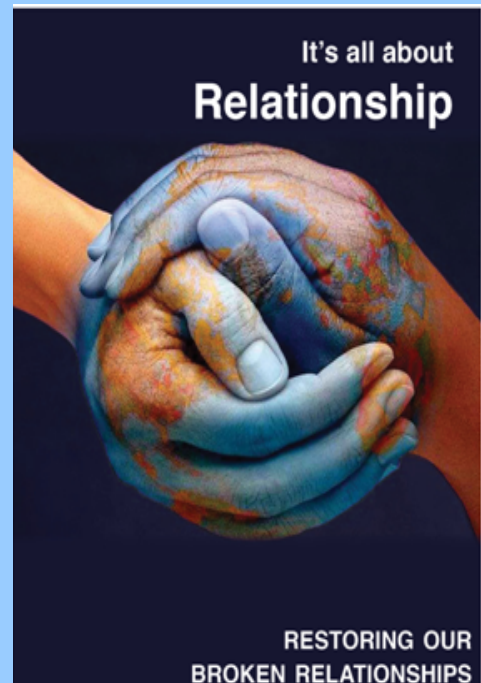


**Handouts to
use with the
IT'S ALL
ABOUT
RELATIONSHIP
Studies.**



1. It's ALL About the Fathers Love

After lesson 1: John Hendee

2. Christianity is Christ

After lesson 2: Gene Rogers

3. Resurrection Reverberations

After lesson 3: Jim Larsen

4. New Choices, Stress and Conflicts

After lesson 4: John Hendee

5. It's All About Maturity

After lesson 5: Gene Rogers

6. Christian Baptism

When needed: Gene Rogers

7. It's ALL About Relationship

After all the lessons are done; Hendee/Larsen

It's all about the Fathers LOVE.

This is actually our story.

JESUS' STORY ABOUT A FATHERS' AMAZING LOVE FOR HIS WAYWARD SON



¹¹ Then He said, "A certain man had two sons. ¹² The younger of them [inappropriately] said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that falls to me.' So he divided the estate between them. ¹³ A few days later, the younger son gathered together everything [that he had] and traveled to a distant country, and there he wasted his fortune in reckless *and* immoral living. ¹⁴ Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to do without *and* be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and forced himself on one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to ^[a] feed pigs. ¹⁶ He would have gladly eaten the [carob] pods that the pigs were eating [but they could not satisfy his hunger], and no one was giving *anything* to him. ¹⁷ But when he [finally] came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough food, while I am dying here of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; [just] treat me like one of your hired men.'" ²⁰ So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Quickly bring out the best robe [for the guest of honor] and put it on him; and give him a ^[b] ring for his hand, and sandals for his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let us [invite everyone and] feast and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was [as good as] dead and is alive again; he was lost and has been found.' So they began to celebrate.



This is a story about God and us. As we reflect on this part of the story we want to look for answers to the following questions:

What can we learn about God from this story?

What can we learn about ourselves?

What is the meaning of this for us?

When the son left his father, he left the most important, valuable thing in his life; his relationship with his father. We can be sure that the Father knew what was about to happen but he gave the son his inheritance anyway. He didn't threaten or withhold what would eventually go to the son. It was his 'stuff' and the great adventures and experiences that awaited him in the city was too enticing to pass up. It was his freedom. Little did he understand the price he would pay was much more than all the inheritance he was going to waste. He would learn the hard way what was really important in life.

The son took it for granted and greatly undervalued the importance of his life with his father. He traded that for the 'pleasures' of life in the city. He abandoned his relationship with his father in pursuit of the 'good life', a life of 'freedom', doing what he wanted, when he wanted, with whomever he wanted.

Going to the city represents his freedom of will to do and live however he wanted. He did have that freedom. But as a man wrote many years ago, with every 'kick' comes a 'kickback'. You are free to choose but you aren't free to choose the consequences even though we try our best to do so.

In going to the city the son limited the father's ability to tell him and show him how much he loved him. He rejected the love, care and wisdom of his father. He turned his back on him. He intentionally distanced himself from his father cutting off contact so he could live the 'good life' he had chosen over life on the farm with his father. He cut off all communication with his father. His relationship with his father died. It was forfeited as a result of his decision and bad choices.

The father didn't chase after him. The son knew the life and love of his father but he cast that off for a vision or dream of 'something better.' In the end the son lost a lot. In the process the father 'freed the son' to go. He didn't fight it. He honored the son's decision. Love can't be forced on another. It must be reciprocated of one's own free will or it isn't love.

We could be sure the father grieved over the sons' decision and longed for him to return. He was surely saddened and embarrassed by his son's rejection of him, and for his newly chosen way of life.

It was a long and hard lesson to learn, a path paved with pain and potholes in the end.

When the son had suffered enough from his bad decisions it says he came to his senses. One could wonder how long that took. At some point he made a decision to go home, confess his errors and plead for mercy and for a lowly position on the farm. That must have been so humbling and difficult but he did it.

One could imagine he that he could only considered doing this based on the memory of the

kind of man his father was. He likely had some fears of rejection for all the errors he had made, for having wasted the inheritance he receive from his Father but he put his hope in knowing the kind of man his father had been in all his growing up years and young adulthood. He was going to find out if he was correct in that. The son went home.

When the father saw the son coming home he didn't turn his back on him, call him names, scold him, threaten him, order him off the property or demand he repay what he had lost. He ran to him with arms open wide. He planned a party. He didn't recount all his foolish errors. The son had confessed the error of his ways. He had learned...a hard lesson. The father later said, "This son of mine was dead and is alive again." He planned an 'un-funeral', a welcome back to life celebration.

The son confessed that he was unworthy.

The truth is all of us are unworthy of God's love and forgiveness. God's love for us isn't based on our worthiness. It is based on the nature of God. He is love.

The father didn't love his son less when he was off pursing his life of selfish rebellion. The father left the door open for a restoration. It took the son's coming to his senses, waking up to reality for him to decide to go back home.

In his return the son he regained what was most important; life with his father. He got much, much more than being a lowly servant.

So it is with our heavenly Father and us. He can't help himself. He loves us and stands waiting for us with open arms...not waiting to beat us over the head with our failures but to plan a celebration. Our rejection of Him and turning our back on him must certainly grieve Him, but He waits....for us to come to our senses.

He is waiting for one and all of us who have gone off on our own selfish pursuits, seeking the 'good life' in place of life with Him.

He waits with open arms to embrace everyone. He gives us the freedom to 'run off' if we make that decision but He lives in hope we too will come to our senses, realize what is of the greatest value in life and return to Him where the 'good life' really is.

In coming to God he takes us as we are at that moment. He doesn't love some future version of ourselves...he loves us with all our faults and blemishes.

God can't love you more than he does right now. It is 100%. It is not something that is earned in increments, little by little.

God loves us but he loves us too much to let us stay the way he finds us. Once back with our

Father, He lovingly and patiently teaches us how to live the abundant life, the inner life of joy and peace with Jesus. It is not a 'religious life' but a life of relationship with Jesus and others.

The Bible says perfect love casts out fear. The perfect love of the father gave the son the courage to take a risk, to return after blowing it. It is the same with us.

It is the nature of God to love, give and forgive but his love must be desired, accepted and reciprocated.

We must be aware that there are limits to our opportunity to return to the Father. The limit is when we die. It is too late to return at that point.

So the question for each person is 'are you living in a broken relationship with your Heavenly Father?' Do you want to mend that relationship? He is waiting, hoping that you will come to him. He wants to celebrate your restored relationship with Him.

Matthew 11: ²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

The following is a paraphrase of I Corinthians 13. It was written years ago. We don't know who wrote it but it beautifully describes God's love for us. Put your name in the blank as you read through the following.

BECAUSE GOD LOVES ME

Because God loves _____, he is slow to lose patience with me.

Because God loves _____, He takes the circumstances of my life and uses them in a constructive way for my growth.

Because God loves _____, He doesn't treat me as an object to be possessed or manipulated.

Because God loves _____, He doesn't need to demonstrate his authority; He is God.

Because God loves _____, He touches me. He wants to see me mature and grow in his love.

Because God loves _____, He doesn't save up a list of my sins to beat me over the head with.

Because God loves _____, He suffers when He sees that I'm not walking in His ways because He sees that I don't trust Him.

Because God loves _____, He continues trusting in me even at times when I don't trust in myself.

Because God loves _____, He never says there is no hope for me; He patiently keeps working with me, loving and disciplining me in such a way that it is hard for me to understand the depth of His love for me.

Because God loves _____, He doesn't renounce me even when many of my friends do.

Because God loves _____, He stands with me when I have reached the end of my desperation, when I see the reality and I compare myself with his righteousness, holiness, beauty and love.

It is in a moment like that, that I can really believe the reality that God loves _____.

Following is a verse known to many. Again, put your name in each blank.

John 3:16, 17 ⁶For God so loved the world_____ that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever _____ believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn_____ (the world), but to save _____(the world) through him.

CHRISTIANITY IS CHRIST

By Gene Rogers

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Christianity centers in a Person!

A living person whom the grave could not hold and who at this moment is very much alive and waiting to meet men in a personal encounter. The Christian faith does not center in an idea, or a system, an event, a building, a geographical Mecca, not a catechism or a book—not even the Bible—but in a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. This cannot be said of any of the present day world religions or philosophies. The great world religions of our day derive from real historical humans, but they do not center in their founders. Their founders are no longer personally necessary to the religious systems. They have gone on apart from them. They are like a spider and her web. The web will remain after the spider is long gone. Confucianism does not center in Confucius but in his set of moral maxims. Buddhism in reality does not center in Buddha but in a complex set of philosophical concepts. Hinduism centers in myth and mysticism, while Mohammedanism centers in the Koran.

With Christianity there is a striking difference. Christianity centers in Jesus. Christianity centers in the person of its founder and cannot possibly exist apart from Him. The focus of the Christian faith is not on what Jesus taught, not what Jesus did, although His teaching, life and sacrifice are central.

The vital center is Jesus Christ himself. That virgin born, God man, sinless example, some day returning royal bridegroom of the church; Jesus Christ is the center and essence of Christianity. Jesus is the sum and substance, the very life of Christianity. Take Him away and you destroy it.

The Testimony of the New Testament Scripture In John 1:11, 12 we read, “He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” This passage plainly states that one is born of God when he receives Christ, a person and not some doctrine or philosophy. 12

In I Corinthians 2:2, the Apostle Paul seems to set forth a conclusion concerning his ministry as he says, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” The person of Jesus Christ was the sum and substance of Paul’s message. The second time he wrote to Corinth he reiterated this when he said, “For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. “ II Corinthians 4:5

In what well may have been Paul’s final word of personal testimony, he said in II Timothy 1:12, “I know whom I have believed and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what has

been entrusted to me.” Note the personal pronouns in this testimony. Paul does not say I know ‘what’ I have believed, but I know ‘whom’ I have believed. His faith was in the living Son of God.

In I John 5:11,12 we read from John, “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son has not life.” John’s testimony was that eternal life is a person and that person is Jesus the Son of God. He does not say that he who has the right doctrine or the right affiliation or the right information has life, but ‘he who has the Son has life.’ The testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ himself was, “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.” Truth and life and the right way are not to be found in abstract philosophical concepts but in the person of the living Son of God.

When Philip met up with the Ethiopian Eunuch and proceeded from Isaiah 53 to give him the message of life, the scripture says in Acts chapter 8, verse 35, and “He told him the good news of Jesus.” Good news centers in a person, and that person is Jesus the Son of God.

Substitutions for Jesus

The reason Christianity is dead in so many places today is because there is no Jesus in it. Substitutions have been made for Him. And as they have, lifeless religion has resulted.

A Christianity without Jesus at the center suffers the loss of power and vitality and is doomed to becoming as dead as a body from which the spirit has departed. If spiritual life and power are lacking in the life of any individual or congregation of individuals professing Christianity, chances are it is due to the absence of Jesus and the substitution of something or someone in his place. On the things people have embraced instead of a living Savior.

Some have ‘joined the church’ in much the same way that one would a fraternal lodge or service club and think of church membership as belonging to a moral, service organization rather than union with a living organism.

Some have acquired for themselves a new moral religion centering in a combination of the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, and the Sermon on the Mount with Jesus as another Moses. Some have subscribed to a plan of recreating first century Christianity.

Some have adopted man made creeds written and oral. Some have learned a catechism. Some have become defenders of orthodoxy. Some have embraced all or part of the New Testament scripture and have codified it into a moral, ethical religion. So many have believed in something or done something in lieu of receiving Jesus as the Way.

Jesus is the Way.

But Christianity is Christ! Jesus is the Way, the unqualified Way. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the A and the Z of the Christian faith.

He is the beginning and the end of all there is in between.

He is 'our wisdom, our righteousness, consecration and redemption. (I Corinthians 1:30).

He is our peace, our cleaning, our healing, our power, our joy, our love, our life, our everything!

He is the one who puts reality and contentment in our life.

It is He who becomes the key unlocking the meaning of life.

It is He who brings dynamic, thrill, excitement, and adventure into life.

It is only as you have received Him as "the Way" that worship becomes the song of the soul, the Bible becomes the unveiled word of Life and prayer becomes the communion of kindred spirits.

It is only as you have received Him as "the Way" that you are going anywhere. Without Him you are going nowhere. In reality, if you don't have Jesus you don't have much of anything.

But if you have Him, all things are yours.

If you have Him you have all there is of God, "For in Him dwells the whole fullness of deity" (Colossians 2:9)

If you have him every spiritual blessing is yours, for God has 'blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:3.

If you have Him you have fullness of life, for "you have come to fullness of life in Him" Colossians 2:10. 14

If you have Him you have one "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3)

If you have Him you have exchanged shadow for the real thing. (Colossians 2:17) How amazingly simple the Christian life becomes when related to the personal living Christ! It is not a matter of how well one knows a doctrine or how well one has been taught but it is a matter of one's relationship to Jesus.

Are you hot toward Him or are you cold? Are you living in close fellowship with Him or is your heart far from Him?

Do you see how the whole matter of being a disciple of Jesus is simply a matter of one's relationship with Jesus? All aspects of the Christian life point to Jesus and have value only in their relationship to Him.

The only value of faith is that it leads us to Him.

The only value of repentance is that it calls us to turn around and face Him again.

The only value of humility is that it brings us down low enough to fellowship with Jesus.

The only value of confessing our sin is that it clears the conscience of the clouds that have separated us from the Son of righteousness.

The purpose of the spirit filled life is to make the presence of Christ real to us.

The whole purpose of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to make Jesus to be the way in human hearts and to glorify him. Jesus summed up the ministry of the Holy Spirit in John 16:14 when He said, "He shall glorify me."

vThe purpose of the whole of Scripture is to bear witness to Jesus as can easily be seen in a statement from His own lips when He says, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me." John 5:39

Jesus is the way in our homes. There is great value in family devotions and discipline based upon Christian precepts as a means of directing our children to Jesus, but if young people are ever going to really see Jesus it will be when they witness His living in the lives of their parents and radiating out from them so as to capture their faith and loyalty.

Jesus is the way in our church life. The whole purpose of our assembling as Christians is to reaffirm our loyalty to Him and to praise and honor and glorify His Name. The Lord's Supper is meant to focus our attention upon Him, upon what He did for us at the cross and upon His coming again. In a word, our assembling as Christians is for the purpose of feeding upon Him who is the Living Bread. 15

Jesus is the way in all our service. Fruit is not to be born in our Christian life by the energy of sheer will power and determination, but by the energizing power of the indwelling Jesus. He has ordained that we bring forth much fruit and that it remain, but he adds that 'apart from me you can do nothing.' John 15:4

Witnessing, missionary work, giving, teaching and all other spiritual activities and works which grow naturally out of the energy of the indwelling Jesus will abide forever but are meaningless without him.

Salvation and Life in Christ.

Both salvation and life are in Jesus. “And this is the testimony that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who doesn’t have the Son of God doesn’t have life.” Christ in you is the hope of glory.’ Col 1:27.

It is all about Jesus. Is your life centering in the person of Jesus? Is your faith in a church or in Him Who is the Head of the church? Are you following a philosophy of life or Him Who is Life? Are you focusing your life and attention upon Biblical teaching or upon Him Who is the Subject of the Bible? Are you more focused on a preacher, priest or some other man or woman leader, rather than on He who is our King, leader, Savior and Pastor? Remember, “to all who received Him, who believed in His name, God gave the authority, power, privilege, right to become the children of God.”

There is life after death **RESURRECTION**
REVERBERATIONS

How the Resurrection of Jesus Rocked his World and Keeps on Shaking Ours

by Jim Larsen

Every late-winter and early-spring countless Jewish zealots began their trek to Jerusalem. The reason for such an arduous undertaking was the celebration of two important festivals. Passover Week commemorated God's signature work of redemption in their history, deliverance from Egypt. Fifty days later, Pentecost would recall God's giving of the Law at Mount Sinai as the Jews prepared to enter into the Land of Promise. On the last leg of their excursion, singing could be heard on the slopes leading up to Mount Zion, the Songs of Ascent (Psalm 120-134).

But this year those holy days would be experienced in shocking ways. The world would forever be impacted by the happenings of those days. Whatever the expectations of these stalwart ones, nothing could prepare them for the spirit of hatred which filled the air in the city on the hill. It was aimed at a man named Jesus of Nazareth. Soon the visitors themselves would be caught up the turmoil.

As festivities launched, Jerusalem had swollen in population from its usual 30,000 inhabitants to perhaps 120,000. Many would see this Jewish rabbi, Jesus, for the first time as he rode into town at the beginning of Passover week. He was accompanied by a multitude of followers who cast their coats and palm branches on his path, proclaiming that Jesus was Israel's long-awaited Messiah.

Infuriated Pharisees and Sadducees demanded that he silence the noisy throng. That was not about to happen. In fact, as the week moved along Jesus became more and more the center of attention. The leaders quickly reached a conclusion: Jesus must be put to death...and soon. But they determined it would have to wait until the city had returned to normal. Jesus had other plans; he orchestrated his own arrest by temple guards and top level Jewish leaders. They quickly dragged

him to stand trial before Pontius Pilate. But Pilate declared Jesus of Nazareth had done nothing deserving death. But by now the crowds had been incited to believe that Jesus was an imposter and blasphemer, not the Messiah or Son of God he claimed to be. Pilate yielded to the will of the great crowd and washed his hands of Jesus. He was taken to a place of execution outside the city gates and on what we now call Good Friday, was impaled on a cross. At this his closest followers ran for cover, confused by what seemed to be their master's utter failure and destruction. He had died a convict's death. As his body was wrapped in linen and placed in a guarded grave, Peter, James, John and the others sequestered themselves in a locked room, full of fear and bewilderment. As for his adversaries, there must have been a huge collective sigh of relief as the days rolled, by nothing more was heard from him.

NO PARADE, NO GRAND CELEBRATION?

Just as Jesus had promised he spent three days in a tomb, then he came forth alive. I'll say it again. Jesus rose from the grave! All of heaven's angels must have shouted for joy! He had been dead but now he was alive again. He had predicted all these things would happen. It was all now fulfilled. Hallelujah!

What puzzled me was why the resurrection of Jesus did not inspire his followers to plan a grand parade down main street. Where was the shouting and celebrating with Jesus as the center of attention? I really wanted to understand this mystery. The absence of wild festivities was nearly as surprising to me as the empty tomb itself. Yet the answer to my 'why' was not so hard to find. In the book of Acts (in the New Testament) Luke records that Jesus spent 40 precious days with his disciples before the public heard the wonderful story of the risen Jesus. Now we can see why God in his wisdom had spaced those holidays (Passover and Pentecost) 50 days apart. While devout Jews stuck around Jerusalem awaiting the second festival, Jesus was with his chosen ones, proving over and over that he was alive. He also used those days to teach the apostles more about the Kingdom of God. Then, ten days before Pentecost, Jesus called his apostles to him on a mountain as he prepared to return to heaven. There he commissioned his chosen 12 to make disciples wherever they went, teaching and

baptizing them. Before beginning their evangelistic work the 12 were to remain in Jerusalem until they had received power from heaven. After he had disappeared into the clouds the Apostles stayed together for ten days, immersed in prayer as they awaited a mysterious baptism by the Holy Spirit. Surely their amazing time with Jesus from the Passover to Pentecost resulted in restored and buttressed faith, a strong sense of conviction, purpose and excitement for what lay ahead. Ten days of intense prayer further strengthened these servants of Jesus for dramatic days ahead.

So two scenes were developing simultaneously: 1) Jesus was devoting time to his apostles, preparing them for a time of power and intensity just days ahead and 2) the rest of the city, unaware of Jesus' conquest of death, was gearing up for the next holy day, Pentecost.

SPECTACULAR PENTECOST

Shortly after the Day of Pentecost had dawned a mighty sound suddenly engulfed all of Jerusalem. Luke says it was like a gale, a mighty wind. That phenomenon was followed by yet another as the crowd surged through the streets to the source of the roar. There they were astonished to find twelve men looking like living candles, tongues 'like fire' sprouting from their heads. Surely everyone would see this as a work of God intended to mark the Apostles as men to be listened to.

Yet still *another* marvel followed! Each of the flaming men began to preach, with every hearer understanding in his own language. This wonder was not lost on the crowd as they asked how it was that a bunch of Galileans could speak thusly. After all, the audience was comprised of pilgrims from 'every nation under heaven': Southern Europe, African lands, Asia Minor and even the Arab world.

At this moment Peter took his stand as the sole preacher. With great power and clarity he made the irrefutable case for Jesus being the Christ, God's Son. His words first produced panic, horror and immense guilt. But in the end, hope ruled.

HERE IS THE OUTLINE, CONCLUSION AND FOLLOW-UP OF HIS MESSAGE

- Peter began by assuring his bewildered listeners that all the recent commotion and miracles were what Joel had written regarding the coming **'great and glorious day of the Lord'**. The wonders they were experiencing were a part of God's scheduling.
- **God himself accredited Jesus to them by signs, wonders and miracles.** The logic was that any observer should have known he was God-sent, considering that he had healed the sick, raised the dead, calmed the sea and fed the 5000 from a child's lunch of fish and bread. There were so many other powerful acts done through Jesus.
- Further, Peter informed the spellbound audience that although they had killed Jesus, his death happened **'by God's set purpose and foreknowledge'**. It didn't clear them of responsibility and guilt, but was within God's plan for man.
- David had explained how the Messiah could be identified when he showed up: He could not be kept in the grave! **"You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay."** (Psalm 16). Peter drew from the famous writing of David regarding the Messiah. His resurrection would identify the Messiah as their Savior. Every serious minded Jew could quote this passage.
- And!! **'God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of the fact!'** Here were more than the 2 or 3 witnesses the law demanded to establish a fact. Rather, there were 12 men accredited by God testifying they had seen the risen Jesus. More than that, they were so convinced of it that they were willing to risk being killed themselves for declaring that news.
- Finally: Jesus is now **exalted to the right hand of God. He has received the Holy Spirit...and has poured out what you now see and hear.**

Peter drew a shocking but undeniable conclusion: They had mistakenly murdered the Son of God! He put it this way: **"Let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ!"** What news could have been worse than this? God's Son had visited earth, and his own people had treated him with such hostility and hatred. Jesus, **whom you crucified** was now proven to be the Christ!

I recall reading of a soldier who came home during the Viet Nam War with plans to surprise his parents. As he crawled through a bathroom window his father, thinking him to be an intruder, shot and killed him. What a disaster! Great horror must have filled the grieving father.

On a much larger scale, that is what the religious leaders had done to God's son when he came to earth without the expected markings of a King of Kings and Lord of Lords. What grief must have gripped them upon hearing they had killed their Messiah, their long-awaited Savior, redeemer and king.

When the horrifying truth sank in, some shouted out a frantic, **"What shall we do?"** Could they ever find forgiveness for such a dreadful mistake? Had any question ever sprung from such dismay and anguish? Having killed God's Son, was forgiveness possible?

Peter's answer was immediate...and welcome! **"Repent and be baptized, every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call(Acts 2:38)."**

You can read this whole story in Acts 2

3000!!

Luke records that there was an intense and immediate response to Peter's demand and invitation. Try to imagine the tumult, the excited conversations in that aroused audience! Peter had battered them with disturbing news of their horrendous crime but then immediately explained God's remedy for their monstrous error. Today, right now, he said they could be cleansed of their evil doing, forgiveness was possible.

Thousands repented of their evil deed and exalted Jesus as Messiah. In that moment they turned their previous rejection and disbelief in Jesus into a complete turn about and then came a flurry of baptisms. What a sight it was! Thousands of Jews declared their belief in Jesus as their lord, and obediently surrendering to him by showing their oath of allegiance to Him in baptism.

Can we even begin to imagine any other change of heart or turn about to compare to what happened that day? I shake my head in astonishment and think of this as the greatest ‘miracle’ ever; 3000 Jewish scholars, including Israel’s upper-crust of leaders such as Pharisees and Priests suddenly becoming disciples of the one whose life they had demanded just weeks before. 3000! Can you picture that? Repentant believers celebrating their forgiveness, redemption and a brand new relationship with God? 3000 men plus women and youth!

Where in all of history can we find a change of heart which begins to compare to this? What about a stadium of rabid sports fans immediately switching from decades of allegiance to their team, suddenly cheering for a previous arch rival? Oh, that doesn’t even begin to compare. In the U.S. we might think of the highest ranking Republicans or Democrats abruptly joining the opposing party. Even this unlikely behavior would be miles from what happened on that Pentecost Sunday. An immense throng of listeners heard a sermon that first crushed their spirits but then offered to take them to the heights of unspeakable hope. **There has never been anything like it!**

Peter’s sermon identifying Jesus as their Messiah set off this whirlwind of repentance, exultation and obedience in thousands of that Pentecost audience.

GOD OFFERS A CLEAN SLATE AND A NEW HEART

What strikes me with great forcefulness is how this profound display of God’s love and his offer of forgiveness happened within a heartbeat of their grief and remorse. The words of Isaiah 1:18 come to mind as we hear of Heaven’s plea to those who killed God’s son: **“Come now, let us reason together. Though your sins are as scarlet they shall be white as snow(**Isaiah 1:18). Jesus teaches us to love and forgive our enemies. On that great Day of Pentecost God himself behaved that way to those who had proven themselves to be his enemies. What God calls us to do (love and forgive) he did on such a grand scale!

THE LARGE MATTER OF JESUS’ PEDIGREE

No wonder I subtitled this article **How the Resurrection of Jesus Rocked his World and Keeps on Shaking Ours**. What is to account for the major 'heart transformations' that took place on that Day of Pentecost 2000 years ago? I remind you that it all sprang from word of Jesus' resurrection identifying him as the true Messiah and Son of God.

We do well to read Paul's words of the correlation between that mighty act and the certainty of Jesus' pedigree:

"...the Son...who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, and through the Spirit of holiness appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 1:3, 4).

The cross has profound meaning, but the immense significance of his death took on clarity and glorious significance in light of his empty tomb. As one has written. "In his resurrection God gave proof that Jesus was the Messiah and that he accepted his death as payment for our sins."

CLAIMS AND PROMISES...PRACTICAL MATTERS

All of Jesus' claims and teachings were validated by the miracle in the graveyard. His disciples would have recalled a long list of statements their master had made about himself. He claimed to have come from heaven, would be returning to the Father, would prepare a forever home for them, had authority to forgive sin, died for the forgiveness of mankind's sins and one day would return to earth to take his church home. He claimed to have existed before time began and would be alive forever. And there is so much more.

His claims pertained directly to him. What excites us is that they have profound implications for us! These implications are called **promises**. Yet, to repeat myself, each of these monumental statements would mean little but for (I say it again) his resurrection, his victory over death and all dark forces. No wonder Paul told the Corinthian church that the most important matters of all are the **death, burial and resurrection** of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:3,4).

Minus his resurrection Jesus may be dismissed as a dreamer, even an imposter. But with the story of his resurrection substantiated, we know Jesus of Nazareth to be none other than God's Son as well as our Lord.

So what of his promises? How are you and I impacted by that first 'Easter'?

- If he was God's last lamb...his blood atones for our sins too! Isaiah 53, John 10:17, 18
- Since he rose from the dead...we can be assured that we too will live even after we die! John 14:19
- As the Bread of Life...Jesus sustains us in every significant way! John 6:35
- If he created the universe...his promise to prepare heaven for us is a sure thing! John 14:3
- If he came to us from heaven once...Jesus can be counted to come again! John 13:3, John 14:3

Friend, you can see that the happenings of 2000 years ago have a huge impact on us. They '**shake our world**'. We marvel at great accomplishments of men in the arenas of science, war and leadership. But no great feat reaches into our very lives like Jesus' resurrection. Everything hinges not only on the love and character of Jesus of Nazareth, but his identity as our Savior and King.

To put all this in everyday feelings and experiences, Jesus transforms curses into rich blessings for believers:

- Darkness turns to Light.
- Despair turns to Joy.
- Desperation to hope.
- Confusion turns to Clarity.
- Guilt turns to No Condemnation.
- Futility turns to Purpose in Life.
- Hate turns to Love.
- Weakness turns to Power.

- Our death becomes the beginning of a whole new level of life!

This has been my experience. God's grace blesses my life by turning every bit of darkness into the wonderful light of his love. The negatives of life here on earth under the Satan's rule are turned on their head in the Kingdom of God's Son.

No doubt the Pentecost audience discussed some of these great joys. Once they took steps of faith to accept God's extravagant offer of peace through Jesus, they must have pondered the glory awaiting them, in addition to forgiveness and the indwelling Spirit of God. They had been '**raised to walk in a new life**' (Romans 6:4), eternal life and a life of renewed fellowship with the God of the universe! So it was that a stunning percentage of the pilgrims who converged on Jerusalem ended up becoming followers of Jesus, charter members of his infant church. None of them could have imagined this as they journeyed to the holy city.

They lingered in Jerusalem for a time, basking in the love and fellowship of their new 'family'. Can you picture the preposterous sight of former Pharisees or temple leaders now sitting at the feet of the Apostles as students (Acts 2:42)? Furthermore, watch them as local converts hosted believers in their homes. Are these some of the same thugs who demanded that Jesus be flogged, crowned with thorns and fastened to a cross? It is all so incredible, the transformation that turned haters into lovers.

Although those first Christians stayed in Jerusalem longer than planned, the time came for them to head back to Rome, Crete, Arabia and Egypt. What kind of reception did they receive in their local synagogues and by family members? We dare not forget that one of Jesus' promises was that his disciples could expect persecution, perhaps even death. Enemies of the Jesus would actually kill his followers genuinely thinking they were **doing God a favor**. Paul was such a misled zealot at one time.

And with what great vigor did these returning pilgrims recite the happenings in Jerusalem, first the horrible crucifixion of Jesus, then his exaltation...and their own conversions? Testimonies were given of the joy of a restored relationship

with God and of their baptisms and sins forgiven as a result of their new faith and allegiance to Jesus.

When Paul visited synagogues distant from Jerusalem he was met with unbridled anger for preaching that Jesus had risen from the dead. But despite stifling persecution, it is noteworthy that within 350 years the cross of Jesus replaced the eagle as the insignia of Rome! Since that Pentecost the Kingdom has taken root on every continent. Its adherents have been persecuted along the way. Jesus is still the great 'watershed' of humanity. It is the word of his resurrection and what that proves that has served as the main dividing point in all of succeeding history.

So I conclude...

The immense love of God was so powerfully declared on that special Sunday 2000 years ago. Think about it. It is one thing to have great power but a lack of love, such as a Hitler or Stalin. It is another thing to have love for others, but little power, such as Mother Teresa or a Gandhi.

What you and I can have with the great God of the universe is **One** who possesses limitless power accompanied by boundless love.

At the cross we read of his love for us. "God so loved the world that he gave..." By raising Jesus God displayed power to lay low every spirit of darkness. When we surrender to God's love as expressed by Jesus we become partakers of heaven's power, beneficiaries of God's love, and ambassadors of the One who longs that everyone in the world be saved.

God still rocks the world with people like you and me. It is a message of God's amazing love, his surprising willingness to forgive our most horrible sins, then in turn fill our lives with that same love of Jesus.

God is still shaking our world today.

That same forgiveness that was offered to the thousands on the day of Pentecost is still offered to us today. Yes, we need it too for having rejected the Savior who came from heaven to rescue us for eternity. We are called to do the same as

those first believers: “Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.”

May God’s blessings rest upon you, dear friend!

Jim Larsen

Note: If you would like to read something more on the proofs of the resurrection of Jesus get Josh McDowell’s book, More Than a Carpenter, on Kindle or at Josh.org

Josh was once an atheist who set out to disprove the resurrection. Instead he found he not only could not disprove it, but rather discovered there was actually an astonishing amount of evidence to prove the reality of the resurrection.

Footnote:

According to Jesus EVERYONE will be raised from the dead.

John 5:28,29 *Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in the their graves will hear his voice and come out-those who have done what is good will rise to live and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.*

5:24 *Very truly I tell you, who ever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.*

Knowing that, Jesus welcomes us, calls us and invites us to accept the life and salvation he offers us.

He will not force it on us. It is our choice. All of us who are already followers of Jesus say to you what we have been told to do:

II Corinthians 5:20. *We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. **We implore you on Christ’s behalf:** Be reconciled to God.*

6:11 *As God’s co-workers **we urge you** not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, “In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.*

NEW CHOICES, STRESS AND CONFLICTS RESULTING FROM RESTORING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

By John Hendee

Don't be caught off guard. Your choice for Jesus while being an incredible, eternal decision also complicates life some. You will learn that is o.k.

Choosing Christ and being in Christ creates a new internal conflict or tension in our life. Don't be surprised or frightened by it. It is normal. Becoming conscious of the tension reminds us that we have free will and will spend the rest of our life exercising it every day. While it is a challenge, it is a good thing. You can use this conflict to deepen your love for Jesus and strengthening your walk with Him. Jesus promised us he will be with us in this 'spiritual war' for our soul. We are not alone.

Becoming a disciple of Jesus does not remove us from temptations. Temptations will not only continue, but in one sense they will become stronger than in the past. Before choosing to walk with Jesus we pretty much did what we wanted. Now that we are living for Christ, the old ways are in opposition to the new ways of Christ. The inner Old Man will call out to us to return to him and his familiar and often pleasurable ways (which often created conflicts, suffering and damage).

The Old Man doesn't give up easily. He has been rejected. He won't go down without a fight. This new conflict is a result of our choosing to follow Christ and His way of life rather than continue in the destructive ways of the Old Man (or "flesh" as the New Testament calls it). Remember that every temptation, every conflict and every tug and pull toward the old way is an opportunity to show your love and trust in Jesus, our Savior. Paul talks about this tension, conflict and war in Galatians 5:16-25 *16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

Let's take a look at this passage. First Paul says, *"16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other."*

He calls us to WALK BY THE SPIRIT. That means to trust and obey the Spirit of God as he leads us through the Word of the New Covenant writings and his inner promptings which will always be in line with the Word. The Spirit will never lead or call us to do anything sinful. Paul is calling us to live our life conscious of the ONE we have invited into our life.

We should live to please Him, love Him and make Him comfortable as an invited guest in our life. He points out that we will have to continually choose to do what the Spirit of Christ calls us to do rather than succumb to the desires of the flesh. The desires of the flesh don't die out when we become a Christian.

What the flesh or Old Man wants is contrary to what God wants. It always has been and it always will be. The Old Man is selfish, self centered and immature. Following him will result in pain and suffering at some point.

The writer of Proverbs says "There is a way that seems right to man but the end thereof is death." That WAY is the way of the Old Man. It seems right. It is what we "want". But God, His Word and very often our conscience will tell us that way is wrong, damaging, and destructive. If we believe the Old Man and follow him we will suffer and lose. If we understand that God is trying to save us from that damaging and destructive life style then we will trust Him.

The flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit and vice versa. THEY ARE IN CONFLICT WITH EACH OTHER. Our choosing to follow Christ puts us in the middle of that conflict. We are not alone there. We have God, His Word, His Spirit, His family and our conscience to guide us into the truth so we can choose the right way. But in the end, we are the ones who have to choose. We make the final choice. Be careful.

We have to choose. Our choices are what prove we have free will. It proves that God hasn't made us like robots with no choices in life. It also proves how much God loves us in that He works by persuasion in our life - not force. He seeks to teach us, call us, lead us and even prays for us through his Holy Spirit to choose the right path and make the right decisions.

It is similar to getting married. Before marriage you have the choice to date and pursue whomever you want. You are single. You haven't made a choice and a commitment to one person. Most 'play the field' for a while. BUT once you feel you have found 'the one', you propose or accept a proposal and you marry. Then everything changes and you understand that you have made a decision and a commitment to live being faithful to ONE person. That means we will STOP 'playing the field'. The search is OVER. You have entered an exclusive, committed

relationship. Now, does your attraction to others cease? Most will find in time that it does not. You will still find some others attractive, interesting and desirable. For most newly married that doesn't even seem like a possibility. "What do I need another for? I'm happy with what I have." But many people will find that in time the Old Life of being single and playing the field is still in their mind and still inviting. Many will find it tempting to look or dream, and maybe even flirt and pursue NEW opportunities. While that might be stimulating at the time of doing it, only damage and danger await that person down the road if they pursue it. Many others will also be affected by their 'unfaithfulness' and 'flirting'. It is amazing how one can justify their 'new' pursuits. There is a conflict for this person. They know deep down they shouldn't be doing what they are doing.

But the temptation is strong. Only the strong, those of character and maturity, those whose word is true and those whose heart is faithful and committed to keeping their word and the promise of fidelity they made will resist the temptations to follow those illicit opportunities will survive. The other attractions are illicit because you promised your love to another. That doesn't leave room for roaming around looking, flirting with and playing with others. Only those who are wise enough to consider and value the importance of their word and the commitment they made to their mate will stand strong. Only those who consider the damage that will be done by their illicit pursuits will know how to say NO and Stop those perilous ventures. Only those who ignore all that will follow the temptations that are out there.

The CONFLICT is a result of making the commitment in the first place. If you don't make the commitment you are 'free to play the field'. You have chosen the relationship and made the commitment FOR ALL THE WONDERFUL BENEFITS THAT WILL COME FROM THE MARRIAGE. There will be the discovery at some point that the person you 'chose' isn't perfect and has a number of defects. Those moments can make one more vulnerable to new pursuits and be blind to the faults of the new person. So in self pity one can justify going after another or others. With that comes the CONFLICT, the call to return to the 'good old days of playing the field, having a number of options.'

Now you have a field of ONE. Your mate. The potential and joys that can come from that will only be known by those who remain loving, giving, romantic and faithful to their special one.

IT IS THE SAME WITH CHRIST. He will be faithful. We don't ever have to doubt that. The question now becomes "What about us?" Will we be faithful to Him?

In marriage one may have to renew their commitment every day as one goes 'online' and sees all the opportunities to 'be unfaithful' there on pornography sites. Then there are the 'attractions' and opportunities to flirt at work, at church, in the neighborhood, club, team, etc. There are others who will flirt with you and will be willing to lead you down the road of

unfaithfulness. There are thousands of opportunities which will create CONFLICT. Do I say NO, first to myself and then to the opportunity? Do I turn and shut it out, shun it, reject it, turn, and run away, or do I tempt myself, play with it and tease myself with it? Rejecting it, and running from it would be for the best interest of our marriage.

God is also hoping that when faced with the calls of the Old Man, the Flesh, that we will say NO, reject the offer, turn and run away. We could tease ourselves with it, which will often lead to our being weakened and in the end damaged as we give in to it. It is a war. Satan and the Old Man want their way and our allegiance to them. God is calling us to trust Him and be faithful to the relationship we have with him. One can't love or serve TWO Masters or Lovers. We can't live to please the Old Man and God. We can try and walk with one foot on each side of the line but it won't last. One or the other will eventually win out. God is trusting that we will honor our commitment with him and keep both feet on His side choosing to stay away, far away from the line. Paul goes on to say that we shouldn't and we don't have to gratify the longings or the desire for our Old Life.

The results of following the old man are disastrous. He lists them in Galatians 5:19-21 Sexual immorality Idolatry (making other people or things gods in my life; giving my loyalty and allegiance to it) Hatred (that is arrogance out of control, bitterness and self righteousness) Discord (conflicts, arguing, fighting, being nasty) Jealousy (being selfish, not trusting others, running others down, maybe wanting what they have) Fits of rage (that is an adult throwing a baby kind of tantrum; very common but so selfish and immature) Selfish ambition (that is living like a baby). "I want what I want now and if I don't get it, watch out) Dissensions (that is fighting, arguing, disagreeing, putting down, degrading, etc.) Factions (taking sides, not understanding, being intolerant and dividing up, taking sides) Envy (that is just another form of selfishness. I deserve more or better and I'd better get it or else) Drunkenness (drinking, drugs, over eating, over indulging in any number of things, is self punishment and a way to punish others or try to numb pain in my life. I only end up causing more pain to myself and others. Orgies (Really, like more and more unfaithful sex is going to make life better. Eeeerrrrr.) All these things only make one a slave and unable to ever be able to live faithfully and be content with the 'best' life offers. They are relationship breakers.

THEN PAUL SAYS: "I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." Well, that is rather obvious. How foolish do we think God is, to die for us to prove how much he loves us and then let us live as total rebels? How can we think that we are still going to get life from him? It doesn't work that way. Granted we will never be perfect in all our ways, BUT flagrant rebellion and rejection of God and his ways are saying God really means nothing to us. We will continue to live how we want, in spite of the relationship we have with God. God says, "Well, that is your choice."

Paul goes on to say that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” We chose Jesus. We rejected Satan and the Old Man or sinful nature (flesh). It was a choice. Now our responsibility is to faithfully live the rest of our life in loyalty to our word and our relationship with God. To us “THE SINGLE LIFE” is dead. It is over. It has ended. WE must not, we will not go back to its ways. We have no need to dwell on the ‘single life’, to revisit it or entertain returning to it.

We will not foolishly entertain the thought that we will stay in our marriage and secretly pursue others at the same time. THAT DOESN'T WORK. We have committed ourselves to our new LOVE. Choosing the way of the Spirit means trusting and obeying God. It means putting our relationship with Him before all else in life. He becomes the guiding and controlling factor in our life. We submit all to Him and his ways knowing and believing that is for our best interest. It is the only way we can show God we truly and genuinely love him and appreciate what he has done for us.

That life will be characterized by and controlled by: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Paul makes the obvious statement following giving that list when he says, “Against such things there is no law.” We aren't going to be arrested and sent to jail for being loving, joyful, patient, kind, good, etc. WE won't be responsible or guilty of breaking a relationship by living in these ways. Being or doing the opposite can and will break relationships. It is our choice.

Paul is saying “YOU have made your choice. Now be faithful to it.” Don't be fooled into returning to the control of the “Old Man”. It ends in death. Following Jesus and His Spirit ends in Life. Romans 8:6LB Following after the Holy Spirit leads to life and peace, but following after the old nature leads to death. We will be tempted till death to do things the ‘old way’ or the way of ‘the flesh’. The fact that the choice will be there every hour of every day creates a HEALTHY TENSION.

We can chose to honor our commitment, vows, promises and be faithful. This makes our love and relationship even stronger.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:19 Paul says “Do not quench the Spirit.” How do we quench the Spirit? Quench means to throw water on something. You quench your thirst with water. You quench the fire with buckets of water. You quench the Spirit when the Spirit prompts you to do what is right or good but you reject it and “throw water on it”. The Spirit can prompt us to do what is good and right through the Word, through someone else's encouragement or even through an inner prompting. It can be the smallest of things or huge things. God is always motivating us to do the good, the right and the best. Sadly we often “throw water on it”. Nah, I don't want to. I

don't feel like it. They don't deserve it. I'm too busy. I'm tired. Later. Someone else can do it. We are putting out the Spirit's fire in us or the spark to create a fire of good passion and ministry for God. Quenching the Holy Spirit is like a child rejecting the good word of encouragement of their parents, teachers, coaches or friends to do what is right, beneficial and good for them.

In Ephesians 4:30 Paul calls us to "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." We QUENCH the Holy Spirit when we reject a prompting of the Spirit to do something good or positive. We GRIEVE the Holy Spirit of God when we CHOSE to think, live and act in WAYS THAT ARE CONTRAY TO GOD'S WAYS. We already know much or most of what God really desires from us. When we act rebelliously and do things "OUR WAY" with no consideration as to how it is going to affect our relationship with God, He grieves. Why? Because he loves us and sees our actions as a lack of love and trust on our part.

In quenching the Holy Spirit we choose to not do something good. In grieving the Holy Spirit we chose to do something wrong or bad. I suppose that most of the time when we sin, when we choose and act in ways that will damage our relationship with God. We do so KNOWING it is not God's will but we do it anyway. Now that has to hurt God! Paul even says that it grieves God.

Have you ever 'grieved' over someone rejecting your love for them? It hurts to the bone. We don't know how we can go on having been rejected. God feels grief too.

Thus Paul calls us to "live in the Spirit" and "Walk in the Spirit". That is part of our commitment and our chosen way. Let's not be foolish. Are we going to trust Satan and go back to the old ways that caused us suffering and pain? Oh yes, maybe we can remember the 'pleasures and adventures' of the old ways and forget or overlook the emptiness and pain of that life.

That is how Eve was fooled by Satan. He lied to her. He promised her things she would not get and he could not deliver.

What are we to do when we do believe the promises and calling of the old man and we fall into sin?

God has a safety net. John tells us we need to go before God and confess our sins. 1 John 1:9 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

God is good. He is good with us. He wants the best for us. He also understands we are not perfect in all we do. With confession he provides us with a 'safety net' for when we fall.

We obviously don't want to take advantage of that and abuse it as if to say, "Ahhh, I know my mate will forgive me so I'll go and commit adultery again. What the heck." When we do fall, God has a plan as to how to deal with us.

If we don't confess or acknowledge our sins but we continue pursuing our sin, God will discipline us. He loves us. Hebrews 12:10 "They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness."

Most often that means he will let us go our chosen way and suffer the natural consequences. Natural consequences are great teachers. Do you remember Esau? You can read his story in Genesis 25. He sold his birthright (which represented all his privileges, benefits and promises for the future), he traded all the potential for many good things in life, for something that he felt he had to have in the moment.

Moses is a great model for us in choosing the right path and rejecting the damaging route. Hebrews 11:24-26. "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible."

Let's live in the wisdom of God, not the foolishness of Satan and his ways.

Remember, "IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP." If we have THE relationship we have it all. Philippians 3:7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ— the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

It's All About Maturity

Gene Rogers

Once you have accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior and have become a partaker of the life of God, your next concern should be to see that new life develops within . Then you can begin to be conformed to the image and likeness of Jesus. Your new birth has brought you a new nature and with it all the potential of a blessed new life in Christ. New birth alone does not insure sustained life nor will it bring one into fullness of life in either the spiritual or physical realm.

The fact that a baby is introduced to life in this world does not insure that it will live to experience adulthood. There are certain conditions that must be met to develop the life begun in it. If those conditions are met, the newborn will most naturally grow. If they are not met, life will be extinguished almost as quickly as it began. If the basic necessities for the sustaining and developing of spiritual life are met, the new inward life begun can do nothing but grow. If they are not met, spiritual life can be extinguished almost as quickly as it began.

BORN FOR MATURITY

Birth is a start in life not the goal. The new birth is a start in the spiritual life; it is not the goal. When a baby is born it is not born to remain a baby during all its earthly life. The goal set before it at birth is adulthood and maturity. All of the nurture and care and discipline that the home gives, added to that which the school, public or private, has to contribute, plus all the experience that life itself offers, combine to bring the baby through the various growth stages to physical, mental, and emotional maturity. Maturity is the goal.

God does not lead us through the experience of the new birth and place his life within us for us to remain a spiritual baby. The new birth is only the beginning. God's will for each of us is that we grow to spiritual maturity. This is the goal that he has set for each one of us. All spiritual nurturing, every spiritual experience, every bit of spiritual discipline, and all Christian education combine to work for realizing that goal within us. God's desire is that every newborn babe be brought to maturity in Christ; he repeatedly says so in his Word. Consider some major passages in which his will is revealed on this matter.

"Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ" (Eph. 4:15, RSV, emphasis added).

"Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28, RSV, emphasis added).

“As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col. 2:6, 7, RSV, emphasis added).

“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity” (Heb. 6:1, RSV, emphasis added).

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18, RSV, emphasis added).

It is equally true in both the physical and spiritual realms that everything and everyone must either continually grow or die.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF MATURITY

A newborn baby in the home certainly has some capacity for experiencing satisfaction in being alive. It experiences satisfaction in nursing, in being held and cuddled, and in being talked to and made over by its parents and older members of the family. In a sense, we could say that these experiences are representative of the joy a baby is capable of knowing in its new found life, limited though these may be.

Contrast the baby’s limited ability to experience joy in life with that of an adult. Contrast the baby’s limited experience of nursing and being cuddled with the wide variety of experiences that adults are capable of entering into. Consider, for example, your own ability as an adult, to experience a wonderful evening dining at your favorite restaurant; consider the experience of spending an evening listening to your favorite orchestra; think of being able to experience the many joys of domestic relationships; or consider the excitement you could have while participating in your favorite sport. As you can see, the ability to receive of the blessings of this life is directly proportionate to the degree of your maturity. The greater our maturity the greater our capacity to receive and experience increasingly more of all that life has to offer in this world. An adult’s capacity for experiencing life is hardly to be compared with that of a baby.

Similarly, there is certainly joy to be experienced by a newborn babe in Christ. To begin with, there is the joy resulting from being set free from the plaguing guilt of sin. There is joy in knowing that we have come into right relationship with God. There is joy in knowing that we have been freed from the fear of death, judgment and condemnation. These blessings which come to us as newborn babes in Christ are not to be compared with those that can be ours as mature, adult believers in Christ.

For though to be in Christ even as a babe certainly is a blessing in itself, it definitely has its limitations. The babe in Christ by the very fact of infancy is limited in ability to receive yet

greater blessings that come with maturity in Christ. While yet a babe he must partake of the “pure spiritual milk” of the Word before he is able to partake of the “meat.” (See 1 Peter 2:2, Heb. 5:12-14.) As a babe he is limited in his ability to experience many of the joys that are to be had in serving. As a new convert he is not yet able to assume positions of responsibility and leadership out of which come many of the greater blessings of the Christian life (1 Tim. 3:6).

The blessings that God is able to pour into our lives are directly proportionate to our degree of maturity and our ability to receive. With growth in Christ comes a greater ability to receive and experience increasingly more of God and the life that he has imparted to us. Maturity in Christ should immediately become the desired goal of everyone born into the family of God.

The new Christian should certainly be thrilled in being born into the family of God. He should begin to earnestly long to quickly grow out of infancy where life is filled with unresolved questions and problems, where we are inexperienced in so many ways, and where we are lacking in mature knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Increased happiness awaits us as we begin to move toward maturity in Christ, and fullness of life shall be ours when we finally arrive.

FOUR ESSENTIALS TO GROWTH

The basic necessities required to sustain the life of a baby seem to be four in number: nourishment, nurture, breathing, and exercise. Withdraw any one of these and a baby will not only fail to grow; it will die. These same basic necessities must be met in the spiritual life if it is to be sustained and developed. The newborn babe in Christ must be nourished and nurtured and must breathe and exercise if the spiritual life begun within it is not to be extinguished. Let us devote some time to a consideration of these four basic essentials.

THE NEED FOR NOURISHMENT

It is quite obvious that the first basic need of a baby is food. If a baby is to grow to adulthood it certainly must be nourished. If all food were withdrawn from a baby it would be but a matter of time until it starved. The newborn babe in Christ must be nourished or it will die. Spiritual birth must be followed by a systematic and regular feeding upon Christ (John 6:52-63). We may feed upon Christ by taking him into our lives through the Word of God. The Word of God reveals to us all that we may know of Christ and the life that He can develop within us. The Word of God is that spiritual food which must be consumed if we are to be nourished and have a developed life. Jesus said that “man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). If an infant is ever to grow to adulthood, and in so doing enjoy good health along the way, it must partake of nourishment daily. To fail to do so would result in weakness, sickness, and eventual death. Likewise, the new babe in Christ must partake of the Word of God by disciplined daily reading and study or he will become spiritually weak and sick and end up dying spiritually. As a baby is fed and begins to grow, the need for nourishment in

other areas begins to arise. We begin to give attention to fulfilling not only the physical but the mental and emotional needs that the child has. These needs may be met by the home until they are of high school or college age, or help may be sought from others in either private or public school. Whatever the case, there comes a time when the help of teaching specialists will be needed to further accelerate the growth of our children. They are going to need outside help when it comes time for them to enter into higher education. The new Christian not only has a need for regular daily nourishment from a home study of the Word of God, but he also needs to be regularly confronted by specialists in the Word who will be able to aid him in reaching maturity much more quickly. There is not only the need for studying the Word of God daily, but there is also the need for assembling with the church where those who have been blessed with the gift of teaching (Eph. 4:10-16) can serve to accelerate growth by giving insight into the depth of the meaning of God's Word. While daily home study is mandatory for spiritual growth, it is of equal importance that we assemble with other Christians where the Word of God is expounded by more mature believers who serve as teaching specialists.

THE NEED FOR NURTURING

A second basic need of a baby is that of nurturing. A baby must be looked after, cared for, loved and handled if it is to reach adulthood. Research has proven that a baby left entirely to itself, though well fed, will sometimes die. It must have contact with other human beings if life is to be sustained and developed within it. If the spiritual babe is to grow to maturity in Christ it too must have nurture and care. It must be in constant contact with the older members of the family of God who have been commissioned by the Lord to look after the lambs. The new Christian cannot fend for himself anymore than a baby can take care of itself. He must have the encouragement and fellowship of the family of God. To fail to be actively associated with the family of God is to court spiritual disaster. The new Christian needs to immediately assume his position as part of the church. He needs to regularly assemble with God's family for worship and study. He needs to take advantage of every opportunity for fellowship and seek the association of older believers who will be able to contribute to his spiritual growth. Surely, if the fellowship of the church was not vital to the Christians' growth and maturity, the Lord would never have instituted such a fellowship in the first place and would not have devoted so much of Scripture emphasizing its importance, function, and value.

THE NEED FOR BREATHING

If a baby is to live to become an adult, the first breath taken at birth must be followed by a life of breathing. Breathing is vital to the sustaining of life. One must take into his body those elements of the atmosphere which are necessary to sustain life.

If the newborn babe in Christ is to stay alive spiritually and grow to maturity he must immediately begin, and maintain, a life of prayer. Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is through prayer that we are able to open our lives to more of God. Prayer is a means of vital contact with God. It is a way of fellowshiping with him and of discerning his will for our lives. It is a means of direct and immediate communication with our Father. The new convert needs to develop and maintain a life of prayer even as a baby needs to take that first breath and continue breathing. Jesus' example teaches us to pray (Matt. 14:23; Mark 1:35). Jesus told us to pray (Luke 18:1). The results of prayer demand that we pray (Matt. 7:7, 8; Phil. 4:5-7). To maintain or restore lost fellowship with the Father necessitates our praying (Matt. 6:6; 1 John 1:9; 2 Chron. 7:14). As new Christians our first request of the Lord should be "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1)

THE NEED FOR EXERCISE

If a baby is ever to grow to adulthood it is essential that it exercise. It must exercise its mind and its limbs. To fail to do so is to run the risk of losing their use. For example, if one failed to use his right arm, he would lose the use of it. Exercise is a vital factor in growing from infancy to adulthood.

Those who become Christians must exercise their faith by serving God if they are to grow and reach maturity in Christ. The Christian life is characterized as a life of service. In 2 Corinthians 5:15 we are told that to be a Christian is to live for Christ: "And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised" (emphasis added). In 1 Thessalonians 1:9 the Thessalonians were told that their conversion was one that had turned them "to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (emphasis added). Jesus said that proof of our discipleship would be a fruit-bearing life: "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples" (John 15:8, emphasis added). God has given each of us talent, ability, and gifts of his grace to be employed in his service. It is his intention that we use them. "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given us, let us use them; if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness" (Rom. 12:6-8). It is as we use these talents in Christian service that growth takes place, to say nothing of the fact that the work of the Lord is done through the service we render. If we do not exercise our faith in service it is quite easy to see that our growth will be seriously limited. We will probably never grow much beyond spiritual babyhood. It is essential to our growth, then, that we get vitally involved in Christian service.

INTERRELATIONSHIP OF NEEDS

Experience is going to teach you that these four basic growth needs are intricately interrelated. Their fulfillment does not take place as isolated experiences. Having one need met will naturally lead to the fulfilling of others. For example, to read and study God's Word and learn of the greater blessings He has in store for you as a believer will move you to lift up prayers of praise and thanksgiving. As you begin to search his Word you will be challenged and directed to Christian activity, and will become involved in Christian service before you hardly know it. As you read and study the Word, begin a life of prayer and start to serve, you will experience that you will not only want to do these things alone, but also along with other believers. You will come to see that studying the Word and praying with other believers will bring added spiritual blessings to your life. You will learn that the most effective way in which service can be rendered is in cooperation with fellow believers. Therefore, of necessity, you will find yourself sharing much of life with them in study, prayer, worship, and service. In running a parallel between physical and spiritual growth, as we have been doing in this study, there is a great difference to be noted between the length of time required by each to reach maturity.

Physical maturity is a lengthy process. One does not expect a baby to arrive at adulthood in less than 18 or 20 years, or even longer. Spiritual maturity may not require as much time. Spiritual maturity can be reached in a relatively short period of time if vigorously pursued. How quickly it is reached will depend upon how earnestly one yearns for it. How fast can you grow? That depends entirely upon you. God grant that the desire of your heart will be to "grow daily in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" and "to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ," that you may be "mature in Christ."

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

By Gene Rogers, Minister

Christian baptism is referred to in New Testament scripture by several terms. In Titus 3:5 it is called a “washing of regeneration”. In Acts 22:16 it is characterized as a washing when Ananias exhorts Paul to “rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” In Ephesians 5:26 Paul spoke of the church as having been cleansed “by the washing of water with the Word.” Many take the declaration of Jesus in John 3:5, where He calls for a birth of “water and spirit” to mean Christian baptism when speaking of water.

The word baptism is not an English word at all. It is an anglicized form of the Greek word baptizo. In fact, it is the transliteration of this Greek word. As you can see, all that has been done to the Greek word has been to add an English ending to it. When the Greek word baptizo is translated into English, it translates “to dip,” “immerse,” “sink,” “overwhelm,” or “plunge.” The word as used in the language of the New Testament refers to the initiatory act entered into by converts wherein they are immersed in water.

Baptizing disciples as an initiatory rite was employed by many others prior to its use by Christ and His disciples. Jesus’ forerunner, John the Baptist, had baptized those who came to repent of their sins. For many years before that the Jews had baptized Gentile proselytes to Judaism. As a matter of fact, baptism as an initiatory rite was used by various religions all over the Mediterranean world for some time, even before the advent of Christianity. It was particularly used by those religions and cults that are referred to as the “mystery religions.” It is easy to see, therefore, that baptism had become a commonly accepted means of expressing a departure from a former way of life and an initiation into one altogether new.

As He had often done, God took a commonplace practice, sanctified it, and gave it a significance that it never had before. He took the commonplace practice of baptism and made of it the means of one declaring his Christian discipleship and entrance into the kingdom of God.

BAPTISM – OF GOD OR OF MAN?

In Matthew 21:25 the chief priests and elders of the people came to Jesus questioning His authority to do some of the things that He had done. They wanted to know by what authority He was doing them. He told them that He would tell them if they would answer a question for Him. The question was, “The baptism of John, whence was it? From heaven or from man?” If it came from man, then one is certainly left to do with it as he pleases. He can take it or leave it, and if he takes it, he can subscribe to whatever mode he may personally choose. If it is from God, one must receive it as God gave it and must enter into it as He has prescribed.

We are living in a day when baptism has been relegated to a “take it or leave it,” or “do it however you want to,” matter of mere human whim. Since it came from God, we must receive it as He has given it to us or we must discard a good portion of New Testament scripture, which is devoted to directing us in this observance.

Baptism is indeed ordained of God. It is one of the things commanded by our Lord Jesus in His great commission, when in His final words He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Matthew 28:19. Baptism is the one thing alone that is to be done in the name of all three, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There is no mistaking the place of importance baptism held among the first Christians. The account of the infant church, as recorded in the book of Acts, witnesses to its importance repeatedly. In every clear-cut example of conversion cited in the book of Acts. There are nine or more of them and baptism is called for in every instance. Whenever you read of one coming to faith in the Lord Jesus, they are almost immediately baptized. (cf. Acts 2:38; 8:36-38; 10:47; 16:14; 15; 16:33).

WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

In considering Christian baptism, one of the most important questions to be considered is, “Who should be baptized?” This has been a subject of debate for centuries, but it need not have been, for the scriptures are quite clear on the matter.

In the first place, disciples should be baptized. Let us go back again to Jesus’ great commission in Matthew 28:19 where He says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ...” Do you see what Jesus is saying there? He is saying make disciples and then baptize those disciples. In order to understand who should be baptized, we must ask, “Who is a disciple?” A disciple is a “learner” or “follower”; one who has been taught and has begun to follow the teaching, or teacher, or both. Therefore, one is a candidate for Christian baptism who has first been taught the Gospel and has subsequently decided to follow Jesus as the way of life. This would exclude certain groups of being baptized. For one, it would exclude babies, for they cannot be discipled or taught. For another, it would exclude those who have never heard the Gospel, for they too have not been discipled or taught. It would also exclude those whose mental ability prohibits learning.

In the second place, those who believe should be baptized. In Mark 16:126 Jesus said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”. There have often been those who have wondered why Jesus did not say “But he who does not believe and is not baptized will be condemned”. The solution to such a quandary is simple. Jesus is pointing out that baptism is a means of expressing one’s faith. But if one is faithless the act is

meaningless. Therefore, if one does not believe, there is no need to consider being baptized. He will be condemned on the basis of his unbelief, not his failure to be baptized. It is as one believes in the Lord Jesus Christ that he proceeds to express that faith in Christian baptism. This is clearly seen in the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 where, after having heard the good news of Jesus, and having come to water, he asked to be baptized. In verse 37 Phillip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may". And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God". It is obvious that Phillip was not going to baptize the Eunuch until he was sure that he had faith ... that he believed.

In the third place, Christian baptism is to be administered to those who believe with all their heart. Look again to the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian. Phillip told him he could be baptized if he believed with all his heart. Baptism is for those who believe with all their heart. That is, one must believe in Jesus and His gospel with the whole of one's intellect, emotion and will – with his entire being. Paul said in Romans 10:9, 10, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved."

There are many people who have, in the name of Christian baptism, been dipped in water without having been taught the Gospel and consequently without having come to faith in Jesus Christ.

There are those, who, on occasion, laden with problems, have attended a worship hour hoping to find some solution to those problems. When the invitation to receive Christ was extended at the close of the hour, being unfamiliar with the meaning or purpose of it, they responded thinking that this might be the means of finding a solution to their pressing problem. Before they really understood what was going on, they found themselves mumbling some words about Jesus and being dipped in a pool of water, after which everyone began calling them "brother." All this can and has happened to many persons without their having either heard the Gospel or having come to faith in Jesus Christ.

There are children who have gone to the front of the sanctuary with their parents as their parents went through the formality of transferring their membership from one congregation to another. It was noted that the children were not transferring their membership. They hadn't become Christians yet. So they were quickly asked to repeat some words, which for all practical purposes, were meaningless to them at the time, and they were dipped in water and declared to be Christians, members of the Church of the Lord Jesus. All this happened to them without their having been discipled and without their having come to personal faith in Jesus Christ. You might say this was an attempt to save them by "piggy-backing" on the back of their parents.

Others have been in attendance at a moving camp service or youth rally where many around them were outwardly moved to make a decision for Christ. They didn't want to remain seated and appear odd so they joined the group. They said some words about Jesus and were hastily dipped in water without having been discipled or having come to personal faith in Jesus.

All of these illustrate what has all too often been done in the name of Christian baptism but which in reality has amounted to nothing more than a mere dipping in water. Christian baptism must be (1) the faith-response of one who has been taught the gospel of Jesus Christ, (2) has come to personal faith in Him, and (3) is committed to following Him in faithful discipleship. Anything less than this is not Christian baptism.

Very often the New Testament epistles call upon believers to look back in remembrance to their baptism. Baptism must be something one is able to remember. After having entered into it there must be something to recall at a later date. It must be an expression of a faith that grips the heart and moves one to determine to follow Jesus Christ till death.

THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

Now that we have given consideration to who should be baptized, let us devote the remainder of this study to the meaning of Christian baptism.

1. First of all we may learn a great deal about the meaning of Christian baptism by looking to the baptism of Jesus. His baptism obviously meant at least two things for Him: (1) It was a point of departure from the past and (2) it was a launching out into the altogether new. Until His baptism, Jesus had lived in a home in Nazareth of Galilee with His mother, three brothers and His sisters. In all probability, He was the head of the household, being the elder brother. When He came to Jordan to be baptized by John, this became a point of departure from His life in the Nazareth home and launched Him out into an altogether new and different life – the life of an Itinerant preacher. Baptism must have this same meaning in it for everyone who would enter into it. It must serve as a point of departure from one's past and entrance into an altogether new and different life. It must mean a break with the past and an entrance into life where all begins to become new.
2. In the second place, baptism is a means of declaring one's faith in Jesus Christ and His gospel. There is nothing that God requires of man that more beautifully portrays the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ than the believer's baptism. It is in baptism that one declares his belief that Jesus died for his sins, entered into death for him, was raised victoriously and triumphantly over death as the first fruits from the dead, and shall in due time, call him to share in that resurrection.
3. In the third place, Christian baptism is the means of bringing us into union with Christ and His body the church. In Romans 6:5 we are told that it is by means of baptism that "we have been united with him in a resurrection like his." In Galatians 3:27 we are told

that it is by baptism that we “put on Christ”, when Paul says, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” As we are brought into union with Christ the Head we are also brought into union with His body the church. In I Corinthians 12:13 we read, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body”.

4. Baptism symbolizes a sealing of a contract. In I Peter 3:21 we read, “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The word “appeal” in this passage could well be translated “pledge.” It is the Greek word eperotema or the Latin word stipulatio. It is a technical business and legal word. In every business contract drawn up during New Testament times there was a definite question and answer which made the contract legal and binding. The individual was asked, “Do you accept the terms of this contract and bind yourself to observe them?” If the individual did accept the terms his answer before witnesses was “yes.” Without such a question and an ensuing answer, no contract was binding. Baptism becomes the culmination point in the development of our faith where we are faced with God’s question, “Do you receive my Son as your Lord and Savior, and do you accept the conditions of my service with all its privileges and responsibilities and with all of its promises and demands?” And as we accept God’s terms, we declare our “yes” in Christian baptism whereupon God is bound to fulfill His side of the covenant as we declare intention of fulfilling ours.
5. Baptism is a starting point from where we begin to build our Christian life and to which we look back for a frame of reference for the duration of that life. We human beings are earth bound enough to need a starting point, a place to begin. In all the important adventures of life there is the need of a starting point. For example, in marriage there needs to be a starting point from where married life starts. Be it very elaborate or ever so simple, there is a need for this. And from this point, two people proceed to build their wedded life together.

We need just such a starting point in our Christian life. Thank God He has made provision for us to have it in one of the most beautiful and meaningful experiences that one could hope for – Christian Baptism.

This is the last of the special items we have to give to those who have become disciples. It might be good to get together with them and discuss it with them. You can also download this and the other papers at www.itsallaboutrelationship.org

It's ALL About Relationship

John Hendee

ALL: as in everything, entire, complete, total, every little thing, lock stock and barrel, the works, whole ball of wax, whole enchilada.

This book has been designed for all new Christians, especially those who have gone through the four lessons of "It's All About Relationship." This is a follow up to those four lessons.

This is just an introduction to the issues that will be shared here. There is SO much more that you need to discover as you read and study the New Testament. It will be a never ending process for the rest of your life.

We encourage those who have shared the four lessons with someone to continue on with them in guiding them through this booklet. You can figure out a schedule as to how to do so.

We have put together lessons based on the truth of the New Testament that our commitment and life with Jesus is ALL about relationships, nothing more and nothing less.

Our premise is this; Every command in the New Covenant which God has given to disciples of Jesus is about improving our relationships with God or others. God's call to the world is to accept and live in His love.

EVERYTHING!

Every command

in the New Covenant has to do with our relationship with God or with others.

They are all based on love and doing what is loving in the eyes of God, our creator.

There are no exceptions.

Our becoming a disciple of Jesus is totally about relationship and has nothing to do with manmade religion or as I like to call it, religiosity (trying to reach and be right with God through religious activities).

John 1:18 says, “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.”

God came to earth in the person of Jesus to make himself known to us so we too could be in close relationship with him.

As a new follower of Jesus we want to encourage you to focus in on that relationship. We will challenge you to take off your ‘religious glasses’, that is seeing what you read in the New Testament as having to do with ‘religious teachings, instructions, rules, ordinances, practices, etc.’ and instead put on your ‘relationship glasses’, seeing every command you read in the New Testament in terms of building your relationship with Jesus and others.

If you didn’t have the opportunity to be taken through the four lessons of “It’s All About Relationship” we encourage you to go to this web site and over the next week or two and watch them there. You are always welcomed to go back and review them.

www.itsallaboutrelationship.org

If you click on the cover of “It’s All About Relationship”, it will open and you can download the copy; you can also print off a copy. The four video presentations are then found at the lower left. Click on each one in order and follow along. Each lesson is about 30 minutes long.

God summarized the calling and purpose of the life of a disciple of Jesus in just **two commands**.

Matthew 22:37-39 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it. ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

The New Testament shows us how to carry out those two commands in our daily lives.

RECEIVE IT, LIVE IT, ENJOY IT, SHARE IT

That is it. Oh there are a lot of other instructions, teachings and directions in the New Testament but if you will read them with your **relationship glasses** on you will see that all the commands are about our relationship with God and with others: Everything. It is ALL about receiving God’s love and then being loving as God defines love; selflessly giving of oneself for the best interest of others. That is what God did for us. He limited himself, denied himself many things and suffered greatly in order to advance our best interest so we could be at peace

with God, forgiven, filled with Him, learning from Him and preparing to spend eternity with Him.

Jesus promised the 'abundant life' to those who became his followers. It is a life abundant, full, and overflowing in strong, healthy, rewarding and loving relationships rather than involvement in religious activity.

Years ago I wrote a paper with a long title. It captures the essence of what we want to pursue here. The title was "The Incredibly Tragic Error of Becoming a Religious Person Instead of Getting Close to God." If you get close to God/Jesus you don't need man made religion. Most all manmade religions teach that you have to 'earn' their god's love or salvation. That is a dead end pursuit.

In Jesus, God showed us how much he loves us and takes us as we are. He then lovingly and patiently starts working in our life to help us become more loving, developing stronger relationships with him and others.

So PUT ON YOUR RELATIONSHIP GLASSES and never take them off. Wash your eyes and minds of the 'religious way' of looking at the New Testament and your new life with Jesus.



IT IS ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP. EVERYTHING. EVERYTHING.

Don't let others lead you down another path or you will lose what is most important.

I told the following illustration to a doctor one day. It came to my mind while I was listening to him complaining about his past religious experience which he had dumped years earlier. I used this to try to explain to him how following Jesus was different from seeking to be right with God by being 'religious'. Let me share the illustration here.

IT WAS HIS TENTH BIRTHDAY

He was the oldest of four kids in the family. His 10th birthday was rapidly approaching. But this year was weird. Unlike previous years no one in the family had said anything about the approaching day. He was mystified. As the days passed and the big day approached, his feelings went

from mystified to amazed to saddened and then on to depression as he realized they must have forgotten his birthday.

“How can you forget your oldest son’s birthday?” he thought.

He was distraught.

The night before his birthday he laid awake in bed pondering the whole issue. He could hardly sleep. Morning brought no relief as he got up, went to the kitchen and no one said anything other than good morning. He walked slowly to school. He couldn’t concentrate all day long. He dreaded the last bell. That meant he had to go home to the family that had forgotten him!

He took longer than normal going home. Half way there it hit him. It had to be a surprise party. There was no other explanation. He repented of all the mean things he had thought about his family. Now he was more nervous than ever. He picked up his pace. He approached the front door and entered prepared for people to jump out from their hidden places yelling surprise.

The surprise? He entered the house. Nothing. It didn’t happen. Nothing. Deeper depression. “Oh, they must be in the kitchen.” He lays down his backpack and says out loud (as if to warn them). “I guess I’ll go to the kitchen for some cookies and milk.” No one there.

Auuggghhh! “How could it be?” He gave up.

He went back to the living room about to burst into tears and just then he saw his dad coming down the steps from his bedroom with two packages in his arms.

“Hi son, welcome home. Come sit with me on the couch.”

They sat down. He was encouraged to see the wrapped gifts.

“Son, happy birthday. I’m sure you’ve been wondering what was happening.” The son sat silently, having no clue as to what was about to happen.

“Son you are the first of the kids in our family to turn 10. Ten is a very special year in our family and you are the first to achieve it.”

He hands his son the first package and asks him to open it. He did. Wooppeeee! A book. The title is “The Book of Life” by Dad.

The father explains, “Son, this is now the most important book you will ever get in your life. You must start reading it and studying it today. We will have regular lessons on it. You must learn it quickly. It will tell you how to live. Now if you can learn and do what this book tells you to do, without failing, when you turn 65 you will be fully acknowledged and accepted as my son and you will receive your inheritance from me.”

The son is sitting in stunned silence trying to figure out exactly what his father is saying. It made no sense. His head was swirling. He didn’t understand.

Without giving his son time to develop a response the father hands him the second package. A big one.

The son slowly opens it not knowing what to expect and finds a large folded piece of soft material. He tries holding it up. He has to stand up in order to hold it up in the air, reaching up high above his head. It is some kind of robe or something. It is black with dark blue trim. A robe?

The father responds to his sons puzzled-looking face by saying, “You’ll grow into it son. It has to last you all your life. It is a ‘talking’ robe. From this time on any time you want to talk to me you need to put on this robe, go to the bottom of the stairs going up to your mom’s and my bedroom (oh by the way, from today on you CANNOT go upstairs anymore to be with us). call my name ‘Father on the Second Floor’, and if I can I will come to the top of the stairs and we can talk. Now in the back of the book is a CD that you need to listen to. It will teach you how to chant/talk with me in the future (My Father who is on the second floor, may I please speak to You?) You need to practice it and when you start getting it right, the tone, inflection, variations, etc., I’ll listen. NOW if somewhere along the line you screw up at school, with work, with the police or something don’t tell me. You go tell your uncle Fred. And Fred will tell me about it. Okay son, happy birthday. Do you understand it all? Any questions?”

Now, here is something for YOU to think about.

What do you think this son would be thinking about his dad and this family he was born into at this point? I’ve heard many different responses to that question. The most common is something like “Weird!”

And I agree.

And here is the point. While we would consider such behavior as weird in a family relationship we have been duped into thinking that it is “okay”, or the pattern when talking about a personal relationship with our heavenly Father. Some have been led to believe that it is normal in that realm! I propose it is also weird when talking about God, our Heavenly Father, and that it’s not what the God of the Bible wants or has asked for. Many men with their religious ideas or philosophies have messed it all up. They have injected their own weird ideas or imposed them on what Jesus is all about. Doing so has been referred to as ‘muddying up the waters’ of what life with Jesus is really to be like. And it is pathetic.

The truth is as we will pursue it in this book, is that it is ALL about relationship; that is, a loving relationship with our Heavenly Father.

It comes down to an issue of Relationship versus Religion.

Man made religion ensnares, enslaves, discourages and damages people. Unfortunately many who have become disciples of Jesus have knowingly or unknowingly started to turn the life of being a follower of Jesus into a ‘religious life’ trying to keep a long list of manmade traditions, rules, programs, services, titles, ceremonies, rituals in order to gain the acceptance of their god..

These become their focal point or way of becoming right with God.

Take those religious glasses off. Put your Relationship Glasses on and never take them off.

I remember the day I got my first pair of glasses. I was in the eye doctor's office. He put the glasses on and adjusted them. I paid and walked out of the office. Once I got outside I was shocked. I just had to stand on the sidewalk and look. Everything was so clear and sharp. It was so exciting. I was amazed at how blurry everything had been and how getting new glasses made it so crisp, clean and clear.

It is the same when we take off the 'religious glasses' and put on the 'relationship glasses'. That changes everything from darkness, blurred, fuzzy vision to seeing things as they ought to be, as they were intended to be and it is so exciting to be able to see all this so clearly. It changes everything.

Once having become a follower of Jesus you will spend the rest of your life getting closer to God and others. It is a journey. It is a never ending, life long process.

Love in any relationship can suffer if that relationship is ignored or something else is made more important. Jesus predicted in Matthew 24:12 that *'Because of the increase in wickedness, the love of many grow cold.'*

In Revelation 2:4 God sent the message to Christians in Ephesus saying, *"Yet I have this against you: you have forsaken the love you had at first."*

How does that happen? It happens by letting other things or people become more important. The same thing can happen in marriage. It can happen in our relationship with Jesus. It takes a lot of desire, effort and attention to maintain strong and healthy relationships.

We will see that in the New Testament there are what we will call **Relationship Builder Commands** and there are **Relationship Breaker Commands** or teachings. As you read through the New Testament you are going to see a lot of those pointed out for our benefit. God wants us to practice all the Relationship Builders and avoid or eliminate from our lives the Relationship Breakers. The reason is obvious. He wants to see all our relationships grow and become stronger. Our choices and decisions will decide whether we end up building and strengthening or breaking and damaging our relationships. He has gone out of his way to show us the best way. While we can't control the choices and decisions of others we can practice 'self control'.

We can know that God has done and will continue to do everything he can to bring people into a strong relationship with him and others. Then he will be doing everything he can to show us how to maintain those relationships and try to avoid anything that would damage or destroy them.

God wants us to learn from him, and to be like him, and treat all others with mercy and grace. As we read the N.T. we will see his teachings and commands related to this. We will need to learn to act on them, do them out of love for God and others, not based on emotions or feelings.

God has treated us with Mercy. Mercy means we ‘don’t get what we deserve.’ God treats us with mercy and he wants us to treat others with mercy (giving them what they don’t deserve) rather than revenge (giving them what we think they deserve).

In Matthew 9:13 Jesus said, *“But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’”*

God has treated us with Grace. Grace means we ‘get what we don’t deserve.’ He wants us to treat others with grace which means giving them what they might not deserve in our mind. Paul said in Colossians 4:6 to *‘Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt...’*

We need to learn what these two really mean and see how to actually carry them out in life. God will help teach us this through the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit.

What follows in this short booklet is like a “Sampler Box” of chocolates. It will help get us started on the journey of building and maintaining healthy relationships with God and others.



It will allow you to see (taste) a few Scriptures on a number of different topics as it relates to loving relationships. This is not meant to be exhaustive in scope but an introduction of beginning to read the New Testament with those Relationship Glasses. Spend the rest of your

life reading the New Testament and finding more wonderful 'nuggets' of truth to apply to your life. Enjoy

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

1. **Study Number One;** *It ALL starts with the love of God*

Everything good started with God. Life came from his love. Salvation comes through his love. It all starts with and comes from God. No man made religion has the markings of love like God has revealed he has for mankind through Jesus. It ALL starts with God's love and ends with God's love.

It is somewhat summarized in Ephesians 2:4-10

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith- and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 3:17b, 18 And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Romans 8:35, 37-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?.....No in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height no depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The God of the Bible stands out as a very unique God among gods.

Buddha is not known for his love for mankind.

Hindu god's are not known for their love for mankind.

Allah is not known for being loving toward mankind.

Satan is not known for being a god of love.

It is all different with the God of the Bible.

He is a God of love, doing all he can to win the hearts of all people and then doing what is for their best interest for eternity. He invites us to a relationship based on love. The Bible says He first loved us. I John 4:19 *We love because He first loved us.*

He is a God of love. I John 4:7-12 *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

What is love? It is faithfully and intentionally seeking to advance another's best interest or do what is best for them.

Jesus is our model in how to do that. He is our teacher.

What do the following verses teach you about God's love?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. Daily pray and thank God for his love.

Verse 1; John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

Verse 2; I John 4:10 *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

Verse 3 I John 3:1 *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.*

Verse 4 I John 4:16 *And we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love.*

Verse 5 I John 4:18 *There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment.*

Extra resource; Because God Loves Me; author unknown.

BECAUSE GOD LOVES ME

Because God loves me, he is slow to lose patience with me.

Because God loves me, He takes the circumstances of my life and uses them in a constructive way for my growth.

Because God loves me, He doesn't treat me as an object to be possessed or manipulated.

Because God loves me, He doesn't need to demonstrate his authority; He is God.

Because God loves me, He touches me. He wants to see me mature and grow in his love.

Because God loves me, He doesn't save up a list of my sins to beat me over the head with.

Because God loves me, He suffers when he sees that I'm not walking in his ways because he sees that I don't trust him.

Because God loves me, He continues trusting in me even at times when I don't trust in myself.

Because God loves me, He never says there is no hope for me; he patiently keeps working with me, loving and disciplining me in such a way that it is hard for me to understand the depth of his love for me.

Because God loves me, He doesn't renounce me even when many of my friends do.

Because God loves me, He stands with me when I have reached the end of my desperation, when I see the reality and I compare myself with his righteousness, holiness, beauty and love.

It is in a moment like that, that I can really believe the reality that God loves me.

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

2. **Study Number Two:** *It is a heart matter.*

Whoever or whatever we give our heart to will totally determine how we will live our life. When we chose to become a disciple of Jesus we surrender our heart, our entire being to him. Jesus points that out when he said "For where your treasure is there your heart will be also." That means whatever we put our faith in for meaning and purpose in life will control our heart and head. Whatever we give our best to is what we love. Our heart follows our treasure or what we value most. Everything we do will be to follow and hold on to that 'treasure', whether it is Jesus or something or someone else.

When we surrender our will to Jesus he begins to help transform us into more loving beings. He is our model and mentor. We learn from him.

What do the following verses teach you about your heart?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. Then pray and thank God for his love.

Verse 1 2 Corinthians 5:27 *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!"*

Verse 2 Proverbs 4:11 *"Above all else guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."*

Verse 3 Romans 5:5 *"And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."*

Verse 4 Psalm 86:11 *"Teach me your way Lord that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart."*

Verse 5 Proverbs 3:5 *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding."*

Extra resource; My Heart, Chris's Home; you can get it on Kindle Store. It is only \$1.20

A short but powerful illustration.

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

3. Study Number Three: Love God

Matthew 22:27-38 Jesus replied: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment."*

Jesus is our model in how to do this.

Galatians 5:6 makes it pretty clear. *"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."* The ONLY thing that counts!

It starts with our trusting God and having confidence in him based on the historical records telling about his coming to earth to offer us salvation and eternal life. Our

response to his love for us is to love him in return, loving him more than anything else in life. There is nothing more important than loving him and trusting him. Everything else in our future depends on this. Loving Him results in our being more loving to others.

What do the following verses teach you about love?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. Then pray and tell God how much you love him and why.

Verse 1 I John 5:3 *"In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome..."*

Verse 2 Ephesians 5:1,2 *Follow God's example therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."*

Verse 3 I Corinthians 8:3 *"But whoever loves God is known by God."*

Verse 4 John 14:15 *"If you love me, keep my commands."*

Verse 5 Galatians 5:6 *"The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."*

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

4. **Study Number Four:** *Stay close to Jesus*

We can only mature into what God wants us to be if we stay very close to Jesus. We see in John 15 that he says 7 times, 'remain in me....' 15:5 "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing. "

Remaining in Him means staying very close to him and depending on him for all that is important in life.

Jesus is our source of life, our strength, our power, hope, joy, guide and more. If we fall back into taking him for granted we will become weaker. There are many potential traps or distractions that can draw us away from Jesus: Pride, lust, selfishness, deceit, anger, bitterness, lies, etc.

I did a series on marriage years ago titled "Keep Courting or Count the Cost." The idea was simple: if you don't keep courting your mate, doing loving, kind, helpful things,

spending time together, telling of and showing your love, you will lose something and pay a price for it; the relationship will suffer. The same can happen with our relationship with Jesus.

What do the following verses teach you about 'remaining in Jesus'?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. Then pray and tell God how much you love him and why. How are you going to SHOW him this day or week that you truly love him?

Verse 1 Colossians 3:1-4 *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."*

Verse 2 Hebrews 12:2 *And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.*

Verse 3 Colossians 2:6,7 *So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness"*

Verse 4 Hebrews 3:12 *"See to it brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God...14 We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end."*

Verse 5 Philippians 3:7-11 *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ- the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."*

Extra resource; Bruce Wilkerson; Secrets of the Vine; Kindle Store. \$5.99 Short read but very powerful help in our life. It is about John 15 and Abiding in Jesus.

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

5. **Study Number Five;** *Love others*

"What the world needs now is love, sweet love." Oh they are such nice lyrics for a song. Most everyone is in favor of love, thinks highly of being loving, thinks everyone should be loving and I think most see themselves as being loving.

So when God commands us to 'love others as we love ourselves' it seems like a good thing, something we would be in favor of and willing to do. But with time we find out it can be very difficult. I have seen in life that it is much easier to be 'religious' and go through the religious rites, ceremonies and practice religious traditions than it is to love everyone.

It is easy to love some people who are very loveable. But then there are those who irritate, annoy, oppose, abuse, abandon or reject us. Jesus shows how to love all of them. He has called us to a lifelong mission in learning how to love others. It isn't feeling something but it is a decision as to how I will treat others regardless of how they treat me. I may not be able to change them but I can and will be in control of my actions.

Our 'old way' or 'old nature/man' was basically selfish. So being called to love, to give, to seek the others best interest rather than using them to just meet my needs is a huge change. And there are a lot of people to love; Self, mate, kids, parents, relatives, siblings, friends, neighbors, associates, boss, employees, people on the street, strangers, enemies.....

There are a lot of teachings about loving others in the New Testament. Jesus calls us to a radical new love. He asks us to love others just like he has loved us.

What do the following verses teach you about loving others?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How are you going to SHOW others that you love them? How will doing so change your life and maybe theirs?

Verse 1 Luke 6:27-33 *"...Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you....Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is*

that to you? Even sinners do that....But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Verse 2 Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Verse 3 Romans 13:8, 10 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law....Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

Verse 3 I John 4:11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Verse 4 I John 3:16-18 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brother and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person. Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

Verse 5 Matthew 18:22-35 This is a longer one. Look it up in your Bible and read it.

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

6. **Study number Six;** *Learning to love is a process*

'Love at first sight' can happen in an instant. It can disappear rapidly too. The kind of unselfish love God calls us to is based on a decision to actively and intentionally do what is for the others best interest regardless of what my feelings might be at any given moment. Romantic love can rise and fall over night depending on how 'the other makes me feel' at any given moment. The love God calls us to is dependent upon an ongoing, life long commitment to do what is best for the other whether I feel like doing it or not, whether I think they deserve it or not. I read a comment a while ago that shows one aspect of this; "If a man loves a woman's soul, he'll end up loving one woman, but if he

just loves a woman's body or face, all the women in the world won't satisfy him." Benjamin Chavez.

Being loving to others and treating them right is actually based on my decisions to do so, and not on how others act and treat me.

Actually all the love God calls us to is 'love at first sight.' That means we have decided to treat all people right, proper and respectfully with the love of God from the first second we see them. It is not an emotional feeling but a predetermined mindset and decision.

God loved us because He IS love. It is His nature. He did what was for our best interest even at a time when we had no interest in him or maybe knew of him but chose to reject him and go our own sinful way.

Romantic love is an emotional response usually based on 'You make me feel so good.' It is sort of automatic; I don't have to do anything to have it, feel it or develop it other than see the other person and be in their presence. It is based on the others looks, personality, abilities or willingness to please and pleasure us. In many ways it is selfish. "You make me FEEL so good. I want you. I need you. I can't live without you."

God's love, the love he calls us to is based on his first giving himself for our best interest even while we were sinners. If we accept that love he then fills us with HIS love and asks us to love Him and others not based on their looks, behavior, how they can benefit me, or what they can give me in return. I seek to do whatever is for their best interest. That is love. It is a decision. It is an act of obedience. I am helped by the Holy Spirit. It goes way beyond my old human nature; I give as a result of my having been loved by God and my new Spirit Nature.

What do the following verses teach you about loving others?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How are you going to SHOW others that you love them? How will doing so change your life and maybe theirs?

Verse 1 I Corinthians 13:4-8 *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trust, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.*

Verse Colossians 3:13 *Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

Verse 3 Romans 12:9-10 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

Verse 4 Romans 12:17-19 *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath...."*

Verse 5 Romans 15:1,2,7 *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up...Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

7. **Study Number Seven;** *Prayer is about relationship;*

Prayer is talking or communicating with God. Before I was a Christian I normally talked to myself all day long; internally, not out loud. It was normally 'brain talk', 'self talk' or inner talk. "John, that was great." "John that was stupid." Or maybe "Now what am I going to do?"

After I became a Christian I realized one day that had just naturally changed. No one told me to do this, it just happened. Now all through the day I talked to God. I had a friend to talk to, share with, ask for help, thank for good things or cry with.

A simple guide to daily prayer is to use ACTSS as an outline for your private prayer time. It will work anything.

A – Adoration. Praise God for his greatness, his being our God.

C - Confession. Confess your sins to God. Thank him for his forgiveness.

T - Thanksgiving; Have a time of thanking God for all he does for you.

S – Supplication; pray for your personal needs and the needs of others you know.

S - shush up and listen. I heard a man share this one day. After ACTS we need to add another 'S' which he said stands for we need to then "Shush Up and Listen!" Maybe God has something he wants to tell me! I thought that was good. Listen to your heart. Listen to the Word as you read it.

What do the following verses teach you about prayer?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How can you make talking with God a bigger part of your life?

Verse 1 Romans 12:12 *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*

Verse 2 I Thessalonians 5:16-18 *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Verse 3 James 1: 5-8 *If any of you lacks wisdom you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave in the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.*

Verse 4 Ephesians 6:18-20 *And pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*

Verse 5 Romans 8:26 *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.*

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

8. **Study Number eight;** *Bible reading is about relationship*

Some have said that the New Testament is like a collection of love letters sent to us from God. When one is in love with another and is separated from their loved one for a period of time and they get a letter or email from them they will often read it over and over. And they will often respond back to them sharing their thoughts and feelings.

We learn most of what we can learn about God/Jesus and his love from reading his Love Letters to us which are the New Testament writings.

If a person learned that the one they loved just threw their letters in the trash, or deleted them or didn't even bother to read them it would make them wonder. If it is a written letter it will have 'worn edges' from our reading them over and over. It is like the person is there with us in thought; We feel closer to them.

What do the following verses teach you about the importance of reading the Bible to our relationship with Jesus and others? Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. What can you do to make spending time reading God's Love Letter of Good News to you a bigger part of your life?

Verse 1 II Timothy 3:14-17 *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Verse 2 Psalms 119:105 *Your word is a lamp for my feet a light on my path.*

Verse 3 II Timothy 2:15 *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of Truth.*

Verse 4 James 1:22 *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

Verse 5 I Timothy 6:3-5 *If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about word that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.*

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

9. **Study Number Nine:** You will experience *a new struggle in life by choosing Jesus.*

When we choose Jesus we make a huge life change. We got off the throne and put Jesus on the throne. Life is now “What do you want Jesus?” rather than “What do I want today?” Life is now lived to please my Savior. He lived to please me and meet my needs and he is still working to meet my needs.

Here is the problem. While I have intentionally made that mind or head decision, the OLD me is still there. The old me was selfish and self centered. So for the rest of my life the OLD me and the NEW surrendered me will be in conflict. Each will be calling me to live their way. The Bible talks about this. So don't be surprised by this new conflict. Before I came to Christ I didn't have this in my life. I just did what I wanted! No problem.

It is like marriage. Before marrying a person pretty much does and lives the way they want. But that had better change when they marry or it is not going to go well.

After making the commitment and exchanging the vows a person may have to deal with wanting to go back to the 'single' way of living and or dealing with attractions to other people in the future. Marrying doesn't automatically end 'other attractions'. But the commitment we made on the wedding day is to an exclusive relationship which means if and when one is attracted to another they must be ready to say NO to pursuing it, turn their back on it and if necessary RUN or flee from it. If we don't live in serious consideration of our mates needs and how to meet them, the relationship will suffer.

All this is a 'conflict of feelings' based on having made a choice, having made a commitment to another. Get used to it. Stay close to Jesus. Flee other attractions.

What do the following verses teach you about dealing with the temptations to be unfaithful or put yourself back on the throne? Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How will practicing what is written here change your life?

Verse 1 Galatians 5:17 *For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other...*

Verse 2 Romans 12:1,2 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer you bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Verse 3 Romans 7:23,25 *But I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.....Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Verse 4 II Timothy 2:22 *Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

Verse 5 James 4:7 *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.*

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

10. **Study Number Ten:** God desires to see his children grow up into healthy, loving, mature adults. What parent would be happy to see their children in their 30's acting babyish or childish? The New Testament uses different words or phrases to describe God's desires for his Disciples in life; mature, perfected, whole, Christ-like, complete. We are called in the Scriptures to examine ourselves to be sure we aren't stuck in immaturity. Jesus is our model of maturity and wholeness.

What do the following verses teach you about maturing and growing up in Jesus? Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How will practicing what is written here change your life?

Verse 1 Philippians 3:10,11 *I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him....*

Verse 2 I Corinthians 10:33-11:1 *For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*

Verse 3 Ephesians 4:11-14a *So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants....*

Verse 4 Colossians 1:28 *He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.*

Verse 5 Hebrews 5:12-14 *In fact though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

Extra resources; Go to www.itsallaboutrelationship.org

Look under FREE books. You will find a booklet for free there titled, Adult Babies.

It is a great read on this subject.

11. Study Number Eleven; *Someone else wants your love and devotion.*

You angered someone when you gave your life to Jesus. You angered them, irritated them and now they are upset with you. They might attack you or assault you openly or they might be more subtle in their approach. They had you but they lost you. They are now going to act like a jilted, jealous lover. They will fight to win you back. Who is it? In the Bible he is known as the great dragon. He was called that before he was called the devil or Satan. Revelation 12. WE have been warned about him. Prepare yourself for his crafty schemes to break up your relationship with Jesus. He wants you to surrender to him instead of Jesus. He will gladly 'take you back.'

Be sure and read the free book "A Dragon Slayers Life." www.itsallaboutrelationship.org

What do the following verses teach you about Satan?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How will knowing this help you and what will you now need to do to not let this dragon mess up your relationship with Jesus?

Verse 1 Revelation 12:7-8 *Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.*

Verse 2 II Corinthians 2:11.. *in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.*

Verse 3 II Corinthians 4:4 *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

Verse 4 Ephesians 6:12 *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the power of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

Verse 5 I Corinthians 16:13 *Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong*

Extra resource; A Dragon Slayers Life; Free at www.itsallaboutrelationship.org

A preacher with 4 kids read through it with his family. He later told me "John, this book has become a second Bible for our family. It is such a powerful teaching tool for our kids and us adults."

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

12. Study Number Twelve; *You have a spiritual family relationship*

As a follower of Jesus you have been born into a new family. You ARE NOT an only child. For a while you might be the 'baby' in the family but God wants to see you grow and take an active part in this family. Hopefully sooner than later you will be a 'big brother or sister' helping out with many responsibilities that God has given the family for each other. In the New Testament that family is called the church. We often tend to think of 'church' as a place or building. It is not. It is made up of all those who are in the family of God.

With time we will discover that there are some really special people in the family as well as some we will think are a bit weird. We will find some who are strong, mature, helpful and giving and we will encounter some who are immature and still selfish and misguided in many things. God gives us a lot of guidance in the New Testament about how to love this family. It will be easy loving some and very, very difficult loving some others. But loving the family is not optional. Oh, we might find some who aren't lovable and will reject our love. Even then we will seek to be mature and not let them stop us from serving the rest of the family and loving them in our actions.

What do the following verses teach you about loving those in your new family? Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. What do they say about how to work with and live with those in your new family, the church?

Verse 1 John 13:34,35 *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

Verse 2 Romans 15:5 *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Verse 3 Hebrews 10:24 *Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day appearing.*

Verse 4 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8 *Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.*

Verse 5 Ephesians 4:31 ,32 *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Extra resource; Read Gene Rogers free book titled: Don't Walk Alone in the Light.

At web site; www.itsallaboutrelationship.org

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

13. Study Number Thirteen: How to love your blood/physical family

What do the following verses teach you about our sharing Jesus love with those in your physical family? (If you are single, this is prep for any possible future marriage.) Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How will doing so change your life?

For your information; "Submitting" is the same as loving; doing what is for the others best interest; putting their best interest ahead of mine; a selfless action. Notice in the first verse here. Men are being told to submit too! Submitting is NOT having to 'obey' another and participate in any sinful activity against your will.

1. Ephesians 5:21 *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*
2. Ephesians 5:22-24 *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. (The word submit means the same as 'love'. Do what is for their best interest. It doesn't mean become their slave.)*
3. Ephesians 5:25-33 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleaning her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church.....in the same way men ought to love their wives as their own body.*
4. Ephesians 6:1-3 *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor you father and your mother" – which is the first commandment with a promise – so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.*

5. Ephesians 6:4 *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

- 14. Study Number Fourteen:** *We are given a huge assignment as those in a serious relationship with Jesus. This is not optional for Disciples of Jesus.*

As a person who has come into relationship with Jesus we receive so many wonderful blessings and promises from God. It is overwhelming. And we have seen that God calls us to love him and also to love others. Part of our loving others is to accept our role as one of God's Ambassadors to go to those not yet in God's family and share with those who will listen to God's invitation to become part of his family. This is a job given to all Disciples of Jesus. It is not just for pastors. It is for men, women, young and old; all who become followers of Jesus. We must prepare for this most important task to be most effective at it. This really isn't optional. Unfortunately there are many who are willing to take all that God gives them but are unwilling to go and let others know they can become sons or daughters of God.

It is rather selfish to take all he has given us but then be unwilling to go and help those we know and meet in life become aware of what God has done for them in his love and how they can become one of his Disciples also.

What do the following verses teach you about our sharing Jesus with others? Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How will doing so change your life and maybe theirs?

Verse 1 Matthew 28:18-20 *All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.*

Verse 2 II Corinthians 5: 18-20 *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*

Verse 3 I Corinthians 9:22-23 *I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

Verse 4 Romans 10:14,15 *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news."*

Verse 5 Matthew 9:37,38 *Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

Book; Training Disciples who Can GO and Make New Disciples

It is free at www.itsallaboutrelationship.org

IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIP

15. Study Number Fifteen; *Don't forget your future.*

What you see and experience every day of your life is not the total substance of life; there is more to come. We can become overwhelmed with the events of life at times. There are painful, evil things we experience in life. At times we wonder, "Is this all there is?" We can pass through times of discouragement, disappointment, division, disillusionment, disease, disaster, downfall, danger, difficulty, distress, destitution, drudgery, discomfort, depression, despondency or despair. We can get tired of working, marriage, parenting, financial stress, health issues, studies, friendships, politics, serving and any suffering. Just keeping on with life will be difficult at times. During those times we MUST remind ourselves that what we are experiencing at any given moment is not going to last forever, it is not God's plan for our eternity. Something better is awaiting us. We will be raised from the dead one day and we will be ushered into an eternity with Jesus our Lord, King, Savior and Friend.

What do the following verses teach you about your future with Jesus?

Read one a day for the next five days, writing down key thoughts that you learn. How will these verses help you as you face tough times?

1. John 14:1,2 *Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?*

2. Revelation 21:1,3,4 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth had passed away....And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*
3. Matthew 28:20 *And surely I am with you to the very end of the age.*
4. 2 Corinthians 7:1 *Therefore, since we have these promises dear friends let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit , perfecting holiness out of reverence for Christ.*
5. Revelation 2:10 *Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.*
6. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Extra resources; I can only imagine.

I CAN ONLY IMAGINE

E. Stanley Jones was a missionary in India for 40 years and authored over 40 books.

In one book he told about a tour of a village in India he was taken on. As they walked along the main street of the village his guide pointed out a group of women sitting next to the street weaving rugs. The guide mentioned that it took them 6-8 months to make one rug. E.S. wrote that he felt pains of sadness and pity for the women. The rugs were ugly with no design or pattern. There were loose threads and knots everywhere. What a waste of their life making something so ugly.

As they walked further up the street a loud noise made him turn to look back. As he turned he happened to see the women and their rugs again. He was shocked. He had to go back. Arriving at their location he realized that earlier he had been looking at the backside of the rugs! Now he saw the front. They were amazingly detailed and beautiful. He was overwhelmed and asked how they could possibly make something so beautiful in only 6-8 months. He stood looking with his mouth hanging open.

I've often thought of a wonderful life application in this. At times from our perspective our life seems a bit 'ugly', seemingly lacking in design, full of knots and loose threads. We experience unexplainable and

unexpected pains, disappointments, failures and seemingly meaningless events of life maybe mixed with a scattering of good things and it doesn't make sense. We wonder, we have doubts and we ask why, what's it all about?

Those are the moments when we need to be patient and trust God, the one who weaves the tapestry of our lives. What we see now is the 'backside' of our tapestry. One day, when this life is finished, we are going to be able to look back on all that happened and we are going to see something amazing, a product of the Master Weaver who has been working behind the scenes. We are going to see the 'Front side' of our tapestry, the finished product.

One day we are going to see what God was doing in those dark moments and how He used them to add to the value of the finished product of our life, and it will overwhelm us. Our mouths will fall open as we fully understand how great God is and how He was with us through all the years faithfully working in our life.

I think about all I've gone through in life; the joys, the victories, the struggles, the sins, the failures, the mistakes, the evil actions of others and the mysteries I never understood. I also think about the many blessings in my life: my loving wife, our dear daughters, our grandchildren, dear friends and the laughter and joy I have experienced with others. I think about my sense of peace and joy in knowing Jesus and realizing that He has forgiven me of my sins. Oh, the lists go on and on.

I am sure that one day my eyes will tear up in a momentary blindness as God shows me the final tapestry from my earthly life. "Why did I ever doubt?" I believe at that time I will fall to my knees and weep uncontrollably with joy, gratitude and amazement.

I'm sure that the design and colors will be so brilliant that they will make a rainbow appear pale in comparison.

What will the blend of colors be?

For me I'm sure there will be plenty of black representing my failures and my sins.

There will lots of red showing the blood of Christ by which those sins were forgiven.

There will be plenty of browns recalling the the pain and suffering caused by the lies, betrayals, short sightedness, selfishness, inaction, disinterest, unfaithfulness, abandonment, neglect and indecision.

There will be grays from the dark days, illnesses, loses, injuries, unexplained suffering and hurts.

There will be green reflecting the good I have done.

There will be splashes of light blues reminding me of all the refreshing times from God in my life.

Yes, there will be yellows showing the many moments that the Son shown in my life.

There will be rich purples reflecting the majesty of my King.

Oh yes, there will be lots of GOLD indicating the many untold riches God lavished on me.

I can only imagine.

John's attempt to define the Love of God put into action in our lives

I think most of us would like to see and think of ourselves as being loving.

And I think most of us at times will over exaggerate the reality of our being all that loving. Proverbs 16:2 says, "All a person's ways seem pure to them." Yes, when we look in the mirror we might not like what we see on the outside but our tendency is to see ourselves as better than we might actually be on the inside.

God often calls us to examine ourselves to take a serious and honest look at ourselves. With Jesus we don't have to hide things. He knows what is going on. And he can help us mature and grow faster if and when we humble ourselves, confess our sins, weaknesses and confess our need for him and dependency on him.

I once read that often the longer one is a Christian the more honest and open about their weaknesses they become, because they understand God's mercy and grace better. They know they don't have to hide things from God but can openly come to him and confess those weaknesses and their need for him in their life every day and he will lovingly help them deal with it all.

I have to speak as a learner, as one still on the journey. I have failed often in my efforts to build loving relationships. And I have succeeded often. I wish I could say I was an expert on the subject but I'm not. I have a lot to learn yet; ah, well maybe I don't have so much to **learn** as I have a lot **to do** practicing it better. Know it I do; doing it as well as I could? Well, I have plenty of room for improvement.

I will have to adopt Paul's statements as my own: *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ."* Philippians 3:12-14

I am still pressing ahead, trying to apply what I know.

Let me take a stab at trying to give a picture of the differences between our human kind of love and the kind of love relationship God commands us to live and share with others.

Human love tends to be selfish. Me First!

God says this about our heart. Jeremiah 17:9 **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.”** We have a heart problem. Most of the world’s problems are caused by the kind of heart Jeremiah speaks of; deceitful, lying, unfaithful, selfish, justifying, hiding, denying, blaming, criticizing, and so on. It is no wonder the world is in a mess. That being the case it could be said we need a new heart.

Jesus said “For it is from within, out of a person’s heart that evil thoughts come.....All these evils come from inside...” Mark 7:21,23

God promised to help us by giving us a new heart. *“I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone...”* We don’t need new laws, more education, more government programs, more jail, armies, police, lawyers, judges, etc. We need new hearts.

He did that in Jesus. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old is gone, the new is here.”*

Part of making us NEW is that God forgives us, cleanses us, empties us and then fills us with himself and his kind of love.

*And hope does not put us to shame, because **God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.**”* Romans 5:5

Having done all this God now calls us to a life of love. He commands this of us. John 15:12 *“My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.”* This would be impossible without him filling us with his love.

He calls us to live a life of love first to him as in ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul.’ Then we are to love others as we love ourselves.

THERE IS ONE DANGER INVOLVED IN ACCEPTING GOD’S LOVE

He expects us to change and to pass it on.

If we accept his love, forgiveness, cleansing, support, presence, and all the other promises but then don't pass all that on to others we run the risk of being an ungrateful son or daughter. This following parable addresses this.

It is sometimes called the parable of the Unmerciful Servant:

Matthew 18:21-35 Read it in you Bible.

Oh, those are hard words.

But they are logical.

If I accept God's forgiveness but don't forgive others I am not obeying God.

He forgave me of the sins that put Jesus on the cross. But then if I turn around and won't forgive those who have sinned against me and instead I seek to punish and seek revenge against them God is not going to be happy.

Jesus forgave us.

Do we forgive our mate for their offenses, irritations and grievances?

And our kids, parents, friends, etc.

Oh, so we will TAKE ALL THE GOOD from God, but we won't pass it on?

How small, how ungrateful and how pathetic. The Holy Spirit has reminded me of this parable a number of times as a loving slap on the back end.

Love is a decision to be willing to make sacrifices for others to help meet their valid needs, to advance their best interest in the eyes of God. It is a decision to limit my own freedoms to help meet the needs of another. It is denying myself and what I always want in order to fulfill the life and heart needs of another. In Matthew 16:24 Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves." Whoa. Are you starting to see it? Self denial is a means to put others first and be a blessing to them. That is exactly what Jesus did for us. And at times he suffered for it. But he did it willingly and in love. And that demonstration of love in his suffering became the force that opened the hearts of many who had even helped kill him. Many of them became his followers.

Love that doesn't have a sacrificial element to it will end up being based on emotions and selfishness. That is a human love.

Selfish love is focused on and thinking about the answer to this question; **“What have you done for me lately?”**

If you have been good to me, treated me good, given to me, given me what I want, made my happy, then I will be good to you.

You do things to make me feel good and I will treat you well.

I’ve heard it described as the “IF” condition. “If you are good to me, I will be good to you.”

Jesus calls us to the ‘regardless’ condition. I choose to be loving, kind, respectful, helpful, polite, etc. “regardless” of how you treat me.

The IF condition: If you do things that irritate, annoy, hurt or anger me I will respond in the same ways maybe even attempting to make my response more irritating or painful to punish you and maybe even teach you a lesson.

It is basically trying to get others to change the way they treat you through upping the intensity of revenge treatment a level or two. Or maybe it is simply just to get even or punish them. That doesn’t make relationships better. Forgiveness and self control do.

Love which decides how it will treat others based on how I ‘feel about you’ or how ‘you make me feel (good or bad) will damage, weaken and with time destroy relationships.

“If you haven’t been good to me; you will pay a price.”

I will withdraw.

I will withhold.

I will pout, maybe scream, throw something, betray you, try and hurt you, gossip about you, or maybe just be cold to you or abandon you in order to let you know I didn’t like what you did or didn’t do for me. Maybe I’ll just search for something or someone else to give me what I want.

There is a way to respond if others actions, attitudes, philosophy, habits, views on life, way of thinking or living don’t agree with ours.

Being loving doesn’t mean I have to approve of or like your attitudes, philosophy, habits, views on life, way of thinking or living or the way you treat me, but it does mean my

response to you will be honest and respectful and certainly not with a revengeful, punitive or arrogant attitude.

Oh, it is WONDERFUL when love is reciprocal and that is the way it should be but it isn't always that way. A big question for each of us to ask about love, life and others is "Are they present in my life to please me in all they do and make me feel happy and loved?" Or do I have the perspective that I have the privilege of being present in their lives to be a blessing to them, to bring joy to their life? Most have an ongoing battle between these two view points in their inner being.

Godly love is focused on and thinking about the answer to this question: "**What have I done for you lately?** What do you need that I can provide?" (Help, support, kindness, respect, interest.....)

Godly love is giving not knowing if what I give will be appreciated or returned but it is my nature to bless and encourage through my loving.

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And oh how we try and prove him wrong. But we can't.

We are often raised from childhood where others are always 'giving to us'. Christmas, birthdays, holidays, rewards, etc. Oh, we love it too. But we need to be taught the joy and excitement of giving as we grow up.

So the Godly love asks, "What can I do for you today to help you or bless you?"

What can I say to you to bless you?

What can I give you to bless you today?

What can I say to others to bless them?

What can I give others today to bless them?

God, who can I love in your name today?

What can I do today to reach out to offer the Gospel.

How can I fulfill my role as an Ambassador today?

WHAT DOES GOD'S LOVE LOOK LIKE?

God, while we were yet sinners died for us

This is a major example of sacrificial love.

He did for us what we needed, even when we had turned our back on him, rejected his ways, thought we knew better, wanted to live 'free' doing what we wanted, when we wanted, how we wanted and all the time wanting to be free from any temporary or eternal consequences, or without any real concern on how it would affect God or others.

Godly love is sacrificial; while we were yet sinners.

He gave up more than we can comprehend by coming to earth, to be rejected, spit on, ridiculed, lied about, unjustly tried, beaten and then killed on a cross. He did this with HOPES that we would respond with appreciation, gratitude and love for him and desire an eternal relationship with him.

Godly love is selfless; he limited himself to show us his love and allow

us to have a good relationship with him.

Godly love provides us with what we need in life and eternity.

Godly love is a decision to bless.

Godly love is not a decision to support or approve someone's sinful life style but a decision to offer them the way, truth and life regardless of their life style. It is then their choice if they want it.

Godly love is not based on another's morals.

Godly love is offered freely but can't be forced on anyone.

Godly love is focused on providing or offering any legitimate need.

Godly love is 100%. There is nothing I can do to make God love me more than he already does.

Love leads to self control. Titus 1:8 Paul talks about the qualities of a Christian leader when he says, *"Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined."*

Self control is defined as; caution, care, order, refusal, humility, modesty, reason, abstinence, self denial, avoidance, abstaining, non-indulgence.

Godly love says I won't do anything that will harm another person;

Romans 13:10 *"Love does no harm to a neighbor."*

That includes your mate, kids, parents, relatives, friends, associates, neighbors, etc.

The opposite of self control is self indulgence, revelry, arrogance, impropriety, lawlessness, animalism, audacity, disorder, irresponsibility, gluttony, wildness.

Love leads to self denial

It is more blessed to give than to receive.

It is not more blessed to receive than to give.

Selfishness says: If you give to me, I will love you (as long as you give to me).

Stop giving and I stop loving."

I've started a chart for you. This is another tool you can use for the rest of your life as you study how to love God and love others. Make your own 'blank chart' up and keep it near your Bible as you read it. See how many passages you find over the years showing how to love by God's standards.

What do people need? How do I show love? Here are a few examples'

As you read N.T. passages you can break them down as illustrated here for your own learning and growing in love.

There are RELATIONSHIP BUILDERS and RELATIONSHIP BREAKERS.

You can think about each word and how they either build or break a relationship.

Passage	<p>What people need; how I show love to others. This IS showing love.</p> <p>RELATIONSHIP BUILDERS</p>	<p>What people don't need. These are not being loving. These are being selfish with no self control.</p> <p>RELATIONSHIP BREAKERS</p>
Colossians 3:5-14	<p>Compassion Kindness Humility gentleness patience Bear with each other Forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Put on love</p>	<p>Sexual immorality Impurity Lust Evil desires Greed which is idolatry Anger Rage Malice Slander Filthy language Do not lie</p>
Ephesians 4:2-3	<p>Be completely humble Gentle Patient Bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the peace.</p>	

2 Timothy 3:25		People will be lovers of themselves; Lovers of money Boastful Proud Abusive Disobedient to their parents. Ungrateful Unholy Without love Unforgiving Slanderous Without self control Brutal Not lovers of the good Treacherous Rash Conceited Loves of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Having a form of godliness but denying its power. (religious)
I Corinthians 13:4-7	Love is patient Love is kind Always protects Always trusts Always hope Always perseveres Love never fails Rejoices with truth	

Now, go and spend the rest of your life learning how to enjoy the love of God and in return, Love Him and love others.

