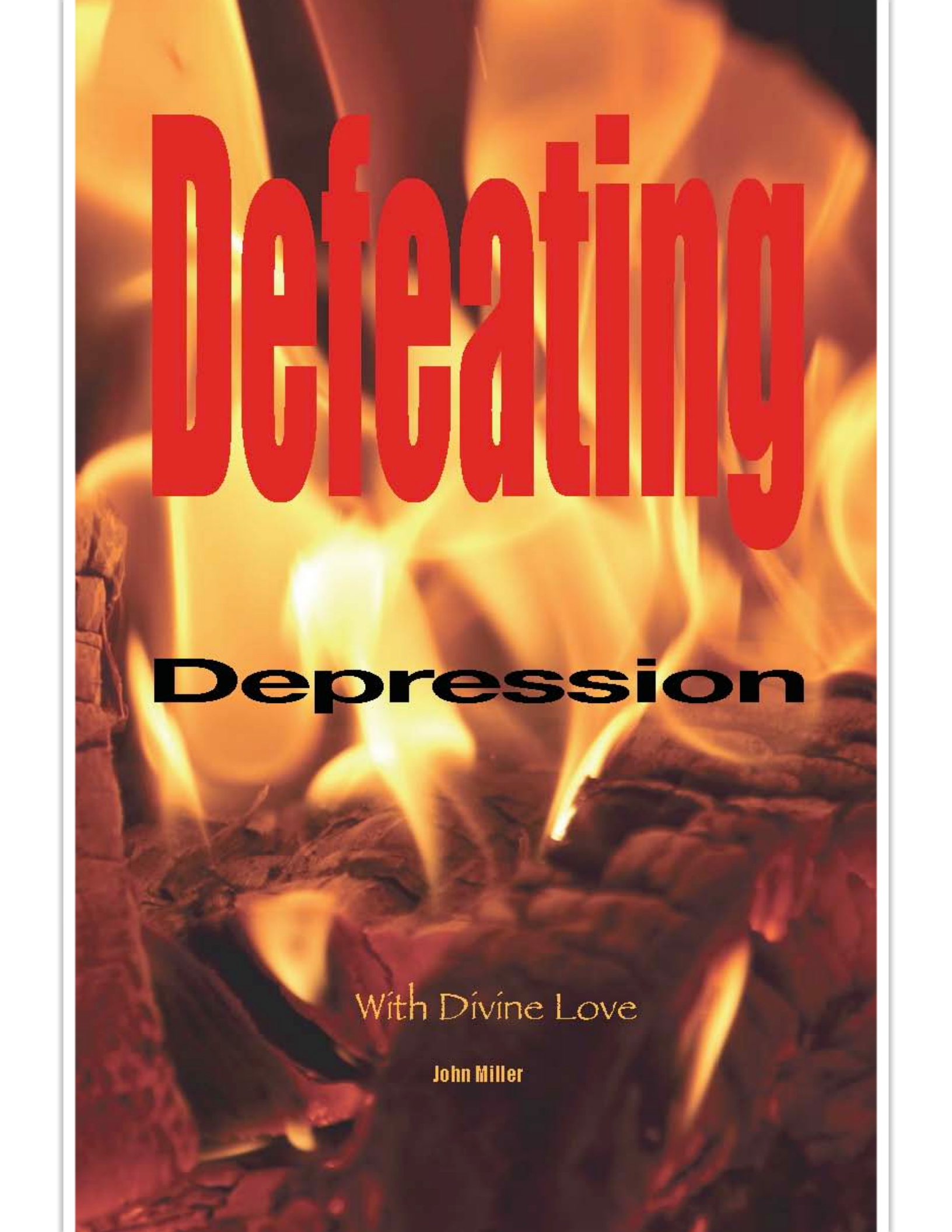




Defeating

Depression

With Divine Love

John Miller

In memory of
Alice
and others like her,
who have
needlessly suffered.
May this come to an end.

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Forward

Some of life's most important subjects are often not explained very well. I can think of a number now without trying to hard, but will express only one to help you better understand where we are trying to point the ship.

When I was a boy my father said to me, “be true to your teeth or they will be false to you.” To be honest, my father was a man of the mind. He love books, abstract thoughts, but was weak in his ability to work with concrete physical things. This is stretching it, but he could hardly change a light bulb.

He loved Burma Shave’s. One I still vaguely remember hearing was, “Missed the curve the car was wizen. The fault was hern, the funeral hizen.” I think he probably just loved and wanted to share the cute little saying on teeth. I’m not sure he actually was trying to give me some form of wisdom, but rather a little wry humor on that sunny day.

On another day, the dentist offered no pain killer as he ground away the decay. Suddenly, prolific revelation of what I had heard my father say regarding teeth as a boy with a different twist as big screen scenes passed before my eyes. When I was a boy rusty old cars seemed to be everywhere with even a few seen in the driveway of the house we lived in. If my father had said something after the cute little line, referencing the corrosive qualities of salt on cars with sugar and other foods on teeth, while flashing a picture of a toothless man, I doubt I would have been sitting in the chair that day smelling burning decay at the drills edge. It’s amazing what a little pain can do. Selah.

How about when the difficulties and traumas of life kick the breath out of your spirit, divorce, abuse, fear, shame?

Likewise the subject of loving God, what does that look like to you? Most people know the command, but how do you do it? With the incidence of anxiety, depression considered to be on the rise, or at least unresolved, is there a correlation between loving God that promotes receiving God’s love and peace? Obviously, “perfect love casts out fear.”¹ Not just any kind of love, but “perfect love.” If this is the medicine that for centuries has been overlooked, lets start taking high doses of “perfect love.”

To be fair, not every subject for loving God will be covered in this book. However, subjectively, what seems at this time to be the most important ones will be covered that

enable the tuning of ones heart no matter the difficulty. May God begin to open the understanding of our hearts to the truths of love that belong to God alone.

This is not meant to be an academic work. Loving God or a person through study will never work. So drink in the scriptures and evaluate as needed, but for the greater purpose of this book you'll need to remove any glasses academia. They'll just get in the way of coming face to face with the King of Love. This in the end can not be simply studied, it must become a personal discipline of loving God.

For those who are gender sensitive, please forgive me. It is difficult for me to communicate within this arena without using words at times like, He or Him. I do not wish to offend anyone, yet for this reason alone, that Jesus came as a man, these words will be used. As Paul put it so wonderfully, "there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The need of both genders is obvious to complete being "made in God's image." Yet in Christ Jesus, the need for gender distinctions begins to fall away!

Religion is a cruel task master. Christianity was never intended to be that way. Listen to the words of Jesus and let us begin.

And I have declared to them Your name,
and will declare it, that the love
with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."
John 17:26

¹ 1 John 4:18

*For with You is the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light.
Psalms 36:9*

1

Darkness

*“Behold, I have created the blacksmith
Who blows the coals in the fire,
Who brings forth an instrument for his work;
And I have created the spoiler to destroy.
Isaiah 54:16*

*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.
John 10:10a*

There are slight, different shades of darkness when one walks in the woods. After forgetting the light, walking down the path from the lodge became a significant challenge. The rain was still coming down without light from the moon or stars forcing the beauty of that path to become bankrupt in the forest that night. Each step felt for the worn areas where the hardness of the rocky ground could be felt. The rocks at times, worn free of moss and vegetation became large enough that the possibility of going in any direction seemed viable, causing the deep darkness to become exceedingly difficult, where the trees, sky and ground seemed the same color, pitch black. Hands flailing in front, feeling for branches and trunks of trees was the only other source of radar other than feet, feeling for the worn path. It wasn't that far of a distance, but any thoughts here that strayed into the what if, would begin to press the panic button.

The distance between the old lodge to the cabin was short, but what if the distance was significantly longer with perpetual darkness? Here when alternatives seem to fail and the trail begins to go up and down hills with steps in the rocks that are no where to be found. Often times in life vain comforts of friends and toys or even success can subdue the pain till just the right set of circumstances become too much to bear. Even the delight of indulgences during a difficult season can dull the pain and sense of defeat. Enough pleasure that can be bought for a price can bring a smidgen of happiness, but not the pure joy that life was designed for. A trip here or a celebration there seems to bring a strange light, that does not keep one on the rocky path. Just the wrong step at the right time and off the edge of the rock one goes.

Down to the ground and all that one can feel is the pain from the hard stones in this wild land. Call out as you will, but neighbors are few and far between. Many just don't have time or the tool box to come along side and comfort the sorrowing. So is the pain of shipwreck when one has stepped off the rock and done what seems the unforgivable, experiencing the shame of just not measuring up to the standards of those who never seem to bend in the gales of life.

The silent terror of being stuck in the woods day after day, unable to feel where the trail surely goes in the light of day. For many, wounds from the past perhaps forgotten, still inhibit the ability

to navigate the darkness of these days. These wounds never cared for or bandaged with improper remedies inhibit the ability to trust, becoming the puss of where is the next sure step. Wounds that have happened deep in the soul long before one knew to guard the heart.

*But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*¹

For some it is divorce and others the inability to seemingly keep one's head above water in the torrents of life's activities that causes a hopeless emptiness to creep in. Deep cries out to deep,² but not here. The waves and the breakers crash relentlessly upon those who's broken spirits know not the possibility of hope. Irrational voices can set in that wine to convince that nothingness or the worlds standards of success would be a step up from this brokenness.

For many who are not in utter darkness, the path is still lit well enough to traverse the terrain with seeming ease. Little pleasures of the next event leave or seeming success in life, produces enough happiness that the thought of abundant life must be for someone else. Burning light to utter darkness, there are countless shades of grey in between. Care must be taken to see if the signs of the Kingdom along the path from the King establishes the path as genuine. Even the one deemed by Jesus as the greatest prophet sought assurance for the path in the midst of a seemingly dark hour.³

Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."⁴

There are all different kinds of shades of gray that seem to light a path that are not the true color of light that only the King can shine forth. For some it's the indulgences of eating that brings forth a bit of gray light. Others may press for sexual perversions to try to find some relief from the dark woods. Money, things, work, indulgences of the mind, entertainment, ministry or some measure of all or others not named mixed together to bring forth a strange fire that leads only to an uncertain outcome like pouring cement in a river, not the vibrant pouring forth of brilliant colors of light.

Role models and identity play a huge part where one may have looked to improper sources. If in the end a role model fails, identity becomes twisted with doubts and fears of a similar outcome. What if a role model is successful to the observations of countless many, yet waltzing down the path of mere religion has led many astray by their seeming success? The possibility of taking another step quietly speaks of disaster. Surely the wounds that role models knowingly or unknowingly inflict, hammer away at the core fabric that supports the future outcome of a persons life. For those who have been wounded by role models, the ability to forgive or simply overlook a failure of another creature as God surely does or desires to do, can hamper the the future as deep darkness.

This same path that all travel certainly has different shades of darkness. Maybe just enough light to make it down the path to the next impasse before darkness sets in. Lives are tattered by

different activities that seem a balm to the soul for a moment or two. Money, a relationship, food, entertainment, drugs or alcohol, a vacation, involvement in a religious order of some kind or another, business, sexuality all vie for the throne of the soul. None of these are bad in and of themselves, but the place of fulfillment that may be found in them or following a role model found in them will bring some measure of destruction, that the King of abundant life never intended.

Without knowing it many role models unwisely guide with the value on the education of the mind. It is a good value, but not the most important value. This priority lends itself well to the cares of this world, food, housing, finances, not to mention the pleasures every parent wishes for their child. How does a child learn to develop the muscles of inner knowing where the muscles of logic and reasoning are of atlas proportions and valued as superior? What room is there for, “not leaning on our own understanding?”⁵ How does a believer learn to “walk in the Spirit”⁶ day to day, setting the mind to the side as a tool to be picked up only for certain applications? The world model can make a believer and unbeliever successful or even extremely successful for a season, independent of Jesus Christ. This is utter darkness.

You may be reading this as one who has never known the greatest opportunity of all, coming into the divine romance with Creator of all Creation, The Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe no one has ever explained it well enough or you have never heard of such a thing. As you read, if you come to the realization that you desire this most delightful relationship, you will find an appendix in the back of the book devoted to help you with this. I’d highly recommend going there now, but know that is there for you when you begin to realize this is too good to be true.

You see, this book is really for Christians only. You can read it, but the benefits are only available to believers. We’ll look at grace a little more fully in a later chapter, but there’s common grace available to all men. A doctor, lawyer or university professor can be a Christian, Buddhist or atheist and if the atheist is the best, we want their help because they are operating under common grace. One of my pastors officiated as a pastor for seven years before he came into a loving, saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Common grace can do a lot, but the extraordinary grace bought at Calvary for believers will do so much more.

Now do we begin to see the shades of darkness around us? How a city can be prepared to celebrate a victorious professional team like the Romans, yet fails to come out together to celebrate the one who has given them breath? We’ve lived like this for generations assuming these shades of darkness were light!

Church groups calling themselves “the church” while not realizing the full body as the church, further set oneself up for the fall. Well, we’re pentecostal, charismatic, not charismatic, not pentecostal, traditional, evangelical, catholic, revivalist rather than simply a disciple who lives to love and please the King, shows a predisposition to weakness. We’re promised weakness when we devalue the foot or the toe as part of the body.⁷ Weakness implies some measure of torment which produces depression.

One can walk down the path on a cloudy day seeing well enough to make good time. One can even smile about the beauty of the path as even here the beauty is evident, but the joy of a full brilliant Son lit day is not experienced here.

Humility is our best friend that causes us to loose some of our faulty preconceived ideas or ideas that have been given to us by those we trusted who knew no better. Certainly they meant no harm, only they repeated the company line of their particular group that they had been mentored by. Humility opens up our ears to begin to hear beyond the voices of the different crowds to listen to the voice of the King. Humility causes us to bear with one another when the obvious areas of common ground for all believers have yet to be explored.

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.⁸

Many christians simply believe that their church doctrines are correct. A pastor has stated, Jesus is perfect theology while the apostle Paul cries out, “not that I’ve been made perfect yet” which seems like humility. Paul further writes of the ongoing process in the forth chapter of Ephesians for the whole church coming to the unity of the faith where every joint supplies growth by the edifying of itself through love. Every joint implies the need for humility of open fellowship with one another outside of our safe groups.

Being able to fellowship, recognizing the whole body and understanding the need for the whole body enables us to begin to walk in the light. Humility says, “we see through a glass darkly”. Every joint supplies, building up in love begins to break the grey shadows on the path that the casual hiker fails to see. All creation is in groaning, and until we see it clearly enough, we can not move on towards perfection.

On the path different hikers are walking in different levels of light. Some might be termed having clinical depression. Others who seem to be walking strong, have no perception of the darkness that surrounds them. Until we learn to graciously persevere for the “full stature”⁹ found only in Christ, pain and difficulty await us. And what does the full stature of Christ look like to you? It may not be today, but rest assured, seek first the Kingdom is not a suggestion, it simply is not an optional task for breaking free of the tyranny of this world before seemingly unknown darkness comes in like a fog.

The christian is called to live by a different set of rules than the world. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”¹⁰ This verse corresponds to “if you are led by the Spirit”¹¹ and “Love the Lord your God with all your heart.”¹² Being a Christian only opens doors to the seeming impossibility of walking with Jesus and the life giving fruit only available here. “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”¹³

The educational model developing the ability to make good rational decisions, teaches a child to live independent of God’s Spirit. Yet the educational model tries and can enable a believer or an unbeliever to be successful independent of Christ Jesus, this is darkness. This is for the believer, living according to the flesh. Is the educational model wrong? No, It simply must be seen as good, but not the end value for true living.

These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.¹⁴

We are called to be "anxious for nothing."¹⁵ The mind in and of itself can not keep this command. The mind has the ability to think on negative things that cause it to spiral down to anxiety, fear and depression. The believer must learn to repent quickly when the mind dwells on "vain imaginations"¹⁶ rather than pure and lovely things, or Christ. We are to have His mind that only comes through union with Him as, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit."¹⁷

The Day came and the gurgle was heard. It wasn't the gurgle of a stony brook on a summer day, but the gurgle of death with each breath that dark spring day. He was eighty-one and by most peoples standards had lived a sufficiently long enough life. For many people this would be acceptable, but for this son who had experienced significantly different things in Christ, this seemed more like, "killing, stealing and destroying," the very things Jesus came to end in His promise of "abundant life."¹⁸ Some have been deluded to believe that sickness comes from God. In that case, someone better warn the doctors to stop fighting an irreconcilable fight.

It's not that the son hoped that his father would never die on this earth, but that his father would not leave in this manner, but in abundant life. Years before this the son had studied in a church which devoted two classes on healing. And now the gurgle was heard, a client of hospice, with no more hope of medical remediation. It had been two years of daily prayers for healing, often with it seemed, God's Presence palpably entering the room.

A short time earlier, before the gurgle, the pastor of the church the son had attended called out of the blue, after over two years of silence to say, "Your father's time is short." In the short conversation, the pastor repeated it a second time to break through the barrier that was obviously building up in the son's brain. The son thought, six, eight months down the road where his original thought had been six weeks for a healing before coming home. Now the gurgle that refused to go away with prayer after prayer.

The son remembered his days in class with the pastor who on a number of times was obviously reading his life. The son also remembered before going to an internship in a church how the pastor said he saw the son living in a cabin by a lake half way across the State of Minnesota. It seemed far fetched with his finances, but sure enough he stayed in a cabin on a lake owned by a doctor off to Afghanistan for six months. Weeks later, the sons father was gone.

The truth was he'd fallen in love with his father during those years of care in a way he'd never known possible for a man he dearly loved before the illness. Love or not, he knew the time was short, but just weeks later and hope lay there paralyzed refusing to get up. Weeping, no, balling walking through the neighborhood during broad daylight without feeling a bit of shame. The torrents had come and would release without control as if the dam had completely eroded the

wall of hope. In the middle of the night, in broad daylight it made no difference, uncontrollable weeping. Only in the memory, “Your father’s time is short” knowing God knew, seemed to shore up the dam when darkness tried to creep in to devastate the sons mind.

Despite the prayers persisted till he breathed his last, confusion over what he’d experienced pierced through the sons soul. The experience of his personal healings and stories of healings, even a pastor who’s family he’d lived with who was healed of numerous issues to the point of a ricochet prayer that ended his career with glasses. Than there was the gurgle and than the burial that drove the nail into his heart.

It wasn’t till later that the son listened to two messages by another pastor, the Thrill of Victory and the Agony of Defeat that the truth set in as this man of God shared the thrills and the agonies through breaking tears that he realized that functioning in a gift is like most other processes like playing the piano or riding a bike, a process of refinement. To only begin to as the Bible commands, “Eagerly desire spiritual gifts” when a loved one is dying is a poor time to expect to become a virtuoso.

One can know the Bible inside out, have most of it memorized and the gifts can still never function. The writings in the Book are of exceedingly great value, but Jesus never promised a Book. Jesus is the Word of God and without doubt, the Bible is the Sword of the Spirit. One word from God and any of us are cut through.

It was the union or abiding that Jesus was after where he had written, “you can do nothing without me.”¹⁹ Like any relationship time and commitment must be given to produce that sense of trust if only on our end. Who are you going to give the keys to for your car or home? Likewise, here is the only place the joys and delights of union can be developed, the “fruit of the Spirit.”²⁰

Simply, the gifts without the fruit is equally deceptive with a propensity to produce sought after leaders who’s moral failures produce destruction rather than growth. Jesus modeled both the fruit and the gifts and our completeness and joy are dependent on our emulating and becoming like Jesus or Christlike. The joy of abiding with the King.

Tears like a waterfall at times filled the sons life, but it was at the Jack Frost conference where he listened to Jack share of his father’s broken interactions which were developed in other ways to show the failings of all earthly fathers. The son knew that his father was far from perfect, but also that despite his faults, for this son, his father had in his mind been a great, loving father. It wouldn’t have mattered if his father had been a negative memory, because it was the realization that all earthly fathers pale in the Light and Glory of the Perfection of our Heavenly Father.

In the last session again the invitation to come forward for prayer was given. And this time the son rose sensing it was time. He was met by a woman who seemed to feel it was inappropriate, looking for a man to pray with the son. Half an hour later a man was found who simply gave the son a hug and kept walking. The woman sensed something incomplete and stood by the son in his bewilderment of that shallow hug. It seemed that minutes passed by and than she said, “I feel like the Father would like to play catch with you!” She must have felt a bit out of her mind to say

such a thing, but little did she know that this activity of playing catch was the most significant activity that the son and his earthly father had shared together.

Likewise it is here, to the Father that we must go to fully develop the dam of hope. At first the son thought it had to do with doing things together like ministry, this playing catch. And certainly this may be a part, but it was much later the son realized the Father just wanted to spend time together in all of life's activities.

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name (gone to church, done Bible studies, prayed, given to the poor)?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’²¹

Both the Fruit of the Spirit and the Gifts of the Spirit flow from the same watershed and can be taught and studied, but there is no greater teacher and proficient enabler like learning to spend time with the King. Studying about peace and joy is all well and good, but daily learning the joys of divine union with the Prince of Peace, the King of kings is indescribable!

¹ Matthew 6:23

² Psalm 42:7

³ Matthew 11:3

⁴ Luke 7:22-23

⁵ Proverbs 3:5

⁶ Galations 5:16

⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:15

⁸ 1 John 1:7

⁹ Ephesians 4:13

¹⁰ Proverbs 3:5

¹¹ Galatians 5:18

¹² Luke 10:27

¹³ 1 John 2:6

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:13-16

¹⁵ Philippians 4:6

¹⁶ 2Corinthians 10:5

¹⁷ Romans 8:16

¹⁸ John 10:10

¹⁹ John 15:5

²⁰ Galatians 5:22-23

²¹ Matthew 7:21-23

*And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence
to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish,
but imitate those who through faith and patience
inherit the promises.*

Hebrews 6:11-12

2

Grace

*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,
by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.
Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.
Ephesians 4:30-31*

*Do not quench the Spirit.
Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good.
Abstain from every form of evil.
1 Thessalonians 5:19-22*

*I do not set aside the grace of God;
for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”
Galatians 2:21*

*But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.
Titus 3:4-7*

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Romans 15:13*

For many, grace is best understood as the forgiveness of sins. According to the passage above in Titus, it was God’s mercy that saves us. How God saved us according to this passage is through the washing and regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. This passage simply states, “washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit (God) is, “His grace”. Titus, what in the world happened to the blood?

Titus we should hope would have agreed with the blood at calvary as, “knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”¹ and
“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?”²

Please notice the “Spirit of Grace” that we find so intimately tied to the blood and also to Jesus in the second passage. It seems that it was the Blood of the Pure and Spotless Lamb that made atonement for the sins of mankind so that relationship of “the washing of regeneration and renewing” could be restored to the Spirit of Grace, which ties us back to the passage in Titus, “we should become heirs!” Heirs to whom? “To “the hope of eternal life” that is impregnated together with this Self Existent, All Powerful and Loving One.

Now before we go on, we must unpack this “eternal life.” Eternal would have to do with a quality that God alone possesses of being “the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end”³ and where this “life” is invigorated by God! A congruent verse to this thought would be, “be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might” when we think of, “eternal life.” This is the abundant life that comes only through a vital union to the “Spirit of Grace.” This vital union has little to nothing to do with situational circumstances or events, but simply being connected rightly to the “Spirit of Grace.”

Here is the test, do we feel like an heir at the end of the day to this All Powerful One? If not, we begin to see the goal of experiencing certain sonship.

So it appears that there are two dimensions that take place in a twinkling of an eye, the sanctifying work of the blood that paved the way for the “Spirit of Grace.” According to Titus, the “Spirit of Grace” washed us and renewed us The first being where God cleanses a person of sin. The second, is God’s empowerment for the cleansed child of God to walk out their life in that sweet abiding, completing the “good works” together with God that had been predestined for that sanctified being to do. These good works can be hindered by sin, but more importantly and precisely, by not knowing how to enable the empowerment that was bought at Calvary. Without question, one of the fruits of God’s Spirit is self control which if fully enabled, frees one from the tyranny of sin.

Let us start here with the tyranny of sin that disqualifies us from the “Spirit of Grace.” You see the Bible makes it clear that by our actions we can “grieve the Holy Spirit.”⁴ Have you ever grieved someone? Fellowship is broken that solidifies sweet fellowship along with relational blessings. Certainly, God is not completely unlike us in that we are made in His image where we find that grieving is a common emotion. We need to remember well this word and the effects upon this Great One that we can not see.

g3076. λυπέω lypeō; from 3077; to distress; reflexively or passively, to be sad: — cause grief, grieve, be in heaviness, (be) sorrow(-ful), be (make) sorry.

AV (26) - be sorrowful 6, grieve 6, make sorry 6, be sorry 3, sorrow 3, cause grief 1, be in heaviness 1;

- I to make sorrowful
- II to affect with sadness, cause grief, to throw into sorrow
- III to grieve, offend
- IIII to make one uneasy, cause him a scruple

Have you ever been with someone who will not listen to a word that you are saying? This is the idea behind “do not quench the Spirit.”⁵ No matter the attempts and the appeals, the responsiveness to direction is hindered causing a rift in the relationship. These quenchings and grievings of God’s Spirit are real things and need not be the result of what most would consider blatant sins. You see, when we seemingly need not cross one of the ten commandments to grieve and quench, just the greatest one, “Loving the Lord.”

Let’s consider Peter again and his unforgettable moment of denying Jesus three times.⁶ How does one physically walk with Jesus the perfect one for three years, virtually twenty four hours a day and then deny Him three times? How did he face Him again knowing He had already declared these things and knew all things. Here we all can be encouraged when we know we have failed the Lord.

We can put on our Sunday bonnets and show up at the club, but if we have been grieving by not listening, quenching the Holy Spirit, “the Truth is not in us.” Jesus foretold Peter’s failings that must have been the most grievous sins to him that he could have committed. How Peter must have suffered before Jesus restored him. Jesus has a plan for restoring the most grievous sins and failings. We can be confident of this by Peter’s example.

“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”⁷

The Holy Spirit knows us and perceives our every thought and though we can put on an act for others, this Great One knows and has a plan to bring truth and light to the very core of our being. God could sovereignly do it, but God is looking for this union of agreement that is based out of free will. Peter who knew the depths of his failings wrote and likely spoke these great words, “Grow in Grace.” Sin is best understood as being relationally disconnected from God. Grace is the glorious gift of the opportunity to walk in union again and develop this walk in every possible nuance of a relationship with God. Each of our religious backgrounds, because they are incomplete, give us a sense of false satisfaction in our relationship in Christ Jesus.

The one who laid his head on Jesus’s breast understood well the human condition that can be both unresponsive to the seriousness of sin and to the point of plain denial that there is even a problem to be addressed. We might even choose or deny certain groups to continue practicing our faith in a manner we simply prefer despite knowing what is expected by the King. When we begin to see that sin or simply going our own way, causes God to grieve over us, finding the path back to God becomes the key priority. We can not defy gravity nor the seriousness of sin including the ten commandments that many unbelievers keep, except one, and the one command

that is connected to union with the King, “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength,”⁸ this command which is for believers only.

You see, there is a higher standard that few are willing to embrace. The Apostle John later writes these words to set the standard and greater depth of meaning to, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.”⁹

The Apostle Paul writes the same thought, “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”¹⁰ Now we begin to see the horizon and though we make no place for sin, we no longer deceive ourselves into having made it. The pressure breaks, and we begin with a glorious sigh to echo the words of the Apostle Paul who so clearly sees his own state.

“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”¹¹ It is an upward call of God in this glorious union with Christ Jesus!

The good news John points out is the advocate we still have standing on our side, is more than willing to restore us, He died for sin in the first place! “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”¹² He’s died for this and is more than ready to apply Himself to His Kingly cause. Let us not forget that John wrote, “I write to you, so that you may not sin.” The beauty and blessing of walking in the light and sweet fellowship first with Jesus and then other believers is beyond compare. If reconciling is important with the King, addressing to keep short accounts of our failings with one another is also important.

In the Old Testament, the priest would shed blood for the remediation of sin before going into the Holy Place, where God dwelt between the Cherubim. Today, there is a new temple, and if you have chosen Jesus as your redeeming, loving King, God’s temple is now your body, where God dwells with you. Learning to, “fix your eyes” on the Spirit of Grace and to behold your Glorious King is the most amazing gift ever given to man.

As one pastor has said, “It would have been enough if Jesus had just forgiven our sins,” but it is this unbelievable gift to encounter heavens King on a daily, moment by moment life changing experience where the apostle Paul cries out, “It is no longer I who live, But Christ Jesus who live in me. No wonder the profound effects that still reverberate in Christendom from this one man, the Apostle Paul who understood and gave us much to digest on the subject of uniting ourselves with Christ.

Listen to Paul, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”¹³ As we learn to fix our eyes in Loving adoration of our Lord and King, we are changed by God’s

attributes becoming ours, the attributes of His Spirit becomes, us “no longer living,” but His attributes flowing through us, love, joy, peace... and also the gifts that bless other people’s lives.

Revelation 7:14

And I said to him, “Sir, you know.”

So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Revelation 19:7-8

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

How does a Saint do righteous acts, the fine linen, the robes of righteousness? This was bought by the blood of Jesus at the cross, the ability to live in union with Jesus. As we wash our robes, only wishing to be dressed with Jesus, we make ourselves ready by living in Jesus, enabling the righteous acts.

If we are sin conscious rather than union conscious, we will tend to look on things that limit our ability to bring forth the fine linen. Jesus simply stated, “apart from me, you can do nothing.”¹⁴ The Apostle Paul stated of this union, “for me to live is Christ.”¹⁵ In his life, Paul’s eyes became fixed on Jesus,¹⁶ allowing him to finish his race well.

So what accounts for the emphasis of sin in relation to grace rather than union or abiding? Much of it comes by an important revelation that came to Martin Luther 500 years ago that people are not saved by giving the priests money, or any other act, but by grace through faith. It was a Holy concept that Luther brought to the church, relieving people from the powerless tyranny of financial manipulation and a dysfunctional relationship with God at the outset of a believers life.

Five hundred years of this shout that many believe changed not only the formation of the church, but society as well with this one explosive thought that still echoes in our minds. This shout that has pervaded from one generation to another, leaving for many that grace through faith functions perfectly to deal with sin for salvation rather than giving a priest money without a significant emphasis to the overcoming power of the Christ King within.

By this deafening shout, we have come to see grace, or what grace does as, *sins are no longer cared for by a payment to the priest, but by Jesus saving me by the atonement of His Blood at Calvary.* This understanding of grace has been shouting truth for five hundred years in the minds of believers.

An eye doctor from India personally carried an idol for protection all the way from India to my home as his grandmother had given it to him. It is what he had been told by generations of people from his society. My Pappy, my grandma, and all the way back to Luther’s day have held the belief of those nails being driven into those church doors, my sins are dealt with by grace through faith.

These nails being driven into the doors were a holy moment that was desperately needed in that day. That simply was a monumental event that has crystalized a truth in regard to grace that no one would challenge. This is certainly not the only view of grace, nor Luther's full thoughts, but understandably, the one that hangs at the pinnacle of most people's minds. These nails are not the nails that went into hands of Jesus!

Yet, Paul tells us clearly what God spoke to him in regard to grace.

“And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”¹⁷

In this passage grace has nothing to do with sin. Grace in this passage is completely different where strength or redemption is being poured into a vessel to enable and overcome in a difficult season or even an easy season. Surely the Apostle Paul was saved at this juncture and makes no mention of needing to confess sin. It really is the story of learning to abide well in Christ Jesus. Notice Jesus's words to the Apostle, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Does this not take us back to “heirs”, “heirs of Eternal Life?” God's Power being infused into our being?

Notice that the Apostle took it to another level when he wrote, “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” An infirmity is by definition a physical or mental weakness. Boasting in infirmities, so that, **“the power of Christ may rest upon me.”**

Notice the similarity to how Peter responds to the question of, “Brothers, what shall we do?” in regard to the workings of God's Grace at Pentecost after Peter had preached to the crowds who witnessed the event. And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”¹⁸ What was the promise, but that, “and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Later we read about Peter preaching to another crowd after the lame man was healed again telling the steps to take, possibly more refined after time to consider this glorious union than on the day of pentecost. “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.”¹⁹ This “washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,” is not in either of the passages in Acts relating purely to blotting sin, **but to grace being poured out during and after rebirth for the enabling, strengthening, refreshing union with God.**

Without question, our part is to repent of our wayward lives that have missed this great opportunity of fellowship with God. Once you understand that life is all about this union with God, why would anyone want to go back to a dysfunctional way of living. For to many, repent has to do with being sad about our sins, which is not, “pure and lovely and of good report”²⁰ rather

than being elated that we now know the better way of a life, in union with God, “abundant life”! God’s promise in each passage was the Gift of Gifts, a union that is all about refreshings!

There is a distortion between getting someone saved and what they did in the book of Acts where you shall receive the Gift of Gifts that coincides with Jesus’s mantra, the Kingdom is at hand. As has been well said about at hand, “it is just within reach.” This gift was never being saved from hell to a heaven someday, but heaven today, nor a second blessing or a baptism with some evidence years later, but the undeniable result of this repentance, turning to God, is the glorious union with the God King of all, where once again the opportunity of walking with God is blown open for all mankind.

Certainly these “times of refreshing” are not qualified as to what should be experienced. What God did on a first refreshing could be different on subsequent refreshings, but always carrying the bear minimum marks of the Savior with love, joy and peace, anything else should be considered suspect.

These refreshings have been mistakenly termed a single encounter for what some use words for Second Blessing or the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues, but why not more? Possibly some had believed in Jesus but never received because they had not been told of the refreshings as where the Apostle Paul asked, “did you receive?”²¹ as likely many are today. These refreshings Jesus continues to boldly cry out in a book written to the church, “Let everyone gripped with spiritual thirst say, “Come.” And let everyone who craves the gift of living water come and drink it freely. “It is my gift to you! Come.”²²

For those of you who have been taught the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of tongues I sympathize with your predicament. Did the people at Pentecost experience the baptizer and speaking in tongues? Yes! And if this has been your experience, that is wonderful! Peter in both accounts where he gives language for helping people to experience salvation makes no mention of tongues as the outcome, but on the final explanation uses the words, “times of refreshing.” If you are willing to consider that there is a different part of the Body of Christ that purposes a Second Blessing, that should be enough to tell you that these people have experienced a portion of the “refreshings” without your evidence! The doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of tongues came hundreds of years later out of a period in church history where this wonderful gift was being reintroduced to the Body of Christ.

If you are interested, I have included Charles G. Finney’s account of his refreshings that he terms baptism without the evidence of tongues in appendix B. It is well worth taking time to read no matter your convictions on the subject. There are other accounts that could be searched out, Moody being one who so highly valued the “refreshings’ without the evidence of tongues.

If in the event you have experienced the refreshings and the gift of tongues being poured out upon your life, that is your testimony! God’s word tells us to comfort others with the comfort we have received. So go to it, but I would suggest dropping, purposing to the person that you are trying to comfort that this gift of the Spirit is a needed evidence of the “refreshings” in another persons life, but that the two can and have gone hand in hand in many peoples lives. We do not want to hinder those we are trying to help, nor weaken the Body of Christ by offending believers who know they have had an experience being refreshed.

Certainly we get to speak in tongues and Jesus expressed that He expected us to speak in tongues.²³ Without question the Bible records the Apostle Paul expressing that he wished, “all would speak in tongues.”²⁴ If you have grown up in a church where people do not speak in tongues, it’s not likely that you will either. Then you will need to seek God here and as God’s word encourages us to, “eagerly desire spiritual gifts.”²⁵ God’s word records that the person who speaks in a tongue, “Strengthens themselves.”²⁶ And this certainly would be God’s desire as would be any parent that their child would be strong. You may likely need to find people who have received God’s comfort here to be comforted as well. Hopefully you’ll find some who are open to helping receive this gift of the Spirit.

Surely it could be that subsequent encounters dwarfed the original encounter, but why not even seemingly greater encounters with God? Moses certainly had the burning bush experience, but there were others that came after that one as it would only seem right as one grows in union with the King. We should at least mention being on the mountain for forty days with God²⁷ without failing to mention, in the Cleft of the Rock!²⁸ John certainly was at Pentecost and spoke in tongues, but what about his union on Patmos? Please, I encourage you to not settle for a baptism or a second blessing without innumerable subsequent glorious encounters or blessings.

Until this blessing, times of refreshing, where Jesus is bidding us to come and drink, which is all about being refreshed, comes to be the result of our ministry, times of refreshing in union with the King, we will misrepresented the King, in essence creating a false view of salvation which in the end can lead to depression because we have reached either salvation without subsequent refreshings, a second blessing or a baptism that was never reported by Peter, but refreshings, as many as you want, as often as you thirst! The ball is simply in your court, you must learn to choose how well you will fellowship with this Glorious King! There is always a King with every Kingdom and this glorious King is within reach every day! That the power of Christ, His wonderful love may rest upon us.

Possibly, rather than using the word saved, it would be better to say lifed. I’ve been told the old time Methodists used to say, “tell us when you’re saved.” When one is truly saved, walking in Christ, peace, joy, power and all the rest are your portion. “I was lifed again today, drinking deeply by going to Jesus for refreshment no matter the difficulty you may be experiencing.

Please notice the reasons that Jesus gave to his disciples for going to the cross. How did Jesus go away? He went away by a horrific death culminating with His agony on the cross for me and for you. Will you find him talking to his disciples about sin here? What is the foremost reason Jesus gives for going to the cross?

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.”²⁹

I can see Peter raising his sword at this point telling Jesus how pathetically mistaken He was for His plan of leaving. How in the world could it be advantageous? This perfect One has plans of breaking our ability to control with His ability to create glorious scenarios to walk out our lives in joy with Him including tribulations.

Please note that Jesus says that after He is gone that there is an advantage coming for His disciples. What His disciples heard from Jesus that day, they made known where Peter on his second attempt with sharing the good news to people after Pentecost repeats the advantage, “times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” This is the grace bought at Calvary that you are to lay hold of through faith. The gospel I heard as a boy was, “get saved so that you don’t end up in hell.”

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,”³⁰

Don’t be sold short and take anything less for the grace of faith than the blessing of “times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” And this grace you have the supreme luxury of growing in! Peter who was at Pentecost and spoke in tongues, who obviously had the second blessing encouraged, “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”³¹ **If you are to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, you’re going to have to enjoy these “refreshings.”**

In the Strongs concordance we find that half the definition of the Parakletos summoned, called to one's side, esp. called to one's aid relating to sin.

“one who pleads another's cause before a judge, a pleader, counsel for defense, legal assistant, an advocate

one who pleads another's cause with one, an intercessor
of Christ in his exaltation at God's right hand, pleading with God the Father for the pardon of our sins”

The first part of the definition has to do with sin and our Advocate. “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”³² The second part of Strong’s Concordance sheds light on the work of the Holy Spirit, the “advantage.”

“in the widest sense, a helper, succorer, aider, assistant
of the Holy Spirit destined to take the place of Christ with the apostles (after his ascension to the Father), to lead them to a deeper knowledge of the gospel truth, and give them divine strength needed to enable them to undergo trials and persecutions on behalf of the divine kingdom!”

Consider a hymn with the subject of grace.

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt,

Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that is greater than all my sin.

Sin and despair like the sea waves cold,
Threaten the soul with infinite loss;
Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold,
Points to the refuge, the mighty cross.

Dark is the stain that we cannot hide,
What can avail to wash it away?
Look! there is flowing a crimson tide;
Whiter than snow you may be today.

As true and wonderful as this hymn is on the subject of grace, the emphasis of Jesus when He spoke to His disciples of Him going to the cross for the better of the Holy Spirit to come are not realized here within these stanzas that focus on sin rather than “It is to your advantage that I go away.” The advantage for Jesus was not, the dealing with sin that was certainly dealt with at the cross, but the Gift of refreshings!

Much the same is true of the purposing of many well intentioned saints in regard to doing evangelism. The emphasis is upon sin and becoming right with God for the purpose of eternity. This concern though real and reasonable shows the distraction of mankind's thoughts to Jesus's thoughts who's concern was for the believer to experience the advantageous union with God's Spirit.

Why then do we often lean towards the forgiveness of sin as the understanding of grace? Much of this has to do with a shout the church received when Luther became aware that we are saved by grace by faith, the redemption bought at the cross through the blood of Jesus, not the indulgences paid to the priest or any other works on our behalf, simply, perfectly grace bought by the blood of Jesus. With this culture shattering shout that speaks to sin, we tend to associate grace to sin, rather than the work of the cross Jesus spoke of to his disciples. Luther did the right thing in his day, but the effects that still reverberate point us to sin rather than a gloriously divine union with the God of love.

If a relationship is broken, it is in the transgressors court to confess wrong doing. Once the sin or mistake is dealt with, normal healthy relations can once again be restored. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”³³ We are no less the same, “made in God's image” so that when we fail another, it is only appropriate to humble ourselves for the gift of relationship. Once restored, the door is opened to joyful relations again and with God where glorious blessings can begin to flow.

Here is the profound change that was worked through the Cross. For many the Cross deals with sin, forgetting that it is the relational love, that God is longing to restore us too. Yes, sin is dealt with at the Cross, but that is not the hearts cry from God's side. God's looking for relationship! Let us consider the Garden where God originally walked with Adam and Eve. Is not the the restoration of the cross meant to restore us to such a glorious condition where with every step we take, the King steps with us?

Imagine for the past three years you have had the greatest opportunity to live with the most perfect man you have ever met. He's wiser and more understanding, possessing divine insight to every circumstance, yet more loving and kind than anyone you've ever met. He simply is delightful beyond description, while possessing power to deal with every shortcoming. And He tells you that He's leaving for good, but with the words, "it is better"³⁴ for you, someone else is coming! Any of us at this point I'm sure would wish to tell Jesus that He was gravely mistaken, and by our lives, we sometimes still do.

The disciples before the cross fell asleep when asked to pray in Gethsemane, but after the cross, after Pentecost, they gave themselves to prayer. They knew that the Perfect One they had known had said that this next One was for their advantage, the One that Jesus promised to leave them with after He was gone. They remembered those glorious three years of delight, how He was and how He was full of truth and they "gave themselves to prayer"³⁵, they gave themselves to developing this union with this Most Glorious One! These were not boring prayer meetings! What happened to Peter when he went up on the roof top to pray?³⁶

Can you imagine seeing Jesus pray? Can you imagine what that might have looked like? And they asked Jesus, "Teach us to pray". Was it for academic reasons they wanted this or for their own desires, problems of life to be solved or because they saw something special when they saw Jesus pray and wanted to be able to do it too? Can you see that it must have looked delectable, beyond what they had ever seen? It is never written that they asked to be taught anything but this. Can you see Jesus bringing them into a huddle and holding them close while looking each of them in the eye, saying, "Our Father."³⁷

The Chosen People would not say God's name Yahweh. In the middle ages they developed the name Jehovah from different letters of Adonai and Yahweh because they were too afraid to say God's name. And Jesus says to his disciples, "Our Father!" From one extreme of not being willing to say a name to another extreme of using a name for God of such intimacy, Father. And each of us has a perverted view of Father by each of our imperfect fathers, no matter how seemingly good a father life may have dealt you. It's here that we grow in grace.

We see Jesus doing all night prayer sessions, and after Pentecost, after utterly failing to pray in Gethsemane, they gave themselves to prayer. It's because of this Priceless Union that was bought for us at Calvary. "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."³⁸ This glorious union bought at Calvary affords constant sweet fellowship.

"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."³⁹ Here we find what Jesus so victoriously brought to the table! Moses gave us the Law along with all the

requirements, but Jesus allows us something so much more alive than the dealings of sin that Moses brought to the table. Jesus brought us Grace, our ability to abide, dwell with God and Truth for the journey that comes as we listen to this Glorious One in Abiding Grace.

So what did grace look like to the one who wrote, “but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life, the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that your joy may be complete.”⁴⁰ Did the disciple learn to dwell with “Our Father,” fellowshiping, bringing forth great joy? Absolutely, “so that your joy may be complete!”

We find John exclaiming that he wished to fellowship with the recipients of the letter, but not hesitating that this fellowship would include fellowship with the Father and the Son. Who Did John want to be with? “Indeed our fellowship is with the Father and the Son!” Being united with the King forces a Joy bath. If we were really making a connection, getting our fingers in the socket, we can’t miss the delight of the King’s Presence.

When John was given a vacation that no one else would ever want, a ticket to the Island of Patmos he wrote, “I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.”⁴¹

There are numerous things to bring to light in the passage from Revelations. With the emphasis of this book, it would be wrong to bi-pass, “the patient endurance that are in Jesus.” Here we understand the Apostles fortitude in the midst of this tribulation of being torn from his community of family and friends to an unknown land that was a penal colony. The promise well understood from Jesus of the better that started at Pentecost, forever changed John’s world in dealing with difficulty. This constant fellowship with the God of all creation whom John had laid his head, knowing the love beyond description, pursued this relation with abandon whom Peter had recognized having, “The words of life”⁴²

How does one sort between Love and Life? Sorrow quickly follows those who’s life is empty of love and Words of Life are always filled with Love! Above all else, please notice that John expected those who received the letter to understand, “I was in the Spirit”. There was no prayer

meeting, no Bible study, no sermons, but oh, such sweet fellowship! Here John was, no doubt worshipping in abandon before the trumpet blast, already, “in the Spirit.” “In the Spirit,” where there’s River’s of Love Divine no matter the circumstances, refreshings!

We begin to understand the Apostle John’s desire for people to simply come together to fellowship with God. We see the fruit of such a lifestyle where the banished one only mentions tribulation, to be followed by, “kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.” Seeing the outcome of John’s pursuit of being, “in the Spirit,” we begin to understand, “the patient endurance that are in Jesus,” Grace. Grace where we not only are aware of God being dynamically with us, but words of guidance into all truth begin to flow.

Probably some of the world knows what most prayer meetings are like. Maybe you have been at some of these affairs. But I wonder if we learned to abide and fellowship with the Father and the Son, how much more being overwhelmed in delight we would become to possess. Maybe the world would want in on this one and might not ask us to, “teach us to pray.” Would, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you,”⁴³ become true?

Let’s look at one last Apostle’s recorded experience with tribulation.

“The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.”⁴⁴

Worship, intercessions, loving God after being beaten, seemed to activate all of heaven where the outcome was swift and final, even salvations in the midst of such tribulations. We don’t know all the facts and happenings in the jail that morning. Paul and Silas being washed with the Divine Love of Jesus long before the ground shook. It’s this Grace activated by our passion to keep the great command to, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength.”⁴⁵

Was it here or earlier put in place, Paul’s understanding to write, “Rejoice in the Lord always.”⁴⁶ For it is in “speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making a

melody **in your heart to the Lord**,”⁴⁷ that one is filled with God’s Love or filled with Grace or filled with the Spirit! Imagine that the greatest commandment is not a burden or a heavy yoke or optional, but the most wonderful thing that anyone could ever dream of being commanded to do, being consumed in love, joy, peace!

This, Rejoice in the Lord always was stated in another way by the Psalmist. I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. David who was honored as a man after God’s heart gives the secret of his success as the Apostle Paul shares with repeated conviction of a vital way of living.

It is here and only here where, seasons of refreshing, in the storm or outside of the storms enables the fruit of the Spirit. It’s when we learn to put our foot forward to be filled that we receive the strengthening of God’s grace. Fruit only comes to fruition when sap is flowing in the branch.

So let’s have a scriptural basis for allowing ourselves to enjoy times of refreshing. “And You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life;”⁴⁸ “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.”⁴⁹ Jesus actually repeats himself on this, the Ministry of Jesus, “come to Me and Drink” at the end of the book of Revelations.⁵⁰ This is actually what Paul and Silas were up to after being beaten, singing to God.

What does this drinking from Jesus produce? Nothing short of the fruit of being united with God, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.⁵¹ When one wants to learn to be better at anything, finding someone who has greater ability and spending time with them promotes the learners ability. God spoke these attributes when passing before Moses. And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”⁵²

God wishes yet today to not just pass by us, but impart the Sap of Life into each of our lives on a daily basis. One old shepherd wisely said, you need to get drunk every day. At pentecost they heard them speak in other tongues and they were thought to be drunk. Hearing another speak in another language has never elicited the thought of the person being drunk, so something more was going on here. There’s no stronger drink than that which was purchased at Calvary and now flows from the Throne.

This glorious Peace that passes right past our thinkers which at times can be at best stinkers. Our minds can not make sense of it. The logic in our minds of earlier moments, events or circumstances that for any other person should illicit horror, now is changed and flooded with peace. It makes no sense to the carnal mind for this unseen Prince of Peace, King Jesus to flood our minds, spirits and bodies with such glorious love.

There’s a price to pay here, though it is worth it all. “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.”⁵³ It takes times of devotion to gaze deeply into the Kings Face. This is a discipline of loving, to not loose sight of the King regardless of the circumstances. It goes deeply past an

intellectual knowing a Book to a relational delight of intimate divine union built out of trust. We only trust those that we have come to know. Let us learn and grow in our ability to, “Fix our eyes on Jesus.”⁵⁴ To “wait upon” actually carries the idea of, setting an ambush! For a fuller explanation on the discipline to “wait upon” please take time to enjoy this video.⁵⁵

I have never seen Jesus as some have in dreams or visions like John on Patmos. Yet, the eyes of my heart see Him day in and day out. I sense His Presence in my members, sensing the Prince of Peace’s love pervading my being. And with the eyes of my heart, I see Him with me! One of the most delightful commands ever given is to “Fix our eyes on Jesus” and be raptured in His Love.

So what are the things that can hinder us from enjoying God’s marvelous Grace? You may be highly intelligent and attended church, but have never have been exposed to this portion of the gospel. There is an eye surgeon who stayed in my mother’s home from India while doing a fellowship for three months. At the end of his fellowship, he gave me a heavy metal idol his grandmother had given him to protect him on his trip. Intelligent, yes, but yet he carried a hunk of metal from India and kept it with him for three months for protection. Sometimes our religions, Christian Religion are heavy burdens to bear.

We are not unlike people of other religions. The truth that we have received from others will help us while the things that are not true will hinder us. Growing up in a community that omits a subject of the gospel or wrongly teaches on a subject out of ignorance will likewise limit our understanding and promote a false security and hope.

My grand pappy and his grand pappy and my father all held to this belief. What we have been told from childhood about God, such a significant and personal subject, whether true or false becomes deeply ingrained in us creating huge foreboding walls. There is an enemy who delights in false truths, seeds of lies that distort our ability for a profound relationship with God. Did God really say....? If we are willing, only God’s Presence can bring us deeper into all truth that will allow us the freedom that Jesus died for.

The beauty of God’s Presence must begin to encapsulate us so that we begin to Love being with God above all things. This is the ultimate fear of the Lord. This ultimately says, whatever you wish is my immediate command. This is a journey of growing in grace that must be pursued, yet with forgiveness for others, ourselves and for our own failings. Notice three different writers confessions, yet admonitions:

Philippians 3:12

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

James 3:2

For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

1 John 1:8

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1 John 2:3

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.

Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never harm me.

It sounds like a nice little saying, and it is important to learn how to rightly handle the brokenness around us, but words and unloving actions do grieve us and the One who's image we bear. Forgiveness, asking or confessing our failings and pursuing righteousness, in the King's Presence is our only hope.

Love's highest form expresses itself through forgiveness. It says that relationship is of significantly greater value than morbid ill will for those who have harmed us. "Mercy triumphs over judgment!"⁵⁶ We can and should be ready to forgive as God is, but forgiveness is only complete when another confesses their wrong. It's stunning that when confessed, God remembers our sin no more, as far as the east is from the west.

As Jesus did, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."⁵⁷ Jesus with His life paved the way for forgiveness, yet we must pick up this glorious love through brokenness, confessing our faults. Love died, that we might be reunited through forgiveness. Likewise, looking to resolve broken relationships through confessing and forgiveness of those here or gone or the King Himself will bring the healing love of God.

The key is that one must learn to allow God to lead one through all of life's difficulties. Even forgiveness, we can not do without the King leading and guiding. But this restoration of relationship is what our King surpasses in with dazzling ability. Fear not, it really is to be, I no longer live, but Christ who lives in me. Jesus is perfectly fearless in showing the way in restoring relationships in peace.

Those who have not experienced God's forgiving love are least likely to be able to experience forgiveness within a broken relationship with another. "These three remain, faith hope and love, but the greatest of these is love."⁵⁸ The experience of God's love and God's love alone and at times through another person breaks down the walls of pride that have been coursed through sin and shame. It is this very love we are called to keep ourselves swimming in to the greatest depths of God's grace. In Jude it simply says, "keep yourself in God's love."⁵⁹ It's this love juice that was paid for with blood that enables every good and perfect gift, even forgiveness to flow.

There is another form of confession for dealing with this pride that must crumble for relationships to be restored. You see pride is our inability to receive God's love and give it away. "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."⁶⁰ Finding people you sense are righteous and available to pray are part of the arsenal for dealing with sin. Dealing with sin opens the door for our stepping forward in grace.

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness,

not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”⁶¹

If you have ever struggled with sin, you’ll know it is a strong wicked foe. The key to dealing with sin is learning how to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Warrior King who victoriously deals with this wicked foe.

One of the great fruits of God’s Spirit is self control. If you’ve ever tasted a deliciously sweet mango, peach or whatever fruit it might be, nothing compares to, tasting and seeing that the Lord is good, bringing the victory. One of the fruits that comes to fruition by learning to stay inebriated in God’s Love is self control. The taste of the Fruit of God’s Spirit that is self control is one of the sweetest, most delectable fruits ever tasted when one is overcoming a sin pattern. Oh, the delight of tasting this sweet sweet fruit!

Learning to take in the sap is for those who have asked for Jesus to be both King and friend. Jesus is standing at the door waiting to dine. There is only one entree and can be only one entree on the menu, Love that fortitudes and over powers all the other areas of life.

Being Kingdom people who know the love of the King who emanates peace in any given situation, causes us to overcome no matter what is thrown at us. If we are being led by the spirit, peace is our portion. If there is another power that is leading, depending on the situation, anxiety will be our portion. Repenting to the Prince of Peace for our wayward thoughts, however small or big will open up our lives to the Kingdom at hand. With every kingdom there is a king. And the Kingdom of God has a King who emanates peace. Where we are walking in the Kingdom to the degree of closeness of proximity to the King will dictate the level of Peace or union with the King that we experience. If I am face to face, Peace is my portion. If I am on the border of the Kingdom, I should expect to experience unrest.

“For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”⁶²

Let us learn to be extravagant diners with the King. He’s lowly and humble of heart, receiving all who come to Him. The worst of sinners to those who have lived seemingly good lives, but have not taken seriously being united with Him, which is virtual treason are welcome. By simply asking for cleansing, all are welcome to dine on the most excellent of fare, the King, The Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord Jesus, I have not known how deeply you long to impart Your Grace, Your Life into my life and being. Wash me in the torrents of Your Love. Hold me under your arms and breakers till I know nothing, but You. Teach me to drink deeply of Your Divine Love. Help me to learn to come quickly and swim deeply in Your Rivers of Love, moment by moment, saturating myself in You. Let me drink deeply Lord of Your Grace, washing me deeply of all things that unknowingly keep me from knowing You in all Your Brilliance of Your Radiance.

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- ¹ 1 Peter 1:18 -19
- ² Hebrews 10:29
- ³ Revelations 1:17
- ⁴ Ephesians 4:30
- ⁵ 1Thessalonians 5:19
- ⁶ Luke 22:54
- ⁷ 1 John 1:5 - 2:2
- ⁸ Deuteronomy 6:5
- ⁹ 1 John 2:6
- ¹⁰ Ephesians 4:13
- ¹¹ Philippians 3:13 -14
- ¹² 1 John 1:9
- ¹³ 2 Corinthians 3:18
- ¹⁴ John 15:5
- ¹⁵ Philippians 1:21
- ¹⁶ Hebrews 12:2
- ¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 12:9
- ¹⁸ Acts 2:37-39
- ¹⁹ Acts 3:19
- ²⁰ Philippians 4:8
- ²¹ Acts 19:2
- ²² Revelation 22:17b Passion Translation
- ²³ Mark 16:17
- ²⁴ 1 Corinthians 14:5
- ²⁵ 1 Corinthians 14:1

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- ²⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:4
- ²⁷ Exodus 34:28
- ²⁸ Exodus 33:17-23
- ²⁹ John 16:7
- ³⁰ Ephesians 2:4-8
- ³¹ 2 Peter 3:18
- ³² 1 John 2:1
- ³³ 1 John 1:9
- ³⁴ John 16:7
- ³⁵ Acts 6:4
- ³⁶ Acts 10:9
- ³⁷ Matthew 6:9
- ³⁸ 1 Thessalonians 5:16 -18
- ³⁹ John 1:17
- ⁴⁰ 1 John 1:1
- ⁴¹ Revelations 1:9 -16
- ⁴² John 6:68
- ⁴³ John 15:7
- ⁴⁴ Acts 16:22-34
- ⁴⁵ Deuteronomy 6:5
- ⁴⁶ Philippians 4:4
- ⁴⁷ Ephesians 5:19
- ⁴⁸ Psalms 36:8b-9a
- ⁴⁹ John 7:37
- ⁵⁰ Revelation 22:17
- ⁵¹ Galatians 5:22-23
- ⁵² Exodus 34:6-7a

⁵³ Isaiah 40:31

⁵⁴ Hebrews 12:2

⁵⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5evaei51r4&feature=youtu.be>

⁵⁶ James 2:13

⁵⁷ John 15:13

⁵⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:13

⁵⁹ Jude 21

⁶⁰ James 5:16

⁶¹ Romans 13:12-14

⁶² John 6:55-58

*“These things I have spoken to you,
that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.*

John 15:11

3

Warfare

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.
2 Corinthians 10:4-6

The enemy has come to “kill, steal and destroy.”¹ If we are taking regular times to fellowship in the King’s Presence, then when anxiety, panic, or any shade of depression presses in, this should be easily distinguished from the Prince of Peace, King Jesus. Not only is Jesus found as the Prince of Peace, but as, “a man of war.”

“The Lord is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation;
He is my God, and I will praise Him;
My father's God, and I will exalt Him.
The Lord is a man of war;
The Lord is His name.”²

What is it when we begin to put on Christ Jesus? We begin to put on God’s nature. In Galatians we find, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”³ We must begin to see this putting on of Christ. What does Christ mean? Christ = anointed. Enabled, empowered to perform in a capacity of office or service. We know Jesus was enabled empowered as we read the accounts of His life. What happens when we begin to put on Christ, but those same dimensions belonging only to God by union with God’s Spirit begin to percolate into our being. Peace, love joy, but also the same abilities and nature of God.

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
My soul shall be joyful in my God;
For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments,
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”⁴

One aspect of this putting on Christ is connected to the Warrior King. Later in John’s life he sees Jesus revealed as a warrior.

“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”⁵

Learning to fight, not just putting on the armor, the Lord Jesus Christ, our robes of righteousness, but taking up the sword of God’s Spirit is our victory. These opinions, thoughts, philosophies, unseen realities or even at times plain ignorance that hinder us from knowing God must be rendered powerless through Christ with the Sword of the Spirit.

When the battle rages putting on the armor is a good starting point, but picking up the sword is where the battle is won. Taking that sword, sticking the one who comes to devour and declaring truth, breaks the power of the enemy. Jesus gave us this example of declaring truth in light of the lies of the enemy and telling evil to be gone.⁶

This Sword is not a defensive weapon, but an offensive weapon. When the fight is on and fear, panic, dismay surround you, picking up the sword will drive these away. Picking up the sword and swinging with the Word of God. I like to start with a submitting to the Lord Jesus Christ with scripture.

“Therefore submit 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. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”⁷

This is a good place to start otherwise, holding the sword will be of little effect. You see when our hearts have various desires on the altar other than desires for God, our minds become double minded. or unstable. What we hold in our hands is connected to our hearts. It’s a turning away from worldly pleasure to a place where we are lifted by God’s love out of our mess. Our laughter and joy can never compare to the lifting up that only the King can do. We were created for one thing.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”⁸

Jesus, I submit to your love, your wisdom, your guidance, your all powerful Kingship. I submit to your renewing of my mind to your thoughts and commands. I submit my mind to your all powerful, loving peace. I submit to the path that you are leading me on. I submit to the light of your love that you have for me, as manna today.

This is a process where we are developing a love for God. A servant submits to a master out of reverential response based upon wisdom, this one is greater, wiser, more powerful than I. While a love slave or a friend submits out of affection. I’d rather enjoy union with the King than any fanciful desire. It’s a process that Paul understood when he prayed for the Ephesians to, “know the heights and depths of God’s love.”⁹

Do not be ashamed, it does not happen in a day. The admonition to “grow in grace”¹⁰ by logic establishes this truth. If we must grow here, we obviously are incomplete on the fullness that we need. Peter also asks us to “add to our faith” pointing to God’s understanding of the brokenness of our frame and the gradual process of restoration, but add, we must! Repent, turn to God we must with the understanding that God already knows our fallen frame which God wishes to restore to fullness.

Once out of submission the sword can be taken into our hands to wield against the lies filtering around us. Darkness flee, lies flee, evil flee by the grace of Jesus.

“No weapon formed against you shall prosper,
And every tongue which rises against you in judgment
You shall condemn.
This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord,
And their righteousness is from Me,”
Says the Lord.”¹¹

I’ll take the liberty to personalize the scriptures at times saying wether alone or with another, No weapon formed against me/us shall prosper, And every tongue or lie which rises against me/us in judgment I /we shall condemn. This is our heritage as servants of the Lord,
And my/ our righteousness is from the Great Shepherd who carries the big stick.

Another favorite for wielding the sword is:

2 Timothy 1:7

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Jesus, you haven’t given me a little spirit of fear or anxiety, but you’ve given Your Spirit of Power and of Love and a Sound mind. Jesus You’re Spirit carries so much Peace that in your Presence, my mind becomes peaceful, through you’re grace, I receive the Peace that overwhelms my thinker to think clearly. Thank you for your peace that my understanding can’t fathom.

Picking up the sword of God’s Spirit and declaring these truths while rebuking or condemning the devourer can pierce the darkness quickly. I’ll at times hold an invisible sword in my hand and flail the enemy as I declare the Word of God. Good manners and reading skills do not count for much here. This is a war that must be won. Here we are looking for God’s Presence of peace to again rapture our lives. Repeating a phrase that seems to cut deeper is good here. If anything comes to mind that seems alive with life, give it a go. Sometimes a song or a phrase will come that breaks the darkness. If you sense the Lord speaking something into your life, declare it.

Timothy needed a letter with this admonition of the distinct difference and preeminence of God’s Spirit versus the unseen foul spirits that come to kill, steal and destroy. Timothy was the one who had the tender stomach no doubt from the torture of life he experienced during his day. Who needed this reminder from the war horse who had learned the secret of contentment and was unafraid of the next trial he would certainly go through, even going to Rome where he knew the outcome of the things that he would suffer.

A Spirit of Power, Who spoke and said, “Let there be light”¹² and “raised Christ Jesus from the dead”¹³ where the Apostle Paul in another letter tells the recipients to, “be strong in the Lord and the power of his might.”¹⁴ Make no mistake, you get your fingers in this socket and you won’t be tossed about anymore. Love, the Bible simply says, “God is Love”¹⁵ how desperately we need to keep our fingers in this socket. And a sound mind, where we get to listen to “the wisdom from above”¹⁶ “the mind of Christ.”¹⁷ We know were getting our fingers in the socket when peace begins to pervades our minds. Jesus longs for this abiding joy with you!

For some, leaving pure scripture will be uncomfortable, but God is still speaking and gives effective words. After all, God’s desire is relationship, not robotic contractions. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God, whether the written or the spoken Word. How did Peter find permission to go to the gentiles? God spoke to him and also Cornelius!¹⁸

In the written word we read, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”¹⁹ Word in this passage is translated from the word *rhema* in greek not the greek word *logos* for a written word. “That which is or has been uttered by the living voice, thing spoken, word.”²⁰ Now we begin to see why the Apostle Paul put such a great emphasis on the gift of prophecy, or hearing and speaking out what God is saying in the first verse after the Love Chapter. “Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.”²¹ When we begin to speak out truth, lies or darkness is displaced. No wonder the enemy wishes to hold back this gift from the church.

After you hear God for the first time and find the effectiveness of listening and declaring, you will forever be ruined for the Spoken Word. God’s directive in the gifts emphasizes, “Especially that you might prophesy.” Prophecy at it’s core is simply declaring what God has spoken. This emphasizes the relationship with God above what can become robotic in nature.

If you are having trouble breaking through, find another believer to stand with you that you sense the Lord is leading you too. Linking arms with another believer with shields in both arms so that the other arms are free to swing the sword of the Spirit. There’s a greater power as we stand with one another. “How could one chase a thousand, And two put ten thousand to flight, Unless their Rock had sold them, And the Lord had surrendered them?”²²

How about declaring the “fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace or the effects of abiding well with the Spirit upon my life is love, joy, peace. Or, there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear. “God is love”, God is perfect love and God loves me. When the path we’re on turns dark and looses the Sonlight, we must fight to reconnect to God’s love. It’s a good fight, a fight for freedom in God’s wondrous love.

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- ¹ John 10:10
- ² Exodus 15:2-3
- ³ Galatians 3:27
- ⁴ Isaiah 61:10
- ⁵ Revelation 19:11-16
- ⁶ Matthew 4: 1-11
- ⁷ James 4:7-10
- ⁸ Deuteronomy 6:5
- ⁹ Ephesians 3:16-19
- ¹⁰ 2 Peter 3:18
- ¹¹ Isaiah 54:17
- ¹² Genesis 1:3
- ¹³ Romans 8:11
- ¹⁴ Ephesians 6:10
- ¹⁵ 1 John 4:8
- ¹⁶ James 3:17
- ¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:16
- ¹⁸ Acts 10:1-48
- ¹⁹ Mathew 4:4
- ²⁰ Strong's Dictionary
- ²¹ 1 Corinthians 14:1
- ²² Deuteronomy 32:30

*The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.*

Psalms 23

4

Light

but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 3:18

*For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God,
which is in you through the laying on of my hands,*

for *God gave us a spirit not of fear
but of power and love and self-control.*

2 Timothy 1:6-7

emphasis added

Is not sin, missing the mark of God's desire for the fruit of the Spirit being evident in our lives each and every day? For each one, moment by moment, kept in His Love? If we have never disciplined ourselves or have never been told of the possibility that is on our end to, "Keep yourself in the love of God,"¹ than this missing the mark of love, the grace bought at Calvary will cause great difficulty.

Years ago I had the good fortune to live five years in the Northeast corner of Minnesota using a wood stove in a cabin at a camp as a source of heat during the winter. This is still a normal way of life for some people, but for me growing up in the suburbs of Chicago, it was an unheard of activity. With ten, twenty, thirty below temperatures not being uncommon for weeks at a time, knowing how to build a fire was more than an art, it was of utmost importance.

The old stoves at the camp would be filled with a layer of birch bark, some kindling and hopefully some dried wood from the summer. In the early spring a semi load of forty cords of birch was delivered each year cut and split from piles of logs left near each building. Wood from the previous season was extremely precious because of the cost to have it prepared a season ahead and the virtual impossibility of wood making it through the winter.

Leaving the door slightly ajar caused the air to blow into the stove encouraging the wood to ignite. If the fire went out, the same method would be used, especially with the door being left slightly open, blowing on the coals to bring blazing flames.

Heat was a gift during a cold snap that came with a premium cost in tending the fires. How the Apostle came to use the analogy was undoubtedly due to experience. Certainly a common experience for those of that generation though not for this one. So if you have not had the experience of fanning or forcing a fire into existence, you'll need to use your imagination to begin to consider this concept that Paul used to express the passionate expression of love to be poured out on God, "fan into flame."

Your wet and tired with perspiration at the end of a day. Your cabin's temperature is ten below. Your hands are already cold as you take off your chopper mittens to make the fire. As you finish setting the fire you can feel the cold beginning to burn into your hands. You fumble to pull out a match and strike it against the metal of the stove. The heat from the match is barely perceptible as you wait for the birch bark to ignite. Finally the birch bark ignites and you open the damper on the flue while finding that perfect distance for the door that forces the air into the fire creating a small inferno. Your hands are so cold now that you are left with one thought to place them on your lower abdomen to soak up some remaining warmth from your core as you wait for the stove to warm.

Five, ten minutes later you begin to feel some warmth from the stove. You open the door now that the birch bark and kindling have turned to embers and ash, leaving room for larger pieces of wood. You push in as much wood as you can on top of the blazing fire starting with smaller pieces to larger ones on top and close the door, making sure that the draft is fully open.

Minutes later the fire is ablaze. The damper now is slightly closed, keeping the heat from rising up the flue to hold as much of the heat in the cabin. The draft is also lightly shut, but not enough to keep the flames from racing. Time is taken now to stand by stove to absorb some of the radiant heat. And Paul told Timothy, "Fan into Flame the Gift of God."

A short distance from the stove the room is still frozen. Hours later the small cabin would become warm by constantly monitoring the fire, adding wood and adjusting the damper and draft for optimal heat production.

Later before bed, my grandfather who heated his farmhouse with wood called the procedure, banking the wood. The stove would be gorged with larger pieces of wood and the damper and draft would be closed a bit tighter to keep the interest as long as possible. Depending on the temperatures, their might be deposits put into the bank one or more times throughout the night.

Thank God for modern heating systems that are virtually run year round without any thought on our part. But for that drafty little cabin lacking any semblance of insulation, much thought and energy was given to the fire. The body was the thermostat that wisely called the shots, more wood, adjust the draft, fan the flames!

We each must, like the thermostat perceive whether the fire is out or not. In the modern home when the heat goes out we call the heating repair man. The rest of the time, you do not have to think about it. The modern thermostat combined with a heating system does a great job providing a perfectly comfortable atmosphere to live in.

Our bodies likewise act as the thermostat. When it begins to feel anxiety, fear, boredom we must discipline ourselves to put the fan into gear. We are the thermostat that must discipline our hearts to fan the flame of love to a raging fire. Take heart, if there's just a few coals left, with a little persistence, the fire can be raging again.

For some who have not experienced God's Love, the Bible simply says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God

and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”² How does God bear witness, but with the fruit of His Spirit which is love, joy, peace (He is the Prince of Peace) and when God’s love, joy, peace are permeating our being, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control becomes natural expressions.

For those who’s fire has completely been lost and the situation is severe, the potential need for medical care increases dramatically. But if we can correctly learn the discipline to monitor the situation, we can avoid this pitfall. For those who need medication, the promise is still available, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” With every kingdom there is a king and when we find this King beyond mere religion, love joy peace are natural beyond any set of circumstances.

If you are one who is already receiving medical help, you’ll need to continue working together with your doctor especially if you have started medication. Let your doctor work with you to come off your medications when you have developed a discipline, become a disciple in this area and your doctor can acknowledge your progress.

Have you opened your heart yet to know this God of perfect love? Have you asked for the divine romance of a lifetime? If you haven’t, you really should love yourself with this greatest blessing and than give yourself to being raptured in God’s Love. If you would like, the appendix is still in the back of the book.

Some seasons of life the fire can be out and one does not seem to know it. But when the seasons shift from summer to sudden winter, you’ll know. When everything begins to fall apart and our little indulgences no longer can sustain us, than one begins to learn to fan the flame even when it seems warm out side. The fire must be kept burning hot whether living in plenty or in want. The pleasure of loving God becomes the true lifeline.

It was the Apostle Paul who told Timothy in the culture they lived in during that day. Think about a culture that would hang people on crosses. Probably a significantly more fierce culture than the one that most people are living in today. It’s hard to go back and imagine from our world, but a little study of history will give you a different picture. What personal credentials did the Apostle have that he had experienced in his own life?

“Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—”³

There are some credentials to speak with authority about how to deal with fear that leads to torment and depression. We know, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.”⁴ We are the ones who must tend the fire of His love and “love Him.”

“The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out.”⁵

Throwing the wood on the altar of worship from our hearts when all is well and when all has gone haywire. It’s really not optional not to keep the fire going, but lay more wood in the morning, throughout the day and when we wake throughout the night. Laying those burnt offering that are costly when life is not as we might wish through which we learn to be content by drinking deeply of the refreshings of His Love.

“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”⁶

Likewise our bodies tell us when the fire has gone out. No love, no joy, no peace, anxiety and fear, your fire is out, you need to be strengthened with Christ’s love. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.” He’d learned to bank the stove and tend the fire in summer and winter. He didn’t need trivial things to create his sense of well being.

The writer of the eighty fourth psalm expressed, “My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” He was expressing something is wrong, my flesh knows, my fires out. David knew on one of his toughest days how to, “strengthen himself in the Lord.”⁷ When everything that he owned was taken and his friends were talking of killing him, David in a lesser dispensation, strengthened himself in the Lord. He then went on to overcome the situation and become king by the King’s command.

Love is the most strengthening force known to mankind. A child falls down and begins to cry. It looks and runs over to it’s mother or father. The little child is loved and held in it’s parents arms while the sobbing and tears begin to wane. A smile returns and the little one is released to run and play again. We are much the same and must quickly learn to be comforted by our unseen Father and King.

Jesus’s words speak to this. “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”⁸ If Jesus gives the command to be of good cheer in tribulation, it must be entirely possible. God would not give a command that is not possible to do. It’s on our end, “to keep the fire burning.”

In the world it’s possible to live for long stretches without God’s fire. We can build strange fires using things that can never bring consistent contentment. Modern conveniences, various chemicals, ministry, indulging the mind, entertainment of various kinds, etc. can keep us insulated from our true need of God’s love. Blaise Pascal wrote of this ability:

“What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace?

This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself”⁹

I spent years building fires in the bitter cold of Northern Minnesota winters. I started building fires when I was a child. Virtually anyone can build a fire. But when it's been raining out for days and the wood is wet, can you get the fire going? How big a fire can you build? How hot can you get it when it's been tribulations for months and years?

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers. For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”¹⁰

In essence, it was expected that your soul would prosper. After all, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. What soul does not prosper here with these divine influences of God's Spirit? That in essence is what relates the “for” of this verse to “walking in the truth.” In other words, abiding in Christ is a prospering soul, love, joy, peace, which is the outcome of “walking in the truth.” Walking in the truth means, you've learned how to sufficiently abide where Peter cries out, “joy unspeakable and full of glory.”¹¹ This ability to fan the flames of God's Love in your being must become a preoccupation to enjoy some amount of this true delight.

There is this Divine Restaurant inside you serving the most scrumptious fare. You can choose to eat there if you want. Of course the fast food restaurants are always open. This Divine Chef and King stands waiting at the door wondering what it will be tonight. Will there be dining delights never known before ravaging the heart and soul?

The ESV did leave out “prosper” for “may go well with you” which is a little weak according to the Strong's. Strong's gives these ideas for the passage: “to grant a prosperous and expeditious journey, to lead by a direct and easy way, to grant a successful issue, to cause to prosper, to prosper, be successful.” If we know how to keep our soul prospering independent of worldly things, connected to Jesus, it would seem, every other area is granted the possibility to begin to prosper. Without this, we should not begin to wonder when, “that you may prosper in all things and be in health” does not become a reality.

If the woman with the issue of blood, “came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped.”¹² How close can we come to this King of Love by fanning or pouring out our hearts of adoration and not expect such virtue to flow into our being?

Defining prosperity is really what is at stake. A pink Cadillac may well spell prosperity for one, while a pair of shoes may be the Lord's kiss of prosperity. After all, Jesus is

abundant life. Seek ye first the Kingdom. There's always a King in a Kingdom. If you find the King, you are there. And all these other things, which the King James translates in another place as "dung," will be added unto you. "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit"¹³.... if we really find Him. When we are not healthy, we are missing some dimensions of peace and joy aren't we?

"Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me."¹⁴ What is it to really find Him? That we must each find for ourselves. But let's take a look at that word "live," so we can begin to know what we need to be looking for when fanning the flame. Strong's gives a long list of thoughts for the greek word zoe in this verse for the word live.

- I. to live, breathe, be among the living (not lifeless, not dead)
- II. to enjoy real life
- III. A. to have true life and worthy of the name
- IV. B. active, blessed, endless in the kingdom of God
- V. to live i.e. pass life, in the manner of the living and acting
- VI. A. of mortals or character
- VII. living water, having vital power in itself and exerting the same upon the soul
- VIII. metaph. to be in full vigour
- IX. A. to be fresh, strong, efficient,
- X. B. as adj. active, powerful, efficacious

The one who spent a day in the night in the deep and endured countless traumatic events, also wrote most of the New Testament, talked about "these light and momentary afflictions,"¹⁵ understood and encouraged fanning the flame! May each of us grow in the ability to ignite our love to our Wonderful Savior's Fire of Love. In loving, the door is opened for the opportunity for knowing Him.

You see, the "gift of God" is God. We have the choice to choose to engage Him. When we finally choose to fan the flame, we're pouring out our love upon him. Make no mistake, when you are building a fire, you are actively engaged. You are carefully choosing what to put on the fire. All your attention is there trying to perceive the effects of your efforts. If things aren't going well, a change in tactics is taken to artfully force the issue. All the while judging if there's a response.

You see if your pouring out your love to a person, you are looking for a response. You're not just pouring out your words for yourself, that's religion at it's worst. You're looking to engage this person to get a response. If I say I love you at the appropriate time in the appropriate way, the appropriate response is, I love you too! We are made in His image, made to give and receive love between God and ourselves and one another.

How well have you learned to love others? How well have you learned to love God or find out what pleases Him? You see, Christ in us will always let you know if what your doing is pleasing to Him. When you interact with others, by gestures, a smile or words we know if we are pleasing another. If we begin to pay attention to the unseen one within us, we will find the things that please Him.

Paul prayed for the believer's in Ephesus as he likely prayed for all.

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”¹⁶

God inspired Paul that he wanted people rooted and grounded in love! This isn't just a casual encounter, but full contact love. Paul was the one who would take a licking in one town, and off he'd go to the next. He was ruined by love and he could not stop. Nothing else mattered. That word "know" in the greek is an intimate knowing.

As we fan that Flame we watch for it to billow as we pour out our love. You must keep the eyes of your heart open to sense God's Presence. If you were building a fire that your life depended upon, you would watch to make sure it was taking off and actually producing heat. With practice one can become efficient at building natural fires or igniting the Fire within.

With each word or utterance pay attention to what you sense in your members. With practice you'll begin to discern what pleases God's heart. You'll begin to sense His love billowing inside of you. When you find a phrase that works, often times you can repeat it, intensifying your love into the words to further ignite the Flame. Raw desire works better here than eloquence and sophistication.

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.”¹⁷*

You see every child who's had healthy parents knows that their parents love them. God's Spirit comes and says, “I love you!” You can't miss it if your watching the Fire. “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God”¹⁸ When God bears witness, you'll know. The question is, how big a fire do you want? How big a fire can you build? How much love, peace and joy do you want? What are you willing to give up, to seek God first? What are you not willing to give up? Again it is in this union that self control and all other blessings emanate.

“Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.”¹⁹ What does greatly distressed look like? Have you experienced it? And how did David strengthen himself in the Lord?

David the psalmist, David the worshipper, “even more undignified than this!”²⁰ If you really want something, dignity really doesn't matter. How did he get the blueprint to put worshippers around the Ark where God's Presence dwelt when previously it had been hidden behind a veil without worshippers. Listen to the Psalm David wrote for that day.

“On that day David first delivered this psalm into the hand of Asaph and his brethren, to thank the Lord:

Oh, give thanks to the Lord!

Call upon His name;

Make known His deeds among the peoples!

Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him;

Talk of all His wondrous works!

Glory in His holy name;

Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the Lord!

Seek the Lord and His strength;

Seek His face evermore!

Remember His marvelous works which He has done,

His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth,

O seed of Israel His servant,

You children of Jacob, His chosen ones!

He is the Lord our God;

His judgments are in all the earth.

Remember His covenant forever,

The word which He commanded, for a thousand generations,

The covenant which He made with Abraham,

And His oath to Isaac,

And confirmed it to Jacob for a statute,

To Israel for an everlasting covenant,

Saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan

As the allotment of your inheritance,”

When you were few in number,

Indeed very few, and strangers in it.

When they went from one nation to another,

And from one kingdom to another people,

He permitted no man to do them wrong;

Yes, He rebuked kings for their sakes,

Saying, “Do not touch My anointed ones,

And do My prophets no harm.”

Sing to the Lord, all the earth;

Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.

Declare His glory among the nations,

His wonders among all peoples.

For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised;

He is also to be feared above all gods.

For all the gods of the peoples are idols,

But the Lord made the heavens.

Honor and majesty are before Him;

Strength and gladness are in His place.

Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples,

Give to the Lord glory and strength.

Give to the Lord the glory due His name;

Bring an offering, and come before Him.
 Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!
 Tremble before Him, all the earth.
 The world also is firmly established,
 It shall not be moved.
 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
 And let them say among the nations, "The Lord reigns."
 Let the sea roar, and all its fullness;
 Let the field rejoice, and all that is in it.
 Then the trees of the woods shall rejoice before the Lord,
 For He is coming to judge the earth.
 Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good!
 For His mercy endures forever.
 And say, "Save us, O God of our salvation;
 Gather us together, and deliver us from the Gentiles,
 To give thanks to Your holy name,
 To triumph in Your praise."
 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel
 From everlasting to everlasting! And all the people said, "Amen!" and praised the Lord."²¹

David the worshipper who gave the priests words to worship with who God says,
 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.'²² When
 we love someone, we want to please them. The more we are in love with someone, the more we
 wish to please them. It's the fruit of God's Spirit, where the Bible declares that, "God is Love",
 where one finds fortitude and strength that leads to self control. Do you understand, "David
 strengthened himself."

There's another that Scripture tells us, started this tradition of strengthening oneself. It is Father
 Abraham. "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in
 faith, giving glory to God."²³ When everything in the natural looked pathetically impossible,
 Abraham strengthened himself through worship. These two great men of faith share their
 understanding of overcoming great odds, worship, fanning, loving God and no doubt above all
 things, delighting themselves in God.

You see, once the fire is burning well within, the key is to put another log on while the fire is still
 burning brightly. The Apostle Paul put it like this, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say,
 rejoice!"²⁴ The Apostle is talking about "Fanning the Flame" isn't he? "Abraham grew Strong by
 giving glory to God" and David wrote, "His praise will always be on my lips."²⁵ You can do it too!

A Pastor who I've been dialoging with on this subject sent a link²⁶ that was helpful in regard to
 putting another log on the fire. Out of it came the suggestion to put a timer on your phone to go
 off every ten minutes as a reminder to fan into flame God's Love. At that interval it only takes a
 short period of time to sense God's Love beginning to billow in your being. Then, simply go back
 to what you were doing.

Seconds is one app that can be used as a ten minute reminder. Simply using the +, create a Round Timer with a hundred Cycles. Put in ten minutes in for the length of the rounds and an alert, possibly a single beep and you are ready to start fanning with the help of a timer.

Lord, pour your love afresh inside my heart today. Teach me to worship and love you beyond what I've ever known. Teach me to build myself up in Your Holy Love, so that I might finish well the desires you've intended for me to walk in with you. Thank You for Your kindness and gracious mercy, Amen.

¹ Jude 21

² Romans 8:16-17

³ 2 Corinthians 11:23-27

⁴ 1 John 4:18-19

⁵ Leviticus 6:12-13

⁶ Philippians 4:11-13

⁷ 1 Samuel 30:6

⁸ John 16:33

⁹ <http://www.doxologists.org/blaise-pascal/>

¹⁰ 3 John 1:2-4

¹¹ 1 Peter 1:8 KJV

¹² Luke 8:44

¹³ Roman's 14:17

¹⁴ John 6:57

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:17

¹⁶ Ephesians 3:14-19

¹⁷ Matthew 5:6

¹⁸ Romans 8:16

¹⁹ 1 Samuel 30:6

²⁰ Samuel 6:22

²¹ 1 Chronicles 16:7-36

²² Acts 13:22

²³ Romans 4:20b

²⁴ Philippians 4:4

²⁵ Psalms 34:1

²⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v39Mi_AmqvA&feature=youtu.be

*Bless the Lord, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
Who satisfies your mouth with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
The Lord executes righteousness
And justice for all who are oppressed.*

Psalms 103:1-6

5

Love

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

John 8:31-32

Sometimes, we are willing to enjoy the failings of other Christians to support dysfunctions within our own lives. Certainly countless Christians and Christian leaders have succumbed to depression. If we choose to look to people's failings as examples of how to walk in Christ, we are playing with strange fire. The apostle Paul wrote, "follow me as I follow Christ."¹ Or we could take the inverse, If I am not following Christ, do not follow me. If you see me driving into the ditch, avoid following my example at all costs! Jesus never succumbed to despair. Jesus had, "joy above His brothers."²

Make no mistake about it, times can be tough. "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us."³ Please notice the reason given for the, "sentence of death in ourselves." The apostle deliberately points to the reason, ***"that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,"***

We absolutely love and affirm people who have or are struggling. We do not in any way discount the good things these people have done in Christ. Nor do we discount the good things or the good plans which God yet has for each life. We should not deny nor inappropriately affirm the disease or our own failings. Jesus came specifically for that, to destroy disease. I have been told countless times that Jesus died for my sins which is true. But even more true is the fact that Jesus gave His disciples for going to the cross, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."⁴

The King James version was used here because it expresses the portion of truth in the word “Comforter” which will help for the direction of this writing. I believe Jesus died so that His children would be taken from torment to comfort. God being so loving knew that the sin issue needed to be dealt with to take care of God’s ultimate concern, the discomfort of His children. Convict of sin, sure, “hey, you’re missing the boat, I have such love for you that will bring you into joy!”

Below a portion of Strongs Concordance for the Greek word *paraklētos* gives this understanding. The last portion, “on behalf of the divine kingdom” in my view is correct, yet needs expanding. To simply be redeemed by the blood and a child of God opens the door to the divine kingdom and comforting. Here, all our welcome to, “drink of the river of delights,”⁵ God’s divine love, in the midst of tribulations. Learning to drink and be delighted is paramount to being a fruitful disciple.

Strongs

in the widest sense, a helper, succourer, aider, assistant

1 of the Holy Spirit destined to take the place of Christ with the apostles (after his ascension to the Father), to lead them to a deeper knowledge of the gospel truth, and give them divine strength needed to enable them to undergo trials and persecutions on behalf of the divine kingdom⁶

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”⁷

Love is the life blood of the body. It is the end result of the plurality of the multiple offices working together to equip the church, “till..... we all come to the unity of the faith..... to measure and stature of the fullness of Christ.” We must in humility realize these things have not yet happened. We tend to believe our theology or are groups theology or are relationship with God has been perfected. Do you sense the full stature of Christ? What would that look like to you? Do you sense the unity of the faith among believers building each other up in love?

The end result being, “the body edifying of itself in love.” The out workings of the greatest commandment to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” If we still need the “till,” then there’s a healing taking place

within the body and ourselves that we might yet walk upright as God intended. In essence, the till means, God is rewriting the DNA of the church to love, to change the fabric of society.

We tend to come to Christ assuming that those who teach us know everything or maybe even this book will finish it off. Nothing could be further from the truth as this passage plainly points out. The “till” says so. We mistakenly assume what love we have experienced is the high level mark. We must steadily look to grow in grace or for the next person to come along to equip us. Leaders looking together in humility to the King as the newest believer looks to them and Jesus to be further equipped. Only here can love come to it’s fullness within the body. But there is one prerequisite, learning to love God well which enables us to truly love our neighbor well.

For some groups within the body of Christ the idea that once one is Baptized with the Spirit, some holding that you will speak in tongues, while for others not speaking in tongues that the finish line is reached. Yet Peter who had walked with Jesus, had the King blow on him and say, receive the Spirit, denied Him three times and later at the very least at pentecost spoke in tongues, wrote, “grow in grace.”⁸

How is it possible that we yet have such a need to grow in grace? Jesus gave the command to, “go into all the world and make disciples teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. Jesus commanded them to heal the sick. Can you imagine what they must have felt like when Jesus gave them the command? Probably something similar to what you’re feeling right now. Only in doctor Luke’s gospel are we told that Jesus gave the command to the seventy too. It must have made such an impression on Luke that he told a bunch of fisherman, a tax collector and who knows what else to heal the sick.

“Teaching them to obey”⁹ could easily be a chapter in itself where the test of love is looking to please the God of love.

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”¹⁰

One of the keys to loving God well is the gateway of obedience or yielding to the desires of God. If we love someone, we look for ways to please them. We look to find their desires realized in anyway that we are capable in God’s grace to commit too.

When we begin to see the false finish line with the true finish line of walking like our Elder Brother, King Jesus, pursuing growing in grace takes on new meaning. We start to see the importance of saturating our spirits with God’s Spirit of Love so that like Paul we can begin to say truthfully, “it’s no longer I who live, but Christ Jesus who lives in me.”¹¹

How much room have we made for Jesus to live in us? We'll know the next time we lay hands on the sick. We'll know the next time we are mistreated.

It's time for the world to see Jesus. No doubt, if the gifts aren't functioning, the fruit is malnourished too. If we haven't seen the finish line for loving Jesus with all our heart, soul and strength, how can Jesus's Love be perfected in us so that we can begin to love our neighbor? When we love someone, we want to often times give them a gift. If our neighbor is sick, love will be proved by a gift. If these gifts are not given, the perpetuation of fear and torment are allowed to corrupt the grace bought at Calvary.

It is this grace bought at Calvary with blood of Jesus that allows us to become gloriously infected with the Divine Love of God that allows us to step forward and finish our race triumphantly. There was never such a gift given as our ability to drink deeply of this Love and be changed from one glory to another to reflect the King. There are no shortcuts here, no classes to take, only disciplining ourselves to take time to be fully immersed in the King's Love.

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:1

² Psalms 45:7

³ 2 Corinthians 1:8-10

⁴ John 16:7

⁵ Psalms 36:8

⁶ Strong's Concordance

⁷ Ephesians 4:11-16

⁸ 2 Peter 3:18

⁹ Matthew 28:20

¹⁰ John 14:15-18

¹¹ Galations 2:20

*Set me as a seal upon your heart,
As a seal upon your arm;
For love is as strong as death,
Jealousy as cruel as the grave;
Its flames are flames of fire,
A most vehement flame.
Many waters cannot quench love,
Nor can the floods drown it.
If a man would give for love
All the wealth of his house,
It would be utterly despised.*

Song of Songs 8:6-7

6

Hope

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Romans 15:13*

What does it look like to overflow with hope? Certainly it is connected to being filled with all joy and peace or abiding well in Jesus. Have you ever seen anyone overflowing with hope lately? It's a rare commodity to be sure in this world today, but it is written that the possibility is available for you. One pastor has said, "when the impossible begins to look probable, you know your mind is beginning to be renewed." That person with cancer over there is no longer unapproachable, but a person to love with the reigning peace and joy of heaven, King Jesus.

When one is dying of cancer, there is little hope left in this world. Surely we can look onto the great hope of the world beyond, but that is still not the abundant life promised for the believer today. Hope is sure and confident for the moments we live in, when the Anchor of our souls floods us with living peace and joy. Now this peace and joy is not as the world gives. This King of profound peace and joy yields breakthrough in every circumstance. Once we have tasted that the Lord is good, we will only be disillusioned with anything less.

"But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you."¹

What did Peter know about suffering? He'd walked with Jesus for three years. He'd experienced perfection in the flesh like we can only dream. And then he blew it. He denied this Perfect One three times after knowing Him for three years. Murder, adultery, could these be worse than knowing you have physically lived together for three years with the perfect One and then completely discounted Him? Satan had asked to sift Peter, make no mistake this was a torturous time for Peter not unlike what Judas surely experienced. And Peter was restored!

Can we in humility say that we need to be established, strengthened and settled? We often want to think we have it all together and are ready, confident for whatever we might face. What was the process for Peter, after knowingly failing the test like no other. Aren't we glad for Peter's phrase usage here for the duration in time for suffering, "a while."

g3641. ὀλίγος oligos; of uncertain affinity; puny (in extent, degree, number, duration or value); especially neuter (adverbially) somewhat: — + almost, brief(-ly), few, (a) little, + long, a season, short, small, a while.²

Yes, there are seasons to walk through where our gracious Heavenly Father needs to make an adjustment in us for our own good. In essence it is our heavenly Father loving us to life! The adjustment is meant to keep us abiding in the Vine. You see, we must learn to keep our eyes, “fixed on Jesus,” having eyes for Jesus alone, where we embrace the joy of our true delight, the true desire of our hearts. Here, hope can never be deferred.

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”³

Hope is deferred when we do not know how to abound in hope or that there actually is an option here. We suffer when we do not know how to approach or come face to face with the One who holds all the cards of love, joy, peace and power. How quickly we press for the keys to the car, rather than the union with the One who holds all and is All. This establishing Peter is referring to is our ability to walk in a greater union with the King, where God’s grace, love, peace, joy becomes imputed into our being where nothing can deter heavens calling of being led in victory. You see, our “high calling” is union with Jesus. Here, all abound, by learning to “beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord.”

If I live in a home with another person and never spend time in the same room with that person, how will I know what they are thinking? Shouting from room to room isn’t really an option. To the degree that one knows that it is safe to come near another, their voice can begin to be heard. Hearing someone’s voice is only part of the process, where being able to perceive their emotions takes the communication process to another level. If you really love someone, close proximity is a must. It is there where love can best be given and received.

“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you”⁴

What is Paul referring to when he mentions Christ? He is purposing for this glorious union meant for all. Christ is the very presence of God.

g5547. Χριστός Christos; from 5548; anointed, i.e. the Messiah, an epithet of Jesus: — Christ. AV (569) - Christ 569; Christ = "anointed"⁵

Who anointed Jesus?

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”⁶

He walked through walls and crowds that were ready to do Him in. Yet, He willingly gave Himself to be hung on a cross for me and for you. He longs to take us back to the garden where we begin to walk with Him “in the cool of the day”⁷ again whether in the city or the country.

We tend to look at the new covenant through the lens of the Old Testament where a person would be anointed as a priest or a king. Inanimate objects would also be anointed to make them

holy for instruments of worship. Not everyone experienced this blessing. It simply takes God to be able to worship God. Without the grace of His Presence, all attempts of worship is vain.

There are no doubt times when hands are laid on a person in the new covenant to impart spiritual graces and we do not want to impair these important moments, but what is being imparted are dimensions of God. To neglect these or not understand the importance will inhibit the outcome.

“Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.”⁸

Can you see that all that Paul labored for was that a believer would have this divine union with the God of all creation. Christ be formed in you, fan into flame the Gift, He gave you a Spirit of power and love and a sound mind. To the point where, it is meant to be, no longer we who live, but Christ Jesus who lives in us.

To “not neglect the gift that is in you,” calls us to, “fan into flame the gift of God.” Why fan into flame? “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” In other words, when fear, powerlessness, lovelessness and feelings of being out of control begin to touch us and these come together, the apostle writes to fan or worship or pour out our love to God, the glorious gift of God with us, our salvation. This fanning is to quench the discord and allow our spirits to be purified through the union with God’s Spirit by the fire of God’s love.

Notice that the Apostle did not say, read the Bible to deal with fear, nor did he tell Timothy to go to Church or a revival meeting or join a small group, see a pastor or counselor, but find the “Wonderful Counselor.”⁹ All these things are wonderful, but the Apostle told him to “Fan into flame the gift of God” to deal with fear by receiving power and love which forces a sound mind to come into bloom. This was the remedy that the Apostle, who had been through so much, knew would help Timothy to deal with his troubling fears.

Let’s take this just a bit further to see that the work of Jesus was to open this doorway for all believers. This divine union that enables a person to walk in purity and divine purpose and destiny with great joy.

“Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.

These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.”¹⁰

What is the outcome of all this purposing to abide?

“And have made us kings and priests to our God;
And we shall reign on the earth.”¹¹

This is no small victory bought for each one at Calvary. It would be enough for each of us to be made a priest of God, but kings too! Here we are given the honor of reflecting the King within us. What ultimately does a king do? A king reigns, making governing decisions. Let us make no mistake about it how our King reigned while on this earth, as a Servant King. Here is our high calling in Christ Jesus, reigning! This is a victorious salvation that builds a victorious hope. It is not a hope of maybe it will work out, but a hope of sure victory.

This practice of abiding only produces victory. Jesus always walks in victory! If you are abiding with Him, no matter the trial or difficult task, victory is assured. You’ll notice the cross for Him was a victory. What are your crosses and how are they producing victory in your life? Learning to grow in the grace of our union with Jesus leaves no opportunity for anything less than reigning in every compartment of life.

“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”¹²

Often times in the Bible a subject has different nuances depending on the passage. Here we find this love seemingly fully cooked and complete, ready for consumption. And certainly it is ready for consumption, but the believer must be sure to digest this glorious gift as a cow chews it’s cud. In another location touching the same subject, God’s love, we find the Apostle driving in a different direction.

“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”¹³

Here we find the Apostle praying a prayer for the completion of being consumed by God’s love in a believers’s life rather than being a church goer. It’s in the relationship that hope is always restored. To the degree that we learn to progressively find our souls satisfied in God’s love, to that degree we find that, “hope does not disappoint.” Here we find the apostle praying that people would come to know the “fullness of God’s love” which he says is better than knowledge.

Why is God’s love better than knowledge? When we find our union of God’s love as our source, the possibility of being “guided into all truth” is no longer an insurmountable task, but a daily delight. Remember, what was given through Jesus is, “grace and truth.” They are coupled together in Christ where abiding in the peace of God’s love, affords our spirits to relax and hear God’s whispers of truth we need to finish the particular race each one is uniquely called too. A right guidance answer for one, will likely be a roadblock for another, who’s life course has a different outcome.

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”¹⁴

The more we experience God’s love, the desperateness for an immediate answer, or just doing something, no longer becomes an appropriate solution. The real solution is the “power that works in us.” This all Powerful One, Who spoke and the worlds came into existence and Who dwells in us, loves us and by His unseen Presence desires to guide us deliberately into all truth. Remember what has been given, “but power, love and a sound mind.” Our earthly father was more than keys to the car. Likewise the different dimensions of our Heavenly Father all fit together and are ultimately all expressions of His love.

“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”¹⁵

Paul understood the single, most important ingredient of his life was the Love of God. We can not doubt that this single ingredient enabled him to finish his race well. If we are learning to abide well in God’s love, faith and hope are natural manifestations of our union with Him. The outcome is not the goal, but our union with Him is what establishes the goal, day by day listening for His guidance as we bask in His love. If we are good lovers, we are always aware to please our Beloved. And with this single goal, we will also finish our lives well too.

May you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit as you practice fanning into flame or, loving God allowing for the Love of God to flood your spirit.

¹ 1 Peter 5:10

² Strong’s Concordance

³ 2 Corinthians 3:18

⁴ Galatians 4:19

⁵ Strong’s Concordance

⁶ Colossians 1:15-17

⁷ Genesis 3:8

⁸ 1 Timothy 4:14

⁹ Isaiah 9:6

¹⁰ 1 John 2:24-28

¹¹ Revelation 5:10

¹² Romans 5:5

¹³ Ephesians 3:14-19

¹⁴ Ephesians 3:20-21

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:13

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the Lord commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.
Psalms 133*

Unity

*Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask,
it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.
For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”*
Matthew 18:19-20

*Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you
shall chase ten thousand,
and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.*
Leviticus 26:8

*Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth
for a sincere brotherly love,
love one another earnestly from a pure heart*
1 Peter 1:22

Our ability to keep ourselves in God's love, or loving Him with all our hearts is connected to the openness and vibrancy of our relationships within Body of Christ. These are not people of our choosing, but any person or groupings the King chooses to put us in fellowship with.

What happens when we come together reflects a particular group's hunger for Him. Finding the significant people that God has for us to be joined to, opens up the door to God's blessings. The Lord is very partial to those who give themselves to abiding in Him, but this implies finding others with hearts longing for Him and Him alone.

Not everyone will have a heart for this longing for Him and Him alone. Many find contentment in the things of this world. For some it is prestige, others it is things or finding fulfillment in another. You will find varying degrees of hunger as you interact with different people. Your goal is to guard your, "Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life."¹ Your best guard is. Keeping yourself in His Love, by fanning the flame. From there you can both be encouraged by others and be an encouragement.

Finding such a person or persons who have a deep longing for God opens the door for touching God's heart. When we can not stand on our own, another who has learned the pathways to God can help guide us into His heart. Notice that Jesus says, "two or three."² There's nothing wrong with the large assemblies, but notice the groups of people that Jesus spent time with. There were the occasional thousands, but predominantly the twelve with the occasional smaller groups. Although in the midst of this, "Jesus did not commit Himself to them,"³ there were words and blessings to anyone who came to him with good intentions.

It really only takes, “two or three” to do church, but what is it to actually gather in His name? I would suggest that to gather in Jesus’s name is for one purpose, “To love the Lord with all your heart and soul and strength.” Finding others who love God and are being known by God. People who do not share this longing will in the end, distract us from the King. In the end we are to influence them deeper into the light of God’s love.

"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.

"Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand.”⁴

Until we have learned to, “boldly come to the throne of grace, to find mercy and grace in time of need,” or to “abide,” to love God and enjoy God’s loving care, we need others who know how to help us find our place as “living stones” before the King. Then when the delight of this Good News is bright in our hearts, the love of God, we’ll be ready to share or enjoy with those around us. If salvation is just getting somebody out of hell to heaven someday, the good news will never be preached of the delight, “refreshings” of God’s Abiding with mankind, Emmanuel, God with us.

Notice the privilege for those who gather in His name, “it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.” Finding one other longing soul for meeting with the King opens up great blessings. Do not be disheartened, in time this door will be opened to you of koinonia. Some will not be initially able to go there with you. As Peter said, “we all stumble in many ways” and our lives are in need of God’s light and love for purification.

When we have found another, finding times for worship that accommodate schedules on a regular basis is of importance. For that reason, often times a close family member or a friend a short distance away will be a great blessing. Notice what happens in the book of Acts, there were the larger meeting in the temple, followed by smaller gatherings in homes where, “praising God and having favor with all the people.”

“So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”⁵

Although Paul told Timothy to fan into flame on his own, finding another to find the delights of worshiping or loving God together is a extremely special gift. This opportunity may not open up to you immediately, but boldly coming in worship before the King on your own is a true delight. Need it be regimented or can it be an activity that simply opens up in different locations at different times with different people? The more the merrier!

This is the goal to have at least one to numerous people to be able to worship with throughout the days of our lives. Where time can be taken to learn to “fan into flame the gift of God,” together. This can certainly be an individual event, but in the corporate event comes power where it is possible to encourage, edify and comfort others, where we may be on one end or the other of receiving encouragement. Let’s look at a few passages where the importance of this activity is brought out.

“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”⁶

“who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”⁷

This is an important activity where people are enabled or built up in Christ or comforted by God through words, actions and at times touch. Nice reasoning is not effective here, unless it comes with the “comfort of God.” This whole activity of worship and comforting can be an unknown experience for many church goers who have not been exposed to this dimension of body life.

“Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.”⁸

“from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”⁹

The end result is to “love one another earnestly,” “so that it builds itself up in love.” The whole body, every joint involved in this activity. One of the fads or prides of Christianity is to somehow belong to the right group. Simply, the body of Christ is the right group. Learning to love each member, even those with a funny predisposition compared to our understanding is the only way to true victory through Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is only through love that the possibility of influencing another in a better way. It is in this union of Love that comes from God where we can be either influencers or being influenced, being built up. Even the best hardly know what it is to “love one another earnestly from a pure heart.” This simply is uncharted territory that must be explored in Christ Jesus. This is our only hope to break the seen and often unseen, the grey light, that surrounds each one of us. Each one is uniquely and “fearfully made” to enter into this greatest opportunity in Christ Jesus, to “Love our neighbor as ourselves.”

There is one warning that must be given here.

“But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.”¹⁰

Immoral - “not conforming to accepted standards of morality.”¹¹

Covetous - “having or showing a great desire to possess something, typically something belonging to someone else.”¹²

Idolator - “a person who worships an idol or idols.”¹³ An Idol being something that represents God or usurps God’s place for worship.

Reviler - “to assail with contemptuous or opprobrious language; address or speak of abusively.”¹⁴

Extortioner - “a criminal who extorts money from someone by threatening to expose embarrassing information about them.”¹⁵

Not all who come to the corporate meetings with the cloak of a believer are to be received. May God guide each one of us to the people who are right for us avoiding those who in the end are bent on trouble. I believe that as we avoid those according to the Written Word with a confirmation from the Spirit that need to come to repentance, it further opens the door for God’s goodness to work in those lives that desperately need change. In the end, we actually love them by keeping God’s word. Avoiding the wrong people actually opens the door to the right people for corporate worship. Without developing our union with the King, it is impossible to develop union outside of our safe groups.

In the end our ability to worship individually and corporately enables our ability to draw near to God where the possibility of growing in grace individually and corporately affects both our lives and those around us. Our ability to develop our union with God independent of any other source for emotional stability is one of our great rewards from the King. With this single reward of joy in God’s presence opening the door to being face to face, close enough to hear God’s guidance for the future which is perfect prosperity no matter the difficulties we will face into the future.

Listen to the words of the testimony with the implications of her lifestyle so accurately spelled out by great hymn writer Fanny Crosby, which gives the importance of “rejoicing in the Lord always.”

Refrain- Theme of Fanny’s Testimony

This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.

What is it to praise someone? Paul writes to “rejoice in the Lord always.” If this person is a husband or wife it would be directed toward lovingly affirming their greatness. How much more the God of all creation, pouring out our devotion and love.

Stanzas 1-3 list the implications or outcome that are emboldened of Fanny’s lifestyle of worship.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine;
Oh, what a **foretaste of glory divine!**
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,

Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

Perfect submission, **perfect delight**,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, **all is at rest**,
I in my Savior am **happy and blest**;
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

God, allow us to “grow in the grace” of our union with you finding the fruits of Your Spirit and the gifts of your Spirit, but finding our satisfaction and delight in our union with You alone.

¹ Proverbs 4:23

² Matthew 18:20

³ John 2:24

⁴ Matthew 5:13-15 MSG

⁵ Acts 2:46-47

⁶ 1 Thessalonians 5:11

⁷ 2 Corinthians 1:4

⁸ 1 Peter 1:22

⁹ Ephesians 4:16

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 5:11

¹¹ Dictionary Version 2.2.2 (203)

¹² Dictionary Version 2.2.2 (203)

¹³ Dictionary Version 2.2.2 (203)

¹⁴ Dictionary Version 2.2.2 (203)

¹⁵ Dictionary Version 2.2.2 (203)

*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts,
to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.
Colossians 3:15*

Robes of Righteousness

*And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright,
for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.
Revelation 19:8*

*I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
My soul shall be joyful in my God;
For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments,
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.
Isaiah 61:10*

These robes of royalty were paid for in full at Calvary affording a joyful union with God through the varying twists and bends of the adventures of life. When one is growing in grace, the ability to sense that the clothes of peace and joy, a peace and joy paid for and made available from the Royal Blood of Jesus, are in place. Quickly one can begin to sense when they have been dropped and stand naked before the onslaught of the enemy where fear and anxiety begin to torment the mind. These robes let the armor to be fitly set in place and really are the armour.

Growing in grace is just this, positioning our spirits so that God's peace and joy pervade our lives. When we begin to sense that we feel exposed to the elements of life, fanning or loving God pulls on God's heart so that we begin to experience the divine embrace of the King, grace, which is our spiritual robe that enables victory, "the fine linen," in our present circumstances.

There is simply no greater joy than to sense being covered by the King's Presence. This robe of many colors, fruits or virtues, love, joy and peace that invoke every other blessing. There is no shortcut here, but to take time fellowshiping with the one who clothes us with His righteousness. With His command to "be of good cheer"¹ comes the grace bought at Calvary which was released for all eternity for all who learn to call on His Name for strengthening and refreshing, these "times of refreshing."

We are commanded, "not to be drunk with wine."² There is an effect from wine that those who know no better way, illicit the effects of alcohol upon their minds and bodies. "But be filled with the Spirit"³ causes a similar effect that allows the robes of righteousness to be placed on our beings. If you take enough wine, you can feel the effects of the alcohol. Likewise, if you refresh yourself in Jesus by "making a melody from your heart to the Lord," expressing love from your heart to God, you'll experience a similar effect without a ride to the liquor store or a hang over later. How well you learn to drink of these refreshings bought at Calvary is really up to you.

On two public occasions Jesus announced His ministry.

Luke 4:18-19

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”*

John 7:37

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.

These two proclamations overlap each other as the good news is the acceptable year of the Lord is upon us to set us free for anyone who is oppressed or thirsts. The Bible ends with God repeating this magnificent opportunity for all to drink.

Revelation 22:17

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

You can never take a little sip and be the same after drinking this water of “refreshing,” this “water of life.” After you have tasted “and seen that the Lord is good,”⁴ you’ll always want to be covered with the robes of righteousness, the robes of peace and joy. These robes that come from drinking the “water of life,” the waters of “refreshing” bring healing to our minds and bodies. Our minds and bodies were made to be at peace, no matter what the tribulation we may be walking through.

Once you have tasted and experienced this divine grace you will know when you are clothed and when you are leaving yourself exposed. Growing in grace affords the possibility of wearing the robes experientially no matter what the atmosphere is like that you have stepped into each day.

I play the guitar at different locations each week. The atmosphere in the home that I live in is rarely the same as the atmosphere that I may be playing in that day. Once the strings have stopped stretching after being changed, the guitar stays in tune from day to day as long as the temperature and humidity do not change. If the temperature or humidity change, the wood will expand and contract causing the instrument to go flat or sharp.

We are the same and as we go from day to day through different atmospheres, experiences and relationships, we will go in and out of tune in relationship to the different dimensions that we walk through. If we plan to experience the fullness of abundant life, tuning our hearts to

embrace the robes of righteousness with these “refreshments” bought at Calvary really is not optional.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”⁵

The Apostle Paul was aware of an unseen realm that we walk through each and every day. Some days I wake up and feel just great. Some days I wake up and feel a little sharpe or maybe a little flat. We have the ability each and every day to put on Jesus, to put on the “armor of God,” these robes of righteousness.

It is this tuning up of our spirits to perfect pitch by fellowshiping with King Jesus who is always in perfect tune. When I tune up my spirit to His Spirit, I feel the robes of righteousness being imparted to me. My mind and body actually feel better as I tune up. And if my mind or body has actually been suffering, it may take some time for His Presence to shift these effects. The better I stay in tune, the better our minds and Bodies will feel.

“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”⁶

What did Jude understand? But you, beloved, building yourselves up! In the end this is our responsibility. But it is the most wonderful responsibility once that you have tasted that the Lord’s love is good. It’s the most enjoyable thing that there is to do on the planet allowing God to wash us and let us drink from His river of delights.

For almost two years I took care of my father who had had a number of strokes that left him impaired mentally to read write and most days speak or to safely walk by himself. After Christmas going into the second year my mother also ended up in the hospital. After a week of tests a surgeon was finally able to find a place in her intestines where scar tissue from a surgery as a little girl had grown around and cinched off the ability for food to flow. He was able to go in laparoscopically and snip the tissue.

There was a period of about a month where I took care of both of my parents. During that time I became aware that something in my body did not seem right. At about the time that my mother began to feel well I felt a sharp pain early one morning and thought I should go to see a doctor. After an EKG, the doctor reported that he thought that I had had a heart attack and wondered if I could drive over to the hospital.

I laid down on the examining table that I had been sitting on thinking about my father who was on hospice at this time, likely needing his underwear changed. I looked back at the doctor and assured him that I could drive to the hospital. As I drove to the hospital I submitted myself and the situation to God and started to worship. God’s Presence came so sweetly as I drove. Once in

the emergency room, I saw no need to stop. So I continued to quietly worship and had a mountain top experience in the emergency room as I heard people moaning around me.

After a number of tests and the usual long wait, they said that they thought I hadn't had a heart attack, but to drink something they called a GI Cocktail. Everything went numb as I drank this concoction, tongue, mouth, lips and throat. After this I found my whole digestive tract out of order with so much gas that I would sleep for twenty minutes, get up and belch gas to release the pressure in my chest, sleep again and repeat the process.

The experience was like nothing I had had before and learning to continue to keep myself in God's love was a new experience during this sleep interrupted season. I wondered at times when the pressure from the gas was great in my chest who might die first, my father or myself. Not wanting my family to fear during this season I asked the Lord if it was time for me to stop taking care of my father. I felt that I was to continue.

There was a long process after my father's passing of healing that went on where I would sense that I had gone up a rung on a ladder each month. Slowly over a year it went from one good day a month, to a week, to an occasional bad day. Slowly the digestive tract started to have normal processes allowing the body to digest food. Fourteen years later, close to sixty and I'm still feeling strong and healthy.

The process was to keep myself in His love and to grow in this love. The better we learn to do that, the better we heal, whether emotionally or physically which at times are hard to separate. The journey to learn to abide in God's love through tribulation was worth every step. For the delight is to be able to grow in grace, His love poured out at Calvary, the joy of knowing Him.

Your season of tribulation likely will not end in a day. This does not matter. It is simply learning to look away from hardships and turning the eyes of our hearts upon Him that allows for the joy of knowing Him and experiencing His Love that brings us through hardships with great joy!

¹ John 16:33

² Ephesians 5:18

³ Ephesians 5:18

⁴ Psalm 34:8

⁵ Ephesians 6:10-13

⁶ Jude 1:20-21

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

Appendix A

There is something that God is looking for in salvation that is distinctly higher than fire insurance or help in a difficult season. God is looking for a love relationship. In two of the first passages after Pentecost, where the disciples proclaim salvation with the admonition to repent, turn from a self life and be converted to a love, worship relationship with God. The promise set forth for doing this is, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord!

These times of refreshing are simply the guideposts of salvation offered from fellowship with God. It is the same message that Jesus promised, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.” He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”¹ It is tied to, “it is better that I go away so that the comforter will come.”² Notice what Jesus promises will happen to those who believe! “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”

I’ve been told that the old time Methodist used to have people wait on a bench till they knew they were saved. “His Spirit bearing witness with our spirits that we are children of God.”³ This is the guarantee or promise of being saved. The promise is to “Call upon the name of the Lord and you will be saved.”⁴ “This is the lightning strike place, so to speak, spiritually. This is the awakening.”⁵ The promise does not need a bench, but be expectant and wait for God’s fellowship.

So the King is ready for all with a heart to know, love and serve Him. And in this relationship the blood wipes away sins so that “times of refreshing” out of fellowship with the King are yours. Call upon Jesus and wait till you receive the promise! The point is to call out and wait till one knows that you have begun fellowshiping, drinking of the river of delights, union with the King of Glory. You’ll know!

¹ John 7:37

² John 16:7

³ Romans 8:16

⁴ Romans 10:13

⁵ <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/methodist-history-the-mourners-bench>

Appendix B

There was no fire, and no light, in the room; nevertheless it appeared to me as if it were perfectly light. As I went in and shut the door after me, it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. It did not occur to me then, nor did it for some time afterward, that it was wholly a mental state. On the contrary it seemed to me that I saw him as I would see any other man. He said nothing, but looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at his feet. I have always since regarded this as a most

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remarkable state of mind; for it seemed to me a reality, that he stood before me, and I fell down at his feet and poured out my soul to him. I wept aloud like a child, and made such confessions as I could with my choked utterance. It seemed to me that I bathed his feet with my tears; and yet I had no distinct impression that I touched him, that I recollect.

I must have continued in this state for a good while; but my mind was too much absorbed with the interview to recollect anything that I said. But I know, as soon as my mind became calm enough to break off from the interview, I returned to the front office, and found that the fire that I had made of large wood was nearly burned out. But as I turned and was about to take a seat by the fire, I received a mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost. Without any expectation of it, without ever having the thought in my mind that there was any such thing for me, without any recollection that I had ever heard the thing mentioned by any person in the world, the Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love for I could not express it in any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God. I can recollect distinctly that it seemed to fan me, like immense wings. No words can express the wonderful love that was shed abroad in my heart. I wept aloud with joy and love; and I do not know but I should say, I literally bellowed out the unutterable gushings of my heart. These waves came over me, and over me, and over me, one after the other, until I recollect I cried out, "I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me." I said, "Lord, I cannot bear any more;" yet I had no fear of death.

How long I continued in this state, with this baptism continuing to roll over me and go through me, I do not know. But I know it was late in the evening when a member of my choir — for I was the leader of the choir — came into the office to see me. He was a member of the church. He found me in this state of loud weeping, and said to me, "Mr. Finney, what ails you?" I could make him no answer for some time. He then said, "Are you in pain?" I gathered myself up as best I could, and replied, "No, but so happy that I cannot live."

He turned and left the office, and in a few minutes returned with one of the elders of the church, whose shop was nearly across the way from our office. This elder was a very serious man; and in my presence had been very watchful, and I had scarcely ever seen him laugh. When he came in, I was very much in the state in which I was when the young man went out to call him. He asked me how I felt, and I began to tell him. Instead of saying anything, he fell into a most spasmodic laughter. It seemed as if it was impossible for him to keep from laughing from the very bottom of his heart.

There was a young man in the neighborhood who was preparing for college, with whom I had been very intimate. Our minister, as I afterward learned, had repeatedly talked with him on the subject of religion, and warned him against being misled by me. He informed him that I was a very careless young man about religion; and he thought that if he associated much with me his mind would be diverted, and he would not be converted.

After I was converted, and this young man was converted, he told me that he had said to Mr. Gale several times, when he had admonished him about associating so much with me, that my conversations had often affected him more, religiously, than his preaching. I had, indeed, let out my feelings a good deal to this young man.

But just at the time when I was giving an account of my feelings to this elder of the church, and to the other member who was with him, this young man came into the office. I was sitting with my back toward the door, and barely observed that he came in. He listened with astonishment to what I was saying, and the first I knew he partly fell upon the floor, and cried out in the greatest agony of mind, "Do pray for me!" The elder of the church and the other member knelt down and began to pray for him; and when they had prayed, I prayed for him myself. Soon after this they all retired and left me alone.

The question then arose in my mind, "Why did Elder B—— laugh so? Did he not think that I was under a delusion, or crazy?" This suggestion brought a kind of darkness over my mind; and I began to query with myself whether it was proper for me — such a sinner as I had been — to pray for that young man. A cloud seemed to shut in over me; I had no hold upon anything in which I could rest; and after a little while I retired to bed, not distressed in mind, but still at a loss to know what to make of my present state. Notwithstanding the baptism I had received, this temptation so obscured my view that I went to bed without feeling sure that my peace was made with God.

I soon fell asleep, but almost as soon awoke again on account of the great flow of the love of God that was in my heart. I was so filled with love that I could not sleep. Soon I fell asleep again, and awoke in the same manner. When I awoke, this temptation would return upon me, and the love that seemed to be in my heart would abate; but as soon as I was asleep, it was so warm within me that I would immediately awake. Thus I continued till, late at night, I obtained some sound repose.

When I awoke in the morning the sun had risen, and was pouring a clear light into my room. Words cannot express the impression that this sunlight made upon me. Instantly the baptism that I had received the night before, returned upon me in the same manner. I arose upon my knees in

the bed and wept aloud with joy, and remained for some time too much overwhelmed with the baptism of the Spirit to do anything but pour out my soul to God. It seemed as if this morning's baptism was accompanied with a gentle reproof, and the Spirit seemed to say to me, "Will you doubt?" "Will you doubt?" I cried, "No! I will not doubt; I cannot doubt." He then cleared the subject up so much to my mind that it was in fact impossible for me to doubt that the Spirit of God had taken possession of my soul.

In this state I was taught the doctrine of justification by faith, as a present experience. That doctrine had never taken any such possession of my mind, that I had ever viewed it distinctly as a fundamental doctrine of the Gospel. Indeed, I did not know at all what it meant in the proper sense. But I could now see and understand what was meant by the passage, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." I could see that the moment I believed, while up in the woods all sense of condemnation had entirely dropped out of my mind; and that from that moment I could not feel a sense of guilt or condemnation by any effort that I could make. My sense of guilt was gone; my sins were gone; and I do not think I felt any more sense of guilt than if I never had sinned.

This was just the revelation that I needed. I felt myself justified by faith; and, so far as I could see, I was in a state in which I did not sin. Instead of feeling that I was sinning all the time, my heart was so full of love that it overflowed. My cup ran over with blessing and with love; and I could not feel that I was sinning against God. Nor could I recover the least sense of guilt for my past sins. Of this experience I said nothing that I recollect, at the time, to anybody; that is, of this experience of justification.¹

¹ CHARLES G. FINNEY, AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY (1908 version) 32-36

