights are flickering torches. We are surrounded by what appears obvious death. A traitor is on his way with a band of anger-crazed madmen. Our crucifixion looms before us. We can run, leave the responsibilities of fatherhood, motherhood, leadership. Or, we can pray the simplest, most profound prayer ever recorded. The prayer uttered by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane put into motion the power of eternal salvation! **"Nevertheless, Father, not My will, but Your's be done!"** That garden scene has never been equaled in rejection known by man. God's "so great of love" was to be thrown back into His face, on a cross. Yet, with a simple prayer, rejection was turned into eternal acceptance for as many as receive Him. Will you let the mind which was in Jesus be in you?

*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. **Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard***

*equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant**, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming **obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross**. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world. Philipians 2:3-8, 14,15*

## FOUR LAWS FOR ABUNDANCE THE LAW OF LIBERTY

The closer we get to the Lord, the bigger small foxes become! You may remember the quote from Song of Solomon that it's the small foxes that spoil the vines. Before you think this is unfair, consider that gemstones get a much closer inspection than cheap imitations. The person buying a five year old car is not usually as particular with the paint finish as someone purchasing a \$50,000 auto!

*If you would be a vessel for honor, for God's use, cleanse yourself. 2 Timothy 2:21 (paraphrase)*

If you're serious about following the Lord, then watch out for all sin, and especially small, seemingly insignificant ones! There appears to be a season when God's grace makes allowances for the fledgling Christian's ignorance. As a brand new believer, His grace covers many of the "small" sins. But there comes a time when we're expected to grow. There's a point when we're to be weaned from the, "Wow, ain't God great," to spending serious time with our Lord and His Word. The pureed foods given us are taken away and we're to chew for ourselves. Some would-be disciples get mad when the well dries up and they are required to start digging their own well. Cleaning up our behavior and conforming to God's holy standards is not supposed to be a guilt-driven thing, but rather a romance of learning what gives our Beloved pleasure.

Some of the small foxes that the Lord wants out of our lives are the personality quirks that tarnish the image of Christ in us. We are expected to grow in grace, from glory to glory, not cling to "Well, that's just the way I am, take it or leave it." All of us need to be on the path toward changing into the very likeness of Jesus. We will never be Jesus, nor do I believe we will ever obtain perfection this side of heaven. But what happens too often is that some believers feel

because they were saved by grace apart from works, that they can sit back and do nothing. They remain at a level of productivity that they know is far less than what God wants for them. **The gift of grace was not meant to make us sloppy, but provide the wherewithal for us to strive for mastery,** to walk in the complete triumph that Jesus has provided.

How hard is it to walk in absolute victory? It's easy, yet impossible! Because no good thing dwells in us, that is, in our flesh (Romans 7:18), and due to the fact that we can't do what we want to do (Galatians 5:17), it is impossible for us to walk in absolute victory by ourselves. But, if Christ is doing it, then it could be very easy for us to enjoy. My personal opinion is that we enjoy victory over sin in installments. We will have seasons when things click and victory flows. Then we hit a speed bump! We've been overlooking a personality flaw that Jesus is saying He wants to work on NOW! It was there before, and we enjoyed victory in spite of its existence, but at our present maturity level with the Lord, it's time to come a little closer. I feel that this process goes on throughout our life. It's not a cause for despair, but rejoicing. **The Master gives us adequate time to grow and will work with us at a pace that can be easily managed, if we cooperate.**

Have you hit any speed bumps? The little foxes of yesterday that were no big deal become a bone of contention and point of surrender today. This is one reason why it's so wrong for us to tell others how to run their lives. We are each at a different place in our spiritual development, and therefore God has different lessons for each of us.

"Well," you may counter, "why don't we just get it all over with at once. Can't God just tell us what things are wrong at the start so we can conform and be on our way?" That sounds good, but it's the seed of phariseism. What it's really saying is, "Don't bother me with the process of growth and maturity, I just want to be perfect." But if perfection is God's ultimate goal, then all He would need to do is take us home to heaven. No, that would just make for more angels, the greenhouse variety that have been sheltered from the bumps of life! The growing pains of life are useful and, in fact, are the necessary

ingredients to produce the free moral agents who can accept God's grace or refuse His love.

If you were looking for a bride for your son, would you try to find him a slave, a robot without feelings, or would you desire to find him a helpmeet with a track record of growth in unselfish love? God has designed life to groom supernatural qualities in us through trying times and tyrants. The closer we get to the Lord and the further along the road of discipleship we go, **the more He seems to be concerned about our attitudes and less about the attitudes of the people who bug us!**

What kind of little foxes are we looking at? The Holy Spirit will target self-centeredness, selfishness and self in general. While many denominations have been in an uproar about such earth-shattering things like, "Can Christians smoke or drink or go to picture shows?", the Holy Spirit has been trying to get our rough edges off by using the sandpaper people around us! The ornery people in our life have been His main means of polishing our personality, yet, when we react inappropriately to them, the process slows down.

Have you noticed how dangerous it is to pray for patience? We find out too late that tribulations work patience (Romans 5:3). We tell the Lord we want to please Him, be like Him, be more filled with His love, and whammo! All of a sudden we have an abundance of nerds in our life, all making demands of us. Can't anyone accept us for who we are? But hold on a minute; didn't we just ask the Father to make us more like Jesus? Do we have any right to tell Him how He can make us more like Jesus? Let go, let God use what He wants to smooth off your rough edges. **See every irritation in life as none other than a God-ordained polishing tool.** See life as the workshop God designed to make us into what He wants: loving, yielded, cooperative, gentle, patient, a perfect bride for His perfect Son! His process will produce perfect victory.

**It's the process, therefore, that becomes absolute victory, not our perfection (which is available only in heaven). The loving, yielded lifestyle is the victory!**

Do you have any sandpaper people in your life? There are four very essential laws in the spiritual kingdom that we must learn to use as they are intended. These laws always work, both in the spiritual realm and in fleshly realms. Our human predisposition is to try to use these laws in reverse, or to live as though they don't exist and pray like fury that they get cancelled out before they boomerang back on us!

The laws are interrelated and are God's designed means for successful relationships between mortals. When we violate any of these laws in personal relationships, pain arises. The usual consequence is perceived rejection. If I think you are rejecting me, then immediately my ego swings into action, assisted by the notorious accuser of the brethren! Me and the accuser go to work building walls to protect "number one" from the nasty people "out there." When the walls are up, then cannons are installed on the walls. "Just let them treat me that way again, and I'll show them!"

Behind the scene, the Spirit is grieved because He was setting up a polishing session, only to have it turned into war games! Look around. So many of the hurting people Jesus desired to be shiny gemstones by this time, but because they have lived in ignorance of His laws, they are frustrated.

Please don't get upset when you see how simple the four laws are or how obvious they are. We have had to have help in overlooking them. The enemy's fishhook has had a very appealing worm on it – self-protection. Remember, Jesus said if we seek to save our life, we will lose it, but if we lose our life for His sake, we'll save it. All the devil has to do is to dangle self-protection in front of us, and if we take the bait, we're hooked!

The four laws work against self-protection at every level. Let's go back to the example of selecting a bride for our son. When we're looking for Miss Perfect for our boy, the one thing that will insure failure in their marriage will be if she is more concerned with self-protection than building mutual love and trust. If her rights, her comforts, etc., are most important to her, she will make a lousy wife.

Any time hubby gives the slightest impression that he is infringing on her space, there is war. We would call such a person a spoiled brat. But isn't there a spoiled brat inside us all? Oh, not in you? Not even a

little one? Just because you're not as bad as some doesn't mean that you've mastered selfishness. A few folks have had the lion's share of brattiness spanked out of them when they were being raised. For others, life itself has squeezed it out of them. Hard times can do that. But humanism sings the tune written by Lucifer, "Look Out For Number One." Jesus wants us to learn a new song, "Lose Your Life For My Sake, And You'll Find It!"

Because the four laws are so interrelated, it's hard to pick one as the starting place. But we must, so let's begin with:

## THE LAW OF JUDGING

The Law Judging is probably the first law we violate as a child. Just because we don't know these truths doesn't stop them from working. In Hosea 4:6, the Lord says His people perish from a lack of knowledge. The only known cure for ignorance is education, so let the class begin.

Stated by Jesus, this law is:

*Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Matthew 7:1,2*

Even if you've never read this law from the New Testament, you've seen it work all your life. You hear someone belittling another person for forgetting things, only to watch them turn around and forget something. We see the judging perfectionist who is sloppy about taking the command of love seriously. People frequently gossip to me of someone who is a gossip!

This law can get ugly. It's been a real thorn in the flesh for me. I can't shake it. Just when I expose the root sin in someone else, I see three fingers poking their nasty nails back at me. What I didn't realize was that God designed this law to work with love to produce life. James says it this way:

*So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.*

*James 2:12,13*

In order to be judged by the Law of Liberty, we must give mercy to others! According to James 2:13, this thing called mercy is stronger than judgment! This is one of those areas where we will have to take God's Word by faith. Harsh judgement seems so strong, and mercy appears weak and insipid.

Isn't mercy that golden stuff we all crave? When a person hurts us and we respond with mercy, we will tap the power of this law – we receive mercy! Jesus put the responsibility on us. He said the standard we use to measure out is what will be used to measure back on us. If I respond to situations with love and grace, I, too, will receive God's love and grace. Little grace given, little grace received. Much mercy given, much mercy received!

Let's look at how this works out in our lives. The human personality easily comes up with expectations. If my expectations are not met, there's trouble. Usually the accuser of the brethren helps us to find someone to judge for our expectations not being met. When I judge someone as not meeting my needs (or expectations), such as a parent, I am judged by the same measure. I will usually project that I feel rejected, whereupon I release the law of judging and rejection spreads like a disease. This confusion is built on partial truths that the devil presents as evidence, hoping for a conviction from us. What he is not expecting is for us to respond with mercy and grace.

The little wife fusses over her home all day, making everything just so. The evening meal is a work of art. Here comes hubby; her expectations are soaring. He will be so pleased. Instead, he plops on the sofa and mumbles something about what a jerk his boss is and how he hates the drivers on the highways. The law of judging is already at work in his life because of his improper reaction toward his boss, so he is set up for failure. The wife assumes he is rejecting her because all her efforts to please him go unnoticed. Her misreading becomes a misjudging and soon two overly defensive people are throwing cheap

slams. Once the law of judgment has been employed negatively, rejection soon follows. Remember the rejection cycle!

A byproduct of rejection is criticism. Perhaps the rarest thing in the world is **constructive criticism**, yet most criticism is offered as "constructive." Jesus said a prophet is without honor in his own country. We could say the same thing about critics. Almost all criticism is harmful, or seen as such by those closest to us. When I feel judged by a critic, Satan helps me by pointing out the critic's worst traits. Have you ever noticed how easy it is to spot the flaws in those who criticize you?

Criticism hurts so much because it is a form of rejection. We're not good enough. We messed up somewhere. The barbs of criticism lie in the fact that **almost every criticism has some truth in it**, regardless of how small. Once criticisms start flying, the accuser of the brethren can step back and watch the fireworks. His job is done. The law of judging is in motion and no one will win.

The cure is so simple that we stumble over it. When someone lets us down, blows away our expectations, or even criticizes us, we must respond with mercy. The enemy will tell us what the intention of the person was. What does the word say about people knowing the intentions of the heart? Jeremiah 17:9 says:

*The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?*

According to Hebrews 4:12, the only way we can determine the intentions of our heart is by the Word of God and this will require spending quality time pondering the Scriptures. Do you believe the Bible when it says we can't know what the intentions of others are? If you do, then it will be easier to respond with grace. When we give grace out, God gives grace back. **We choose the measure** and God responds back to us in kind. The person who has been hurtful toward us may not be the one to lavish kindness on us, but God will personally see to it that we are reimbursed according to our reactions. He gives us mercy where we need it the most – in our heart!

If mercy, grace and love are parts of the abundant life, then how can we increase our abundant life, on purpose? We must purposely give mercy, grace and love to others, regardless if they deserve it or not!

I feel that this law is why some suffer from an inferiority complex. They judge those who didn't come up to their expectations, and therefore, God sees to it that they can never come up to their own expectations. For example, little Sally feels that daddy is not giving her enough attention. The enemy, Satan, comes along and offers a judgment call: "He's not a good daddy; good daddies spend more time with their daughters." If she accepts this judgment call, she in turn will be judged as to how good a daughter she is. She will end up trying to prove how good she is, usually by making comparisons with others and putting others down. People may pat her on the back all day, but it won't be enough, because the judgment continues! She bought Satan's judgment against her father, and thereby gave him legal right to harass her with charges of "bad girl." You know what I mean if you've ever tried to encourage someone out of an inferiority complex.

**The shortest path to self-acceptance**, if I might use that term, **is to give acceptance to others.** Unconditional love! Stop assuming the worst about others. Even when their malice appears more than obvious, pour out grace on them. This is what Jesus did as the Romans were crucifying Him. The nastiness of the cross was turned into eternal salvation because Jesus handed out mercy instead of judgment "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." The opposite of this was seen when the Apostle Paul, having a bad day at the temple interrogation in Acts 22, tells the high priest, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall." Don't you love it when we see that all of us humans struggle with the same basic frailties? Paul forgot to return mercy for evil and consequently got into deeper trouble.

How am I to respond to criticism? Let me say at the outset, I don't like to be criticized any more than you do. It's rejection and rejection stinks! But with criticism, first yield yourself to Jesus. Don't argue with the criticism (this is easier said than done; I'm still trying to learn it). The Master said to agree with your opponent at law on the way to the judge. Resisting can too quickly lead to judging, which sets the

law of judging in motion. Countering criticism with criticism yields more rejection. Young lovers that end up in divorce courts can testify that this process is hazardous to your health!

A simple prayer can be memorized and be on hand for emergencies, like the emergency numbers programmed into some phones. "Lord Jesus, I yield up my right to judge this person." **Something as simple as this can start the law of judging working for you instead of against you.** Now release more power by praying something like, "Lord, I forgive them for saying this and I ask that You pour out grace, mercy and love on them." Say this prayer quietly, unless the Lord tells you to pray it out loud, like Stephen did in Acts Chapter Seven.

If there is a possibility that there is some truth in the criticism, then wouldn't it be to our advantage to sort through the trash and take out the pearl? God told Jeremiah that He was looking for people who could sort through worthless stuff and extract the precious. So why not? Maybe there is something God wants to perfect in us and He's using this criticism. Let your guard down and consider what was said, not as condemnation (which it may or may not have been intended as) but as possible matters for you to work on. Being able to receive criticism without guilt or resentment is also part of the Crucified life.

The next time someone offers you criticism, try these steps and see what a difference you get to enjoy in your inner self.

If I feel that someone is rejecting me, it is very harmful to give back rejection. This builds barriers between families, lovers, friends, nations, and churches. God told Judah that He could no longer show them compassion, not because He ran out of love, but because "*You have rejected Me*" (*Jeremiah 15:6*). We all crave acceptance, but no matter what the reason is, if we give out rejection, we will be rejected. Hallelujah, there's nothing that says we have to judge others!

Someone might ask, "What about in 1 Corinthians 5:12, where we are told to judge others?" These two chapters, 1 Corinthians chapters 5 and 6, refer to disputes between believers and open sin in churches, which calls for judging; but this is not what we are talking about. That was concerning the settling of disputes about moral and civil issues; what we're talking about here is judging another's heart intention.

In personal relationships, we can tap the power of God and give mercy instead of rejection. Only this response frees us to see what God wants to do in us and releases the power to accomplish it at the same time.

This matter of being loving, merciful and overflowing with grace must be balanced with the reality of living in a world where wrongs often must be corrected sometimes using the judicial system!

A good exercise in building wisdom would be to ponder the passage of Scripture in 1 Corinthians 5:9 6:7 and compare it with 1 Corinthians 4:4,5 and Matthew 7:15-20 in an effort to see the difference between: bad judging, good judging, discerning, and fruit inspection. See if you can come up with a rule of thumb for deciding where you will draw the line between situations you will cover with grace and let them go and conditions when you will seek out proper channels for jurisprudence.

## SOWING AND REAPING

Very close to the Law of Judging or the Law of Liberty is the LAW OF SOWING AND REAPING. Whereas the Law of Liberty is tied into our self-acceptance, the Law of Sowing and Reaping is what triggers the power of God in our life. We can write the word "love" over the Law of Liberty, and the word "faith" over the Law of Sowing and Reaping. When the two laws work together, faith working through love, absolute victory becomes the catch of the day! Simple responses on our part trigger huge miracles of God.

Why has the world referred to one of the Lord's teachings as the golden rule? Partly because it is always to be followed, but no doubt because it's a way to make gold! **"Do to others as you would have them do to you."** Simple, yet it best sums up the Law of Sowing and Reaping the way God wants it to work in our lives. This law works for everything from producing the fruit of the spirit to making a million dollars. There are enough ministries today telling us how to use it to make a million dollars, so I'll stick to my main concern, producing the abundant life!

There are many different places where we can sow good seed, and there also is an abundance of seed we can sow. Let's start by considering the basic foundation: our thinking.

What kind of seed is being sown into your mind by family members? By TV/books/magazines? At school or in the work place? How negative or positive are your friends? Is your free thinking times basically negative or positive? What are your dreams like? Negative or positive?

We can purposely sow much good seed into the soil of our minds. There are Christian TV programs, radio, books, tapes, meetings, etc. What seems to work best for you when you need to get your faith charged up? My quickest refresher is to turn to the Word of God or ponder my memory cards.

We will be limited in what we can do about the amount of negative seed-thoughts that come to us, but we can respond properly to them once they hit our soil! Let's say you are a little angel assigned to King Sarx. Every time the phantom sticks a killer thought into his mind, your job is to overpower it with a faith thought, a "God has a better idea" thought! Reflect back over the allegory in the first chapter. Our story could have had an entirely different slant if every weed-seed the phantom stuck in Sarx's mind was countered with a faith-seed. If the bad seed, the inward, self-centered flow was turned into an outward flow of mercy by combining the law of liberty with the law of sowing and reaping, Sarx not only would have been a very happy young man, but he would have had the joy of refreshing the lives of others.

A warning is in order as we talk about sowing seed into our minds. Something opposite of what we desire can take place if we're always reading, singing, laughing, and in general, busying ourselves mentally. Reflect on these verses with me. Notice how we also need times of quiet, when we can hear God's still small voice:

*Cease striving and know that I am God...*  
*Psalm 46:10a*

*For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said, "In repentance and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and trust is your strength..." Isaiah 30:15*

As we consider sowing seed-thoughts in our mind, ask yourself first, "What do I want to reap?" If I need courage, I will sow thoughts of valor, bravery, and the sufficiency of God's provisions. If I need peace, I must sow thoughts that will generate peace. Let's say that you realize you feel lonely deep inside, what kind of thoughts can you sow to fill the need? What kind of thoughts should one plant to overpower lust?

If you have difficulty holding on to godly thoughts, consider becoming a mental artist. God so designed our minds that we can quickly focus our thinking with mental pictures. We're told that a

picture is worth a thousand words and it's probably true with mental pictures. Words that describe help guide our painting.

God gave us the paintbrush; it's called an imagination. When it's prompted by the phantom, we get into big trouble because, "*As a man thinks in his heart, so is he...*" *Proverbs 23:7a*. When we allow the Holy Spirit to take our imagination, life comes forth. Sow phantom seed- thoughts, reap death. Sow Holy Spirit seed-thoughts, reap life!

But how do we paint with the Holy Spirit? The Scriptures are God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16), so, as we meditate upon the word pictures in the Bible, our mind will be guided by the Spirit of God! Sound easy? I think it's not only easy, but powerful! Imagine the crop we'll get as we sow God's thoughts in our minds!

Read Psalm 16:8. See if you can get the picture David painted in His mind:

*I have set the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*

This is using the law of sowing and reaping for great personal benefit. David set the Lord before himself. We know the Lord lives inside us, so He is always present, but this is a conscious effort, using our will to paint a mental picture by faith. See Jesus in front of you, offering you His hands. Reach out and take them. Draw His life-giving anointing into your whole being.

Here's an experiment that can help you draw God's peace even in the middle of World War III. Read Psalm 23 a couple of times, then paint yourself into the picture, doing something with the Good Shepherd. Some people have told me they see themselves walking in a lush, green pasture with Jesus. Some see themselves sitting with Jesus under a shade tree. He's our good shepherd! Let Him fill your mind with life-giving pictures. Remember, we have to pick up the paint brush. This is a way we can exercise our faith and sow good seed into our life on purpose.

Obedying Psalm 101:3 as we plant seed in our minds can help us tremendously. Ponder it:

*I will set no worthless thing before my eyes...*

When life tries to overwhelm us, we can reach into our art gallery and take out one of our quality paintings. The phantom wants us to picture the worst case scenario, but we have God's portfolio of victory scenes! When you feel like you're maxed out and can't take any more, let your mind paint the still waters, green pastures and Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Have Him sit under a big shade tree, and lay your head on His lap. Look up into His eyes of love and ask Him to chase the wolves away that have been nipping at your heels!

If you think this is too crazy, then keep doing what most "maxed out" people do, paint themselves into a sick bed, nut house, or a screaming tirade! We will think something. Our brains cannot operate in a vacuum. Why not take the initiative and accept Jesus' challenge, *"As your faith, be it unto you"* (Matthew 9:29). Paint godly, biblical pictures and you'll be sowing good seed-thoughts. What will you reap? Abundant life!

One of the pictures I use frequently when I feel dry is John 20:22. I paint Jesus standing in front of me, breathing on me. I see the Holy Spirit enter me afresh. What am I doing? I'm focusing my thinking on the Master, and drawing from His abundance with my faith. Because He works with my faith, He will honor my picture and revitalize me. Does He? Every time! This is a fast way to get out of a slump or depression, and the Lord Jesus gets all the credit!

Words result from thoughts. Recall that our words come from our heart, and therefore our thought life will be directly connected to our speech. As you maintain your inner sanctuary with thoughts focused on Jesus, your words will have more potential. I use the word potential because many people think great thoughts about those around them, but for one reason or another, they hold back words of encouragement.

The power of life is in the tongue (Proverbs 18:21), but this power will remain virtually untapped unless we start speaking. Our world needs to hear words of hope, life, salvation, forgiveness and how to walk in victory! We can sow this kind of seeds in the lives of others, and, guess what we'll reap in return! How often do you tell

others that you love them? If you're sincere, you can sow valuable crops for the Lord.

Words are very powerful. Some words can put us to sleep, others can make us fighting mad. Call someone a brat and what kind of power have you released? The words "Great job" are power words that can make a hard task worth the effort.

What words do you need to eliminate from your vocabulary? Think of some life words that you can start using.

When we think of sowing and reaping, we tend to think of deeds and good works. James, the half-brother of Jesus, said that faith without works is dead (James 2:17). We can think kind thoughts, speak nice words, but if we don't plant good actions, our harvest will be less than what we'd like.

Sam was raised in a home where love and affection were doled out as scarce as hens' teeth. He met a gal at work and struck up a conversation with her. She demonstrated a genuine interest in him and he began developing feelings for her. He found he began thinking of Sally during the evenings and could hardly wait to see her the next day. Her interest in him gave him the courage to ask her out on a date. She accepted and soon they were a thing. He couldn't buy her enough presents, nor she him. **Love was gushing as a river from both of them, because they gave love.**

They were not faking this love, but their feelings and actions masked the persons they really were. Before this romance started, folks closest to them would have told you Sam was aloof and rather cold. It was hard for him to show much emotion. Now, Sam was romeo number one, and all that Sally, who also had been stingy with her affections, had hoped for.

Of course they marry and settle down. The honeymoon begins to wind down as their credit cards remind them of how lavish their gifts have been. As they each begin decreasing the amount of love they invest in the relationship, so the yield begins to dwindle. All too soon, home life takes on the appearance of business as usual, and frighteningly similar to what they were raised with mom doing her thing and dad doing his thing. Panic rises. Did I marry the wrong person? What happened to that gal that used to make me feel so warm

and good inside? The Law of Sowing and Reaping is working and was working. It always works, either for us or against us!

If Sam realizes what's going on and uses faith with the Law of Sowing and Reaping, things will not only regain the momentum, but will surpass the puppy love of romance. The Scripture puts the brunt of obligation on the husband to invest love in the marriage. This is not to say that Sally couldn't use faith to start the Law of Sowing and Reaping working, to pull the plane out of its nose dive. As we read down through Ephesians chapter five, heavy words like "nourish and cherish" and "lay down his life" leap out as the husband's responsibility. If you are a wife, please don't take these as your rights in a marriage; rather, plant them yourself in your marriage.

My point is that what produced the love in the first place is the Law of Sowing and Reaping, and it is the only thing that can overcome the years of bad programming Sam received in his home as a child. Stinginess can raise its ugly head and tell Sam to be careful, Sally is taking advantage of him. The accuser of the brethren chimes in and points out her faults; though seen before, they didn't look so bad through the rose-colored glasses of love. **Who says we're to take off the rose-colored glasses?** It's been said that God looks at us through the blood of Jesus – talk about rose-colored glasses! If Sam invests selfishness in his marriage, guess what will grow?

Satan tells Sam that it wouldn't be so bad putting up with Sally, even though she obviously fooled him when they were dating, pretending to be so loving, if only she wouldn't have to talk so much on the phone. A plan arises in Sam's mind: I'll tell her to not talk so much on the phone, and then it will be better around here. What do you think will happen as he plants criticism in Sally?

You're probably right. But what if he told the liar, the devil, to buzz off, and instead planted a big kiss on Sally, followed by a warm hug and a description of how beautiful she is and how blessed he was to have her for a wife? *"Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap!"*

I don't want to give the impression that it will be easy for Sam to change his lifelong habit of being a recluse, stingy with his love and

affection. He will need to tap the power of the third law in order to truly change: the Law of sacrifice. But, that's the next chapter.

The Law of Judging typically works its way in and around the Law of Sowing and Reaping. In our couple above, the phantom will do everything he can to get them to judge the motives of the other one. The negative power of judging will make them even more hesitant about opening up. Childhood survival techniques learned from surviving parents will replace risk-taking love. If I don't sow love by faith for whatever reason, I will not reap what my inner person is craving. If I'm not acting in love and faith, I'm not pleasing God, and therefore feel distant from Him, further complicating the whole mess.

When you feel as though you've messed up big time, stop. Sit down. Get quiet. Pick up your Bible and turn to your favorite Psalm or passage. Begin sowing some good seed. As you calmly read, ask the Lord to wash you with the water of the Word (Ephesians 5:26). Ask His Spirit to wash away the bad seed you've sown. If the devil can do it to farmers, why can't we do it with the devil's weed-seed?

Recall a Jesus Word-picture. Muse on it for a while. Let your mind draw life from God's resources rather than relationships, accomplishments, or things. When you feel clean and full, then ask the Master to forgive you for your part in the confusion. Let Him point out where the train jumped the tracks. Ask Him for some faith-seed thoughts to begin sowing into the situation. Speak them in your mind, then out our mouth. Ask Him what you can do, action-wise, to release your faith by your works. Sow, sow, sow!

How can you use the Law of Sowing and Reaping to help someone toward salvation? Plant the good news!

How can you use the Law of Sowing and Reaping to gain healing? Pray for someone else's healing. Sow healing verses into your soul.

How can you use the Law of Sowing and Reaping to make money? This is the easiest thing – give and it shall be given unto you!

## THE LAW OF SACRIFICE

How can we change a brat? Is there any hope for someone who has always been selfish? Can a person really change after years and years of living in ruts? Almost anyone can act nice for a short period of time, but is it possible for people to alter their natural personality? God seems to think we can change; why else would He require us to grow, to become imitators of Him? Yes, we can change. The question is not can we change, but are we willing to pay the price necessary for positive change?

Maybe the selfish young husband in the last chapter, Sam, needed to exercise more willpower to change into a thoughtful, loving husband. Willpower can do miraculous things in the fleshly kingdom of man, but it has its limitations. The flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:8) and therefore, willpower, which is concentrated flesh, will not be able to produce the kind of results that will have spiritual benefit.

As believers, we must stay away from strengthening our flesh through the use of willpower. We could, given the exertion of our will, change our basic personality, but unless we do it through the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom of Ego will become more deeply entrenched. If Sam and Sally of the last chapter want their marriage to last, they can read books, attend seminars and go to encounter groups. They may improve their level of communication, but if they do so by tapping the power of the flesh, the ugly old self still remains, though hidden behind their "new effort."

The influential people of our world, for the most part, have maximized willpower. They are famous, they are wealthy. Willpower can transform a shy lad into a world renowned Arnold Schwarzenegger. Is this what we want for our families, change based on our trying harder? No, because these efforts also make us subservient to the ruler of this world, the phantom! We need a power that will change our personality flaws, along with increasing our

humility and dependence upon the Spirit of God. Any other source of change will produce a skyscraper constructed on a foundation of sand. Seminars that purport to transform marriages by strengthening ego and pride are planting land mines for future blowups. And even if there is not a future breakdown of the marriage, there will be no eternal reward. Why not go for the best?

The only lasting means for effecting change comes from tapping the power of **THE LAW OF SACRIFICE**. As I learn to yield up my rights as a sacrificial gift to the Lord, my ego shrinks, Satan's place in my life is eliminated, and God is free to pour His resurrection power into me. Fleshly methods of change strengthen my faith in myself, while the Law of Sacrifice strengthens my faith in God Almighty.

The Law of Sacrifice is what Jesus used to frame our salvation. He gave His life as a seed. He was planted as a grain of corn so that millions of sons would be born to God. The Law of Sacrifice is this:

***For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. Matthew 16:25***

We've mentioned this principle in conjunction with surviving. It becomes the force that insures failure when we fight to protect our self. But it is also the eternal law that guarantees success when we freely lay our life down as a sacrifice.

When Jesus first mentioned to Peter and the boys that He must be crucified, Peter threw a fit. His reaction is very understandable; we hate to see someone we love be humiliated. No Messiah of his was going to be shamed by crucifixion! Jesus showed a bit of displeasure with Peter's enthusiasm and put the blame on the devil "*get behind Me, Satan!*" It was following this scene that Jesus told His disciples that if we fight to save our life we will lose it, but if we give it up to God, we'll gain it!

Let's go back to Sam and Sally. What if Sam puts two and two together and realizes that it's his duty to lay down his life for his wife? What if he sacrificially plants his time, affection, and devotion for Sally? What will come forth? A resurrection of their love, but with a

far greater intensity! They had a juvenile love at first: you love me and I will love you. You make me feel good, so I will make you feel good. Now Sam enters into the arena of mature, Calvary-type love. He gives, not sparing the cost. If, Sally says something that irritates Sam, he must lay his emotional responses on the altar of sacrifice. He must sacrifice his right to "straighten her out!" If she makes request of him for help with things around the house, he must not resort to hiding behind excuses. Love pays the price of sacrificing self-defense. Pick up his sox? Of course. Help with the dishes? Sure.

**The Law of Sacrifice is the fastest way to heal situations.** When you are faced with an unsolvable problem, ask the Lord what you can sacrifice to release His solution. Catch-22 situations, or dilemmas, are no-win deadlocks. Our usual response to unsolvable situations is to get frustrated and then angry. "How dare these people put me in this no-win situation!" Most folks stomp off, huffing and puffing, because there was no way for them to come out on top. Why not instead purpose to let go of having to win? If we sacrifice our personal success for the Lord, He promises to enter the problem and give us the victory! I let go of having to please others (to look good), and seek only for the Lord Jesus to be glorified.

The Law of Sacrifice is **not** "working for salvation." We are saved by grace UNTO good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). Once saved, we must enter into the work prepared for us. The disciples once asked Jesus what work they were to do:

*They said therefore to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the **work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.**" John 6:28,29*

Believing or having faith is the work we were created for. Works for salvation says I must earn or deserve God's pardon. Faith says I must receive that which is freely offered. But, like Ephesians says, now that I'm a Christian, I must work for God. Jesus tells us this means we must live by faith! If believing is our work, then what am I to believe? I must agree with the Word that I have been bought with

a price, therefore, I am not my own. I must lay my life down before the Lord as a living sacrifice. I must have a very strong, confident faith that God is bigger than any situation I find myself in, and that He will do whatever is necessary to take care of me, His servant! If someone is trying to rip me off, I must have greater faith in the Lord Who will fight for me, than in the person trying to hurt me.

We are believer-priests. Priests offer sacrifices, right? What do we have to offer?

*I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. Romans 12:1*

We can give our bodies to the Lord. This would include all of our creature comforts, our rights, our fetishes, our idiosyncrasies, etc. As we yield up our right to survive, to win in no-win situations, to exist as the personality we've been, God is free to enter and release resurrection power. I frequently talk with folks who "know" what the people around them should be doing. They are pushed by a strong force to do whatever is necessary to make other people change. This pushy behavior must be yielded up as a sacrifice. Jesus is the people-changer, not us!

Paul talks about a suffering that is the privilege of believers (Philippians 1:29) that can make up for what is lacking in the suffering of Christ (Colossians 1:24). He's not taking away from the power of what Christ did on the cross, but he is saying there is a price that must be paid if the salvation of Jesus is going to get out to the world. He personally paid a price to preach the gospel and so must we. Humiliation, harassment, even death may be in the path of the obedient Christian. But, the Law of Sacrifice takes such an investment and turns it into a provision of grace for others. **There is a price I have to pay to share Christ with my world. I must change and become the person Jesus wants me to be. The law of sacrifice must start with me.**

I can't ask others to change their behavior and then I will make a sacrifice. Paul said, "I die daily." He had to sacrifice his own safety to

take the gospel to hostile regions. Jesus told us to take up our cross daily. Every day, the people around us will offer us something that we can either die to or make a fuss over.

**If I fight for my rights, I lose the right to have the Lord fight for me!**

If I offer up my rights as a sacrifice to God, He steps into the picture and begins working in everything for my good. I may see the end results of this quickly, but it may take a lifetime. Regardless, as I yield up my will to Jesus during suffering, a powerful force is released in me: the Spirit of Glory!

*If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for **the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.***

*1 Peter 4:14 (NIV)*

The Law of Sacrifice is not a passive response but an aggressive one. I'm not talking about some pacifistic manipulation device that shames others into giving us our way. **The Law of Sacrifice gives up what I think is best (what I think is right) to Abba Father, and waits for Him to direct the next step I should take.** The next step may be to fight back, walk away, confront, ignore, or any one of a multitude of possible responses. Jesus lived His life as a "living sacrifice" before the Lord, and He only laid down and died once! Sometimes He ignored the questions asked Him. He called the Pharisees a bunch of hypocrites to their faces! He walked away from the crowd that tried to push Him over a hill. The living sacrifice lifestyle will take us into uncharted territory, and will be anything but boring!

When I fight to save my life (without Jesus' direction), the Kingdom of God swings into action to see that I DO NOT succeed. When I lay my success down as an offering before the Lord, heaven again is mobilized for action, but this time, for my defense.

How hard is it to say, "I'm sorry, I was wrong"? For some macho men, it would be easier to be shot at dawn by a firing squad! Some

self-centered individuals will allow their home to be destroyed before they will apologize. This expression of pride must be slain by the use of the altar of Sacrifice. It will hurt, and will probably be the hardest thing an egomaniac will have to do, but anything else is only a fleshly Band-aid.

Others find it easy to ask for forgiveness. They've learned that they can do what they want, then plead for mercy. For them, their cross will be to not do their own thing in the first place! Yes, they can stop before they act selfishly, but it will cost them something. Alcoholics and habitual liars are used to pampering their own flesh, getting their own way, then when others start fussing, they play the part of poor fools who can't help themselves. If their story is bought, they continue their lifestyle of selfishness, having gained their original purpose. They wanted to walk away from responsibility and do their own thing, so they did! All they have to do is to play "sorry" and everything is OK. Or is it? **Their sacrifice will be to do what is unselfish in the first place**, and not respond to the temptations the enemy throws into their mind!

Along with this type of personality, liars in general are people who are looking for an easy way out. Sacrificial believers press in to God in prayer, spending however much time it takes for the mountains to be moved by faith! Answered prayer gives the Lord glory. A liar protects his own skin, while the cross-minded saint cares more for the approval of the Master.

What about "perfect" people who always want to tell others how they messed up, or how they should get their act together? Parents can slip into this godlike role, well past the age when their children should be trusted to act responsibly. We pay counselors to give us this kind of advice, but we resent folks giving us their two cents worth for free! If you are one of these "world-straighten-er-out-ers" you will have a difficult sacrifice before you. You must resign your Mr. Knowitall title and turn the world back over to God! This is very difficult for those who get their sense of purpose in life from telling others what to do. **Their cross, and it is a bitter one, is to let go of trying to control the universe.** Ouch. Jesus can do quite well without our advice! **The beauty of the cross is that it alone can fill the**

**empty spot inside Mr. Knowitalls; that itching to be accepted is soothed by the total acceptance that comes from Calvary!**

Lazy folks and "Oh well, whatever will be will be" people also have a cross, a price tag before them. These guys give the appearance that they are afraid of using any extra energy. They don't plan for success, much less pay a price to succeed, and do so while hiding behind the phoney mask of "waiting on the Lord." To truly "wait on the Lord" is to be an active servant, waiting on the Master, paying whatever price is necessary to please Him. We know what Jesus thinks of those who never get around to getting involved...

*And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground; see, you have what is yours." But his master answered and said to him, "YOU WICKED, LAZY SLAVE, you knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I scattered no seed. Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 25:24-30*

Jesus called the lazy man who was too self-centered to give his master what he wanted, "WICKED." Failure to get involved with others, to use the talents the Lord has invested in us, is behavior punishable by being cast into the outer darkness! This is big time seriousness! If you do not bother to try to give your Master what He wants from your life, you will pay a very big price! I cannot overstate this. Lazy people who drift through life without ever getting involved,

or paying a price, will find something far worse than the daily cross they turned down for "creature comforts."

Lazy people read where Jesus said all the Law is fulfilled by loving others as we love ourselves. They then decide to major on loving their self, for how else can they ever learn to love others. It is very easy to see who they love the most, as they pamper their own flesh. Do you remember what the Lord promised for the one who seeks to save their life?

Which of the crosses I've mentioned so far do you think you will need to work on?

Every personality type has good points and bad points. Our good points must be yielded to the Lord for His use; our bad points must be surrendered to Him for elimination. When folks around you let you know that something that you do drives them crazy, offer this personality quirk to Jesus and tell Him you're willing to adopt a new lifestyle, if He so desires.

"What? You expect me to change just because someone doesn't like my personality?" The decision to change or not to change needs to be left up to the Lord, but you must be willing to let go of any traits. Wallflowers need to be willing to change into gregarious mixers; boisterous bull-tossers need to be willing to become quiet listeners. Self-defensive, argumentative people need to be willing to change into loving, considerate acceptors of others just as they are. The bottom line is, **the Law of Sacrifice is calling for us to lay down our personality before the Master for His alterations and improvements.** The hardest part will be to get past the immature response of, "That's just the way I am; take it or leave it."

When things in our kingdom are less than desirable, we reach for coping devices. These are similar to the small spare tire in newer cars. They'll get you to the next town, but they look funny and they won't work very well for very long. Coping devices are the flesh's Band-Aids, glue and bailing wire. Let's look at some coping devices.

**DEPRESSION:** When things get out of control or are overpowering, our mind will sometimes shut down. We can't think very well and we don't feel well. Like one person said, "The lights are on, but nobody's home!"

The key to dealing successfully with depression is to spot the brewing storm before the hard waves of depression begin to roll in. If we wait too long and the waves of depression come crashing in, we will likely have to wait for the emotional storm to pass. If you sacrifice your right to have things go your way BEFORE you reach for the coping device of depression, you can stay on top. Once you sink in the swamp of depression, you'll probably not be too receptive to someone who suggests you yield up your right to control the circumstances around you.

I've seen people snap out of mild depression when "accepting the cross of Jesus" was put before them as their Christian duty. It's hard to suggest this recourse because they are asking for all the sympathy you can give, and in turn, you offer them death – death to having things go the way they think they should go! I personally believe that we can eliminate most nonchemical depression by the crucified lifestyle. [I see a difference between psychological depression used as a coping device, and chemical depression caused by disease, poor eating, sleeping or exercise habits, or drugs.]

**ANGER:** People with a bad temper have found a great ace-up-their-sleeve. We call this a "temper tantrum" when a child throws one; but with adults, its an Irish temper, "I'm Italian," P.M.S., etc. Temper tantrums for adults work best when they break things. They can cool down right away, and the person watching, with eyes bugging out, will usually give them whatever they ask for! The problem with anger is twofold. Anger eats humans up from within by saturating the body with chemicals, such as adrenaline, intended for flight or fight responses. Fight or flight uses up the adrenaline and the person's system returns to normal. But for the angry person, the supercharged system has no recourse but to soak up the toxic chemicals. Anger becomes a deadly coping device.

Add to this the fact that angry people have a shrinking circle of friends. Not very many folks get their thrills in life by handling dynamite or hanging around volatile volcanos. It would seem that the self-centered temper tantrum thrower would be better off to make the discovery of the inner joy that comes from surrendering their life to Jesus as a living sacrifice, rather than having to always get their own

way. Why play with the emotional dynamite of anger, when you can humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and allow Him to exalt you at the proper time?

**MANIPULATION:** There are a ton of games we play to "get" others to come around to our way of thinking. Lucille Ball in her old TV series was always trying to trick Ricky into doing something that he insisted he would not do. We all had a good laugh, turned off the set, and turned on our own games. Teens will use the sad story, "But everybody's doing it; I'll look like a nerd if you don't let me go!" Some adults use sex as a manipulating device; some use threats. Comparisons are commonly used to shame another person into conforming. Games are easy to spot when someone is working us over; but because we would never stoop to such behavior, it's hard to believe anything we would ever do could be misconstrued as a manipulative game! Really?

The sacrificial mind set says, "I give up my right to get you to do what I think you should do." A person who is dead to the world through Christ does not need to cope or to get her own way. In fact, she says in her heart, "**If God won't change this, I don't want it changed!**" This is true spiritual maturity. In terms of our young couple, Sam says, "I accept Sally just as she is, Lord, and even if You don't change her, I'm going to love her just as she is. Thank You Lord, for my wife!"

Please understand that there are many things in life that we can and should change. If someone is invading your space and a simple request will help them know what you want, then share your concern. If you can change your circumstances and it appears to be OK with the Lord, then do so, by all means. Things that we can and should change are not the things that drive us crazy. It's when we're up against a deeply rooted quirk in another person that we must yield up our control measures to the Master as a sacrifice. When there is something that you know is not really God's best for you, even though you think you want it very badly, yield it up to the Lord and you will release resurrection power. Something far better will be given to you!

If your mate has registered concern over something that you do and you find it irritates you when they "pick" on you about it, yield it

up to the Lord. Let the Master decide if you need to do some changing. **The Law of Sacrifice says there are no sacred areas where we can remain selfish.** As we yield everything to Christ, without defending self, we release resurrection power. The beauty of the cross is seen from the other side of death. Resurrection power is promised to those who have been conformed to Christ's death. When there is a conflict, and to get your way (not God's) will cause problems, sacrifice your way. It will keep you from playing games to out-manipulate others.

## THE LAW OF FREEDOM

Human beings are, for the most part, under the delusion that they can be totally free. Even people living under a dictatorship are prone to believe that they are free to think what they want. It's almost funny to hear some Americans scream about losing their rights, as though they had a guarantee for total freedom. The courts of the land have a difficult task in deciding where one person's rights have to be curtailed lest another individual's rights be violated. But, everyone hollers as though they deserve "total freedom."

Most people have a very exaggerated sense of freedom. It's almost as though we see ourselves standing in front of three choices: the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Self and the Kingdom of Darkness. The myth is that we feel we are free to serve whichever kingdom want, or blend some from each! The ugliness of the fourth law is that we are slaves, either to God or to sin. I call this the LAW OF FREEDOM. Put simply,

IF WE ARE SLAVES OF GOD,  
WE ARE FREE FROM SIN;  
IF WE ARE SLAVES TO SIN,  
WE ARE FREE FROM GOD.

I use the word ugly because there is no in-between area where we can do our own thing, or be sort of nice. **There is no Kingdom of Self!** There are only two kingdoms, and they are as opposite as day and night. Jesus let us know that we must choose FOR His kingdom on purpose, because if we don't, we've already chosen!

*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Matthew 6:24*

*He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. Matthew 12:30*

The Apostle Peter writes about wicked people in the last days and how they will preach "personal freedom" as a platform to entice the simple minded. The irony Peter points out is that, while they are pushing freedom, they are themselves enslaved to corruption!

*Promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. 2 Peter 2:19*

If we are overcome by the temptation of the enemy to protect our self at the expense of another person, slavery starts. Why? Because we obeyed the evil one. If the phantom gets us to use coping devices to get our own way, we will be hooked on his bait and will become his servants. Obey God, become His servant. Obey Satan, become his servant! This is why it would have been deadly for Jesus to make the stones into bread at Satan's suggestion. Jesus was hungry after fasting for forty days, and maybe it was a good idea to make some bread. Surely it makes sense to eat when you're hungry, doesn't it? But, as Adam turned over his right to rule planet earth by obeying the devil's suggestion, so Jesus would have turned His Messianic Kingdom over to the evil one had He obeyed him.

Paul the Apostle is the one from whom I gleaned the name for this fourth law:

*Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been FREED from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you*

*presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were FREE in regard to righteousness. Therefore, what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death. But now having been FREED from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life. Romans 6:16-22*

"What's gotten into people today? Where are their morals?" Maybe you've voiced something like this as you've witnessed the callousness to common decency or other people's rights. The problem is that, when our generation said "yes" to the phantom's offer of free sex, situation ethics, etc., they became free from righteousness. Their conscience became free from the burden of right and wrong. The only motivation for not doing evil is fear of going to jail, getting AIDS or being shot by a jealous husband. If the law of the land says they can terminate a pregnancy, then it's OK; they have no fear of God, because they are free from Him. But there is one great big problem they are not free from the consequences of sin! The wages of sin is still death!

If there is no middle ground where I can do my own thing, be a nice guy, live and let live, then being a "Carnal Christian" is a predicament (see 1 Corinthians 3:1-4 KJV). You may be saved, but you are under the lordship of Satan, and he can bang on your head pretty hard. Some Christians wonder why they can't get the devil to leave them alone, consistently plant good seed or totally yield up their life as a living sacrifice. The answer is ugly: the enemy won't go, and doesn't have to go, if you have obeyed him! He is always throwing his fiery missiles at us, and if we respond to his temptations by using fleshly coping devices, **we put ourselves out of God's reach until we repent and turn away from the enemy and humble our self before Jesus.**

The phantom says, "Stick up for yourself." If you do it, you're not on your own; you're under his thumb! Obey his depressing input and prayer will do little good, until you back out of his kingdom and resubmit to God's loving leadership. The stark reality of this law is that there is no kingdom where we're safe, other than smack dab in the middle the kingdom of Jesus. For a person to resist the Lord's cross is to spend their days striving for something they can never have. To yield to Him is to find what can never be taken away. The smartest thing we can do is to take up our cross daily and follow Jesus.

Think with me about what some people do to meet their needs and what will likely come to them if they go about trying to get what they want improperly:

Brag about accomplishments: They will most likely have people pull back from them; instead of feeling important, they will feel rejected. The Kingdom of God tells us not to blow our own horn, but boast only in the Lord and He will lift us up which is a reference, I believe, to that inner feeling of importance or what some would call a healthy self-image.

What about being Critical of others?

The critical person may be on a search for perfection. If we find perfect people, then, theoretically, it will be safe to get close to them. People who let you down because they are continually messing up need to be shaped up by our criticism, naturally! The critical person may be searching for the perfect, the ideal, the safe, but they will only find the downward pull of death: the mind set on the flesh is death Romans 8:6! What if a person gets Angry with mate for overlooking something "special"?

An ignored anniversary may hurt because the person was desiring to be close with their mate; to enjoy celebrating their special moment. The Phantom's worldly advice is for the staging of an uprising – good old fashioned mad! But his kingdom of the flesh will push a relationship farther apart rather than closer together! If we get mad for not being close, the anger will make us even more distant!

Then there's being suspicious of others. Suspicion is like a scout on a wagon train. He rides ahead looking for trouble, then returns with bad news so the travelers can prepare for war. The devil's bait of

suspicion stimulates war preparation all right, but not against the proper foe. Innocent, well intentioned dear ones are treated like criminals. Instead of close relationships, this worldly wisdom generates fear and a lot of cheap, judgmental attacks. There are only two kingdoms, so the sooner we jump into the middle of casting every imagination down and taking every thought captive to Christ, the sooner we tap into the bond of love that makes us one instead of opponents.

Why are we sometimes tricked into Selfishness? The law of the jungle that pushes selfishness is totally ignorant of the Law of Sowing and Reaping. Hoarding causes resources to dwindle; sharing, or planting good seed, will trigger a hundredfold return! Remember, there's no room for a third option. We're either for the Lord and working by His rules, or we're being taken captive by the devil's ignorance of spiritual laws.

Why do some people always have to be right? Besides the rush pride temporarily supplies, always being right is a safety measure, and definitely part of the divine rights of a king such as Sarx. The sheer exhaustion that results from trying to make everything "be right" is the worldly stress-related fruit that can be traded for peace and renewal of one's strength while waiting on the Lord. We don't have to be right, but we do need to be loving and walk by faith. This flesh-kingdom trait kills creativity and promotes ignorant phariseeism.

To resist the cross of Jesus is like walking up a mountain all your life, with things that appear so important becoming mirages as you grasp them. You may gain your goals, but they will lose their power to satisfy and the tempter will pull on your chain to drag you higher up the mountain. Maybe you enjoy mountain climbing, but this perpetual quest for the "peak" experience of satisfaction from reaching goals, will never yield lasting fulfillment. I think unsaved folks can gain a measure of contentment from worldly accomplishments, but they do not have the awesome "Jesus Experience" for comparison! The deeper one goes into the mysteries of Christ, the harder it is to be content with temporal trinkets.

Many excited Christians have told me how meager their former flesh accomplishments appeared as they compared them with the total

fulfillment they found in serving Jesus! They frequently tell of the "high" that knows no hangover! It just keeps gettin' better!

Who had more fame than Elvis? Who was more miserable than he? Fleshly heros frequently die miserable, alone, and with haunting fears of Judgment Day. Why do so many find it virtually impossible to break loose from their paltry, depraved, godless lives and receive the Lord Jesus as their personal Savior? The Law of Freedom! They're free from God! The worthless, temporary highs don't satisfy, but the victim is not free to walk away. They are trapped.

Can a deceived, trapped sinner be saved? Can they break free? Only with difficulty because what they want is impossible: freedom from sin and freedom from God! This can't be. If the servant of sin were to say, "It would be better for me to be a slave of Jesus than perish in this miserable state," they would be on their way out of jail. But, think about it, what self-respecting brat wants to jump from being one person's slave into another slavery? From being at alcohol's (or any other master) beck and call, to God's? That's not very appetizing to a self-centered person.

## THE JEALOUSY OF GOD

There is a characteristic of God that ties into this law that should put holy fear into us. Our God is a jealous God. I found eleven references in the Bible to this trait. His holy jealousy is similar to, but not the same as our human jealousy. Because His jealousy is similar to ours, we know what it means when it says our God is a jealous God. Pay close attention to these strong words from Moses' farewell address to the children of Israel:

*You neglected the Rock who begot you, and forgot the God who gave you birth. And the Lord saw this, and spurned them because of the provocation of His sons and daughters. Then He said, "I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be; for they are a perverse generation, sons in whom is no faithfulness. **They have made Me jealous with what is not God; they have provoked Me to anger with their***

*idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation, for a fire is kindled in My anger, and burns to the lowest part of Sheol, and consumes the earth with its yield, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains. I will heap misfortunes on them; I will use My arrows on them. They shall be wasted by famine, and consumed by plague and bitter destruction; and the teeth of beasts I will send upon them, with the venom of crawling things of the dust. Deuteronomy 32:18-24*

These are hard verses and difficult for our modern culture to grasp; they're convinced that God's a pushover. There are not two different Gods, one Old Testament harsh God and a New Testament mushy, softy God. There is but One God and He is love, yet He's also a God of justice and holiness. It's the New Testament that tells us our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29) and, "*Knowing the fear of the Lord (K.J. terror), we persuade men*" (2 Corinthians 5:11). God is not lopsided, He is well-balanced. What, in your mind, does "balance" mean when used in reference to God? He is a unique blend of love and wrath, holiness and mercy. The only way we can discover how to relate properly to our Awesome God is to meditate on the Scriptures and respond accordingly.

*"The Lord knows our frame, that we are but dust"* (Psalm 103:14). Jesus said to His disciples, "*The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*" Do these two verses mean that there is nothing in us that can please God? Is He looking for something that we can't give Him?

God is not asking for something we cannot give, but something that we exercise all the time. We have faith in the lies of Satan that everything is going to get worse, or that some little sin won't hurt anything. We believe man and his threats. We release great amounts of faith as we chase after every manner of empty flesh-promises of happiness. It's not that we humans can't believe; it's that most of us are using our faith believing lies instead of having life-giving faith in the God of all grace. If God is limited to working with us by faith, then

our faith in someone or something else places us in a kingdom that is working against His kingdom. God clearly states that:

*The righteous shall live by faith...*

*Romans 1:17*

*...the administration of God is by faith...*

*1 Timothy 1:4*

Eve's sin wasn't that she gave to Satan what she couldn't give to God, but that she willingly gave to Satan that which was designed only for God! The harlot's sin is that she gives to any who can pay her price, rather than only to a covenant partner. This is why God uses harlotry as a picture of idolatry. The faithful spouse limits their affections out of love for their mate, the unfaithful squanders their affections on their own lusts. This is what makes chastity, monogamy and faithfulness such an excellent cure for venereal disease. If everyone on earth reserved sexual relations for their covenant marriage partner, how long would it take to eliminate venereal disease? We could say the same thing about sin in general. If every person gave their devotion and allegiance to God first and foremost, Satan would be shut down immediately!

Because of His great love, God does not punish us out of enjoyment, "*For He does not afflict willingly, or grieve the sons of men*" (*Lamentations 3:33*). Reread the first part of Hebrews chapter 12 to remind yourself of God's commitment to discipline His wayward children. The moment we slip out of the Father's lap and wander into the land of selfishness, His protective love begins the process of discipline. We can do ourselves a great big favor and immediately run back into His arms of love, the second we sense any pain. When you sense Him reaching for a switch, head for Home! I love these words of encouragement and admonition:

*But if we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged.  
But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in  
order that we may not be condemned along with the world.*

*1 Corinthians 11:31,32*

The Law of Freedom, as ugly as it is to the flesh, can help us deal very decisively with every temptation to do our own thing (which is really Satan's thing). The words that follow were written not to bully us, but to encourage us to do whatever is necessary to live a life yielded to our loving Lord:

*See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal; and there is no one who can deliver from My hand.*  
*Deuteronomy 32:39*

How does the Law of Sowing and Reaping interact with the Law of Freedom? If my sins are washed away when I get saved, does the Law of Sowing and Reaping still work, or is it superseded? This is a very good question, and one that deserves some serious consideration.

King David offers an example of how one can obtain forgiveness for sin, but the Law of Sowing and Reaping is left intact. David was caught in adultery and murder. He confessed his sin and was forgiven by God, but note what the prophet said to him:

*"Why have you despised the word of the Lord by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your companion, and he shall lie with your wives in broad daylight. Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.'" Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you*

*shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die." So Nathan went to his house. Then the LORD struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was very sick. 2 Samuel 12:9-15*

With David, there was forgiveness for the evil he did, but the seed he had sown would produce a crop of suffering. On God's record books, David's account showed that his sin was covered. On earth, the bad seed would rip David's family apart! This story should sober up the one who is tempted to think they can live any way they want, run to God in prayer, and not suffer any side effects. Recall Galatians 6:7: God will not be mocked.

*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.*

Another example of the residual effects of our sin is seen in Saul, later called Paul. Notice what the Lord Jesus told Ananias before he sent him to lead Saul to Christ. As we read of Saul's later life, the Lord's words were surely proven to be true!

*But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." Acts 9:15,16*

Paul suffered as few people ever have. Why? I believe it was because of what he sowed, even before he was saved (see Acts 9:1,2)! After becoming a new creature in Christ, God used the suffering to spread the gospel, and Paul was so blessed that he said:

*And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of*

*Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:9,10*

Can you say this about your suffering? Maybe you planted bad seed and you know the Lord has forgiven you, but you sense the negative crop coming in continually. By turning to the Lord, He will show you, through the use of praise, how to turn the weed crop into something beneficial!

What do you think? Is weed seed done away with when you confess your sin, or is forgiveness the only benefit?

Something else takes place when we sin after becoming a Christian. Let's say you blow it big time. You run to the Lord and seriously repent. He forgives the sin, and in fact, removes it as far away as the east from the west (Psalm 103:12). But, you feel a low-level nagging concerning the sin. Stop and turn to the Lord. Make sure you've confessed the proper sin. Maybe the bigger sin was rebellion. You may have thought you could do your own thing, apply for amnesty and then go about your business. This is thinking that you can pull the wool over God's eyes. Confess that you tried to fool the Lord, and abuse grace (Romans 6:1,2).

If the low level nagging concerning the sin remains, the weed crop may need to be dealt with. The phantom uses the Law of Sowing and Reaping to poke us and harass us, even though the sin is forgiven on God's ledger. He points to the fact that we sinned; which is true. His conclusion, therefore, is that we're still guilty. What he fails to tell us is that God has forgiven us. His partial truth, if not overcome with the whole truth, will provide all the convincing it takes to keep us miserable!

Try this response if you can't shake nagging guilt. First, praise the Lord that the Blood of Jesus is more powerful than your sin! Then bind the harassing spirit that is exploiting the weed crop, and cast it out! Immediately praise God that in your weakness, He is strong and that His grace is sufficient for you! Whenever you feel even the slightest twinge from the enemy, go through the whole process again.

If every time the enemy brings up your failures you erupt in praise, he will soon move on to other places.

One last consideration concerning the Law of Sowing and Reaping. If a farmer sows a bad crop and he ends up with a field of weeds, there are some things he can do. He can burn the field, which would be likened to pressing in to God so close that His holy fire destroys the bad crop. The farmer could pull up each weed, which would be to make restitution. And, the farmer could plant something stronger than the weeds, which would be to use love to cover a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8), which is basically what the Apostle Paul did (2 Corinthians 5:13,14).

*The payment or wage for doing our own thing (sin) is death,  
but God's gift for faithfulness is eternal life.*

That's my paraphrase of Romans 6:23. The choice is ours. It's a simple one with tremendous consequences or rewards. The beauty of the Law of Freedom, once we get it deep in our heart, is that it takes away much of the pull of the world, the flesh and the devil! **When we know Who we belong to, it ends the debate of double-mindedness.** We're convinced where we're headed, and Who we're going with! Fence walkers spend gobs of time and energy conjuring up excuses, resisting the tender tug of the Holy Spirit, and patching up war-torn tents! Sometimes they almost make us want to say, "Get in or get out!" But then, upon reflecting in mercy over their plight and our past, we merely pray on!

A remarkable young missionary to the vicious Auca Indians of Ecuador, Jim Elliot, gave his life in service for Jesus; killed by the natives he sought to reach for Christ! He is credited with saying...

He is no fool, To give up what he cannot keep,  
To gain what he cannot lose.

Can you think back to your unsaved days and recall any of the reasons that kept you from accepting Christ? The devil's bait was survival lies on the hook of selfishness, was it not?

What kind of freedom has the phantom tried the hardest to sell you? Hopefully, you are convinced that it's far better to be a slave to righteousness than free from God.

## THE TREE OF LIFE

"Money doesn't grow on trees." This old expression was intended to pop our bubble that daddy had a limitless supply of money. He was probably the first person you heard say it. If it grew on trees, then one could feasibly enjoy it as often as one desired. I think this concept is behind the usage of the term, "The Tree of Life," in the Bible. When God uses the word "life", He is conveying the concept of abundance. A tree of life, therefore, could supply a limitless amount of abundance. We could fully enjoy the wealth of the moment, and not worry where the next batch of blessings were coming from.

What makes people happy? Isn't it being accepted just as they are? Being loved? Understood? Having enjoyable things to do? Laughing? Abundance and the good life may mean different things to each of us, but for sure, we all know when we're not having a good time. God's original intention for the human race was for mankind to live in a garden where every need was met with excess. All one had to do was to walk over to a tree and chomp down on a piece of delicious fruit to satisfy their hunger. His garden was more than enough for all our human needs.

In the previous chapters, one might get the impression that God is calling us to a no-fun life when He tells us to take up our cross. Nothing could be farther from the truth. His design was for us to experience ecstasy beyond comprehension. Paul refers to this abundance:

*So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him Who is able to do exceeding*

*abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us. Ephesians 3:17-20*

What more could we possibly want than to eat at the tree of life continually? There is nothing physically that could exceed God's provisions, but what about mentally? Are there ego thrills that exist outside the realm of the Kingdom of God? Thrills, yes; abundant life, no! It was man's mental appetite that was the target of the first temptation! Satan told Eve that there were valuable experiences awaiting her beyond the boundaries of obedience. It was the knowledge of evil that he said would make her like God. Adam and Eve had tasted God's goodness for some time; now a new appetite was being provoked. Satan elicited an ego thirst for god-power. "What you need is some evil in your life. It will give you power, and does it ever taste good!"

Have you noticed how we humans develop various appetites? Every culture has its own cuisine. Some nationalities like bitter, some like sweet, while others say, "The hotter the better." We develop our appetites from our environment. I've had people tell me they "had to develop a taste for beer." I've wondered why they bothered. A pervert develops an appetite for the sensually provocative. Could it be that the sins that are passed down from generation to generation are nothing more than appetites for certain sins?

When you were born again, you probably found that some old pastimes became distasteful. Your appetites were altered by the redirection of your spiritual life. Could we say, therefore, that spiritual growth is a matter of changing our tastes? Is not the person Jesus promised to bless the one who "*hungers and thirsts after righteousness*"? Wouldn't it be easy to please the Lord if our only appetite was for Him? Maybe this is what is behind the quote from Jesus, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.*" This is what Jesus told the devil when He was being tempted. Man only needs the knowledge that comes from God, not the knowledge of good and evil that Satan sold to Eve.

Behind the devil's statements to Eve was the innuendo that God was keeping something good from her. This lie pricks the ego. Satan's

fishhook is baited with, "You need this!" If we agree with the tempter, we will begin to develop an appetite for that which is not of God. The thrill of getting away with something puffs up the ego. This is flirting with the illicit. Parents can pass this trait on to their children without even being aware of it. This attitude of "How much can I get away with?" is what Satan was selling Eve at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is also what he tries to get believers to grab for.

If I think that God is keeping the good stuff of life from me, and if I think I can sneak some of it without Him noticing, then I have bitten the forbidden fruit! Such an attitude insults God's abundant grace and mocks His omniscience. Satan was telling Eve that God was a mean, fun-spoiling God with poor eyesight!

The beauty of the Tree of Life is that it is more powerful than the power of sin and death. In fact, even after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and the curse of sin began killing them spiritually and physically, they could have reached out to the tree of life and undone the curse of sin.

*Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, **lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever**" so He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every direction, to guard the way to the tree of life. Genesis 3:22,23*

Why do you think Adam and Eve ran to the bushes and hid instead of running to the Tree of Life to eat and live? They were free from God and a slave to sin. The Law of Freedom was fast at work. They were free from the cure and slaves to death. They couldn't even think straight!

The Tree of Life is a type or picture of salvation: the old rugged Cross! There is only one cure for the effects of sin...the Cross of Jesus Christ. There is only one solution for the ego cravings deep within each person... the Cross of Jesus Christ!

The Cross is not a fun-spoiler, but a remedy for fallen, bewitched mankind, sinking in the morass of self-centered living. When we come to the Cross the first time, the consequences of sin are arrested. Death is defeated and our soul will live forever. When we choose to live at the Cross, the tug of fleshly appetites is overcome. The Cross, or the Tree of Life, becomes the place where we find all that we need. Its fruit flourishes continually and its leaves are for healing.

Jesus used the picture of abiding in Him as a branch abides in a vine. When we abide in Him, the Tree of Life, we bear much fruit. As we live at the Cross, where it is no longer I but Christ, His perfect will does not have to struggle against our ego fits. The Cross may mean death to our old self, but it yields the fruit of resurrection power! The Cross is truly the tree of life.

There are two major philosophies in the marketing world. The traditional one is that you determine what people want and then you sell it to them. The second one is that, when you have a product to sell, make a market for it. The diabolical salesman of hell uses both of these philosophies to devise designer temptations. What cravings or appetites have you learned from your environment? Nagging? Worrying? Faultfinding? Substance abuse? Womanizing? Fantasy romance?

The enemy will provide plenty of opportunities for indulging your appetites. He knows what you'll bite on, so he serves up fresh, daily portions. Likewise, this wicked salesman is always cooking up new packages for old sins. He will develop a market for stylish and exciting temptations. Things that didn't even exist 10 years ago, you are now told you can't live without.

Our subtle enemy dangles luring vacations before us and tells us how we deserve such a trip. He shows us how we can be trim and sexy by buying a very expensive hair coloring because "we're worth it." As with King Sarx, he develops a craving for the knowledge of good and evil within us, a craving to be treated as a god. His buzz words are "deserve" and "need." THINGS SHOULD GO OUR WAY IF WE ARE A GOD. Kings have certain rights! The ego appetite that King Sarx developed caused him to become repulsive to those around him. Some egomaniac can be more discerning; they hide their godship

behind false humility. But regardless of how obvious or overt our godship is, the result of feeding this appetite is spiritual death. When the enemy gets us to crave things outside the Father's will, he knows we will be under his sinister thumb. Recall the Law of Freedom:

We become the servant of the one we obey.

Have you seen the movie, "The Last Emperor"? The last emperor of China (in the movie) was what I would call the ultimate spoiled brat. He was pampered from birth and his every whim was indulged. He wanted what he wanted when he wanted it. He had unrestrained appetites. No one told him "no" until his little empire fell. What a shock for the undisciplined ruler to be thrust into a society where he was suddenly expected to control his appetites. This little egomaniac is quite the picture of the flesh unrestrained. Just the thought of having to limit ourselves or go on a diet causes discomfort.

Here's something absolutely crazy. I've seen the time when I would tell one of my daughters that she couldn't do something, and she would fuss like I was the most cruel dad in the world. On a few occasions, I later found out that she really didn't want to go to the activity, but she threw a fit because her freedom was being limited. She was upset not because I said no and she really wanted to go, but the fact that she was being limited made her mad.

Fear of having to do without or having to limit one's eating releases much frustration. Tell yourself you'll go on a serious diet tomorrow, and there's no big problem. But when you awake the next day and you're staring down the barrel of a diet breakfast, you're suddenly overwhelmed by hunger. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil says, "I'm supposed to have whatever I want, whenever I want it!" This produces appetites that lead to death. This is the same kind of pressure that makes a glutton keep eating, or a drunk take another drink, or an egomaniac say one more cutting remark. Unrestrained appetites develop into monster appetites. "Give me my freedom and don't you dare limit or restrain me."

Can you imagine having an Olympics where the athletes did whatever they wanted? How would you judge the winner? Quality life

demands limitations on what is allowed. What do you think makes restrictions so unpalatable to humans?

For a season, some educators held to beliefs that students should not be confined and restricted by requirements. Rules stifle creativity and imagination. What resulted? Monsters who had a terrible appetite for self-gratification! Can you think what it would be like to hire someone as an employee who was raised with such a "free" education? You would probably have to ask their permission before you could fire them!

Self-discipline becomes the tree that is to be thrown into the bitter waters of selfishness to make them sweet. The Cross, the Tree of Life, is self-control and self-discipline at their best. The Cross says, "I will pay a price now for God's best." Self-control is a dirty word to the flesh, but it becomes a Tree of Life to the wise Christian.

The unrestrained appetites of the newly-created race of human beings soon led to such debauchery and wickedness that God was left no option but to destroy mankind. Only Noah, a man of faith and discipline, and his family, were spared the penalty of the flood. The book of Romans describes this period of time as one where the imagination of man was continually evil. The fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil did its work well. What is sobering is to watch the same appetites for unrestrained pleasure grow in our society today. Some call for all limits to be withdrawn from censorship of the press and the screen. They want more and more evil. There is an orgy mentality that cries, "Discipline stifles creativity and this is evil."

Do humans have a right to unrestrained freedom? Is it possible to have a free society where everyone can do their own thing?

Your excess might hinder my excess, so I might have to hurt you. That is, if you don't hurt me first for having cramped your freedoms. This may sound crazy, but many marriage problems arise because one or both partners think that they should have unlimited rights. Their appetites for the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is so great that they will despise the person they once loved with all their heart. The kids that used to mean so much are sacrificed upon the altar of selfishness. Why? Basically because there is no

self-control, no self-discipline. They have swallowed the lie, "I shouldn't have to limit myself."

A river without the restraint of banks is called a flood. Fire without the protective confinement of a fireplace will destroy a home. People without self-control are monsters. And this is exactly what Satan is trying to build an appetite for in each of us freedom from restraint. When we pamper ourselves, we face the inevitable end that Paul feared:

*I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified*  
*1 Corinthians 9:27*

Fleshly kings hate talk of self-restraint. Our old nature is like Felix when Paul was preaching to him:

*And as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you." Acts 24:25*

Self-control is a part of the Fruit of the Spirit. As with all fruit, it is the result of the branch abiding in the tree. Like the branch, we must submit to the Tree, the Master, and allow His will to flow in us. "Not my will, but Thine be done." Letting go of self-indulgence and yielding to the Lord's life-giving sap causes delicious fruit to pop up in our life. We become a garden of Eden, a place of refreshment, merely by flowing with the Father's will! I really think the Lord designed the abundant life to be a lot easier than most of us make it out to be.

*But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. 1 Timothy 4:7,8*

Ours is a fitness generation. Articles like a study in *U.S. News & World Report* tout the advantages of physical fitness. A clinic in Texas reported finding that after many years of following 10,000 men and 3,000 women, that the death rate was almost three times higher for those who did not exercise than for those who did as little as walk briskly for 30 minutes a day. Sounds like we all should exercise. But what the article didn't remind us of was that we will all have to die, and then face the judgment of God! **Self-discipline for the sake of godliness has a far greater promise...abundant life now and eternal life later!** Many physical fitness buffs are still miserable people inside. If they would spend the same amount of time and energy seeking God as they do fitness, they would be spiritual giants.

God's three-point fitness plan in James 4:7,8, is simple:

*Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

**PULL-UPS:** Draw near to God; submit everything to His loving will.

**PUSH-AWAYS:** Resist every evil thought, pain, suggestion, etc.

**SHOWER-UP:** Good spiritual hygiene includes regular confession.

Ask an athlete if he thinks our bodies were made for success or failure. He will probably tell you that if you pay a price and discipline your body, you can be successful; neglect it and you'll be a failure. This is how it is spiritually. Pamper your flesh, neglect self-control, and you'll pay a terrible price. Pay a price for discipline, spend quality time in prayer and the Word, seek to walk out the Lord's will, and you'll reap the rewards of an abundant life. See how much you can get away with and the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will begin destroying you!

If you are a Christian, there is Someone inside you, tugging at you right now. He longs to do much more with you. He desires to release so much anointing and abundance that it would make your head swim.

The same God who split the Red Sea lives inside you and He is no respecter of persons. He will move mountains for you, just as Jesus promised, and all He's waiting for is for you to draw near to Him! Imagine the abundance of a life filled with miracles. Consider having every one of your needs met, above and beyond what you can think of or hope for (Ephesians 3:20). Wow! That's abundance. Is it worth the price tag of abiding in Him? Of disciplining yourself for godliness?

*For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. 1 Timothy 1:7*

*All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Hebrews 12:11*

Self-discipline is one of those things that is harder at first, but gets easier once your momentum gets going. **When we see that the denial of pampering the flesh (taking up our cross) releases more energy and enjoyment, we will find follow-through addictive!** God's fruit from the Tree of Life is delicious!

Here are some pointers to help you with personal discipline:

### **1. Start small.**

It would be better to spend five minutes every day reading the Bible, than promising to read an hour a day, only to fail. The first lesson at the gym is "start slow; start small." It prevents injuries. So too with personal discipline start small to prevent the enemy's lie, "See, I told you it would never work!"

### **2. Go for faithfulness and the long haul!**

We'll talk more in the last chapter about developing a cross country pace rather than the mad dash mentality. God is looking for faithfulness throughout our life. People are more impressed with our fantastic bursts of speed, but they usually turn away when we hit the wall! "Steady as she goes, mate!"

### **3. Zero in on your self-talk.**

Who do you spend most of your time talking to: yourself, the phantom or the Master? If you were more conscious of what you mull over in your mind, would you talk differently? Seek to talk more to the Lord, in your mind, as you would to a dear friend the dearest of friends!

**4. Get aggressive with small thoughts.**

The phantom pulls off his mischief by piling up many small, self-centered thoughts. They sound so good, so concerned with our well being. When we take each thought captive to Jesus, they are exposed as the deadly advice Satan designed them to be. Give him a Cross Word!

**5. Build fences (restrictions, no-no's).**

How serious are you about your diet? Let me look in your cupboards. Any chocolate? Sweets? When we get serious about avoiding sin-traps, we build fences. There are places we won't go, things we won't watch, and people we avoid! Why? Because anything less is planning to fail.

**6. Get regular spiritual nourishment (proper input).**

As malnutrition results in disease and death, so spiritual starvation destines one to failure! Be careful that you do not depend upon predigested meals served by preachers and teachers. Grow up. Do some of your own chewing!

**7. Exercise (use) what you've learned.**

Have you ever tried to learn another language? You can read and study until your blue in the face, but if you don't use what you take in, it won't be there when you need it. Share with others what you're learning. Jot down personal insights. Start by talking with the Master about the things you are learning, then, share with others. Put into practice what you're taking in.

**8. Make check-in points (evaluate progress).**

Paul asked us to examine ourselves to see if we were in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). Look for signs of personal growth, such as less stressful, more trusting, less irritable, more concerned about others and less with survival. Are others making favorable comments about growth they notice in you? Ask a close friend to help monitor your progress.

### **9. Grow in dependance upon the Holy Spirit.**

The phantom will flood our minds with thoughts such as, "I really need to do something." If he can trick us into frustration based activities rather than waiting on God by faith, he can destroy us. Instead, fill your mind with Scriptural sayings, such as, "Not my will, but Yours be done, Father."

### **10. Get inertia to work for you with new habits.**

Some folks tell us we can make new habits by doing something every day for a month. Give it a try. The steps of self-discipline you outline for yourself will need to be diligently practiced for at least a month. Promise yourself that you will be faithful, come what may, for a month. Get a calendar, write down your course of action in each block for the entire month. Put the calendar somewhere in your daily path where you have to look at it! Ask someone close to you to check with you on your progress!

## THE FLOW OF LIFE

We may be tempted to think that life is complex and that true happiness is hidden somewhere beneath a pile of jargon, legalistic rituals, or deep secrets. No, life was designed by our loving Heavenly Father to be simple and easy.

*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.*

*Matthew 11:28-30*

A most beautiful picture is given in the book of Ezekiel of a stream flowing from the temple of God (Ezekiel 47). The water comes from under the door as a mere trickle, heading for the barren desert lands and eventually the salty ocean. As the stream flows it broadens and deepens and turns the desolate into a bountiful garden. The bitter turns sweet. Trees line the waterway. These trees are a picture, I believe, of Christians. Notice how verse 12 describes them:

*And by the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear every month because their water flows from the sanctuary, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.*

Tough life for these trees soaking in the Living Water flowing from God's temple. Imagine, a new crop of fruit every month, and leaves that provide healing. As we soak in the Holy Spirit, His fruit will continually emanate from us, blessing others. And speaking of blessings, how about those wilt-resistant leaves – they provide

healing! James says that when the saints lay their hands on the sick, "they will recover."

David saw this same truth in a slightly different way:

*...his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers. Psalm 1:2,3*

The flow of life is God's beautiful design for abundance. Every need met with more than enough and plenty left over for others. As we draw our purpose from the Scriptures instead of people, our real, eternal, inner needs are met. When our ego finds acceptance deep in the well-springs of God's mercy, the dry winds of fickle folks will not drain us.

The Phantom tries to con us into thinking that if we try hard enough, we might cheat death. If we push and pressure, we might get others to comply with our agenda. If we squeeze with all our might, we will extract the elixir of life from people, places and things. Do you know anyone who has successfully beaten death? And how well received are the strong-willed folks that are always trying to force their ways on others? "Mr. Phantom, it's not working!"

Could your life be made easier if you had an experienced guide at your side, one who could see into the future, and had unlimited power? Read John's gospel, chapters 14 through 16, and marvel at the job description of the One assigned to walk beside you. **The Holy Spirit, the River of Living Water, is God's gift to you when you were saved.** If you pressed in for more of His power via the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, you have gained access to unlimited power: indescribable love, God's more-than-enough provision for your every need.

*For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His*

*glory, to be **strengthened with power through His Spirit** in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and **to know the love of Christ** which surpasses knowledge, **that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.** Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.*  
*Ephesians 3:14-20*

Life gets hard when we ignore this resource, and rightfully so. God said He put before us life and death. The easy way is life, the hard, bitter path is death. The easy life is floating down the River of God's Spirit, allowing Him to meet our needs and flow through us to meet the needs of those around us. True difficulty is trying to get life from dried up people, bread from bleak rocks, and enough substance to feel good about yourself in a stingy land where everyone is fighting over crumbs.

Problems are merely opportunities for the Holy Spirit to demonstrate His abilities. If you are unaware of this Friend and His toolbox, problems get irritating rather quickly. Human resources dissipate rapidly under continual use. Panic arises as we feel responsible to do something when no matter what we do, someone is going to be upset. Angry spectators and disappointed faces line the roadway. Play to them and you will soon be stumbling, exhausted and depleted. **Turn to the Awesome One walking at your side; drink deeply from His canteen; and, His new wine diminishes the rough edges and dulls your ability to see the grouches poised to drain your vitality.**

How do we tap into this Living Water on purpose? Do we make loud cries and treat our bodies harshly? If this flow of life is to be easy, then it has to be of God. If the flow comes from the Spirit, then it has to be by faith. What faith response can we make to trigger the Holy Spirit's revitalizing flood?

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth, and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it. For you will go out with joy, and be led forth with peace; the mountains and the hills will break forth into shouts of joy before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. **Instead of the thorn bush the cypress will come up**; and instead of the nettle the myrtle will come up; and it will be a memorial to the Lord, for an everlasting sign which will not be cut off. Isaiah 55:10-13*

Thorn bushes are the picture of hard times. If you would like to trade your prickly tasks in for some pleasant cypress luxury; if you desire to be led forth with joy and peace rather than be driven by fear or frustration, then you need God's rain! His Word comes forth and accomplishes great abundance in a short time. Imagine watering your entire city with your sprinkler and hose. A life-time task. Yet God waters entire counties in a few minutes with a rainstorm.

How do we get God's rain, His Word, to accomplish its intended purpose in our lives? Consider a few facts about weather, and in particular, how rain is produced. God made the world out of water (2 Peter 3:5) and left large reservoirs of water around on the surface of the planet. Water evaporates from the oceans and lakes and collects in clouds. When the clouds accumulate too much water, it condenses and falls to earth as rain, snow or hail. You are well aware of this process. What might have escaped your notice is that what is transpiring on the earth's surface, can encourage the clouds to let loose with a downpour.

Deserts send dry air heavenward, lessening the moisture content of clouds. In the summer in arid Arizona, one can see rain coming down only partway. Frequently, light showers are evaporated by the dry, hot air before a drop ever hits the ground! Like this sad picture, many believers, when going through dry, barren wilderness

wanderings, actually repel God's mercy drops before they get close enough to quench their thirst. The dry air is doubt, double-mindedness, fear and worry. Lack breeds lack.

*...and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Mark 4:25b*

The beautiful, easy lifestyle is pictured by lush vegetation. The root system of plants draws up water, uses what's needed to produce food, then returns the rest to the heavens. The air above a lush area of vegetation is very moist. This air rises and adds more moisture to the clouds. The updraft lifts the humid air even higher, where upon it begins to cool. As air cools, it condense its water in little drops. The drops collect into bigger drops, and joyfully begin to tumble toward earth, to give their life-renewing properties away to any that will receive them. The lush areas thus have more water to start with and end up with even more water.

*For whoever has, to him shall more be given...  
Mark 4:25a*

Can we fill our lives with living water on purpose to increase God's rain on us? This is exactly what Psalm 1 is encouraging:

*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But **his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.** Psalm 1:1-3*

Instead of reaching for flesh tricks such as the counsel of the wicked, the path of sinners or the input of scoffers, dive into the

Living Water of God's Word! The flesh is in desperate pursuit of the Abundant Life, but it looks in all the wrong places!

*The wicked are not so, but they are like chaff which the wind drives away. Psalm 1:4*

**Jesus said that His Words were Spirit and Life. Father God said that His Word was like the rain.** If you want to tap into the easy life, stick your roots, your heart, into God's Word. This is more than memorizing Bible verses it meditating on His Word. David said the key was in meditating in the Word day and night. Jeremiah says it this way:

*Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Thy name, O Lord God of hosts. Jeremiah 15:16*

When we casually look at the Bible, it's like gathering a handful of walnuts. Nice, but hard to enjoy. When one pays the price of breaking the shells by meditating on specific verses, the rich meat is a delicacy to be enjoyed! Hidden behind the exterior of the Scriptures is your key to unlock God's overwhelming flow of abundance! Locked inside each nugget is unlimited power, the same power that created the universe God's Word!

The flesh disdains Bible meditation. The Scriptures, like the Cross, are a stumbling block to the lazy, the sloppy, the easily deceived. "The Bible is boring. The Bible is dangerous! It might ask you to stop doing something that's fun!" Such misunderstanding keeps the simple-minded poking their roots into every conceivable substitute for real life. If you feel dry, if your roots are snared in draining traps, consider poking your heart-strings into the Source!

*Thus says the Lord, "Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the Lord. For he will be like a bush in the desert and will not see when prosperity comes, but will live in stony*

wastes in the wilderness, a land of salt without inhabitant. **Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose trust is the Lord. For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream and will not fear when the heat comes; but its leaves will be green, and it will not be anxious in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit. The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds. Jeremiah 17:5-10**

What are your roots into? God warns in these verses that your heart may be deceived into heading into a desert by expecting people, places and things to fulfill your inner needs. You can know what your roots are into by what you are experiencing:

*I... give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds. Jeremiah 17:10b*

When we're drawing life from God Himself, we can let go of the earthly things that are driving us nuts. Stress and tension will fall away as you see how powerless people and things are to provide abundance. We'll be like a man floating down a clear, pure river, watching merchants on the banks trying to sell polluted bottled water. They are pushing and shoving each other out of the way, desperately trying to gain the man's attention. They offer incentives and discount coupons, and insist that their particular rancid water is the best. Our floater, when thirsty, merely scoops up a handful of cool, clear, living water, and then reclines again, giving himself to the calm, powerful flow. "My way is easy!"

With this miracle active inside of us, we are now free to obey a very important directive for increasing even more abundance:

*...If you extract the precious from the worthless, you will become My spokesman... Jeremiah 15:19b*

In every situation of life, there is both potential blessing and cursing; good and evil; and how we respond in each situation will release either good or evil. To respond according to the life-giving principles we discover in our meditation on the Scriptures is to unlock more wealth. To get snared with the world's system is to stumble into death.

We've referred to the Law of Sowing and Reaping frequently because it is a major tool of God. The by-product of this law is what the Bible describes as a hundredfold return. The beauty of this principle is that when we sow one seed, we reap hundreds more. Plant one grain of corn and you can grow a stalk with perhaps two or three ears of corn, each bearing many times the original investment. If financial wizards could reap this kind of return, they'd be beside themselves. God designed this law to trigger abundance and to make life easy. We can, theoretically, quickly get ahead of the game of life, by employing this law.

The law, however, promises both bane as well as blessing! How we respond to life will determine how God responds to us! How we act or react will have repercussions back on us a hundredfold! When negative things happen to me, if I respond negatively, more negative things will result a hundredfold! If, when negative things happen to me, I respond with faith and love, then faith and love will come back on me a hundredfold! If someone treats me poorly, they will receive back on themselves harmful consequences. If I return good for their mistreatment, I will be blessed and they will get back what they've sown.

The Spirit of God seeks to take us to a point where there's a natural flow of effortless praise to God and a sincere love for others. When hurtful things happen, if we can see them as the cart that carries our blessing, the fiber that bears the nutrition, then we can praise God. This praise extracts the vital and discards the worthless.

This is why praising God in all things and for all things is so powerful. **Bad situations are turned into gold mines as we offer the sacrifice of praise.** God is not some egomaniac that needs our praise; rather, He's our loving Father that designed life to release it's blessings when we respond with faith and love. Praise releases faith

and love simply and without effort! And, praise takes our focus off of frail man (us included) and puts our eyes on God. Where do we get this faith? From our meditation on the Word:

*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. Romans 10:17*

Remember the truth we stated at the first of this chapter: the more we have, the more we get. When we are actively soaking in Bible promises and allowing our hearts to bubble over with faith-praise, the flow continues to gain momentum. This flow is required to wash away boulders of opposition and messy problems!

The crucifixion of Jesus is proof that the worst of situations can contain life. Hidden in all of the pain, humility and shame was eternal salvation. Paul said that if the devil had known what Jesus was doing, he wouldn't have crucified Him! Jesus endured the cross by drawing on the promises of the Father (Hebrews 12:2).

Pondering God's promises reveals life-giving principles, and keeps them before our mind's eye. For instance, the Bible tells us to return a blessing for an insult. When someone in our family takes a cheap shot at us, we can either try to "set the record straight" or obey the Lord. The human tendency is to try to balance the scales by returning put-downs for put-downs, but this doesn't trigger the godly abundance we're craving. A tug-o-war with family members is not the kind of lifestyle God designed for us. His blessings come from reaching upward for His anointing, His stream of love, and then allowing it to flow out to the one being less than kind. God's plan is set up to bless the person who makes wise, proper responses to life's speed-bumps.

When hurtful people see God's blessings coming on the righteous, then hopefully, they will consider looking into the resources of the righteous. Locking horns with others and fighting back is a major energy drain. **God doesn't provide grace and refreshment to those who get tangled up with revenge the law of sowing and reaping won't allow it!** There's no grace when we fuss back with others.

When we allow God's love to flow through us, a power is released in our physical body that brings balance and healing. His anointing

releases a euphoric high that chemically dependant people pay good money for! We get it for merely allowing the life of Yahweh to flow through us!

Simply obeying the Word will release power and blessings. When someone struts around, boasting like a peacock, we are tempted to bring them down a notch. The Word warns us to esteem others as more important than ourselves. When we obey the Bible by overlooking the faults of others, we demonstrate that we believe God is big enough to tend to His own servants. This simple, easy response taps the powerful law of liberty and we end up with the greater blessing! God designed life to be simple, yet when we feel we need to set everybody straight, the Law of Judgement drains us and carefree living goes out the window.

Can you see how easy God made it for us to live in happiness and have homes full of love? According Ephesians chapter five, a husband is not asked to "fix" his wife, but merely love her and treat her tenderly. God's pattern for the home is that of Jesus and His church – encouraging love! We don't have to snap back, fight, argue, correct, or even teach, but we must let the love of God flow through us! Where did we get the idea that we're supposed to "train" our mate? Could it be Satan? Regardless, it's very clear that we're to let God's love flow through us to our mate!

What I'm trying to emphasize is how simple the Christian life is supposed to be. Study the Scriptures daily to see how you are to act and react, then, do it! Not only does every situation in life contain good and evil, there is also a Bible verse that tells us how to respond! Submit to God's Word, obey it in faith, then leave the results to God by praising Him. The outcome: you will easily extract the precious from the worthless! The evil will float away harmlessly, leaving no scars, only beauty marks!

I use the term "beauty marks" because I'm thinking of the nail scars in Jesus' body. As we humbly bow in worship at His feet, we see the nail scarred feet, and they remind us of salvation's glorious song! Yes, the world can try to scar us with abuse, lies, back-stabbing or molesting, but as we obey the Word by flowing in forgiveness, the hurts yield up their trapped wealth – we win! Yes, our scars can be

turned into beauty marks! Old hurts are merely gold mines waiting to be discovered. No, we don't have to dig laboriously through the muck and mire of old hurts. Rather, **as we saturate the memories that "pop" into our conscious mind, with the water of praise and forgiveness, God's torrent washes the dirt away and leaves the nuggets exposed for us to easily pick up!**

The most powerful testimonies are those from people who encounter hard, trying times, and by responding with faith, find the power of God to produce gold! Maybe you can think of a time when you were faced with an opportunity that promised to be so good, but ended in a disaster. And, I'm sure that there have been times when everything looked like a mess, and somehow, God showed up and reversed the situation. Great heroes are those who make good come out of bad times! They find the good and let go of the bad! To be a failure is to grab the bad and ignore the good.

We can't stockpile blessings. When the flow of the Spirit is held back, it stops. We can restart the flow the same way we did in the first place, but we can't hoard God's abundance!

People get into trouble when they become too possessive of others or try to make every word another person says mean something..."And, what did you mean by that?" Little things are treated like they are the missing link of life! These people are always found fighting over trivial details that don't make a hill of beans. Why? They are trying to extract life from the wrong source. When life's pressures stress us out and we're tempted to take everything too seriously, we need to be reminded of Jesus words to Martha:

*But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Luke 10:41,42*

It's easy to float down the River of Life. We flow in love, serving as we go; passing out mercy freely. We let hurtful words of others drop harmlessly into the living water for the fish to eat. We liberally

apply mercy and grace to those around us, knowing full-well that their mind is being harassed by the enemy's lies. We calmly raise our faith guns and blow away demonic troublemakers. We praise God from Whom all blessing flow. We yield to the Holy Spirit. We draw in His living water. All in a day's work. When we mess up, we splash the living water all over ourselves, then lay back into the river of mercy. When impossible mountains loom up in front of us, we lay back into the river, knowing that the river will pass through the mountains, some way – that's its job!

If we come upon a falls, we'll be forewarned by the roar, and we merely assume our position as a humble water drop, a servant, and cascade with excitement, getting recharged as we tumble into the oxygen rich waters below! Crosses can't keep us down; they provide resurrection power!

## A CROSS COUNTRY PACE

If a visitor was being shown around your town by someone who knew everyone, and they passed by you, what would they say about you? Are you easy to get along with? Do you make friends with little effort? Do people steer clear of you? Do you always have to be right? Do you have to have your own way?

Most of us have things about our personality we'd like to change. Too shy. Too brash. Too naive. Too critical. Need to be more disciplined. Need to be more spiritual. More easy-going. Less depressed. Perhaps there are some things that need changing that you're not aware of. Friend, it's time to change—it's time to grow up! Let's pay a price, make an effort, make a decision to start today!

Can we change? Absolutely. When we combine the things we've learned so far, we have all the resources necessary to transform anything that needs changing. The Holy Spirit can show us what are self-protective devices from the enemy. He can help us gain a proper self-image so we don't have to be so intense about relationships. He can give us faith and love instead of fear. He can pour out mercy and grace on once bitter soil. He can even fill the deepest ruts!

Looking at areas that need improvement can be embarrassing, but, praise the Lord, it releases joy and a sense of humble confidence in our awesome God. It's worth the effort it takes. Not only is it a blessing to have people respect you, but it's a thrill to know your life is a witness for Christ. It gives a deep feeling of purpose. Life doesn't always make sense, but if, when it's all over, we've helped others come to know Jesus, it will make everything worthwhile.

You've noticed how hard it is for people to change, haven't you? We are creatures of habit. I've heard of an experiment done with fish in a tank. A piece of glass is put up to separate one larger predator from smaller "food" fish. The big guy swims at full speed to attack the little ones, only to smash into the glass pane (or is that pain?). After

many fruitless attempts to get the little guys, the big fish gives up. Then, as the story goes, the glass divider is removed. Now this part I take by faith...the big fish still refuses to attack the little fish! Why? Because of a mental image he has! Even with the barrier removed, the source of pain gone, he is limited by his perception, his past failures. Pain caused a rut of stinkin' thinkin'!

When Jesus comes into our life, “old things pass away, behold, all things become new.” The glass panes of life are removed (for the most part). But we may still react as though our new Lord was not watching over us. Fear of pain or discomfort may continue to be a natural response that prompts less than Christ-like behavior.

If people made fun of us as a kid or a parent humiliated or rejected us, we fight the pain by pulling back from certain types of relationships, like Mr. Fish. Just because we're a Christian doesn't mean we'd like some more pain! We may hang on to some of our old defense mechanisms. This is where discipleship can help us grow. When we commit our self to someone and ask them to help us grow, we give them permission to lovingly take us into the previous “dangerous water”, the place where the panes (or pains) were. As they step with us into the shadow-pain, the space once mastered by our enemy, we'll find that Jesus has made life safer!

The power behind old ruts is twofold: the enemy's input, and our self-talk. Picture these two forces as towering walls, the two sides of a rut. They bombard our subconscious mind with continual messages:

It's not worth it!

It'll take too much effort!

Don't get your hopes up!

Don't let your guard down.

Don't let anyone get close to you.

Why me?

How could they do this to me?

What did I do to deserve this?

Can't they see what they're doing?

How come everybody's out to get me?

Friends and enemies can help us see our blind spots, but, of course, the end results are determined by OUR responses! Changing ruts may take us the rest of our life, but then, that's what life is all about – changing! We're to grow in faith and aim toward perfection, but the Scriptures are quick to tell us we'll not arrive at perfection until Jesus comes for us (compare 1 John 1:8 with 1 John 3:2). This is to keep us humble, yet growing!

**The hardest thing in life that you will be asked to do by the Lord will be to believe Him over what you feel.** Why is it so hard to agree with the Lord? I believe it's because we humans almost worship our feelings! Given a situation where others say we've done a good job, yet we don't “feel” like we have, we'll go with our feelings. I see this all the time. The person rejecting the pat on the back probably has some junk from the past that befuddles their feelings. But, the bottom line is that if they feel differently from objective bystanders, they reject the unbiased input and take their own biased feelings.

Growth in faith is suppose to be very simple. Basically, if we come across evidence that differs from what God's Word says, we're to let it go and cling to the Truth. Sound simple? Yes, it is simple, but it's not easy. In fact, this is what the “fight of faith” is all about! When 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 tells us to take every thought captive to Christ, it's commanding us to hold every thought, feeling, and opinion up against the standard of God's Word and reject that which doesn't conform.

I worked in a laboratory when going to college, and it was my job to analyze the solutions in plating tanks. Certain tests required us to compare the color of litmus paper dipped in the sample solutions with a chart. We determined the pH of the solution by comparing it with the standards on the chart. This is what the Holy Spirit is asking us to do with each impulse, each thought, each temptation that “pops” into our head. It's not a matter of how we feel about our thoughts, but what God's Word says that counts.

EVERY feeling or thought that discounts the work that Jesus did for us has to go! Some of the stuff that keeps us in ruts is obviously from the Phantom, yet some is from our over-crowded memory banks.

Sometimes we get everything settled down, only to have a close family member or old friend stir up the muddy waters. So what. It doesn't matter who is calling God's work of recreating us "insufficient." God is true and everything else must conform to His Word!

In reflecting back over this book, you can see that I feel most of the pain we experience as well as most of the pain we give to others results from taking our survival too seriously and placing too little emphasis on love and trust. Review the teaching of James 4:7 and 8. When you feel the least bit of pressure arise inside your mind, when you sense the smallest troubling of your internal waters...stop and submit your life, the situation, the reactions of others...everything...to our Awesome God who is in total control! Either it's true that He has all power and that He is working everything for our good and will not allow us to be tempted above our max, or all of life is a joke, a bad joke! Let go of your death grip on life! Praise God BEFORE you understand why!

To run this lifelong race, we need to be working at eliminating the weights that so easily beset us. Seasoned athletes are always to be found perfecting their game. There is always some new insight gleaned from others; some new technique; some new diet; new vitamin concoctions. This is what the Lord is asking from us—

## G R O W T H!

In applying the principles we've discussed in this book, I'm encouraging you to do so at a cross country pace, not the sprinter's mad dash!

## MEMORY VERSES FOR THE NEW YOU

*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

*Galatians 2:20 (KJV)*

*Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, for he who has died is freed from sin.*

*Romans 6:6,7*

*Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.*

*2 Corinthians 5:17*

*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

*2 Corinthians 5:21*

*For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.*

*Colossians 2:8-11*

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

*Ephesians 2:4-7*

*By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.*

*1 John 4:17*

*That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*

*Ephesians 4:22-24*

*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.*

*Galatians 6:7-8 (NKJV)*

*For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace*

*Romans 8:6*

What are we to renew? Our mind! What are we to put on? The new self! How do we do this? By agreeing with what the Bible says about who we are in Christ. When we take up our cross, we are dead to our past failures. They were nailed with Jesus on the cross. To renew our mind, we inform it that the rules have changed! We no longer need to survive! We are free to abide in Jesus and enjoy the abundant life!

Develop a steady-as-she-goes cross country pace as you seek to renew your mind in accordance with the Word of God. It may help to read back over these chapters and spend time pondering the Bible

verses. Relax, let go of that which will not produce life, and take hold of that for which you were taken hold of— Philippians 3:8-15!

## APPENDIX

### HOW DOES ONE BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

The Bible tells us how we can enjoy a rich, fulfilling life. The Awesome Creator designed us with a capacity for love and a desire to be successful. This abundant life was formulated around mankind living in close fellowship with the Lord. Listen to the words of Jesus Christ . . .

*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me.*

*Revelation 3:20 NIV*

God's design includes provisions for us even when we're drained:

*Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

*Matthew 11:28 NIV*

Yes, our loving Father God has our best in mind:

*...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

*John 10:10b NIV*

*I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*

*John 15:11 NIV*

Why is it that most people are not experiencing this abundance? Mankind has stepped out of God's plan and has tried to do their own thing. The Bible calls this sin. This rebellion blocks God's blessings from us. None of us is excluded from this problem of sin:

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.  
Romans 3:23 NIV*

Some people feel that sin is an old-fashioned concept, but the Bible tells us that our sin separates us from God's blessings.

*Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.*

*Isaiah 59:1,2 NIV*

Our good works and noble intentions are not sufficient to reinstate us to a standing where the holy God can bless us:

*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*

*Isaiah 64:6 NIV*

God's plan of salvation is the provision of His love for a race of fallen, stubborn beings. Because the Almighty is holy, His standards are essential and can't be ignored. But, because "God is love," He designed a way to reinstate those individuals who, out of sincere love for Him, would obey His instructions.

## **GOD'S SOLUTION**

God's Spirit overshadowed a virgin named Mary, and the child that was conceived was therefore both God and man. God entered our world in human form as the son of Mary and the Son of God Jesus, the Christ (or "Anointed One").

Jesus led a sinless life by complete obedience to Father God. Then, as our substitute, He took our place and our punishment. Whereas the

punishment for sin was death, and because He was just, God couldn't ignore sin, but He revealed in the Old Testament that He would receive a substitute payment for man's sins.

Animal sacrifices pointed to the day when God, in human form, would come to earth and be our substitute sacrifice the Lamb of God! What God's holiness demanded, God's love provided!

*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.*

*John 3:16 NIV*

Because Jesus was a perfect man, He could pay for our sins; because He was Eternal God, His blood paid for all who would come to Him. Jesus willingly went to the cross and died as our sin substitute. He arose from the dead to demonstrate that God's holiness was satisfied. By rising from the dead, Jesus broke sin's power over us.

*...He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption...How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

*Hebrews 9:12b, 14 NIV*

This salvation is all of God. Going to church, doing good works, etc., will not save us. It is very hard for independent individuals to accept that they can do nothing to merit salvation.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast.*

*Ephesians 2:8,9 NIV*

## OUR RESPONSE

A free gift cannot be earned, but it must be accepted! An essential aspect of God's plan of salvation is that it separates between those who couldn't care less about God's will and those who, when they see the error of their ways, will repent, or turn from doing their own thing.

*...unless you repent, you too will all perish.*

*Luke 13:3 NIV*

*I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.*

*Acts 20:21 NIV*

We receive Jesus' payment for our sin by submitting to His Lordship over our life. Submission and obedience puts us back on the original path God designed for us!

*That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9 NIV*

Do you want to receive God's gift of salvation right now? Do you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins? That He arose from the grave on the third day? Will you turn from being the boss of your life and surrender to Jesus, and ask Him to be your Lord?

Here is a sample prayer. Ponder it, then put it in your own words and say it to God, if you truly mean it.

Dear Heavenly Father, I come to You admitting that I have sinned and have not done Your will. I believe that, out of love, you sent Jesus, Your Son, to die for my sin. I believe that He rose from the dead and has destroyed sin's power over my life. I turn from my sin and receive Jesus as my Savior and my Lord!

The exact wording is not as important as the heart response. Did you turn from being the lord of your own life and, in receiving Jesus, are you making Him your Lord?

This may seem like a simple prayer, yet it is a legal transaction, a covenant. If you were sincere, God will honor His Word and will save you and send His Holy Spirit to live inside you.

## **GROWING AS A CHRISTIAN**

**READ THE BIBLE EVERY DAY.** Get an easy to understand translation, such as The New International Version, The Good News Bible, The Book (Living Bible), or The New American Standard Bible.

Start reading at least a chapter a day. Begin with Matthew's gospel and read through the New Testament first; then begin reading in the Old Testament.

Make notes as you read, and write down any questions you may have to ask a Bible teacher later. Begin each Bible study with prayer for God's guidance.

Look up these verses on the importance of Bible study: 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; Psalm 119:11; Psalm 1:1-3. Check the index of your Bible for the location of the books of the Bible.

**TALK TO GOD YOUR FATHER IN PRAYER, EVERY DAY.** Begin your prayer time like Jesus' example, with praise (Matthew 6:9). Confess any sin. 1 John 1:9 tells us the Lord will forgive us. Look up these verses to see what happens when we don't confess our sin: Psalm 66:18; Psalm 32:1-7.

Pray for others (Ephesians 6:18, 19; Colossians 4:2-4). Instead of worrying, pray (Philippians 4:6-7). Give thanks in your prayers (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Bring your requests to the Father in Jesus' name (John 16:23,24).

**BEWARE OF A NEW PULL.** Our enemy, Satan, wants to pull you down, discourage you and make you give up. Jesus said the first thing that would happen to us after we receive the Word would be that

Satan would come to try to steal the seed ("I didn't feel anything; nothing happened"). Also, persecution, worry, cares of this world, and the love of sin will attempt to choke the word (Mark 4:3-20).

Resist the devil in the name of Jesus the very instant you recognize his temptation traps of sin and doubt: 1 Peter 5:6-9; James 4:6-8; Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Think of "resisting" as chasing away a stray dog who's getting into your garbage . . . "Get outta' here, you pest!"

When temptations or pressures increase, get together with another believer. The Lord wants us to strengthen each other (Galatians 6:1,2). We're to help others!

MEET REGULARLY WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS (Hebrews 10:24,25). Find a good church home where the Bible is taught, God is praised, Jesus is served, and the Holy Spirit is honored.

LOOK INTO BEING BAPTIZED IN WATER (Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 10:47,48).

BEGIN SEEKING THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. This is when Jesus pours out the power of the Holy Spirit on us. Study these verses: Luke 11:9-13; John 7:37-39; Acts 1:4-8; Acts 2:1-4; Acts 10:44-46.

BEGIN SHARING THE STORY OF GOD'S LOVE AND SALVATION WITH OTHERS. You may be the only "preacher" some people will listen to (Romans 10:9-15).

Learn all you can; share all you learn!

*For whoever will call upon the name  
of the Lord will be saved.*

*Romans 10:13*

Please send me your comments and insights:

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