



Devotions for Difficult Days

thoughts for those with a heavy heart

Becky White



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www.DevotionsForDifficultDays.com

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“Encourage the exhausted,
And strengthen the feeble.
Say to those with anxious heart,
“Take courage, fear not””

Isaiah 35:3-4a

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By Becky White

The idea for this devotional was birthed in my heart while going through the furnace of affliction. I found enormous comfort and solid answers in the living Word of God. I offer to you the insights I gained, the words of encouragement I found and the hope that Jesus Christ alone can give.

With genuine thanks, I dedicate this book to Jeanne Liston, my mentor and spiritual Mom. For all the godly counsel you gave as well as your dogged determination to keep me focused on the Lord and free of self-pity . *It usually worked!* Thank you to my precious children: Aaron, Sarah, Melissa, Rebecca and Timothy. And most of all, to my beloved Savior, Jesus Christ. I am nothing apart from You.

Becky

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Preface

Struggles. We all have them in one form or another. Some may be minor inconveniences while others are life altering in their scope. I believe, and God's Word bares this out... it's by walking *through* life's challenges that we gain strength and the ability to endure...not by going around or over or in retreat...*but by going through.*

It's for this reason that I chose butterflies as my cover photo. The butterfly gains strength during its struggle to free itself from the cocoon that holds it. During the time of struggle, the beautifully delicate butterfly, gains the strength to fly once it's free. If the butterfly is "helped" by someone opening the cocoon for it, it will soon die. ...having never fought the battle that would have given it strength to fly free.

In your life and mine, we can choose to take what the enemy would use to destroy us and allow God to use it to refine us...or we can allow it to destroy us.

*Be assured and understand that the trial and proving of your faith
brings out endurance and steadfastness and patience.
But let endurance have full play and do a thorough work...
James 1:3-4a Amp*

Index

Introduction & Preface

1. Help! I'm Weary
2. God is Good All the Time
3. Prayer of brokenness
4. No Life Lines Left
5. On What Does Your Mind Dwell?
6. He is There
7. The Wilderness
8. Waxing Eloquent
9. Refiner's Fire
10. An Anchor for the Soul
11. He is Able
12. No Fig Blossoms
13. Worship
14. He Loves Me!
15. Muscle of Obedience
16. Think Big
17. Too Small a Matter
18. Let God Be God
19. Impossible
20. God's Patience
21. Perspective
22. Encouragement
23. Good or Bad?
24. God is Never Late
25. Yes, He Means You
26. A New Creation
27. Compromise
28. Immediate Results
29. How Long, O Lord?
30. In Spite of...
31. Two Questions
32. God's Silence
33. Pain
34. Better Felt than Telt
35. The Power of Testimony

36. Tears

37. Vindication

38. Comfort

39. Happenstance

40. Do You Want to be Healed?

I About the author

II Suggested Reading

III Personal Psalm of Praise

1.

Help! . . . I'm Weary

*He gives power to the faint and weary, and to him who has no might
He increases strength [making it to multiply and abound].
Isaiah 40:29 amp*

Overwhelmed and tired. Plain tired. . . that's how we feel at times. Our faith isn't faltering. We do not doubt God's ways or His plans. We know He will cause it all to work out for our good and His glory in the end. . . But still, we get tired. Tired of the wait. Tired physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Just tired. The Bible chronicles many references of godly men and women worn out from the battle; Jeremiah and Elijah are just two that come to mind. Godly people who were just plain weary.

Our heavenly Father knows we're human. We can feel worn out by the sheer span of time between the asking and the receiving of our requests. Worn out by well meaning brothers and sisters in Christ who ask probing questions. . . worn out by the effort it takes to stay focused on the Lord and not our problems. . . worn out by fighting the good fight of faith or even worn out just from living.

Wrong focus can weary us as well. God's Word reminds us to "*cast aside every sin and every weight that so easily entangles and look unto Jesus. . .*" When our focal point is the problem rather than our Lord, weariness will eventually result.

Sometimes we can't escape the trials or tests we're in. At those times we have to know without a doubt that God's grace is sufficient [see 2 Corinthians 12:9]. He has promised to "hold us up and strengthen us and to hold our right hand" Isaiah 41:10&13 as we walk through our times of testing and trials. His word tells us **He** never grows weary. That's good to know. That means He isn't wearied by my being weary, tired and worn-out.

In fact, rather than berate us for our humanness Jesus beckons us; "*Come to Me all who are weary and over burdened and I will give you rest.*"

*Father, thank You for Your abiding presence that strengthens me, that upholds me. Remind my spirit that Your grace is sufficient for my every need.
In Jesus' name, Amen*

My God, I have never thanked Thee for my thorn. I have thanked Thee a thousand times for my roses, but not once for my thorn. I have been looking forward to a world where I will get compensation for my cross, but I have never thought of my cross itself a present glory. Thou divine Love, whose human path has been perfected through sufferings, teach me the glory of my cross, teach me to value my thorn.

George Matheson (1842-1906)

2.

God is Good...All the Time?

For 25 years I've spent Mother's day at the cemetery. Two of my children are there, buried side by side, even sharing the same epitaph: *God is Sovereign*. I reveal that very painful and personal story to ask a question. Have you ever heard the expression 'God is good...all the time?' If so, maybe you've witnessed this scenario; Someone will say, **God is good**, while all "church people" in ear shot will answer back in unison ...**All the time**. I confess that bothers me. I inwardly think: How would they know? Would they be saying that if...

Let's be honest, life can be a struggle, circumstances can stink. I wondered, do all these people really, down in their gut, believe God is good ALL the time?

Is He as good when you've lost your job and there's no money for the mortgage as when you've just received a promotion?

Is He just as good when your child has been diagnosed with cancer as when they've received a clean bill of health?

Is He just as good when you face another day of emotional pain and isolation as when you are on the mountain top of all life has to offer?

In scripture we find the story of Joseph being sold into slavery, later jailed for a crime he did not commit and serving two full years before being released. And Jesus Christ, the very Son of God— suspended on a rough, wooden cross, nailed there with spikes, having never sinned...and yet we read of Him crying out "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Was God good in those situations?

Is God good...*All the time?* **Yes, absolutely Yes.**

What kind of God would He be if He had rescued Joseph at the expense of an entire nation? And where would we be if Jesus had allowed Himself to be delivered from His unjust torment? One word...LOST.

Back to the cemetery. It was through the birth and death of my daughter that I gave my life to Christ. Because of the tragedy of my son's still birth I have had the immense privilege of comforting others, of entering into their pain in a way that would not have been possible otherwise. I look at their grave stones and reflect on what their short lives have accomplished. More accurately, what God accomplished because of His willingness to appear bad while in truth being so very good. The ache I feel will always be with me, yet I'm not engulfed in sadness because of my loss. What the enemy meant for evil God used for good.

"God causes all things to work together for good for them that love Him." ... Romans 8:28

That He does.

In memory of my beautiful daughter, Tiffany Anne. May 11, 1980 - May 14, 1980 and my precious son, Patrick jr., still-born on November 17, 1994.

3.

A Prayer of brokenness

*For I consider the sufferings of this present time
are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us.*

AND

*But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer
through Him [Jesus] who loved us and gave His life for us.
Romans 8:18 and 37 NASB*

The following is a prayer I wrote a few years ago while going through an intensely difficult season of my life due to an ongoing trial that has lasted many years. May my words echo your heart.

Father,

My heart hurts. I want to cry and never stop. The pain is so great right now and I see no end in sight. I can't hear You. What are You telling me? Comfort me, Father! Cause me to know the way I should walk...make my path straight and clear.

Enable me to release the weight of this burden. I know people are not the "real" enemy...but it still hurts when they are so indifferent...so mean...so heartless...How do I walk this path, Father without becoming bitter and hard? ... How?

Lord, give me eyes to see my circumstances as You see them, give me Your perspective. I've lost my way in the darkness of this trial. Help me, Lord! Your Word says You are near the brokenhearted and save such as are crushed with sorrow. I qualify! Your Word also says "Am I a God who is near declares the Lord and not far off?" Increase my faith, Father. Enable me to walk by faith and not sight. Give me discernment concerning what to say, how to say it, what to do and when to do it. I can't see my way clear.

Thank You, Lord. I know You cause all things to work together for good for those who love You...that You work all things after the counsel of Your will. Your Word says to give thanks in all things...I praise You, Lord. I know Your ways are perfect.

Father, Remove fear far from me. I know You have not given me a spirit of fear but of power and love and a sound mind. Please also give me favor with those causing me pain while I wait for Your Word to be manifest in my life.

In the mighty name of Jesus, I ask these things, Amen

Whether you are facing an immediate crisis situation or a long term trial that is like the steady drip of Niagara Falls, I pray you will be encouraged to keep on hanging on by His unfailing grace. If life is coming up roses for you at this time...I rejoice with you ... tuck it away for later or share it with a friend.

4.

No Life Lines Left

*When my heart is overwhelmed and fainting,
lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.
Psalm 61:2 NASB*

One afternoon I found myself distraught over a very difficult situation in my home, feeling overwhelmed by the crisis I reached for the phone to call my prayer partner. Knowing she would take time out of her day to listen and then pray with me. As the phone rang, I waited in great anticipation, wanting desperately to unload this burden or at least have her share it with me. But...she wasn't home. In tears I hung up the phone and cried; "Why is this happening, God?!"

In the words of Regis Philbin I had "no life lines left". Or in the words of Scripture, God had brought me to "a place of wits' end" Psalm 107:27. I had no where to turn — but to God. After a brief pity-party I realized I hadn't even talked to the Lord yet about the problem.

Sometimes our Heavenly Father has to take away all our life lines so we will be brought to the place of wits' end. It's there that we realize our total dependency on God — that we experience first hand His comfort and faithfulness. So often we turn to our friends or pastors or counselors before ever turning to God. Sadly, some never seek Him out. Though God has given us friends and others to lean on in times of distress, He never intended for us to turn to them at the expense of a relationship with Him.

Once I composed myself, I went to a quiet room and sat down with God. Pouring my heart out to Him and then reading a Psalm aloud. He comforted me as no human could ever do and I learned a valuable lesson. I still called my friend the next day and shared with her my situation, but now I also had the opportunity to share with her what the Lord had taught me and give glory to God for His provision.

When my spirit is overwhelmed and fainting (throwing all of its weight) upon me, You knew my path." Psalm 142:3a amp

5.

On What Does Your Mind Dwell?

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

Philippians 4:8

Fix our minds on things above not on things of the earth

Colossians 2:2

What do you spend your mental energy on? Do you rehearse the events of your day, replaying every word spoken... every slight incurred? Do you mentally rehash abuses suffered in your past or dwell on the what ifs of life? Do you dwell on all those aches and pains we get as we age? *Or* have you disciplined your thought life to dwell on only what is positive and edifying?

I wish I could say I always have a tight reign on my thought life, but the truth is I struggle in this area. Allowing my mind to wander into the land of doubt, self-pity, negative thinking, discouraging thoughts or mulling over insults and injuries of long ago (or not-so-long-ago). God constantly reminds me to “*Fix my eyes on Him (Jesus), the author and finisher of my faith, Who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.*” Hebrews 12:2 Encouraging me to get my focus off all that’s wrong and back onto all that is right in my life.

God also has this to say about our thinking; *As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.* Proverbs 23:7 If we spend our day dwelling on all that’s wrong in our life or the world or the economy or the political system or...*you name the issue...* it will effect **who** and **what** we become...physically and spiritually. For this reason the Lord admonishes us to fix our mind on good and godly things, things that are “lovely”. For me, that meant not dwelling on the circumstances of my life. For you it might mean letting go of the past or forgiving a wrong or trusting God for your future. Stop and think about what you’re thinking!

Father,

Help us to notice when our thoughts are going astray to temporal things—unimportant-in-the-long-run kind of thinking. To notice and change thinking that tears down instead of building up. Enable us to discipline our thinking, so we are not enslaved by any and every thought that comes our way. In Jesus’ name...Amen

6.

He is There

Have I not commanded you to be strong and of good courage. Be not afraid or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9

Though life is bursting with pain and anguish...He is there.
Though what you feared the most has come upon you...He is there.
Though spouses forsake you...He is there.
Though children rebel and abandon you...He is there.
When your heart is broken and trampled...He is there.
Even at death...He is there.

He never leaves you or forsakes you. Others may, but He does not. Will you still trust and refuse to accuse Him of unfaithfulness toward you? Are you willing to trust and commit yourself to Him in the midst of...in spite of? Will you give thanks no matter the circumstance simply as an act of obedience? He is with you now, holding you, carrying you. He has not, and will not abandon you.

Who shall ever separate us from Christ's love? Shall suffering and affliction....? For I am persuaded beyond doubt ...that nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8

You have beset me behind and before and laid Your hand upon me...Where could I go from Your Spirit? Psalm 139

When my spirit was overwhelmed and fainted [throwing all of its weight] upon me, then You knew my path. Psalm 142

Though sorrow may last for a night, joy comes in the morning. Psalms

I don't speak from theological platitudes but rather, from the depths of human experience....He has never failed me, He has never left me. Troubles come and troubles go, but the Lord remains the One constant in our lives. He is ever faithful, ever present, ever merciful...ever there.

Do I [the Lord] not fill heaven and earth? Jeremiah 23

7.

The Wilderness

*How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert!
Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.
They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the adversary...
(Psalm 78:40-42) NASB*

Do you have a “wilderness or desert” in your life? A test or trial that brings you to your literal knees? Have you walked through the raging waters of life and come through with the testimony that God made a way where there seemed to be no way? Or...did you grieve the Lord when you walked through the desert by complaining and grumbling all the way? Inwardly accusing Him of harshness and unfaithfulness toward you? I must admit that I have done that in times past. I have listened to the enemy’s lie that says God is not good, He does not care, and this situation is hopeless. I grieved Him in the wilderness as surely as the ancient Israelites.

The Psalmist reminds us in the above verse that to walk through our wilderness successfully we start by remembering when the Lord delivered us from the enemy in the past. The Hebrew word here refers to “enemy” as *a tight place, adversary, opponent, distress or enemy*.

We are to call to mind all the times; beginning with our salvation experience, the Lord has delivered us. Small and large. From the green lights we’ve asked for to the healings and miraculous deliverances He’s given, to the \$20 found *just when you needed it*. Call them all to mind.

Wildernesses...Deserts...Awful places to visit, dreadful places to pitch tent and stay. Though God allows these dry times to come, they do not last forever. Every trial has a beginning and an ending. In the meantime, in the midst of the difficulty, recall all the Lord has done and refuse to grieve Him by your lack of trust and complaining.

God was patient with me, He has let me go through the desert *several times*... having now, brought me into a place that when the trials come I instinctively call His faithfulness to mind. I refuse the lie and speak the Truth (usually!). I see now that the wildernesses I so feared were/are used by the Lord to mold me into His image. He’s doing the same in all His children.

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

James 1:2-4

8.

Waxing Eloquent

*But, as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge
that I may tell of all Thy works..*

Psalm 73:28 NASB

My eldest son is a real character. He has a bubbling, vibrant personality, though he can be serious if the need arises, he'd rather not have to be. He's also a man on fire for the Lord Jesus, a great combination!

He often reads the announcements at church and occasionally offers a prayer. Last week he read the announcements with his usual flare and was then asked to pray before the ushers took the offering. Though caught a little off guard by the unexpected request, he began praying. As the prayer went on, he spoke about tithing ... blessing ... the book of Malachi ... the law of sowing and reaping. It was soon apparent that he had talked himself into a corner while trying to wax eloquent in his prayer. He abruptly stopped, laughed out loud at himself and said "Just give... give whatever you want... just give" The whole congregation laughed with him and I spoke out fairly loudly; "Aaron, I love you!"

Rather than feeling embarrassed at his blunder, I felt only love and admiration for my eldest son. Thankful to God for his heart and his life.

God spoke to me in that moment... "That is what I feel for My children. I'm not embarrassed at their attempts to please me... I am honored."

Honored at the minutes spent reading the Word when you wanted to spend an hour... honored at the moments in hurried prayer when I knew you longed for more... honored at the attempts to witness of Me when your mind told you to be quiet ... honored at the choices made that bring glory to Me and the decisions made that put Me first... Honored by a way of life that reflects the heritage I've given you.

9.

Refiner's Fire

*"He knows the way I take [He has concern for it; appreciates and pays attention to it].
When He has tried me I shall come forth as refined gold [pure and luminous].*

Job 23:10 AMP

You can hear the crackling and popping of the fire as the flames shoot skyward. These flames are not for warmth on a cold night but for refining. The Master craftsman studies the precious contents of his bowl. Not yet ready. Sitting back again, he waits and watches, never diverting His eyes from the bubbling metal. Finally...it's time. He removes the silver from the heat, skimming off the impurities that have risen to the top; forced upward by the heat of the flame. The craftsman then puts the prized liquid back into the fire for yet another time of refining.

And so it goes... This scene wouldn't mean much to us except that the Lord has chosen this very analogy to describe the trials and tests He allows into our lives. Not cause necessarily, but rather, allow. *As a blood-bought child of God nothing can come into your life unless the Lord allows it.* That is at once both comforting and unsettling.

The Lord tests and proves the unyieldingly righteous. Psalm 12:6 I will refine them as silver is refined, I will test them as gold is tested. Zechariah 13:9b You have proved us, You have tried us as silver is tried, refined and purified (we went through fire and through water and You brought us out into a place of abundance). Psalm 66:10,12

You may be distressed and suffer temptations, so that the genuineness of your faith, which is infinitely more precious than perishable gold, which is tested and purified by fire [this proving of your faith is intended] to rebound to your praise and glory and honor when Jesus- the Anointed One is revealed. Without having seen Him you love Him. 1 Peter 1:6b-8a

Beloved, do not be amazed and bewildered at the fiery ordeal which is taking place to test your quality, as though something strange, unusual and alien to your position were befalling you. 1 Peter 4:12

Question... Would you consider your present circumstances to be a test or trial? **If so**, where in the refining process are you? Just entering the flames...bubbling from the heat, impurities rising to the surface ...a brief cooling off period...entering the flames for another time of refining?

In the final stage the gold or silver is so pure and untainted that the refiner can clearly see his reflection in the hot liquid. The Lord does this in every area of our lives until He sees the very reflection of Jesus Christ in *us*. Transformed into the image of Christ.

Whatever the cause of your fire (even if was of your own making), as a child of God, you can be certain He watches over the flames. Your times are in His hands. What the enemy has brought against you to destroy you is used by God to refine you.

10.

An Anchor for the Soul

*Every word of God is tried and purified; He is a shield to those who trust
and take refuge in Him. Psalm 30:5 Amp*

When going through great difficulty, we need something to trust in, a truth we can stand on...an anchor to hold us firmly in place. *An anchor for our soul*. Some call it standing on the promises, I call it survival.

If we are going to thrive as followers of Jesus Christ we must be able to stand firm through life's storms...and there will always be storms, of that we can be sure. It's not enough to blithely say "Oh, praise God...life is good." No. We have to be real in this world of plastic, fake, religiosity. That includes facing our trials honestly but with the hope, comfort and confidence provided us by the Word of God.

Knowing of the complete and absolute sovereignty of God sustains me. That is my anchor.

"The steps of a righteous man are ordered by the Lord." I know and am comforted by the fact that nothing can come into my life unless God allows it (see the book of Job) and if He allows it, He has promised to bring good out of it as well (see Romans 8). Those two truths sustain me in my darkest hours.

That's my anchor, WHAT'S YOURS? What scripture do you stand on, rely on, speak out loud or remind yourself of while enduring trials (large or small)? Did you say "I don't have one?" May I suggest you start with the Psalms or maybe the book of Romans. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you and give you ears to hear. Ask Him to provide you with an Anchor.

*Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.
Heb 6:19a*

11.

He is Able

Yea, they spoke (Hebrew: to think) against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, He [God] smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can He give bread also? can He provide meat for his people?
(Psalm 78:19-20)

Let God's word penetrate your heart. He is able, more than able, to meet your every need.

The Israelites wondered... "Okay, so God performed a miracle for us back then, but can He do this impossible task for us *now*? Water gushing from solid rock is one thing but is He able to furnish us with a good meal (including meat with all the trimmings) out here in the deserted wilderness? Can He do *that*? I don't think so..."

Eventually, out of the abundance of our heart our mouth will speak. If our heart contains unbelief and doubt ultimately our words and actions will flow with the same disbelief in God's ability and faithfulness.

Isaiah 78:42 declares: ***They limited the Holy One***... Whoa... Now that's an oxymoron if ever I heard one. But am I guilty of that? How many times have I prayed small little prayers, planning ahead how they could possibly be worked out before making the request? More times than I want to admit. Do you too limit The Holy One by asking of Him only what you deemed to be possible? Do you limit Him by accusing Him of unfaithfulness when life throws you curves that He didn't prevent?

What was God's reaction to all this (then and now) ? Anger and hurt. The Psalmist says He was "*full of wrath*" because "*they did not believe in God and did not trust in His salvation.*" After all He did for them and continued to do; they still didn't trust Him when times got tough.

It pains my heart to see the parallel in my own life. It's as if I totally forget His last miracle or provision when the next crisis arises. Failing to remember that even His seeming silence can be trusted.

Father, forgive us for limiting You. For not trusting in You when times get tough. For throwing you only softball prayers that we force into an outcome rather than real, honest, falling-on-our-face cries for help...help that You alone can provide.

I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. And they thirsted not when He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them; He split the rock also, and the waters gushed out.

Isaiah 41:17-18 & 21

12.

No Fig Blossoms...

Though the fig tree does not blossom and there is no fruit on the vines, [though] the product of the olive fails and the fields yield no food, though the flock is cut off from the fold and there are no cattle in the stalls...

Habakkuk 3:17 amp

In language of his culture, the prophet Habakkuk was trying to convey the worst possible scenario. No food, no source of income, no security and an unsure future...

Before we look at what the next verse says, what would **your** list look like?

Possibly; “*Though I have no job and the prospects are bad, though my bank account is nearing empty, though my spouse is hard to live with, [though I have no spouse] though my child’s health is failing, [though I am unable to have children] though my heart aches...*”

We all have a list don’t we?

This is what Habakkuk says next:

*Yet **I will** rejoice in the Lord; **I will** exult in the glorious God of my salvation! The Lord is my Strength, and my personal bravery, and my invincible army; He makes my feet like hinds feet and will make me to walk [not to stand still in terror, but to walk] and make [spiritual] progress upon my high places [of trouble, suffering, or responsibility]! Habakkuk 3:18-19 amp*

Did you catch that? He chose to worship God in spite of...right there in the middle of all that appeared wrong. He gave thanks *anyway*, not waiting for all to be made well, not content to wait on some future date when God would explain it all, working it out so giving thanks at least made sense. He made a deliberate choice. *How about you?* Are you waiting for some day...for this situation or that problem to be fixed before you can say “yet I will rejoice...?” I assure you it is not easy to trust when you can’t see your way clear, I know from experience. But, the Lord is worthy of our trust and complete confidence.

I WILL rejoice in the Lord...I WILL exult in the glorious God of my salvation...Make the choice to worship God, to praise Him no matter your circumstances. He’s worthy!

13.

Worship

*You shall have no other gods before Me or besides Me...
You shall not make for yourself any graven image [to worship it] ...
You shall not bow down yourself to them or serve them...
Exodus 20:3, 4a, 5a*

What does it mean to worship God? We are admonished countless times in scripture to worship Him and given the warning NOT to worship any other god. Old English defines worship as “a condition of worth, or to ascribe worth to”. In the original Hebrew of the Old Testament and Greek of the New Testament, we find it meant to prostrate oneself, to literally or figuratively bow down to, to respect, to honor, to pay homage, to praise, to sing or make melody, to serve.

After finishing my study of worship I figured I was in pretty good shape. After all, I hadn't bowed down to any other gods lately, I don't pay homage to idols, and I don't worship any other so-call gods ...*or do I?*

Do I bow to the god of success? Do I serve the god of comfort and financial security? Do I bow to the god of my own appetites and “rights”? Do I pay homage to the god of religiosity? Do I bow to the god of physical beauty? Do I acquiesce to the god of entertainment? Do I put first the god of family, rather than the God *who gave me* my family? *Do you?*

*If we had forgotten the name of our God, or extended our hands to a strange god
would not God find this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart.
Psalm 45:20-22*

Do I worship God with my words while my actions belie the truth of my allegiance? Do you? God asks of us true worship...not plastic, dead religion, but real, falling-on-our-face-in-awe...worshipping of our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Worshipping Him with our actions as well as our words. Worship Him...not just with your lips but with your life. He is worthy.

*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name;
Bring an offering, and come before Him; Worship the LORD in holy array.
1 Chronicles 16:29*

14.

He Loves Me!

“We love Him because He first loved us.”

1 John 4:19

Several years ago an actress made a now famous exclamation as she received the academy award given her by her peers; “You like me! You really like me!” she exclaimed through teary eyes. I smile every time I think of that. Here she was; famous, beautiful, rich and successful by the world’s standards and still she felt she wasn’t liked or accepted until that night.

I can relate to that...When I’m treated harshly by those close to me, when they are disappointed in me (justly or not), when I am ignored by others, I subconsciously carry that into my relationship with God. Suddenly I’m not sure of the Father’s love anymore. Thinking; “Did I read the word as much as I should this week? Have I shared my faith often enough? Do I pray long enough?” Ugh! The accusations keep coming...and before long I’m feeling like a total wretch.

Of course, there are times when *we have* failed God. When we *did do* the wrong thing, made the wrong choice, fell for the temptation or didn’t do what we knew He wanted us to do...O, but God is so gracious with us. He doesn’t love us because we’re good or nice or holy or fluent in Hebrew or memorized the entire 66 books of the Bible...Thankfully! He won’t love us *when*...He doesn’t love us *if*...His love for us is without condition. We may very well do all those “good” things, but out of a heart of love for Him not out of the need to “earn” His love in return.

He doesn’t simply tolerate you, He loves you. That’s Who He is...that’s what He does. **He loves you, He really loves you!**

If by chance you have never received Christ as your Lord and Savior (or maybe you’ve walked away from Him) reach out right now and receive His gift of love for you by acknowledging:

- * you are a sinner*
- * sin has separated you from God*
- * Jesus paid your sin debt in full*
- * be willing to turn from your sin (repent)*
- * confess Jesus Christ as **your Lord**.*

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Psalm 32: “I pray that you...may grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.”
Ephesians 3:1 “For God so loved the world (your name goes here!) that He gave His one and only Son, so that whosoever (your name again!) believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16

15.

Muscle of Obedience

A friend related a story of she and her husband riding bikes several times this last week. While peddling she said she felt resistance in her legs pushing against the pedals. She woke up the next morning thinking about resistance (I'm sure the pain helped her!). God reminded her in the book of James that we are told to resist the devil and he will flee. She told me that we need to be resisting (be an opposing force) to Satan and the stumbling blocks he sets before us. Not only resisting the devil (pride, rebellion, attitude, thoughts etc.), but the first part of that verse is to submit ourselves to God. *Submit yourself to God, resist the devil and he will flee.*

We are not to allow Satan simply to run rough shod over us with no resistance. However, as in her bike riding, there can be no ability to resist if the muscles aren't there to enable us to be an opposing force. We must submit to God, to His authority, to His law, His will, His way of doing things, and **then** we will have the ability to resist the enemy.

*I will strengthen you and harden you to difficulties.
Isaiah 41:10 Amp.*

Through our continued and sustained willingness to be obedient to the Lord, we gain the capacity to resist our enemy and in the process become wise to his schemes. It is through our willingness to submit to God that we are endowed with His strength.

There could be no better illustration of this than the Savior Himself. As Jesus agonized in the garden He cried out; "Nevertheless, not My will but Thy will be done." Then He rose from His knees and gave His life. *Now that's strength.*

16.

Think Big

“There came a woman of Samaria to draw water...Jesus said to her... If you knew the gift of God ...you would have asked and He would have given you Living water.”

John 4:7, 10 NASB

We think temporal...He thinks eternal. We think “what’s possible?”... He declares; *I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, is there anything too difficult for Me?*

At the time Jesus was walking the earth, the people of Israel were looking for a king to save them from Roman rule and oppression. God wanted to save them (and us) from the power and oppression of Satan... giving them (and us) eternal liberty. But because the people were looking for and focused on a temporal solution to a temporal problem, they didn’t recognize God in the flesh delivering them from their real enemy and from a dilemma that had eternal consequences. They were thinking small, He was thinking big.

I’ve done that. Praying [okay... pleading, begging and bargaining] for a trial to end (temporal) but instead... He allows the hardship to continue until producing in me patience or endurance in a particular area (eternal).

Maybe you’ve done the same...asking the Lord for a glass of water when He wants to give you Living water. Thinking “what will make my life more comfortable?”...He instead offering you what you **need**. Not being so much concerned with our temporal comfort as with our eternal comfort. Eternity vs. the here and now...*that’s* thinking big.

17.

Too Small a Matter

You have not because you ask not
James 4:2 NASB

I have found that people usually view prayer — *specific requests in particular* — in one of two ways. Some think — *Oh, this is much too small a matter to bother God*. If you hold this view you'll think it strange when people pray about a broken car, a microwave in need of repair or enough milk to last the week. You save God for the big stuff, you'll handle all the rest.

While others go to the opposite extreme, surmising — *Why, God could/would never do that...it's impossible*. This way of thinking causes you to reject prayers asking for divine healing, delivering a loved one from addiction, bringing back a rebellious child or restoring a marriage that's beyond repair. You give God only the problems you think He can handle.

Both views are flawed. The Lord cares about every detail of our lives... from the mundane to the major. From grocery money to cancer...from peace of mind to help on a math test...from wisdom in your trials to comforting you as you sleep...from an upset stomach to your children's education.

He tells us; "*Casting the whole of your care and anxiety on him because he cares for you.*" 1 Peter 5:7 amp Right now, at this moment, whatever is causing you anxiety or concern, cast (throw!) it to the Lord. He can handle it. He'll either do the impossible or He'll walk you through the impossible, because *he cares for you*.

There is no problem so small that God is not needed and no problem so big for which He is not adequate.

Is there anything too difficult for me?

Genesis 18:14 amp

*...In **everything** by prayer and supplication [definite request] with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God...*

Philippians 4:6 amp

Pray at all times [on every occasion, in every season] .

Ephesians 6:18a amp

18.

Let God be God

*Call to Me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things
that are beyond your imagination.*

Jeremiah 33:3

If I were standing by the shore of the Red Sea, needing desperately to cross, my first thought would be...*Where's the boat? I need a boat.* If I was stranded in a desert and dying of thirst, my first thought would be....*Where's the bottled water?* If I were lost and abandoned without food, my first thought would be....*Where's the closest McDonald's?* What I would NOT think...what would NOT cross my mind is what God actually did in those very situations.

When faced with the impassable and raging Red Sea...God *parted* it. When His people faced thirst and dehydration ...He caused sparkling water to flow from *solid rock*. When His chosen ones were confronted with starvation... He caused honey flavored wafers to *fall from the sky*.

I am sure the Israelites never expected;
the sea to be parted ...
water to flow from a solid rock...

or

Manna to fall from heaven...*But that is just what God did.*

In your life and mine we come up against our own version of the Red Sea...Seas of divorce, debt, death, illness, guilt, fear, depression, loneliness, hopelessness... And if you're anything like me you might look for a boat when God wants to display His glory by parting the Sea instead.

God — He sees our need and meets it. Just present your requests to Him and give up trying to figure out how He might possibly accomplish it. It may never occur to you what miraculous things God will do on your behalf.

Father, teach us to rest in Your ability to meet our every need. May we simply, by faith, lay our requests into Your hands and trust in You to do what needs to be done.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

19.

Impossible

*I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water...*

*That men may see and know and consider and
understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this...*

Isaiah 41:18 & 20 Amp

The prophet Isaiah is describing the impossible. I mean really, have you ever seen a flowing stream burst forth out of parched, dry ground? Or how about a pool of water in the wilderness. No? Ah, but God can do it. He can do anything. But...He oftentimes waits; waiting until the situation is a human impossibility before acting.

Let's take a look at the life of Gideon and see just what I mean. God wanted to use Gideon and the Israelite army to deliver the nation of Israel, but there was a problem. The army had 33,000 strong fighting men. Who do you suppose would get the credit after the big victory? The people, of course. Knowing this, God said "*The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into your hands, lest Israel boast about themselves against Me, saying, My own hand has delivered me.*" Judges 7:2 Amp. See what I mean? The situation was not impossible enough.

So He waits. He waits until all seems lost, until the last dollar is spent, until the relationship is beyond repair, until the diagnosis is given...Have you noticed this in your own life? Is there a situation that appears out of control, beyond hope, completely impossible? Maybe God has the situation (and you) just where He wants it. If it were any other way man would get the glory or happenstance or coincidence or hard work or luck would be used to explain what the Hand of the Lord has done.

Lastly, look at the cross of Christ, talk about all hope being gone. Dead. Stone cold dead. Jesus was dead yet three days later He's walking around the city! He's in heaven pouring out His blood on the mercy seat for you and I. God took an impossible situation and did the impossible with it.

"Is My hand shortened that I cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make rivers a desert..." Isaiah 50:2b Amp & "What is impossible for man is possible with God." Matthew 19:26

20.

God's Patience

Let's look at two translations of this verse in 2 Peter 3:9

"God is not slow as some men count slowness but is patient toward all, willing that none should perish but that all would come to repentance." NASB

&

"The Lord does not delay and is not tardy or slow about His promises, according to some people's conception of slowness, but He is long-suffering (extraordinarily patient) toward you, not desiring that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Amp

The Hebrew word **Choreo** is rendered *should come or would come* in the above verses literally means "**to give space, to pass or enter**".

Patience is not one of my virtues; in fact, I can be down right impatient at times. Red lights irritate me and slow drivers leave me fuming. I have little tolerance for people who procrastinate or refuse to work hard and zero patience for couch potatoes or laziness. In fact, I have found that I have little patience for GOD'S patience (unless of course it's being directed toward me!).

While complaining bitterly about an ongoing injustice in my life, I came across a taped sermon by Anne Graham Lotz concerning heaven and hell. Truthfully, I wanted to wallow in self-pity and dream of the day I would be in heaven! But to my chagrin the Lord would have none of that. The first part of the teaching described heaven in all its glorious splendor from scripture references that I eagerly digested.

The remaining tape spoke of hell...in all *its* horrid detail...straight from God's word. Mrs. Lotz then added this scripture for her audience to consider...*"God is not slow as some men count slowness but is patient toward all, willing that none should perish but that all would come to repentance."* She continued, "Hell is so very bad, and God knows that. He doesn't want anybody to go there. That's why He's so patient...that's why He sent Jesus."

I stopped what I was doing, turned off the tape and just stood there. I mulled over her words and the word of God I'd just heard. Realizing for the first time how impatient I had been toward a particular person in my life...to the point of being willing to ignore what would surely happen to them after their last breath was breathed. My own well-being and comfort was all that had been consuming me. I had no patience with them and what I viewed as their stubbornness *and* I was a little irritated that God had been so generously patient. How shamed I felt at that moment...at that realization.

God, in His patience, was allowing this person "a space" to repent. He was doing for them what He had done for me (and you). Where would I be if God had not shown extraordinary patience with me? That realization is helping me to be patient with others while they're are given "space" to repent.

21.

Perspective

“For I consider that the sufferings of the present time (this present life) are not worth being compared with the glory that will be revealed in us.” Romans 8:18 AMP

Perspective: The way things are seen from a particular point of view *AND* the ability to understand the relationship between things to judge the importance of each.

Have you ever looked at the back of a piece of cross stitch or embroidery? It looks like a jumbled mess doesn't it? Threads all over the place, colors that don't seem to go together, long hanging threads, short knotted threads and frayed edges. But...turn it over and there appears a beautiful picture.

How often I've looked so intently at my own life, my trials, my difficulties, my burdens and lose proper perspective. Not just perspective, but proper perspective. The more I look, dwell, linger on these things the more magnified the troubles become. Everything is about me and my life. I become less concerned about other's trials, about other's needs. My own importance balloons and God's ability seems to shrink.

Romans 8:18 AMP says: “For I consider that the sufferings of the present time (this present life) are not worth being compared with the glory that will be revealed in us.” Now that's perspective. And in Philippians 2:4 AMP *“Let each of you esteem and look upon and be concerned for not [merely] his own interests, but also for each other's.”* We can't do that if we're consumed with our own interests and our own lives.

When I take my eyes off of the trouble, whatever it may be [and there will always be something] and instead fix my eyes on Jesus, casting aside every sin and every weight [worry, doubt, fear]...**then** He gives me a proper perspective. He said *He who comes to me I will in no way cast out, and Call to Me and I will answer you.* I asked the Lord to give me His perspective on my situation. I realize I'm only seeing part of the story...the backside of His embroidering of my life...to enable me to trust Him even when I can't make out what's going on or the “why” of it all.

I understand that although I am helpless and hopeless apart from Him, I can do all things *through* Him. He makes me more than a conqueror. I have been bought with a price, I am not my own. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives within me and the life I now live in the body I live by faith in Jesus Christ, Who loves me and gave His life for me.

22.

Encouragement

To be *discouraged* is to lose courage.

Remember the old song, *His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches over me?* God's Word says; "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies and yet not one of them is forgotten or uncared for in the presence of God. Do not be struck with fear or seized with alarm. You are of greater worth than many flocks sparrows. And in the Old Testament, "I know and am acquainted with all the birds of the mountains."

(Luke 12:6-7b and Psalm 50:11 Amp)

"Encourage the exhausted and strengthen the feeble, say to those with anxious heart 'take courage, fear not.' For the Lord knows and is fully acquainted with the way of the righteous. You number and record my wonderings; put my tears in a bottle — are they not in Your book? Those who feared the Lord talked often one to another, and the Lord listened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him of those who revered and worshipfully feared the Lord and who thought on His name." Isaiah 35:3-4 Psalm 1:6 Psalm 56:8 Malachi 3:16

Be encouraged, God knows your sorrow, He is aware of the path you take. He is not impotent in your situation. He is all powerful. He is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe and He *loves you*. He thinks on you. He has engraved you on the palm of His hand. Trials come and trials go (thankfully!). But He is faithful. Even when He allows struggles into our life you can be sure He will at the same time provide all you need to emerge as more than a conqueror. It will not always be this hard.

I remind myself of Romans 8:28, by saying; if He's allowed (*fill in the blank*) into my life, He's promised to bring good out of it as well. The apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 1:9

"Indeed we had the sentence of death within ourselves, despairing even of life, but this was to keep us from trusting in and depending on ourselves instead of on God who raises the dead."

Dead lives, dead marriages, dead relationships, dead finances, dead feelings....

He is THE resurrection and THE life...

Behold, He [Jesus] makes all things new.

23.

Good or Bad?

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding...”
Proverbs 3:5

I once heard a story that goes something like this... (It requires a little participation on your part.) After each sentence you answer the question: Was that a good thing or a bad thing. Okay?

There once was a man who had two sons...*is that a good thing or bad thing?* Got your answer? Now...

While riding his horse, the youngest son fell and crippled his leg...*is that a good thing or bad thing?*

The oldest was still healthy and able to care work on the farm...*is that a good thing or a bad thing?*

Soon, war broke out in the country ,and as a result, all able-bodied men were drafted into the army...*was that a good thing or a bad thing?*

The commander of the army decided it would be in the best interest of his country to euthanize all “useless” men...*is that a good thing or a bad thing?*

The oldest brother, being in the army and thus aware of the plan, was able to warn his brother and save his life...*is that a good thing or a bad thing?*

Are you getting the idea? Let’s try another one:

An innocent man was charged with a crime, found guilty by a corrupt court system and sentenced to a torturous death...*is that a good thing or a bad thing?*

Now, what if I tell you that innocent Man is Jesus? ...*was it a good thing or a bad thing?*

What has God allowed into your life that appears so very bad...but may, in reality, be good? It has been said that we must, at times, trust His heart when we don’t understand His hand.

Are you fully convinced that God is FOR you and not against you? Trust in Him at all times...He is *trustworthy*...He sees around the corner and has already made provision for it. I know from experience that it’s not an easy thing to do, but God can and will enable you.

Some trust in chariots and some trust in horses (human strength, wisdom and power) but I trust in the name of the Lord my God.

Psalm 20:7

24.

God is Never Late

*...the Lord knows how to deliver the godly from temptations [trials]...
2 Peter 2:9*

*No temptation [trial] has overtaken you except what is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted [tested] beyond what you are able, but with the temptation [test] will provide a way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.
1 Corinthians 10:13*

The Lord is never late...*not a moment early, mind you*—but never late. Remember, however, that His ways are not our ways, His thoughts are not our thoughts. What we might consider late is actually “in due season, at the appointed time...”

For an example we need only look at the story of Daniel in the lion’s den...You can bet Daniel thought God was a little late as he was hurled into that pit of hungry lions (*Daniel 3*) . Or what about Shadrack, Meschak and Abendigo, do you suppose they thought God’s timing was a little off as they were ushered into a giant size toaster oven? (*Daniel 6*) Think of Lazarus, Jesus waited until he DIED before doing anything...*now that* would make me think “God, where are You? You waited too long!” (*John 11*)
These people were, after all, human, with all the frailties and limitations humans possess.

What goes through *your mind* when confronted with difficulties that make it appear God is late, that He’s not paying attention to you or doesn’t care what’s happening in your life? Do you wonder...“God, did you forget about me?... Are You really real? ... Has my faith been for nothing?... Where are You, God, when I really need you !?” I believe we all have thought these or similar statements at times, even if left unuttered.

As I said at the beginning, what looks like tardiness on God’s part is not...*He is not late*. He knows what He’s doing, He’s aware of what you’re going through. It’s just that He doesn’t do things our way or in our timing or with our limited view of the future or even with our short-sided goals in mind. He may use your “situation” to effect your family for generations to come, or to effect your city or cause change in your church body or to bring a friend to salvation or to affect a nation. Who knows what the Lord has planned as an outcome for your test/trial? Of this you can be sure...He *does* have a plan and a purpose in it all. *Jeremiah 29:11*.

So please, stop looking at your watch and start thanking Him for allowing you the privilege of bringing glory to His name in and through whatever means He has chosen.

25.

Yes, He Means You...

A few weeks ago, while standing in my musty, leaky basement filling the washing machine, I told God; "I don't 'feel' You right now, but I know Your word says You are with me always." Then I mused out loud... "even while doing laundry". I went back to loading the machine and thought, "I wonder how many believers forget to make God's word their own?" Do you apply God's word to *yourself*...in your life...in your circumstances? That's the way He intends it to be, but what does that mean, what does it look like in the nitty-gritty of life? I've put in random names, but you fill them with your own, okay?

I will never leave you or forsake you becomes; I will never leave, Julie or forsake her.

Let's try a few more; *For by grace Carlena is saved and not by Carlena's good works. It is a gift of God not of works so that Carlena can't boast.*

For God so loved Herb that He gave His One and only Son so that if Herb believed on Him he would not perish but have would have everlasting life.

Yea, though Tina walks through the valley of the shadow of death, she will fear no evil for I Am with her.

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for Carol's instruction, that through perseverance and encouragement of the scriptures, Carol might have hope.

O Lord, You have searched Becky and known her; You know when she sits down and when she gets up, You know Becky's thoughts from far off.

When Barb passes through the waters, I will be with her, and through the rivers, they will not overflow on her.

Do not fear, Melanie, for I am with you. If I am for you, Rachel, who can be against you?

It is appointed unto Aaron to die once and then his judgment. As far as the east is from the west so I have removed Aaron's transgressions from him.

I, even I am He Who comforts you, David. Melissa sinned and went her own way, but God has laid on Jesus her sin.

For though the mountains be moved and the hills depart, yet My lovingkindness will not be removed from Lisa.

Pat will rejoice greatly in the Lord, his soul will exult in God.

When Sarah walks through the fire she will not be burned neither will the flame kindle upon her.

All the above "verses" are real scriptures altered only by adding the name. When reading God's word, apply it to you...to your life. Though I certainly don't mean for you to take scriptures out of context, I pray you learn to apply God's word to you *personally*, that's the way He intended it.

26.

A New Creation

*If any man be in Christ He is a new creation (a new creature all together), the old has passed away and behold all things are made new. 2 Corinthians 5:17 amp
I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, that unless a man is born again he cannot ever see the kingdom of heaven. John 3:3 amp*

In my home a few years ago there was a recurring bad odor coming from the heat vents when the furnace kicked on. Trying to correct the problem, I vacuumed out the ducts and placed in them scented air fresheners made for heating vents. Though this would help for a while the odor always came back. After much aggravation and several weeks later, we discovered the problem; a dead mouse. Somehow it had gotten in the vent and died. Talk about gross! Yuck. No matter what we did to mask the odor, the decaying body was still there...producing its awful smell. Once it was removed, so too was our odor problem. Thankfully.

Sometimes in life, when confronted with major issues we seek to cover or mask the problem with Band-Aid solutions rather than doing what is needed; a complete over haul. As for our spiritual condition; no matter how we attempt to change ourselves on the outside...doing good deeds, being kind to others, going to church... our heart is still the same. What's required is a *new heart*...as Jesus said, we "must be born again". We need to be changed from the inside out. From our new heart will flow a genuine desire to do God's will...not out of a sense of obligation but rather of gratitude for His mercy and undeserved favor.

Our old heart (or **nature** as God's word calls it) must be removed and a new heart given. There's no cleaning or fixing up the old one. Back to the mouse. The odor remained until the dead body was removed. The source of the odor had to be taken away. Now I am free to freshen my home all I want and the sweet fragrance will remain.

With our new nature, all our "good works" produced out of love, are a sweet fragrance to God rather than an affront to His holiness as was the case before.

Compromise

*A little leaven leavens the whole bunch Galatians 5:9
Abstain from **all appearance** of evil 1Thess. 5:22*

I've heard that if you put a frog into a pan of boiling water it will immediately jump out, BUT...if you put the same frog into a pan of cool water and ever so gradually increase the temperature...the frog will willingly remain, even though the water has been brought to full boil. Not noticing the gradual increase until it is too late.

The above analogy paints a dramatic word picture of *compromise*. Specifically, compromise in the life of a follower of Jesus Christ. I don't know about you but I've yet to see a believer decide: "I think I'll walk away from God today" ... "maybe I'll commit adultery this afternoon" ... "I want to start a drug habit this evening that will destroy my future" ... "a pornography addiction sounds like a good idea"... "I think I will totally destroy my testimony this week"...

It just doesn't happen like that does it? Rather, in our moment by moment choices, we either walk toward the Father or away from Him. Tragically, it's possible to wake up one day and find ourselves in "boiling water", not understanding how we moved so far away from our faith in Jesus, so far removed from our testimony of being a "new creation in Christ."

We must be ever mind-full of the "minor" and seemingly insignificant choices we make. All those choices are leading us either to become more like Christ or carrying us further away from Him and His character.

*There is a way that seems **right** to man, but the end thereof is the **way** of death.
Proverbs 14:12*

As God's word tells us here, sometimes the road we take may appear right, but in reality it leads to death [death of our emotions, relationships, reputation, finances, and ultimately, eternal death]. To ensure you are on the right path... refuse compromise *in the slightest detail*. Think Biblically... instead of trying to determine "how far can I go without sinning" or "how close can I get to "the line" without crossing it"... decide: "What can I do to please my Lord? What could I offer Him that would show Him how much He means to me?".

That may mean different choices in what you watch on television (or how much!!), how you talk, how you carry yourself around the opposite sex (or same sex), how you dress, how you spend your free time or your money...*

If the damage has already been done, if you see yourself in this picture of compromise...IT'S NOT TOO LATE! Many years ago, I was one of those believers who one day found herself in a distant place...far removed from even a hint of a relationship with my beloved Savior. I got there by slight increases in what I would allow myself to tolerate [not unlike the frog!], making trivial (or so I thought) decisions that, over time, amounted to a total change in my life's direction. By God's grace I was pulled back from the brink.

28.

Immediate Results?

“...who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

Hebrews 6:12

“After waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.”

Hebrews 6:15

A farmer prepares the soil, plants the seeds and waits... When baking a cake, after mixing all the ingredients together, the cook puts it in the oven and waits...

So it is with the fulfillment of God’s promises. There will almost always be a span of time — *-a space—* between our obedience and our reward. God’s Word reminds us not to *“...lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we faint not.”* Galatians 6:9

My pastor often says ; “you will always reap what you sow, more than you sow, later than you sow”. This is usually spoken or thought of with a negative connotation, but it is also true for the positive as well. When we sow seeds of obedience, we will reap a harvest of God’s promises fulfilled in our life.

Is there a promise you’re standing on?... a promise as yet unfulfilled? Don’t be discouraged. Wait on God...wait on His perfect timing. Ask Him what He’d have you do during this waiting period of your life. (be encouraged that the waiting mode is only a season of your life not the entirety of your life) Ask Him what He’d have you learn through the waiting process.

“So don’t throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised.”

Hebrews 10:35, 36

*How Long, O Lord?**O, Lord, how long shall I cry for help and You will not hear?**Habakkuk 1:2**How long will You forget me, O Lord? Forever? How long must I lay up
cares within me and have sorrow in my heart day after day?**Psalm 13:1-2a*

The prophet Habakkuk and king David are not alone in asking the question... **How long, Lord?** How long will this trial...test...difficulty last? Though I'm certain none of you have uttered those words, I confess *I have*. Wondering if He noticed what was happening...was He ever going to move on my behalf? I'm fond of saying anyone can handle just about anything as long as it's short in duration. But what happens when the difficulty goes on for months, even years? What then?

When we don't see immediate results, we might wrongly assume God is not active on our behalf. Remember however, He doesn't do things the way we do... *For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.* *Isaiah 55:8*

Allow me to use my kitchen counter as an example (are you laughing?). I'm happy if the counters are clean. Empty space, that's what I like. A clean counter means a clean kitchen...just don't peak into my drawers or cabinets! There you will find chaos. What appears neat and tidy is really only "counter deep". God's not like that with our lives...He's not satisfied with things just looking good...Facades of holiness will not do. No, He meticulously works out every detail, weaving together people and events to meet our needs in perfect timing. And keep in mind; He knows what we really need. We may plead for a trial to end while what we actually need is an opportunity to stretch our faith.

*God is not slow as some count slowness, but is patient... 2 Peter 3:9a**For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show
Himself strong in behalf of those whose hearts are completely His.**2 Chronicles 16:9**He Who planted the ear—shall He not hear? He who planted the eye—
shall He not see?*

30.

In Spite of...

But insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, rejoice, so that when His glory [full of radiance and splendor] is revealed, you may also rejoice with triumph [exultantly]. If you are censured and suffer abuse [because you bear] the name of Christ, blessed [are you—happy, fortunate, to be envied, with life-joy, and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, [regardless of your outward condition] Because the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God, is resting upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. 1 Peter 4:13-15 AMP

I was given a car several years ago. Months later the car was stolen, wrecked, and then recovered. It had minor damage and the stereo was stolen, but I had my car back in working order...Thank You, Father! My oldest son bought me a new stereo for Mother's day to replace the one stolen. Ironically, two months later, my family and I were eating out, celebrating my youngest daughter's birthday, when my car was broken into, the stereo stolen (with my favorite Third Day CD) and her birthday presents taken. The passenger door was also badly damaged. As I surveyed my car and took the time to take in what just happened I said to my kids, "*Thank God they didn't steal the car this time.*" My youngest son said "Mom, I can't believe you're not more upset about what happened." I told him I really was bothered by what had happened, but reminded him of our need to be thankful for what we have not focused on what we don't have.

While washing the dishes later that evening and feeling sad that my daughter's presents were stolen (they were nice clothes which she needed). I imagined what she would have looked like in her new skirt or the pretty blouse. Then the thought came to me; I'm upset about children's clothes while some mother's have had *their very children stolen*. A feeling of thankfulness welled within me for my children.

The Lord reminded me of the phrase "you are blessed regardless of your outward condition" and the verse that says "The Lord gives and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Let's be thankful for what we have and not focus on what we don't have or feel we should have and stop stressing over the small things of life. Our life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions.

No matter what it looks like to the seeing world, I am blessed...*and so are you.*

31.

Two Questions...

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

2 Corinthians 13:5

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God John 3:3 *Greek = from above*

Several years ago, I took an evangelism class that focused on two important questions. After weeks of training I had the opportunity to go door to door with a small group and ask the questions to complete strangers. The aim was to get the person answering to see for themselves what their “spiritual” state was. As you might imagine, I came across many interesting answers during the class. Some gave “correct” answers but it appeared they were only parroting what they had been told, not really in a *relationship* with Jesus Christ. Others talked about how good they were, explaining that compared to “so and so” down the street they weren’t that bad. A few said they knew they would end up in hell, still others told me to take a hike!

Would you like to take a crack at the questions? Here they are;

Question 1- If you were to die today, do you know *for certain* that you would go to heaven? No maybe or I hope so...

Question 2 - If you were to die today and be brought before God and He asked you “Why should I let you into My heaven?” ...What would you say?

What *could* you say? Thought provoking aren’t they?

So how about it, do you “know” all the right answers but lack an authentic relationship with Almighty God through the person of Jesus Christ? Are you religious but cannot truly say you “know” Jesus as your intimate Friend and Savior? Perhaps you are one of those who looks at other imperfect people as the standard and come out looking pretty good by comparison...forgetting that the standard is Christ Himself. Are you like the few who reluctantly acknowledged that hell was where they were headed? Maybe you’re not even convinced that anyone can really know their eternal future beforehand.

God’s Word proclaims “These things were written that you might KNOW you have eternal life”. *Do you know?* Your eternity hangs in the balance (between you and me, that’s a pretty long time!)

Can you look back to a moment in time when you gave it all to the Lord Jesus Christ? Can you see (*can others see*) how His Holy Spirit has worked to change you into His image over the weeks, months or years since that day? If you can...Awesome. The angels are having a party on your behalf! If you cannot, if all you have is a plastic, fake, feel-good-on-Sunday religiosity...recognize here and now that your eternal destination is hell, not heaven...

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

**missed the mark, as in archery.*

The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Romans 6:23-24

32.

God's Silence

And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt (insert your own version of Egypt), and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters and oppressors (who or what oppresses you?); for I know their sorrows and sufferings and trials (what is causing you to suffer?). Exodus 3:7

I wonder how many years elapsed before God acted? How long did His people cry out in slavery before they saw His hand of deliverance? Maybe they too, did not understand His silence, His seeming inaction. But they trusted and hoped on until the deliverer was sent...at the appointed time.

What do you do with God's silence? With His seeming deafness to your prayers?

While mulling over a difficult circumstance in my own life I searched my heart and had to admit this ugly truth; I didn't really believe God was hearing/listening to me when I prayed. Having wrongly surmised that if He had heard He would surely have acted on my behalf by now. While I certainly would never utter such blasphemous thoughts I was silently / subconsciously thinking it. Certainly He would have done something by now. Right?

I was stunned at the thought of my faith being so low, so shallow. "God", I asked "Why are You silent? Why haven't You put an end to this trial?" I waited...*and* waited...I didn't hear any peals of thunder or see lightning bolts, but I did hear a still, small "voice" assuring me that my prayers were being heard. A calm knowing/assurance that I had to just trust Him. No, I didn't understand why He was allowing this situation to continue as it had, but He was calling me to trust Him even when I couldn't see my way clear. Even when it seemed a contradiction to do so.

In your own life, I encourage you to be honest, be real with God. He can take it. Admit your unspoken doubts and fears to your Father. Then let Him work in your heart the same calm assurance...that He does indeed have everything under control. His timing is perfect, His ways flawless. As the old hymn goes; "Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey."

33.

Pain

*As a father pities his children so the Lord takes pity
on those who fear Him. Psalm 103:13*

While watching my youngest son prepare for dental surgery, I was filled with a jumble of emotions. Apprehension, anxiety and the longing to protect. He balked at the idea of anesthesia, even crying and trying to pull off the gas mask. He cried out “I can’t breathe” and dug his finger nails into my arm. I assured him “I would never allow anyone to hurt you, or put something on you that would keep you from breathing.” I’m not so sure he believed me. After all, it was me who was holding his arms down. I could have stopped the whole torturous affair with just one word, but I didn’t. Not only did I not stop the process, I planned it, worked out all the details and set his “trial” into motion. Some Mom I was.

I wanted desperately to say “Stop! I change my mind.” And then hold him. Hug him. Love on him. But - I knew the reason for allowing him such discomfort. I understood that in the end, he would be glad he’d endured such difficulty. But right now...in the middle of the pain and fearful expectation, he couldn’t see that. Heck, I could barely see it.

I wonder if that’s not what happens to us when God allows difficulty into our lives. Does He hold our hand and allow us to dig our nails in while crying “I can’t take this! Stop the pain.” All the while knowing that it will be for our benefit in the long run. Do His eyes figuratively well with tears as we wiggle to get away from the heat, wanting to protect us yet knowing that it must be done? Knowing we will be glad for having endured it in the end? I wonder.

I hope my son will come to understand how much I love him and that he can trust in that love. Trust me to make choices in his best interest.

And we can trust in the Father’s love, and trust His hand even when we don’t understand the “why” of it all.

*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all,
how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?
Romans 8:32*

34.

Better Felt than Telt

“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him and ran and embraced him and kissed him.” Luke 15:20

More than a decade ago I was what one might call “backslidden” or a “prodigal”. Having given my life to the Lord Jesus some 15 years earlier, I walked away from a life of *genuine* obedience. Oh, I could fake it pretty good, but He knew my heart.

I bitterly recall moments of recognition when I realized I had blown it again. Initially, I was flooded with shame and remorse, then denial which eventually gave birth to rationalization. Rationalization of what I knew in my heart was wrong and an affront to the holiness of my Lord.

When the Lord Jesus was walking this earth, He called the Pharisees (religious leaders) hypocrites. Interestingly, that is the Greek word for *actor*. In that day, actors used those fancy masks on a stick to cover their faces. Switching expressions and whole identities as needed for each scene.

As much as I do not want to admit it, I use to do that with my life. Acting holy based on outward circumstances meeting my approval and rebelling when they did not. By God’s totally undeserved mercy He allowed me to come crashing (and I do mean crashing) down into a pit that led only up...*into His waiting arms*. What a Savior we have!

You see, He could have forced me to stop making such bad choices...He could have prevented me from ever walking away...He didn’t have to let me fall (at least not quite that hard!!)...but He did. As any good parent knows, we have to let our kids fall down occasionally for them fully “get it”. Some lessons in life are better felt than telt. Willful, sustained disobedience to the Lord’s precepts is one of those lessons.

Our Lord is merciful and as one of my favorite authors (Kay Arthur) says; “mercy is not for the worthy but for the needy”.

Below is a brief clip of the Biblical story of the prodigal son found in Luke 15.

“He squandered his estate with loose living...Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred (pretty cool how God arranged that don’t you think?)...But when he had come to his senses he arose...

While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him and ran and embraced him and kissed him...the son said to him, ‘Father I am no longer worthy to be called your son, make me one of your hired servants.’

Luke 15:13b, 15 & 17 & 15:20 NASB

The Power of Testimony

“If I [Jesus] be lifted I will draw all men unto me...”

John 12:32 NASB

Testimony, what does it mean? My trusty children’s dictionary says: a statement or action used to prove something. As followers of Jesus Christ our very life is a testimony to His saving power and His faithfulness...His mercy and grace in time of need. This would include how we came to Christ and how we live for Christ in the day to day real world. *Living epistles [letters], read of all men.* 2 Corinthians 3:2

Have you struggled with the loss of a child...a divorce you did not want...an illness...a betrayal...financial difficulties...rebellious teens ...addiction...depression or simply loneliness?

Someone needs to hear how Jesus Christ brought you through. That someone might be your neighbor, barber, grocery cashier, bank clerk, or the person sitting in the pew next to you.

You have a testimony. You have something to share from your life experiences . Hurting people long to know they are not alone, that another person has been where they are and prevailed. In today’s vernacular you would say; **I’ve been there done that** and this is how the Lord brought me through. Although God didn’t necessarily remove the difficulty... you found His grace to be sufficient, His Word to be true and His promises unfulfilling. And be specific. Point out the Scriptures that strengthened you...allow them a peak at the journal entries you wrote while in the midst of the storm. Share the music that soothed your heart. Don’t offer religious sounding platitudes...Offer hope, hope is an anchor to the soul...hopelessness is deadly.

Don’t attempt to sugar coat your struggles. Be real with people. Be honest about what you’ve gone through...There are hurting people everywhere aching to be understood, to know there is hope in the hopeless looking struggle they face. Use your story to point them to Christ. He is the answer. Not you. Not me. Christ and Christ alone. He said ; *“If I be lifted I will draw all men unto me.”* Exalt Him through your testimony.

Maybe **you’re** the one in need of encouraging words ...I’ve been there myself. As I was preparing to write this I came across a prayer I wrote dated 5-19-04:

“I don’t always understand what’s happening. Why my life’s circumstances are so difficult. But...It’s at those times....I bow my knee and cry out to My God, the Sovereign of the universe —

I trust You! This doesn’t add up, I can’t see my way clear, But I trust You.”

“Who works all things after the council of His will.” Ephesians 1:11

That’s not to say life has been smooth sailing since that day, but our Lord Jesus has walked with me and paved the road ahead of me.

36.

Tears

*Thou has taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Thy bottle;
are they not in Thy book?*

Psalm 56:8

Then those who feared the Lord talked often one to another; and the Lord listened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him of those who revered and worshipfully feared the Lord and who thought on His name.

Malachi 3:16

Did you know that God saves your tears? Holding them in a bottle, recording each one shed in His book of remembrance? What a tender thing to do. How precious they must be to our Lord.

While some can cry without much provocation others strain to show such emotion. He knows that too. He sees the hidden tears of your heart. A heart so hardened by life that inward tears are the only ones shed.

Whatever the cause, there are times when our human hearts literally ache with emotional pain. He sees...He is aware. Nothing escapes His notice.

There will come a day when tears of suffering will cease...

And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death, there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain, the former things have passed away. Revelation 21:4

If you are going through great difficulties...

Trust in Him at all times... pour out your heart to the Lord. Psalm 62:8. He is an ever present help in times of trouble.*

Psalm 46:1

If life is a bit easy on you at the moment, please take the initiative and encourage those around you .

* Hebrew: *to gush*

37.

Vindication

You have said, It is useless to serve God, and what profit is it if we keep His ordinances and walk gloomily and as if in mourning apparel before the Lord of hosts? And now we consider the proud and arrogant to be happy and favored; evildoers are exalted and prosper; yes, and when they test God, they escape [unpunished].

Malachi 3:14-15 AMP

Have these words ever echoed in your heart? Secretly thinking things were easier before you gave your life to Christ. Or maybe you've complained that "bad" people get away with murder while you get a parking ticket for being two inches past the no stopping sign. Injustice. That's what we're really talking about.

God is so concerned with justice look what He did:

We sinned — and sin must be punished (would a just judge let lawbreakers go free because he has a soft heart?)—but He loved us and didn't want to punish us (parents, have you ever been there?) So what was He to do? When His justice bumped up against His love ...He did what only God would do — pay the penalty Himself — That's how serious He is about justice.

Our God is a God of justice. The day of reckoning always comes...But we must be patient and not seek to implement our own brand of justice.

For surely there is a latter end (a future and a reward) and your hope and expectation shall not be cut off. Proverbs 23:18 AMP

...the wise man waits for justice from the Lord. Proverbs 29:26b AMP

Why do you say Israel (put your name here) and why do you declare Jacob (your name again), My way and my lot are hidden from the Lord, and my right is passed over without regard from my God? Isaiah 40:27 AMP

Whatever injustice has entered into your life...a marital affair, an unfair job loss, rape, abuse... be sure God will not allow the guilty to go unpunished. He never does. Never.

I will by no means clear the guilty.

Exodus 34:7

Vengeance is Mine [retribution and the meeting out of full justice rest with Me]; I will repay [I will exact the compensation], says the Lord.

Deuteronomy 32:35

I can't leave the subject of God's justice without mentioning God's mercy. If the one who has offended you **genuinely turns to God in repentance**, He will forgive. Though He will not necessarily remove the earthly consequences.

38.

Comfort

The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; 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.

2 Corinthians 1:3b-4

There's nothing like hearing "I've been where you are" or "I know exactly how you feel" when facing a trial...**IF** the person really has been in our shoes. There's just something comforting about knowing another human being has stood in our place or is walking the same difficult path as us. Take a look at all the "self-help" meetings or groups that provide exactly that. Parents of learning disabled children — spouses of alcoholics — adult children of alcoholics — cancer survivors — the list is as endless as the pain that binds them.

I myself have suffered the loss of two children and have other difficulties I face on a daily basis. *But God* has used those trials to give me the opportunity to comfort others. Certainly not something I would have volunteered for but I'm honored to be used by God to encouraged others and point them to the Savior.

Though we are followers of Jesus Christ we still have our share of trials and difficulties. *But*, we also have the advantage of being comforted by God Himself. He knows and is aware of the path we take, because He takes it with us.

Whatever tragedy has befallen you, first allow God to comfort your heart and then permit Him to use it as a way to point others to Christ...for salvation, for comfort, for healing and restoration. If He did it for you He can do it for them too.

For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:5

39.

Happenstance?

When darkness overtakes the godly, light will come bursting in. Psalm 112:4 NLT

As the story goes; there was a man stranded on top of his roof while raging flood waters threatened him from below. He cried out to God...*'Help me, Lord!'* Several minutes passed and a neighbor rowed by in a boat offering to rescue him. 'No' came his reply, 'God will save me.' Still later, a fire and rescue team cruised by in a speed boat and begged him to get off the roof and into their boat. He refused the offer and insisted, 'God will save me!' By evening, as the waters rose to dangerous heights, a helicopter approached with a rope ladder. They yelled for the man to climb on and once again he adamantly refused, 'No, God's going to save me!' he yelled.

The man awoke to find himself in heaven. 'God! Why didn't You save me?' He protested. 'I sent your neighbor, scuba divers, a boat *and* a helicopter, what more could I do?' came God's reply.

We laugh at the ridiculousness of the man in this story, seeing clearly how God provided for the man just as he requested. But the man refused the help, thinking if it weren't "spiritual" or "supernatural" it must not be from God. When we pray He does answer, He does send help our way. A phone call from a friend in the midst of a difficult day... a song that encourages your heart ...a Scripture that opens up to you in a whole new way...or just time for a relaxing bath!... may be the Lord's answer . Don't dismiss these things as mere coincidence or happenstance, there is no such thing in the life of a follower of Jesus Christ.

After having a very discouraging and difficult day , my mom called me. I never did find out the "why" of her phone call, I was too busy telling her the burdens of my heart. The following Sunday morning, while preparing my Sunday school lesson, the youth pastor's wife asked how I was doing. I didn't explain much, just that life was difficult at the moment. She offered a kind word and loaned me a CD of encouraging music. One particularly encouraging song was "*It'll be Worth it Someday*". The words were like a steaming cup of hot chocolate on a cold, snowy day. So comforting.

My only prayer had been "*Help!*" not even able to really articulate *what* I needed. He [God] provided the encouragement and emotional outlet that made it possible for me to carry on another day. Thank You, Father, *thank you*.

Call to Me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things.

Jeremiah 33:3

Do You Want to be Healed?

What do you want Me to do for you? Mark 10:51a

And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What do you want Me to do for you? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. Mark 10:48-51 KJV

What a strange encounter. Jesus [God in the flesh] hears a blind man calling out to Him, asks the disciples to bring him over and then asks the man: *What do you want Me to do for you?* Wouldn't it be obvious? "H-e-l-l-o...I'm *blind*, God. Don't You see the problem?" And He answers back: "Yes, I see, I have always seen and known, now *what can I do for you?*" Jesus put this man in the awkward position of having to say it, of being forced to speak out loud; "*Lord, that I might receive my sight.*"

Of course he wants to see. *Right?* Or does he? What changes might be in store for this man if he receives his sight? Will he now have to work for a living? Will his friends and family stop feeling sorry for him and thus begin to expect more out of him? Gone will be his built in excuse for not meeting life's challenges. Does he really *want* to be healed? That's what Jesus is trying to get him to see.

Though I'm not physically blind, I can relate. Telling God; "sure I want delivered from this affliction, of course I want healed, Lord. Don't You see how bad I hurt? Don't You understand, all the problems this "sickness" has caused?" He speaks to my heart; "Yes, I do...*but do you want healed?*"

It has taken more years and even more pain than I care to admit, but the Lord Jesus has finally brought me to the place that I can say (scream) "Yes, Lord, *I want* healed. *Whatever* the cost, heal me!"

What about you, my friend. Is there a "sickness" in your life...a habit you profess to want deliverance from, an addiction that seems to stalk you, an attitude you beg God to change, a friendship that is causing you to drift from the Lord, an unhealthy relationship, bitterness, unforgiveness or possibly a victim mentality that brings you an odd measure of comfort through other's pity...Or perhaps the greatest "sickness" of all, that of not recognizing how desperate and completely hopeless we are apart from the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The Lord is asking you now *What do you want Me to do for you? Do you want healed?* If the answer is yes, *Please*, tell Him: *Lord, I want to be made well! I don't want to hold on to this "sickness" because it's the only way of life I know. I want real healing and deliverance. I know it may change my life and I know it might be uncomfortable at first, but I'm ready, by faith I accept Your healing.*

Jesus said to him, "Go your way, your faith has made you well." Mark 10:52

About the Author

...so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light...

1 Peter 2 : 9b

~ ~ ~ *The following is an abbreviated version of my testimony.* ~ ~ ~

If you've never realized your own sin debt and inability to pay; I pray that you read my story and ask the Lord to make you new. If He did it for me He can, *and will*, do it for you. For the rest, I pray you'll been reawakened to the awfulness of sin and the graciousness of our Lord. Whether you gave your life to Christ as a young person and lived a relatively "clean" life or you lived like the devil for years only to find the Lord later in life...Our sin debt is the same...beyond our ability to pay...the price is the same...the Blood of Christ.

My Testimony of the grace of God and the transforming power of His only Son, Jesus The Christ.

I acknowledge *everyone* has a story to tell...**none** were handed a perfect life. Secondly, it's humbling and even a bit humiliating to be so transparent about my own life with *all* its shortcomings , yet it's the very least I can do as a service to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. *All for His glory.*

My Life by Choice

I began smoking and drinking in grade 6. I also experimented with drugs (hashish, speed and pot to name a few). My friends soon changed from wall-flowers to the "burnouts" as we were known. Their "coolness" was intoxicating. Friends and I even pondered mugging old people just for the fun of it. At one point I threatened to stab my brother as he came to take me home from yet another time of running away. My brother, David, always tried to rescue me, though I never appreciated it. I ran from home several times, was arrested twice and by the fall of 9th grade was pregnant. During the pregnancy, I used my "condition" as a way to get attention. Thinking nothing of the life inside me I continued to smoke and party until I gave birth3 months early.

Up to this point my only exposure to God was through the Catholic Church my Dad took my brother and me to sporadically. I had no knowledge of a personal relationship with my Creator, or with the fact that I was a sinner in need of God's grace. God... being "saved" or the idea of a Savior was foreign to me. My own family didn't know God in a real way, instead I learned about reincarnation, ESP, mental telepathy and astrology. But God... has a way of making Himself known, of being found by us even when we're not looking.

What Brought Me to Christ

Throughout this time, unbeknownst to me, there was a house-wife praying for God to send into her life a troubled teen girl to whom she could minister. Boy, did I fit the bill!

May 11, 1980, barely 6 months pregnant [and after 12 hours of labor], Tiffany Anne was born. She was a gorgeous baby; blue eyes, blond hair, 10 fingers, 10 toes and *extremely frail*. Most of her physical problems were related to my drug use, poor nutrition and my age (being barely 15). The doctors explained how sick she was but it didn't register with me. Death and babies just didn't go together.

I sat by her bedside stroking her soft, delicate hands. Though she was attached to numerous wires and machines I was given a rocking chair and encouraged to rock her gently in my arms. *It never occurred to me she wouldn't live.*

May 14, 1980 at 6:20 am, while sitting in a conference room at Children's hospital, the pediatrician told me in a matter of fact sort of way...my daughter, my first born child...had died. She *died*. I felt as if someone kicked me in the stomach. 'It couldn't be', I thought, 'I was just with her moments ago. It just couldn't be.' But it was.

For the first time in my life, I was painfully aware of how lost I actually was. I came face to face with death, the death of my child. *And it hurt*. My heart literally ached with such a crushing pain there are no words to describe it.

For the first time, the nurses allowed me to be alone with my baby girl. They escorted me to a private room where she lay on a changing table. I sat in a hard, wooden rocker and held her close, inhaling deeply her sweet scent. I

rocked her slowly, stroked her velvety soft cheeks and sang the only lullaby I knew. I changed her clothes....and cried. I remember thinking how alive she looked, if I would just stay in that room, she wouldn't really be dead. To me, she was perfect and beautiful. I cried out ...*Look what I've done*, with tears I made a cross on her forehead. I whispered; "Wherever she is I want to be some day" Crying uncontrollably, I told God "If You're there, I need help".

No, I didn't know what "saved" meant nor did I know, theologically, all the right words to pray...but He saved me anyway.

My Baby Christian Days

The changes in me were obvious. No longer did I run with the rough crowd, party, smoke or talk like a sailor, even my taste in music changed. I married the father of my first child 13 days after my 16th birthday and over the following four years gave birth to three more children. I got baptized, took an evangelism course and shared my testimony with any one who would listen. I attended a weekly Bible study led by that praying housewife. Jeanne Liston became my mentor and spiritual mother, 25 years later she still is. My dad and brother also came to the Lord during this time. Through the *Evangelism Explosion* training program I went with groups of other believers and knocked on doors of complete strangers to share what God had done in my life. I studied at home to graduate high school while working full time as a dishwasher to support my family.

But, as sometimes happens, I drifted away from the Lord after realizing being a Christian didn't make my life easier. He (God) hadn't removed the hardships from my life as I had expected. In fact, life got more difficult. An unfaithful husband, job loss, a divorce, a cancer diagnosis all before the age of 20. God's laws do not change. I had assumed forgiveness meant eradication of consequences. NOT TRUE. (Usually). We reap WHAT we sow, MORE than we sow LATER than we sow. And I was reaping.

Prodigal Years

For the next ten years I walked in lip service to God. Saved but not surrendered. Two of those years were spent involved in pornography and heavy drinking along with the promiscuity those things foster. My children and I endured the degradation of living in a homeless shelter for a time. I experi-

enced what it's like to be a battered woman, and the hopelessness mingled with paralyzing fear that circumstance brings. I agonized over rebellious teenagers, while at the same time dealing with a daughter who had a sudden onset of severe medical problems that could have been life threatening.

Though I said I loved God, I felt He couldn't be trusted. I had to look out for myself if I was going to be safe in this world. Subconsciously thinking, maybe He was just too busy or not powerful enough or maybe He didn't really care...

My Life by God's Grace

Through the difficulties of my family situation I was put in a position of either trusting God or giving up on life all together. Either I really believed what I espoused or I didn't. Thankfully, He gave me a heart to believe. *O, I am so grateful for His mercy.*

The Lord used a sermon here and a Christian radio program there to prick my heart and bring me back to Him. After years of great struggle and failure I finally gave up and gave in. January 1998 I fully surrendered myself to following Jesus Christ no matter the cost. *He became my Lord.*

One sermon He used was entitled *Lessons I Learned* by Charles Stanley. His central theme was the need to trust God and be obedient...leaving the consequences of that obedience in the Lord's hands. God also used a teaching by David Wilkerson called *Change Me O, Lord*. He said 'we simply must get our eyes off of others' and ask The Lord to change *us*'. It was me who was in need of change....not my husband, not my co-workers, not my parents... It was so liberating to let go of my need to manipulate circumstances and people and truly allow God to be God. It was His job to work in their hearts and my job to pray.

I've seen such adversity I felt it rivaled Old Testament Job. I've also had great blessings, such as the privilege of being a home-schooling, stay-at-home mom for the last seven years. I have experienced the joy of giving birth to two more children as well as the horrific pain of delivering a still-born son. I've had the pleasure of seeing all my children give their life to Christ [though in varying degrees of maturity to be sure], of witnessing my daughter-in-law come to the Lord [as well as her cousin] and the unspeakable joy of watching my three grandchildren be taught of the Lord.

Jesus Christ has *proven* Himself ...not in cold theology but in reality.... to be faithful, trustworthy, loyal, and ever-present, to be my Friend and Savior. Today, my highest ambition is to be a trophy of the Lord's grace. To tell whoever will listen of Jesus' love for a sinner like me, of His undeserved forgiveness and mercy. I still face difficulties like everyone else, but I've been given and have a peace that passes all understanding. I can honestly say I trust my Lord Jesus.

There is much truth in the old hymn:
*Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust
and obey.*

Scripture says: *For Thou hast tried me O God, Thou hast refined me as
silver is refined. I went through fire and through water, Yet You brought me
out into a place of abundance.*

I have refined you; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.

Psalm 66:10, 12 & Isaiah 48:10 (AMP)

Through my email/devotional ministry God has given me the privilege of being used by Him to comfort and encourage others, some who have gone or are going through similar struggles of their own. Our Faithful God does indeed cause all things to work together for the good of them that love Him and are called according to His purpose. (*Romans 8:28*)

We are told in the New Testament to comfort those with the same comfort we have received. That's what He's called me to do. Now I understand, rather than removing adversity from my life, He has used it... for my good and His glory. What the enemy brought against me to destroy me, the Lord has used to refine me.

*Corrie Ten Boom, a Nazi concentration camp survivor, once said;
"There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still."*

I am living proof.

Becky White

Suggested Reading

As Silver Refined

by Kay Arthur

Calm My Anxious Heart

by Linda Dillow

*When he doesn't believe :
help and encouragement for women who feel alone in their
faith*

by Nancy Kennedy

Just give Me Jesus

by Anne Graham Lotz

Why?

by Anne Graham Lotz

My Personal Psalm of Praise to our God

*Jesus, Jesus, Jesus...
Oh, that I could express to You
The depths of my gratitude.*

*The gift You gave...
Bought with Your life's blood,
I could never repay.*

*I surrender my life to You as an offering.
A token so small...
For the One Who gave me His all.*

*Your flesh ripped...
Your face slapped...
Your body pierced...*

*You willingly suffered such torment,
For me...
How can that be?*

*It was my sin...not Yours,
My guilt and shame...not Yours.*

*Yet You traded,
Giving me Your righteousness
And taking on Yourself the guilt of my sin.*

*Jesus...Jesus...Jesus
O, that I could express to You
The depths of my gratitude*

