

Don't Settle

Ellen Lebsack

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But let all who passionately seek you
erupt with excitement and joy over what
you've done!

Let all your lovers, who continually
rejoice in the Savior, say aloud,
"How great and glorious is our God!"

Psalm 70:4 The Passion Translation (TPT)

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Introduction

Don't Settle – Use Your Imagination

“Everyone is blessed with an imagination. Some just know how to use it better than others. Developing your imagination takes some effort. Don't quench your creativity with thoughts of “I could never do that,” or “That's impossible,” or “Maybe some other day.” Let your mind dream big. Brainstorm... just letting your thoughts run rampant. You may even hit on something that will change the world!

Don't settle for a pre-made, pre-measured, pre-packaged life. Keep your friends and family guessing what you'll do next. Make life an exciting adventure for you and for them!” _Luci Swindoll

April of 2010 marked the beginning of a new season in my life. A new season in any year means a review of old goals. A new season means it's time to set some new goals for my life .

Setting new goals is such a lofty idea compared to what I've done several times each year for many, many years. What this ritual truly

amounts to is setting aside some time with my Lord Jesus to honestly look over where I am in life, as opposed to where He wants me to be.

The Lord told Habakkuk,

“write the vision; make it plain so he may run who reads it.” Habakkuk 2:2

Luci Swindoll's words, quoted from the *“Women of Faith Study Bible”* pretty well sum up my life philosophy: **“Don’t settle!”**

I am vehemently opposed to leaving well enough alone! In my world growth is a requirement. Any day I don’t learn something new is a wasted day. Any day I don’t approach every new situation with a bazillion ideas please check my pulse. Something is WRONG!

In April 2010, as I wrote in my personal journal and prayed one idea that sprang up was re-writing some notes I’ve used for years when speaking to groups of Christian women. From that idea came this book.

“Why imagination and speech notes?” you may ask.

Because a woman's imagination is key when it comes to influencing not only her own life, but also the lives of everyone who comes in contact with her. Don't believe me? Consider this:

“Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are

anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like.

“But whoever catches a glimpse of the revealed counsel of God—the free life!—even out of the corner of his eye, and sticks with it, is no distracted scatterbrain but a man or woman of action. That person will find delight and affirmation in the action.

“Anyone who sets himself up as “religious” by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world.” James 1:22-27 The Message (MSG)

When I finally decided to write this book, the greatest desire of my heart (my goal, if you will) was to share what real LOVE [the Love of Christ] has done in my life. And what His Love can do in your life, if you will simply take God at his Word.

By the grace of God, I am what I am...

1 Corinthians 15:10a

Who I Am Today

I am a servant of the most high God, the God of heaven and earth, who holds my life in the palm of His hand. And, because of the price He paid to give me life, I am His slave. Yet I am free! For God did not give me a spirit of fear, but of power and of love; a calm and well-balanced mind, a spirit of discipline and self-control. He brings to my life love, joy, peace, an even-temper, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-restraint.

Now that I have come to be acquainted with and understand the true God, or rather to be understood and known by God, how could I turn back again to the weak, worthless, elementary things that enslaved me before?

So overflowing is His kindness toward me that He took away all my sins through His Son. He showered down upon me the richness of His grace, for how well He understands me and knows what is best for me at all times. Oh, how kind my God is, for He has shown me how to trust Him

and become full of the love of Jesus Christ.

Yesterday...? Well, yesterday was a very different story.

Yes, it's true! Before Jesus Christ rescued me, I was angry, afraid and blinded by a blizzard of problems and strife that surrounded me every single day. Sound familiar?

Today I am, first and foremost, a daughter of the King of Kings and LORD of Lords. But when my wonderful husband of forty-plus years looks at me he sees a partner, a wife, a friend and lover. When our God-children and their children look at me, they see mom, or Nana. My role is defined very differently by each one of them. Nurturing a large God given family is a huge part of what I *do*. What I do does *not* define who I *am*.

Over the years, I've worn many hats; done many jobs. It would be safe to say 'I'm a *jack-of-all-trades*: artist, writer, web site designer, administrative assistant (that's the politically correct buzzword for secretary, you know), insurance agent...and so on and so forth. One thing I can tell you without reservation my jobs define what I *do*. Again, what I do does *not* define who I *am*.

It is critical that you see the separation between what you DO and who you ARE as you begin

reading this book.

Every relationship you have is completely and totally different. If you are a mother and have more than one child, or if you are a sister with more than one sibling, you already know each person in your life is uniquely and wonderfully different. If you're a young woman with a circle of close friends every relationship is unique. And, if you're smart, you deal with each and every relationship on the basis of the unique needs it represents.

Please, understand this. It's important! The unique way you treat each and every person you love and nurture from deep within your innermost being does *not* determine who you are.

Who you *are* determines what you are able to *give* out of your innermost being!

The Woman You Are Today

“and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

Colossians 2:10 NKJV

When you look at yourself in your mirror, what do you see?

Do you see someone who is imperfect and lacking in many areas, or someone who is whole and complete in Christ?

Please understand and acknowledge this fact – no one else knows exactly how you treat yourself.

There are women, we all know them, who see themselves as incomplete. These women, and I pray you are not one of them, live with a predominately negative self-image. This is because they are super-conscious of what they're missing and of their imagined imperfections. They say, "There are so many things imperfect about me! How can I be satisfied with my life if there are so many areas where I don't measure up?" They see their weaknesses, condemn themselves and feel inferior to others.

We are social creatures. Don't you agree? We learn at a very young age what is socially acceptable and what is not. We are not allowed to go around saying hurtful things to others. It's frowned on in the same light as hitting, pinching, kicking, and biting. It's a big NO NO! So, why do you suppose we often consider it an acceptable practice to treat the woman in the mirror hurtfully in the privacy of our own hearts and minds?

If you always greet yourself in the morning, looking into your mirror over your toothbrush with, "*Hey, Good Morning! I like you,*" Hooray!

If you start your day by making yourself as

attractive as possible and go out to greet your world with confidence, believing you have something special to offer everyone you will meet; confident they will see you as a lovely person with something special to give them – Hip Hip Hooray!

Obviously, you have your stuff together. You even remember where you put it. If that's the case, spending your time reading this book and working hard to make improvements will probably be a big waste of your time. I suggest you don't waste your time, because the whole reason for this book is to help you find a way to give God permission to change your life into something much, much more positive than anything you've ever known before.

If, on the other hand, there are days when you look in the mirror and greet yourself with “if only...”

You know what I mean.

“If only I were thinner; taller, shorter, had more of this or less of that.”

Or, if you're someone who greets the day with a barrage of “what if's...”

“What if I can't do today's job perfectly; be the superwoman – wife, mother, career woman or combination of all the above – who completes all the stuff I've penciled in and top it all off with

a magnificent chocolate souffle for dessert tonight?”

Now don't get me wrong, these are not the only two negatives the women I've met over the years burden themselves with. But they're two of the biggies. So, let me ask you. How would you like to change your “if only” and “what if” thinking and bring it in line with what God offers you?

Yes?

Wonderful!

That means this book was designed specifically for you, and if you will make a prayerful commitment to stick with the program to the end – it will change your life. Guaranteed!

Wait! Don't get all excited and sign on for the duration just yet.

First...I need to explain the difference between dedication and commitment. Have you ever eaten an old-fashioned breakfast of bacon and eggs, something like a farm wife in the early 1900's may have prepared for her family?

Here's how it works--bacon and eggs requires two participants out in the barnyard. The pig provides the bacon and the hens provide the eggs.

The hens makes a promise to lay an egg a day so the farmer and his family can have breakfast. That's dedication! Some of us have it. Some...not

so much. Most of us are eager-beaver starters, but when the going gets rough, we're off looking for a fat worm on the other side of the fence, letting our sisters do the work for a day or two.

The pig on the other hand... Well that's commitment! The farmer and his family can't have bacon with their breakfast without the total and absolute commitment of the pig. He's willing to give his life to fulfill the job he's been called upon to do.

Before you go any further I'm going to ask you for a commitment, with the promise that your life will never be the same again after today.

Focus On The Goal

"I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total

commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you'll see it yet! Now that we're on the right track, let's stay on it." Philippians 3:12-16 The Message (MSG)

Why not lay the book aside, go for a walk, eat some ice cream or something, and take a few minutes to think about it before you read any further.

***Charm can mislead and beauty soon
fades.***

***The woman to be admired and praised
is the woman who lives in the Fear-of-
God.***

***Give her everything she deserves!
Festoon her life with praises!***

Proverbs 31:30-31 MSG



Okay...now that you've taken a little time to think about the things you've read so far, I would like to have you think about this:

Who Are You? Really?

Do you ever make a face at the woman looking back from your mirror and tell her, "I could love you a lot more if only you'd lose those extra pounds you're carrying around?" Or, "You'd be a lot more lovable if you weren't such a _____ (your blank to fill in here)_____."

Let me ask you, would you say something like: "Well I suppose you're a nice enough person, but if you fail to live up to my expectations, we're over," to your very best friend? How ridiculous! I'm sure you're socially adept enough

to understand what such a statement would do to your friendship.

Then why, Oh WHY, do you treat yourself that way?

So...now, are you ready to make a commitment by asking God to help you with some positive personal changes? My guess, yes. Or you wouldn't have continued reading.

Perfect! Let's get started.

I must be perfectly transparent with you here. Back in the early 80's, when I made the same commitment with the Lord I am going to ask of you, the seminars I presented, and the studies I wrote (for myself as much as anyone) were all about self-image.

Today, I understand the truth. And the truth is:

- Your self-image is a picture of Who and What you are IN CHRIST. Your self-image is, in reality, your GOD image.

Your goal for this season of your life is developing a positive God-image of who you are *in* Christ.

Your commitment – give God permission to change your image of who and what you are.

The way you're going to accomplish your goal is through prayer and conversation with Christ. Conversation is a two way street you know. It

requires listening, too!

Many women have a pretty foggy image of themselves. Mostly, these women see themselves as a conglomeration of various components held together by a framework of *shoulds*.

In general, we women spend our lives building a blueprint of who and what we are, based on information from every source imaginable except the right source. Our blueprint comes from parents, educators, bosses, friends, family, church and even the main-stream media. From this information we establish a set of plans or *shoulds* for ourselves that even the much touted Proverbs 31 Woman could never live up to. And just for the record...about 95% of our *shoulds* are totally unrealistic anyway!

As a result we start our days clutching our self-imposed set of “blueprints” firmly in hand, holding tightly to the high expectations we've developed for ourselves, and others. We set ourselves up for failure by writing a script of how the day should go. What we should do. What *they* should do. And so on and so on it goes. And hardly a day goes by when we (or they) live up to our expectations. Then, when we, *or they*, fall short - we start with the old stand-byes. “if only” and “what if.”

Can you identify with what I'm saying? Am I

coming anywhere close to where you live?

Just so you and I are working toward the same goal here, I have a few questions I would like to have you consider. It is, basically, a self-examination or self-evaluation test. The whole thing will take about 10 minutes. If you find yourself spending more than 15 minutes, you're over thinking it...big time.

Your answers are completely private. You won't be sharing them with anyone else. You won't be talking about them unless you choose to do so. Your answers are between you and the Lord. Period.

I think, as you score this self-evaluation, you will begin to see exactly how important the things we are going to be talking about will be to your growth and change. Your scores will be an indication of how you see yourself today – a picture of the woman you are today.

When you've finished scoring your answers, write the score down in your journal or use a Post-it-note and put it inside the cover of your Bible.

In a few weeks you'll be answering these same questions again and I can promise you the scores will be very, very different. I have never seen it fail. It is a Biblical principal – a few weeks of committed time every day with God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit

will change anyone!

Remember, don't get too serious about these questions.

Keep in mind the elderly lady who, during a visit to a local senior's home, asked the director how they determined whether or not a patient should be institutionalized.

"Well," the director told her, "we fill up a bathtub, then we offer a teaspoon, a teacup, and a bucket to the patient and ask them to empty the bathtub."

"Oh, I understand," the woman said. "A normal person would use the bucket because it's bigger than the spoon or the teacup."

"No." said the director, "A normal person would pull the plug. Where do you want your bed, under the window or next to the door?"

Here Are The Questions.

Score them as follows:

0 if **not true**

1 if **somewhat true**

2 if **mostly true**

3 if **true.**

- ___ 1. I usually feel inferior to others.
- ___ 2. I normally feel warm and happy toward myself.
- ___ 3. I often feel inadequate to handle new situations.
- ___ 4. I usually feel warm and friendly toward people I contact.
- ___ 5. I habitually condemn myself for my mistakes and shortcomings.
- ___ 6. I am free of shame, blame, guilt and remorse.
- ___ 7. I have a driving need to prove my worth and excellence.
- ___ 8. I have great enjoyment and a zest for living.
- ___ 9. I am very concerned about what others think and say about me.
- ___ 10. I can let others be wrong without attempting to correct them.
- ___ 11. I have an intense need for recognition and approval.
- ___ 12. I am usually free of emotional turmoil,

conflict and frustration.

___ 13. Losing normally causes me to feel resentful and “less than...”

___ 14. I usually anticipate new endeavors with quiet confidence.

___ 15. I tend to condemn others and wish to see them punished.

___ 16. I normally do my own thinking and make my own decisions.

___ 17. I often defer to others on account of their ability, wealth or prestige.

___ 18. I willingly take responsibility for the consequences of my actions.

___ 19. I am inclined to exaggerate and lie to maintain a desired image.

___ 20. I am free to give precedence to my own desires and needs.

___ 21. I tend to belittle my own talents, possessions and achievements.

___ 22. I normally speak up for my own opinions and convictions.

___ 23. I habitually deny, alibi, justify or rationalize my mistakes and defeats.

___ 24. I am usually poised and comfortable among strangers.

___ 25. I am very often critical and belittling of others.

___ 26. I am free to express love, anger, hostility,

resentment, joy, etc.

___ 27. I feel very vulnerable to the opinions of others.

___ 28. I rarely experience jealousy, envy or suspicion.

___ 29. I am a professional “people pleaser.”

___ 30. I am not prejudiced toward racial, ethnic or religious groups.

___ 31. I am fearful of exposing my “real self.”

___ 32. I am normally friendly, considerate and generous with others.

___ 33. I often blame others for my handicaps, problems and mistakes.

___ 34. I rarely feel uncomfortable, lonely and isolated when alone.

___ 35. I am a compulsive “perfectionist.”

___ 36. I accept compliments and gifts without embarrassment or obligation.

___ 37. I am often compulsive about eating, talking, drinking, smoking, etc.

___ 38. I am appreciative of others achievements and ideas.

___ 39. I often shun new endeavors because I fear mistakes or failure.

___ 40. I make and keep friends without exerting myself.

___ 41. I am often embarrassed by the actions of my family or friends.

___ 42. I readily admit my mistakes, shortcomings and defeats.

___ 43. I experience a strong need to defend my acts, opinions and beliefs.

___ 44. I take disagreement and refusal without feeling “put down” or rejected.

___ 45. I have an intense need for confirmation and agreement.

___ 46. I am eagerly open to new ideas and proposals.

___ 47. I customarily judge my self-worth by comparison with others.

___ 48. I am free to think any thoughts that come into my mind.

___ 49. I frequently boast about myself, my possessions and achievements.

___ 50. I accept my own authority and do as I myself, see fit.

_____ total score

today's date _____

TO OBTAIN YOUR SCORE: Add the individual scores of all even numbered statements [2, 4, 6, etc.] From this total subtract the total of all the odd numbered statements [3, 5, 7, etc.] The net score gives an indication of your level of self-worth.

Where your score is between the highest possible score [+75] and the lowest possible score [-75] will give you an idea of how positively or negatively you see yourself today.

Please remember, this score can always be improved upon as you center yourself in Christ, learn how much He loves you, learn to love yourself, and through Him learn to love others.

Now that you've painted a picture of how you see yourself, answer this one simple question for me:

Do you LOVE yourself? Or, are you telling yourself, "I could love you a lot more, if only...."

Think about it.

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ... 2 Corinthians 5:16-18 NIV



Today I Am

Right here, right now - I'm going to do something I know is not wise. I'm going to assume that since you're reading this book you picked it up because Christ is a part of your life. I'm going to assume you are interested in what I'm telling you because you've already made some sort of a commitment to Him.

If you'll open your Bible to Matthew, chapter 22, and look at verses 36-40 you'll find Christ explaining God's expectations for His followers. I'm going to give you my personal translation here, but I think you'll get the picture. Jesus said, "I want my people to love me with their whole being. Do this by loving others, and by

loving yourself.” The Message Bible translates it this way:

Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.’ This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ These two commands are pegs; everything in God’s Law and the Prophets hangs from them.” Matthew 22:36-40 (MSG)

This means **if** you’ve made a commitment to Christ, your commitment makes you a Christian. The word Christian literally means Christ like.

If you’re going to be Christ like, you are going to have to operate out of LOVE.

If you’re going to show God’s love to others, you’ve got to be first in line to receive God’s love. You can’t give away what you don’t have. You’ve got to be willing to let God love you. You’ve got to be willing to let your family and friends love you, too. And, you’ve got to love yourself! *“Love others as well as you love yourself!”*

Too many of us don’t. Love ourselves, I mean.

Too many Christian women walk through life with a very negative view of who they really are.

Too many of them think it's alright to...hate is such a strong word, instead let's say...dislike themselves, just so long as they wear a veneer to cover up those negative ideas. Dear Heart, I've worked with Christian women for decades, and entirely too often I find good Christian women acting like loving mothers, loving daughters, loving wives, good friends and super saints. They put on a loving veneer, when beneath it all they are filled with emotions light-years removed from love when it comes to themselves.

"Well," you might say, "that's okay. Just so long as they're not hurting anyone else. Right?"

WRONG!

I submit to you that unless you love yourself, it is impossible to honestly give love to anyone else. Anyone else at all.

Think about this... if you've been going through your days thinking along these lines, just let me set you straight right here and now. The only person you're fooling with your *act* is yourself. Plus, while you're putting on a performance, behind the scenes, your stage is set with props that constantly tell you nobody else really, deeply, loves you either.

The idea is this. "I'm unacceptable to myself because _____(again, your blanks to fill in)_____. Others must see the flaws I see. Because others are aware of my flaws, secretly

they can't really accept me. How could they? They're just too polite to tell me.

“Does this dress make me look fat?”

Let me ask you – do the people who love you know you have a self-defeating attitude when it comes to certain areas of your life? Do you think it is possible your self-defeating attitude negatively affects your relationships in any way?

No?

Then, consider this – while you're putting on your “I don't like me, but I'm a loving mother, daughter, wife, sister...whatever – deep down inside you know it isn't working for you don't you? I'll bet you've been thinking you were getting by with it! I'll bet you've been thinking *they* didn't notice. Or care!

Trust me when I tell you again, you're wrong!

Come with me, if you will, on a journey into my imagination.

Picture a white sand beach, rolling surf, a scattering of shells, a few little sea chickens running in and out with the waves; a gorgeous day in every sense of the word. Now, put a little girl on the beach. She's got a pail and shovel. She's wearing a cute hat to protect her from the sun. She's having a wonderful time.



As she laughs and plays, she is approached by someone she trusts. She proudly points out the small sand castle she's just finished. But the person she loves and trusts tells her, "It's nothing really. It's waste of time. Without windows and doors it's just a heap of sand. If you couldn't do better than that, why bother?"

Her smile fades and tears start to well up in her eyes.

The voice continues, "Come here. Let me pull down the bottom of your swim suit. You look ridiculous with your behind hanging out like that. You're really much

too chubby to wear that skimpy suit from last summer. Your hair's all messed up and you have dirt on your face.”

She brushes at her cheek and drags a toe, downcast eyes watching the little line she's making in the sand. All her joy is gone. The day, that started out so beautifully, is ruined and in her memory it was all her fault.

Now fast-forward a decade or so. She's back at the beach, this time with someone who loves her. And she says, “I look ridiculous in this swim suit. I'm much too fat to wear it.”

Suddenly, all the joy is gone. In her imagination she's gone back two decades and she's overwhelmed once again. She is unhappy. The person who loves her is hurt because the only thing they wanted to do was give her a lovely day at the beach. Now their day is ruined, too.

Place the same woman in her home, serving a carefully prepared meal for her family. Hear her saying, “It's nothing really. I don't know why I bother. Nothing I cook ever comes out as good as it should. I'm just not a good cook like my mother was.”

Mothers, I have to tell you, some of the most

damaging negatives in your daughter's life may come from your poor attitude about yourself.

Daughters, I have to also say, some of the most hurtful moments in your mother's life may come from your negative attitude about yourself.

Wives, nobody's is perfect! But try to keep in mind – he married you because he loved YOU. And it wasn't until after the wedding he found out you didn't like yourself at all and so can't believe he likes you much either.

There's an old joke about the bride who planned to walk down the **aisle** to the **altar** accompanied by the strains of a beautiful **hymn**, only to have her husband of six months tell her, "If I'd known you meant **I'll alter him** when you were planning the wedding, I might have thought about this marriage thing a little while longer. Frankly, I doubt if I'll ever live up to your expectations!"

Nobody's perfect!

Are you following me here? What I'm trying to point out is the horrible negative impact we can have on ourselves, and on those we love. When we allow ourselves to act like loving Christian women, but underneath are filled with hostility toward the person we truly are inside nobody wins.

Did my imaginary journey to the beach touch a

nerve? Did you care about the emotional wounds being inflicted on an innocent child? How do you think your “poor me,” I hate myself, if only I were different attitude feels to those who love you? How do you think it feels to God, your Father, who sent His only Son to make a way for you to stop it?

Please believe me when I tell you...the people who love you notice when you put yourself down, tear yourself up, and are just hateful on general principle. And the age-old female excuses you use two weeks out of every month won't cut it either.

Not only do they notice...they care! They just don't know how to get you to STOP! They want you to STOP. But YOU have to WANT to STOP.

Do you?

Are you willing to give up the negative picture of yourself that you carry around in your head? Are you willing to exchange it for the picture of a beautiful creation, designed by the Creator of the universe to be uniquely and perfectly you? Are you willing to allow the Lord to free you from the hurts and disappointments; from the *shoulds*, that have formed your inner picture?

It really doesn't matter if you only have one or two areas where the negative side of your personality is predominate; where you are held captive to hate (okay...dislike) rather than love.

One or two areas are just one or two too many. God has provided a way for you to have total freedom from them. Are you willing to make the commitment to work through that process with Him?

As I've said before...growth is a process. Your release from old attitudes and patterns won't happen over night. Imagine this...

God takes a little worm, wraps it up in a silken cocoon, and hangs it up on a branch for a season. Over time it changes into something wonderfully beautiful and perfect. It breaks the threads that hold it and a beautiful new creature flies off into the sunlight to live out life as God planned.

Are you willing to wrap yourself in the Lord's silken cocoon for a season and allow His Words to change and refresh your thinking? I know that He will do it. He has done it for me.

Today, by the grace of God, I am who I am.

Beginning on Monday, and once a week for the next six weeks I ask you to join me (through this book) for a Bible Study. If you are willing, God's Word will transform your heart and mind, In Christ Jesus, and you will be able to honestly say, "He is changing me to be Christ like."

Amen.

Where Am I Going

This is my prayer for you today:

Lord Jesus, I bring this your daughter before you. I give you thanks and praise for what you have done in her life. And for what you are going to be doing for the rest of her life.

Lord, I ask your protection over her choices, over her changes, and over the seeds that have been planted in her heart. Cause her soul to be good ground, so that the seeds of your Word will produce much fruit, to God's glory.

I pray this believing and in agreement with the one who reads my prayer. I thank you for the answers to her prayers; answers that are already making themselves obvious in her life.

So be it.

But the fruit of the [Holy] Spirit [the work which His presence within accomplishes] is love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper, forbearance), kindness, goodness (benevolence), faithfulness, gentleness (meekness, humility), self-control (self-restraint, continence). Against such things there is no law [that can bring a

charge].

And those who belong to Christ Jesus (the Messiah) have crucified the flesh (the godless human nature) with its passions and appetites and desires.

*If we live by the [Holy] Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. [If by the Holy Spirit we have our life in God, **let us go forward** walking in line, **our conduct controlled by the Spirit.**] Galatians 5:22-23 AMP*

Today you are starting a journey...a journey toward change; a journey toward love, joy, peace, and self-control. You are starting a new journey walking through life, in Christ, led by the Holy Spirit.

When I decide to go somewhere there are several things to take into consideration.

I'm a list maker. Once the decision is made to go, I make a list. If I'm going to the grocery store, it's a grocery list. If I'm going to the coast for a few days...well, quite honestly it may take more than one list to get all my stuff together, packed in the car and headed down the road. The point is this—going somewhere is a process. It means growth.

I have found, over the years, many women have a strong desire to be somewhere, anywhere ,

other than where they are today. In general, I think it's safe to say lots of women – women I've met, women you know – are unhappy. And while they'd never admit it to anyone, much less to themselves, there are a million reasons. They believe if only this or that were different they could be happy. For some their marriage is nothing spectacular; certainly not what they dreamed of as they walked down the aisle. Others have husbands who aren't as understanding, as loving, as...something as they expected. Some have children who are...just children, not exactly a nuisance, but not exactly the overwhelming source of joy they anticipated either. For some friendships or romances are ho-hum; not fulfilling and not headed that way either. Lots of them have a full-time occupation or a job they go to several days a week, but working is a long way from the glamorous career they dreamed of as girls. And so on and on it goes.

If you ask these women where they're going, they tend to shrug and ask, "Where can I go. I have a life, a family and/or a job to consider."

If you ask them, "Are you enjoying your life... your family... your job?" They'll likely tell you, "It's okay...but..." At that point I usually ask them, "Would you like to change your life into something more joyful, more exciting, more fulfilling?" Often the answer is something like,

“Of course I would. But I haven’t the foggiest idea how I’d go about doing that.”

The answer is found in Jesus Christ. So let's take a journey through His life-changing Word.

***Trust God
from the bottom of your heart;
don't try to figure out everything on
your own.***

***Listen for God's voice
in everything you do,
everywhere you go;
he's the one who will keep you on track.
Don't assume that you know it all.
Run to God!*** Proverbs 3:5-6 (MSG)



The Journey

This is a journey that's going to be very exciting! I can promise you you're going to have a wonderful time. Believe me when I tell you this trip is going to have a positive impact on your life, not only today but for all of your future as well. Are you ready to get started?

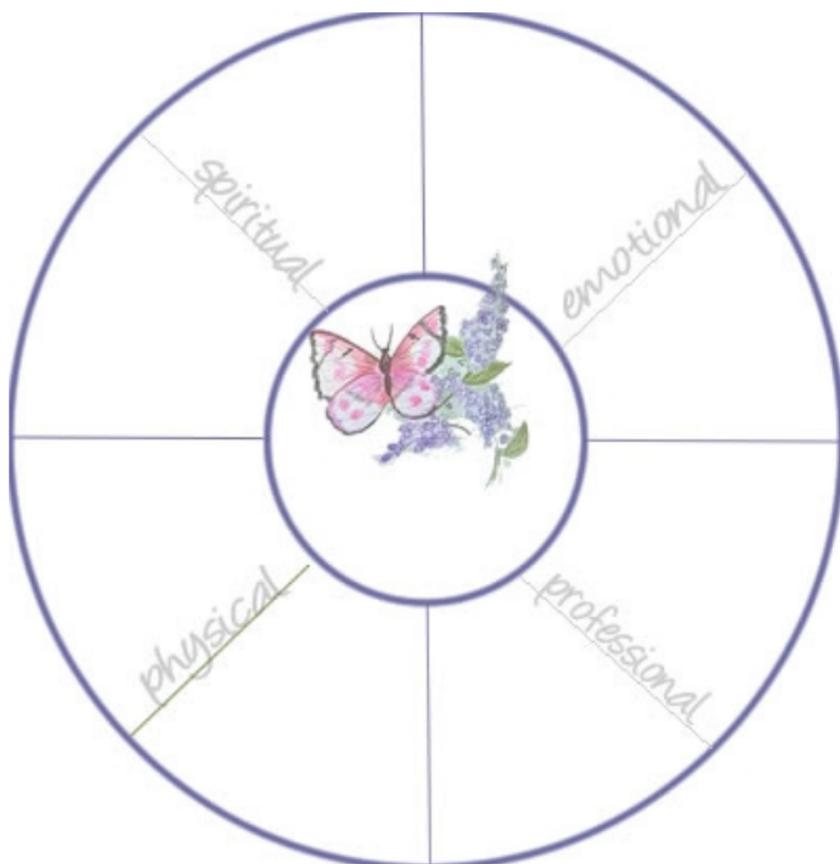
First you have to decide where you're going; when you're going to leave, how you'll travel and so forth.

Play a little make-believe game with me here for a few minutes. Let's pretend you'll be traveling

in a beautiful carriage...picture a horse-drawn, NYC Central Park carriage, vintage 1940 something. You've seen those old movies. I know you have! Before you leave we're going to find out just how smoothly the carriage will travel.

Picture one wheel. In the center of the wheel is a hub. This represents the center of your life. Everything else in your life revolves around the hub. Around the hub are the spokes. They give the wheel strength. They represent areas in your life that propel you forward.

Humor me here...



I'd like to have you sketch a copy of this wheel on a page of your journal or in a notebook.

First I want you to write the name of the person or thing your life revolves around in the center hub of your wheel.

Now...please label each supporting spoke of the wheel with an area you consider to be one of the most important guiding forces in your life.

As you can see, mine are labeled: spiritual, physical, professional, and emotional.

Next label the driving spokes (that's the thin lines) with names that represent the most important relationships in your life. You may have more, or less, driving spokes. Make it work for you.

Now the fun begins!

We have a hub and we have spokes for one wheel of the carriage your life is traveling in. Next we're going to see how smoothly your life is running. And why.

Imagine, if you will, a zero at the point where each spoke touches the hub. Where the spokes touch the rim represents 100% perfection. Take a few minutes here and make a dot on each spoke where you believe you are right now in that area or relationship between zero and 100% perfect. If you're at about 80% of where you'd like to be spiritually, put a dot out close to perfect on that spoke. Play fair and be honest with yourself. Do the same for all of the other spokes. When you've finished connect the dots—drawing dot to dot around your wheel.

Do you have a perfect circle? Is your carriage running smoothly on four good wheels?

No?

BIG surprise!

Try to get a mental picture of a four-wheel carriage, with one wheel shaped like this.

Try to imagine driving down the road with a flat tire on your car. Or, does is your life going along as if you're riding in this?



Do you get the idea of why your life may be running a little rough. The wheels aren't exactly coming off. But things could certainly use a little rounding out.

Are you thinking to yourself, "Great, lady! That's just great! Now what do you expect me to do

about it?”

Here's news! If you haven't arrived at perfection, and if you don't yet realize that God has a perfect plan for your life, it's time to make some lists to help you arrive at God's perfect plan. Remember His Word tells us

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11 NLT

Over the years I've met many, many women who did not realize God has a special plan for their life. They were drifting along through the days just taking life as it comes. They weren't particularly joyful; they weren't particularly contented; they weren't particularly *anything* positive.

They *were* anxious, about everything from the extra pounds they kept promising to lose, to the vague dissatisfaction they felt whenever someone or something pointed up a flaw in their framework of *shoulds*. Most were not in control of their own lives, and what's worse, they were not willing to accept the responsibility for what kept happening.

Ever meet someone whose life was a mess and yet they were going around placing blame on every outside influence imaginable? Could you tell, just by watching and listening, they simply

could not grasp the reality – what goes on in life is largely a matter of choices?

God said,

“This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live...” Deuteronomy 30:19

Please, take a break here. Lay your book aside for awhile. Take some time to consider the choices you’ve made recently and whether or not they brought blessings or curses into your life.

Consider who or what you're blaming for the messes in your life.

Think about the path you have mapped out, and how it lines up with the path God offers you.

Run from evil!

*Your body will glow with health,
your very bones will vibrate with life!*

*Honor God with everything you own;
give him the first and the best.*

*Your barns will burst, your wine vats
will brim over.*

*But don't, dear friend, resent God's
discipline; don't sulk under his loving
correction.*

*It's the child he loves that God corrects;
a father's delight is behind all this.*
Proverbs 3:7-12 (MSG)

*My child, hear my voice. When I call
upon you...come to me; listen to me.
Follow me. Move into the path I have
laid before you and I will give you peace
and rest.*

Those are the words of the Lord to your heart
today. I found them in my

B – basic

I – instructions

B – before

L – leaving

E – earth



Here's The Plan

Welcome back! I pray you are well rested, willing and ready to begin work. Once again, I choose to believe you picked up the book again because you are interested in making some positive changes in your life.

My Bible tells me:

“we may plan the way we will go, but the Lord directs our steps and makes them sure.” Proverbs 16:9

By looking at the wheel (or graph, if that makes more sense) you drew earlier you can get a picture of the way you see your life today. By setting some goals for each area you can begin to move toward the point of improvement.

I believe any positive change is good. I also know, from years and years of personal experience, making plans, setting goals, with God in the mix, causes positive change. I can absolutely, positively guarantee it!

Even the tiniest bit of positive progress and

growth will begin to round out your life. My Father, God, tells me:

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4

He also says if I will commit my works to Him, He will establish my plans and they will succeed. Proverbs 16:3

Many of us are extremely self-centered you know. We live in a society that carefully teaches us to worship the trinity of me, myself, and I. We grow up firmly believing if I want something I should have it. And what's more, I should get *what* I want *when* I want it. I recently heard someone say, "Children are taught the world revolves around them for the first three years of their life. They spend the rest of their lives learning, it does not." In the twenty-first century we have perfected self-absorption as a way of life.

Back in the late 70's I was the center of my life... the hub around which everything and everyone revolved. I believed in God. No wait! Let me put that another way, I believed there was a God - out there - somewhere. But God was most certainly not the center of my life. Far from it. And, at that time I didn't understand much about God at all. I didn't know He wanted to be my Abba, Father - literally Papa, *Daddy*. I didn't know that He loved me and wanted me to

be blessed in every way, satisfied with life and at peace in Him.

My wonderful husband, of just over a year, was a believer and he was working hard to live for the Lord Jesus, but I was centering my life around ME. My wants. My needs. My emotional highs and lows. And my husband was being victimized as only a loving, giving man can be victimized by a self-absorbed female.

Oh, by the way, if you think that just because you don't really like yourself much you aren't self-absorbed, I've got a news flash for you. A negative attitude about yourself is ever so much more powerful than vanity. Because it is negative. Because it is destructive! Because it feeds on making the people who love you the most pay for your self-pity and play your hate games constantly.

You KNOW what I mean.

So...we reached a point of crisis. Even while saying we had the Lord in our life, we arrived at the place every relationship eventually reaches when God is not THE center. And we started looking for help.

From there to here has been a long process. It has covered more than thirty years, and God is still working us. But...back then, through a series of dramatic events, God showed me, without question what I needed was to get my

life centered IN, and revolving AROUND Jesus Christ. He also helped me understand that where I'm going is up to me. He plots the course. But I must choose to follow the plan. I make the lists. And, by my choices I determine what affect my choices have on my life and the lives of those I love. God has proven to me, without question, He understands me perfectly, and knows what is best for me at all times. Ephesians 1:8 LB

My personal journey toward change began at a Christian woman's retreat, with the wheel I've shared with you here. The speaker asked us to draw the picture I've asked you to draw. I looked at my life picture and realized that by setting some short-term goals and some long-term goals, and by prayerfully reviewing my goals every few months, with the Lord guiding my steps, my life picture could change.

My first set of goals were for six months. I was instructed to work on those areas where I saw myself as the weakest. The object of the exercise— just to round out the wheel and get things running a bit more smoothly.

I set some spiritual goals: to spend at least 30 minutes every day with God...praying, writing in a personal journal (we'll talk about that later) and getting to know Jesus, by reading God's Word. I wanted us to grow closer to the Lord as a couple and to find a church.

I set some physical goals: to stop smoking – lose some weight – learn about make-up and wardrobe – develop my personal *style*...

I set some emotional goals: to learn how to like myself the way I was, to overcome my fear of failure, to overcome my fear that the people I loved couldn't really love me.

Just a quick FYI here – Something I did not know back then, but understand now – I set spiritual goals, because **I am a spirit being**; physical goals because **I live in a body**, and emotional goals because **I have a soul** (my mind, my will and my emotions).

St. Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica:

“May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together – spirit, soul, and body – and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he’ll do it!” 1 Thessalonians 5:23-34 (MSG)

About eight months later, when I returned to those first shaky attempts at goal setting (remember my six month commitment) I was amazed!

God had indeed honored my efforts, feeble

though they were. I was filled with wonder and delight by things I was discovering in God's Word; everything I read seemed to be just for me. We were attending church regularly as a couple. I wasn't smoking anymore. I liked myself...a little better. I was a little less fearful of failure and other people's opinions didn't rule me as they once had.

So I prayed, "Lord you remembered my goals, even when I forgot. You have given me growth, even when I was an eager beaver starter and a no show at the finish line. I would like to try again. And this time, I would like to work with you instead of against you by making better choices."

I wrote goals for another six months. And then another... Today I can tell you, without question, God will direct your steps, give you the desires of your heart, and make His plans for you succeed.

Some tips for you to use in setting your own goals are:

1. Do NOT worry about where you've been! Remember, all you're doing is praying about the difference between where you are **now** and where you want to be.

2. Start with God. Shut your eyes to the mess, or go for a walk. Humbly surrender your heart to His control. If you haven't before, let Jesus

Christ, God's own Son, totally forgive you and wash away all your inner mess. The outer mess is just a reflection of the inner mess you know. Get washed clean, holy and pure, as only Christ can make you. Invite Him to live at the very center of your being. The control center. The hub. Don't struggle intellectually over the process. Trust in The Lord!

3. Write your goals. Make notes in a journal or a notebook so you can look back and see where you've come from. Writing crystallizes thought and crystallized thought makes for success. Try writing your daily prayers, too.

4. Make your goals BIG enough for God to get involved. Don't limit Him, or yourself, with small thinking. How much of God's planning will you accept? We have a powerful God. His ambitions for you are enormous. Your cherished desires for yourself can't be bigger than what He wants to give you.

5. Play fair. If you don't reach your goal by the target date, regroup and put what you've learned into action. Do NOT give up the goal. Goal setting can become a life-long habit. So can procrastination, mediocrity and frustration.

Today, I present you with this challenge: Make a quality decision to be GOING SOMEWHERE; to accept responsibility for your choices and your actions. Remember, no one else has final

authority over what you will say or what you will do. Make a commitment to plan your steps, from here forward, allowing God to direct your path.

“All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits – the thoughts and intents of the heart. Roll your works upon the Lord [commit and trust them wholly to Him; He will cause your thoughts to become agreeable to His will, and] so shall your plans be established and succeed.”
Proverbs 16:2-3 AB

Where Do I Start



Your life is hid with Christ in God.

Colossians 3:3

In the most literal sense we live and move and have our being in the realm of spiritual forces. Our “life is hid with Christ in God.” This is not some pie-in-the-sky mystical-magical phrase, but a plain and direct statement of fact; an absolute spiritual truth. Our real life, all our significant actions, are in the invisible realm. What goes on around us in the world is simply as a result of God’s hand guiding and directing us from the spiritual world.

You may be thinking, “Okay! I DO want more peace; more joy; less anxiety and misgiving in my life. But, where do I start?”

Start with God!

I’ve said this before: Shut your eyes to the mess. Go for a walk. Get on your knees. Do whatever brings YOU closer to HIM. Humbly surrender

your heart to His control.

If your life is in crisis...don't over-think it! God's order is first crisis, then process. Surrender to His crisis.

Anxiety and misgivings over your crisis proceed solely from a self-centered motive and from FEAR. The love of God accomplishes all things quietly and completely; it is *not* anxious or uncertain. The Spirit of God rests continually in quietness. Perfect LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR. It is in victory over fear that we find peace. It is in accepting God's GRACE that we move forward.

How much of God's planning are you willing to accept? God is all powerful, and all knowing, and your expectations for what He has planned for you should be enormous! Look as the price He paid to give us life.

Let me tell you a story to illustrate the difference high expectations can make in your life:

Have you ever read about the widow in Second Kings, chapter 4 who was deeply in crisis and expecting the worst future imaginable?

Her husband, a seminary student, was a man who loved God, but he had amassed a huge debt. When he died he left the debt to his wife and sons. His creditor was demanding immediate payment in full. Imagine the foreclosure notice was

laying on the counter in her kitchen along with a pile of bills and a demand that she present her two sons as payment. You see ending up homeless and living on the streets back then was not the worst that could happen. Back in those days, when someone got into debt over their heads the worst thing that could happen, the thing that terrified this widow most of all, was having the creditor force her sons into slavery until the debt was satisfied. Now as you would expect, the poor woman was beside herself with worry. But from what we're told she must have had held onto a little hope. She ran to tell her troubles to Elisha, the prophet. Word around the neighborhood was, "He is a man of God."

I seriously doubt the prophet's first response gave her much hope. "I wonder how I can be of help?" he asked.

Her face fell. She may have thought to herself, "Well, so much for that idea."

We aren't told that the prophet stopped to pray, but I'm willing to bet he did. Then Elisha asked, "What have you got in the house?" In other words, "what's left?"

"Nothing at all except a bottle of olive oil," she replied.

“Then go and borrow as many pots and pans and jars from your friends and neighbors as you can find. Really go out there and round them up. Don’t settle for just a few. Take them, and your sons, go into your house and shut the door behind you. Then pour olive oil from your bottle into the pots and pans and jars. As you fill them, set them aside.”

I’m pretty sure, in her anxiety, she questioned the wisdom of borrowing to pay a debt. I would have. I *have*, actually. But she did as the man of God told her. Her sons brought her the pans, the pots, the jars, and she began to pour from her scanty little bottle of oil. She poured, and she poured, and she poured. And when all the containers she had borrowed were full she said, “Come on, where are some more?”

“That’s all we got,” the boys told her. And with that the oil from the bottle stopped flowing.

Long story short, when all her containers of olive oil were sold there was enough money to pay her debt. There was also enough money for her and her sons to live comfortably. It doesn’t say how long they lived on the money, but I expect by that time they had all learned the lesson God had for them:

“When a crisis comes, come to God.”

When you come to God and He lays out a plan, ask yourself, “How many jars, pots, and pans will I lay out?”

I believe prayer, in all its many and varied forms, combined with faith, is simply spiritual activity on the physical level. Your prayers, combined with faith, are your authority over the natural realm.

And he called unto him his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness. Matthew 10:1

Prayer is the key to the most intense form of spiritual power, that is Almighty God, and its highest potential is reached when your soul asks only for one thing, the one thing that supersedes all others, union with and wisdom from God.

Seek God and cry out to him. He will answer!

It was up to the woman in Second Kings how literally she took the words of the prophet. His directions to gather a lot of containers meant she could borrow as many as she wanted. I wonder? Do you suppose if she had taken his words more seriously, tramped around town, even out into the countryside and rounded up

thousands of pots and pans and jars, God's supply would have reached a certain number and then stopped? I don't think so. I believe the oil would have continued to flow until she filled them **all**. And with God's supply she could have spent the rest of her life feeding the poor, donating huge sums of money to the temple, living in a better house, and giving her sons every educational advantage...

I truly believe this woman's expectation level of God's mercy, grace and abundance determined her lifestyle forever after.

Lift up your eyes. Your heavenly Father waits to bless you in unimaginable ways; to make your life what you never dreamed it could be. Once again...how many containers will you set out for Him to fill?

Over the years God has taught my husband and me to hold fast to this principle. By doing so you will always have every need met. You will always be pleasing to the Father. He desires every detail of your life, no matter how trivial it seems to you.

Every atom of this universe was His design. See the details? See the intricacy and the perfection? Do you suppose He is any less interested in the tiny details of your life? He numbers the hairs on your head. Surely he is no less interested in your dwelling place, or your family, or your life.

Seek Him! Allow Him to do everything for you.

He is able.

Before we go any farther, there are ten questions I want to ask you.

The rules are – if your first impulse is to answer “most of the time,” “sometimes,” “once in awhile,” – anything except absolutely, “YES” – you are to answer NO.

On the other hand, any answer except absolutely “NO” means you are to answer “YES.”

Remember, yes or no, only. These are the questions:

1. Are you a Christian?
2. Do you believe the Bible is the Word of God and therefore absolutely true?
3. Are you afraid of death?
4. Are you afraid of illness
5. Are you afraid of accidents?
6. Are you afraid of financial reversals?
7. Are you afraid of failure?
8. Is there an area of major disappointment or betrayal in your life that you can't get beyond?

9. Are you willing...really willing...to change?
10. Do you believe God really cares about your fears, disappointments and hurts?

Asked and answered...the above questions have been a part of my seminars over the years, seminars that were always conducted in a “Christian” venue. Here’s the big surprise.

Where 99% of the participants answered “YES, I am a Christian,” to question number one – on average 10% did not believe the Bible to be absolutely true, 20% were afraid of death, 54% were afraid of illness, 60% were afraid of accidents, 48% were afraid of financial reversals, 58% were afraid of failure, 65% admitted to having been disappointed or betrayed, and felt they could not forgive the person who hurt them, 13% admitted they were not really willing to work toward change

AND...

and, only 96% of those in attendance believed God truly cares about **their personal** fears, disappointments and betrayals. That leaves a whopping 4% of the Christian women polled who claimed to be followers of Christ, yet weren't ready, willing or able to accept His love!

A wise woman once told me...”Consider where your mind goes in the quiet moments. That will

tell you who you love.”

Answer the questions yourself. Be brutally honest. Where do your answers put YOU? You say you ARE a Christian, but are you a BELIEVER?

At this point I'd like to have you lay the book aside and go do something you really enjoy for a while. Rest your mind and contemplate God's love for you.

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him." John 3:16-18 (MSG)

***In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God, and
the Word was God.
He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things were made;
without him nothing was made
that has been made. In him was
life, and that life was the light of
men. The light shines in the
darkness, but the darkness has not
understood it.*** John 1:1-5 NIV



Where I Started

Earlier I asked you to answer ten simple questions, and to be brutally honest with your answers. Unless experience is a faulty teacher, I'm going to hazard a guess that your answers surprised you a little bit. It's not so surprising, really.

If we're honest, every one of us is weak and fearful in certain areas. I was. I am. Still! Does that mean we are unsuccessful at being Christian? No! What it means is that we are human. Our perfect, Christ-like spirits are still encumbered by our earth suits.

Did you ever watch NASA Television? Around my house we watched every launch and every EVA (Extra-vehicular activity – that's space walk, for the uninitiated or the uninterested). The astronauts put on a cumbersome space suit and exit the controlled environment of the space station to make repairs or construct a new module while free-floating in space. Oh, they're tethered to the station alright, but it's still a clumsy business out there. Put on a pair of heavy gloves and try threading together a small nut and bolt if you have any doubts.

That is the best analogy I can think of for you and me. We are spirit beings, fumbling around wearing a body (our earth suits), trying to accomplish tasks specifically laid out in our flight manual (the Bible), while tethered to our home (Heaven) by a life-line (Christ).

For the astronauts, every motion is monitored and micro-managed. Their lives depend on it! Believe me when I tell you it can get pretty boring listening to those guys as they place 45 bolts in a module, counting every turn of the wrench. One...two...three.... Well, you get the picture. But their life depends on doing the job exactly as the manual lays it out.

Somewhere, back when I was a believer in training, things were not going as I had been lead to believe things would go after I turned my life over to Jesus. My job was going through one

of those miserable, “take this job and...” phases. My brand new marriage had hit a rough patch, too. In fact, my new husband, who I adored, had just finished telling me, “You are the MOST self-centered witch (b-word bleeped for your consideration here) I’ve ever met!”

Not at all what I expected! First I cried, then I took myself up the hill to commiserate with one of my new Christian friends.

“I’m not happy,” I wailed.

“I should be happy! I have everything to be happy about, but I’m just not happy. Not really!”

To be perfectly honest with you, I don’t recall exactly what she said. What she *did* was send me home with her Bible and a tape entitled “Putting God’s Word FIRST.” Right now I can’t even say for sure who recorded the tape. But I went home, locked myself in my office and listened to it. Twice! Then twice again! That tape changed my life!

From it I learned:

The Bible is God breathed, Holy Spirit inspired and infallible.

God’s Word is alive!

God’s Word is a sword!

God’s Word is a lamp and a light.

God's Word always accomplishes the thing He sends it to do.

God's Words are TRUE. Always!

God's Words are my owner's manual. Just like NASA's manual for every EVA it will tell me precisely what to do in every situation. It will tell me how many times to turn each and every bolt, where to put my feet, where to rest my hands, when to lean in and when to lean out. I can absolutely depend on God's Word for every detail of my life.

You can too!

If your answers to my questions left you with more questions, or if you just plain are not happy with your life today, may I joyfully offer you the same things I was offered. First a bit of advice...

“Put God's Word FIRST in your life.”

Next, find out what He has to say about the things that are troubling you.

Back in the dark ages, before absolutely everything was available online, I used a borrowed Bible with an abbreviated concordance and a [gasp] notebook.

Today I often go to *Bible Gateway.com*, click on the Keyword Look Up Link, select a modern translation of the Word [The New International Version or The New Living Translation will do,

although I personally love the Amplified Bible] and type in words related to my questions.

For example, if your biggest fear for yourself or your loved ones is illness, type in *heals* or *healed* and see what God's Word has to say about it. It does not matter what questions you have...your answers are in God's Word.

I promise your life will be changed:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right 2 Timothy 3:16 NLT

Happy (blessed, fortunate, enviable) is the man who finds skillful and godly Wisdom, and the man who gets understanding [drawing it forth from God's Word and life's experiences]. Proverbs 3:13 AMP

Right now would be an excellent time to take a break and consider what you believe about God's Word. Are you looking for happiness and blessings? Does the path you're following meet your expectations? Are you willing to make some changes?

Come back later and we'll continue!

***No one can please God without faith,
for whoever comes to God
must have faith that God exists
and rewards those who seek him.***



*_*Hebrews 11:6

How Do I Get There

*God, teach me lessons for living
so I can stay the course.
Give me insight so I can do what you tell
me my whole life one long, obedient
response.* *_*Psalm 119:34 (MSG)

*Give me understanding and I will obey
your instructions; I will put them into
practice with all my heart.* *_*Psalm 119:34
(NLT)

Welcome back! I hope you are well rested and looking forward to the changes God has in store for you. I pray that you are beginning to see exactly how wide, how high, and how deep God's love is for you.

For YOU Personally.

I thank God for the wonderful privilege of telling

you about His plans for you. I thank God for the desire and the ability to do it well. I thank God that He was willing to send his Son for me, that I may have life and life more abundantly, and that He wants to do the same, exactly the same, for you.

Dear Heart, it does not matter to your heavenly Father what your life circumstances were **before** you came to Christ, or what they are right now. He has a perfect plan and a perfect place for you.

I've said it before, "When I decided to write this book, the greatest desire of my heart was to share what real LOVE [the Love of Christ] has done in my life. And what His Love can do in your life."

We've talked about the way women see themselves; not self-image, but God-image. We've looked at where you're going and at how you'll be getting there. But the primary reason for every word that is written here is to expedite the way you travel through life every day.

I love that word – expedite. It is a verb meaning to "Speed up the progress of; facilitate" or to "Process fast and efficiently."

In today's world we want to speed up everything! We are all about multitasking and efficient processing. We all GO as fast as possible in order to DO as much as possible. The

problem seems to be, we aren't enjoying the process as much as we'd really like to. Look at it like this; which mode of travel would you prefer, an Economy-class flight from New York to London, with one carry-on bag, or a First-class suite aboard a luxury cruise liner?

Let's look at it another way. Use your imagination again and we'll take it to another realm.

Once upon a time, in an ancient city, far, far away; there ruled a generous, wise and loving King. His days were spent watching over an extraordinarily vast and powerful kingdom. The magnitude of this kingdom went beyond the imagination of most common men.

The beauty of his realm was unsurpassed. Cool green forests dotted with crystal lakes and rushing rivers; deep sheer canyons, warm deserts, snow capped mountains and lush fertile plains gave untold pleasure to all who resided within the kingdom.

The King encouraged his subjects to come to him with their problems and cares. He always answered their petitions, no matter how small, with

wisdom, grace and mercy. Never, in all of history had there been, nor has there been since, a more wondrous kingdom or a more loving King.

Privately the King's peace and joy were marred with a great sadness. He had no children of his own, though children were his constant and greatest desire. One day, the King struck upon a plan. He would dispatch heralds throughout the realm, in search of homeless children. Any child found in his vast kingdom to be living without love or a proper home would be invited to live in his palace and given a new life. The King's palace was great, with many, many rooms - rooms enough for every lonely, hungry, homeless child in the kingdom. At last the King would have his own children!

The heralds searched far and wide, and soon children began arriving at the palace. It was easy to see that each child was in great need. They came from vastly different backgrounds; although not one of them knew their real name. They were of all ages, and all personalities. In fact, the only thing

these children had in common was absolute poverty, their lack of possessions and their need of love.

The lives of the children were dramatically changed upon arrival at the palace. Each one was adopted as a son or a daughter of the King and given access to all the wealth of the kingdom. Each was immediately given the King's own name; bathed, and dressed in fine soft robes of snow white. The children only had to mention their needs and desires and the King, in his love and wisdom, would attend to their wishes. Every child carried a signed letter making the limitless wealth of the kingdom available to its bearer.

Thousands of children excitedly accepted all that their new father bestowed upon them. They enjoyed the new life to its fullest, often using their position to help others in the towns and villages they came from.

The King, in his wisdom, knew how each child was responding to a new name, wealth and love. It pleased the good King that so many of his children were

compassionate and loving toward others. As the children gave away the King's gifts, more was added to their supply each day.

A few children, despite accepting the King's invitation to live in his palace, continued to wear the tattered, dirty rags of their former life. In spite of the bountiful table the King provided, they ate only crusts of bread and leftover bits from the plates of others. Instead of sleeping in the soft, clean beds in their rooms; these children slept outside on beds of leaves or straw. They too carried the letter of authorization from the King, granting them access to the entire kingdom's wealth, but they continued to live as though homeless, helping neither themselves nor others. Some of these unfortunate children simply did not believe the words of the King, or the tales of his goodwill told by the other adopted children. Some refused to believe in their own worth as children of the King. Others were fearful of making mistakes with the wealth of the kingdom, so they preferred to do nothing.

A few of the children had been told what to think, what to say, what to decide and believe all of their lives. Older homeless children had made every daily decision for these little ones - so they kept asking the King what to do, what to say, what to think. They were afraid to believe! When they asked, his answer was always loving and gentle.

“Now that you are my child, you have all of the answers you need for your life within. Trust my spirit!” But they could not.

Though the good King loved each child equally, it grieved him to see so many unable or unwilling to accept their new life as his sons and daughters. True, they lived at the palace, but it always seemed they were not really a part of the life within. The wise and gentle King made no effort to force these sad children to receive his gifts. Freedom, acceptance and unconditional love reigned in the King’s house, no matter what a child received or refused from his offerings.

Some children remained outside the

palace, camping beyond the gates, because they thought a great deal would be demanded by the King if they entered. These children believed they would be given responsibilities beyond their abilities. Afraid to risk leaving their familiar poverty, despite its limitations, they refused to acknowledge the King's promises. They were too comfortable in their misery to step into the home the King offered them.

So the years sped by. The children grew and new children were often adopted. But throughout all of the years, there was always room in the palace for more.

Some of the King's adopted children lived richly rewarding lives and freely helped many, many others. Some lived lives of doubt and fear. They rationed out the kingdom's wealth carefully, always fearful it might run short, yet they were a blessing to a few others.

To the King's great sadness, there are always a few children who choose to reject what is rightfully theirs, and live as they did before he found them. When these sad children venture outside the

palace grounds, you will know them. For while they'll tell you they belong to the household of a King, no one recognizes them as one of the King's own children.

Are **you** are still wearing the tattered dirty rags of your old lifestyle? Is there some reason you have been unable or unwilling to accept your new position as the child of a King? Are you claiming to live in the palace but in reality only camped out in the courtyard?

A life filled with constant strife, pain and struggles with one problem after another says you haven't accepted your place as His adopted child.

Do you spend your time comparing yourself unfavorably with others; judging others unfavorably because they respond to the King differently than you do? Do you go about thinking this one or that one is closer to the King than I could ever be? Believe me when I tell you 'even the sparrow finds a home' in the courts of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

You are uniquely and wonderfully made, exactly as God planned. Psalm 139 tells me:

I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night -- but even in darkness I cannot hide from you [God].

*To you the night shines as bright as day.
Darkness and light are the same to you.*

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of
my body and knit me together in my
mother's womb.*

*Thank you for making me so
wonderfully complex!*

*Your workmanship is marvelous--
how well I know it.*

*You watched me as I was being formed
in utter seclusion, as I was woven
together in the dark of the womb.
You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in
your book. Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed.*

*How precious are your thoughts about
me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I
can't even count them; they outnumber
the grains of sand! And when I wake up,
you are still with me! _Psalm 139:11-18
NLT*

“So don't you see that we don't owe this
old do-it-yourself life one red cent.
There's nothing in it for us, nothing at all.
The best thing to do is give it a decent

burial and get on with your new life. God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go!

“This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike “What's next, Papa?” God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what's coming to us – an unbelievable inheritance! We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him!” Romans 8:14-17 (MSG)

And so, just as a loving earthly parent would not give one of their children beautiful gifts and every desire of the heart, and leave another child in the family without life's barest necessities, so your heavenly Father will not give one of His children wonderful gifts of peace, love and beauty, while leaving another in suffering and strife.

Think about these things! God is so rich in mercy, he loved us so much, that even though we were spiritually dead and doomed by our old lifestyle, he gave us back our lives again when he

raised Christ from the dead – only by his undeserved favor have we ever been saved – and lifted us up from death into glory along with Christ – all because of what Christ did at the Cross.

Don't Settle For Less!

...it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.
Hebrews 11:6 NLT

The story about God's adopted children, is an allegory. The Kings own children...that would be us...you and me. It is a beautiful story illustrating God's willingness to give us the good gifts of His Kingdom, including the deepest desires of our hearts.

To be perfectly honest with you, I have to tell you there is a qualification to this story, just in case you didn't pick up on it earlier. In order for your heavenly Father to give you the good gifts of His Kingdom YOU MUST BELIEVE.

First, you must believe that God exists, and second you must believe that God rewards us when we diligently seek him with a sincere heart. You must believe that your Heavenly Father WANTS to bless you.

Many of the modern Bible translations don't bother with the word diligently in Hebrews 11:6, but in the Greek text the word *ek-zā-te'-ō* that the New King James Version translates *diligently* is used. The word implies we must seek out God for ourselves; learn about God, investigate God. Crave God!

If, so far in your life, you have not believed in God I must ask: are you willing, really willing, to change?

In the fourth chapter of Mark's Gospel and in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, Jesus teaches His followers that the Word of God is like a seed. And He says, "the whole Kingdom of God works as if a seed is planted."

Now I'm guessing you have grown flowers or something else from seeds at one time or another in your life so you won't have any trouble with this concept. If you plant seeds and then, a day or so later, start digging around where they're planted to see if they've sprouted yet, you've pretty much killed any chance you had for getting a crop.

Do you also understand that throughout this book every positive, up-lifting thing you've heard has been like a seed planted in your soul? Do you get that what we've been planting here are seeds of encouragement, renewal and restoration from God's Word?

I must caution you, however...the seeds are going to germinate slowly, over time. You may not see even the tiniest shoots of green right away. If you get discouraged and start digging around where they're planted to see if they're growing yet, you're in danger of damaging your crop. Also, watering the seeds with the same old negatives, doubts and fears won't do them any good either.

Please understand...NOTHING you've read here is intended to add more "*shoulds*" to your life. The goal is, and always has been, to set you free, completely free, from those things that hold you captive and limit your life in Christ.

Remember the old jokes from back in the day..."Well, I've got some good news, and I've got some bad news. Which do you want first?"

Today, I have some good news and some bad news for you.

You get the bad news first.

It is this—if you choose to go on living in anything less than the very best your heavenly Father has to offer you after today, it will not only be extremely painful for you, it will be a shame. Also, it may very well be a sin.

How thrilled were your earthly parents when you simply refused, through rebellion or...uhm, stupidity... to accept the counsel and

opportunities they offered you? We only hold a child responsible for their actions in areas where they've been taught to know better. No parent expects to tell a child "NO" once and never have to say it again. But sooner or later we expect that kid to learn life's lessons and act on the knowledge.

God told the children of Israel,

"Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!" Deuteronomy 30:19

God still gives His children the same choice every day!

The good news is Christ has purchased freedom for us. His death on the cross completely liberated us from our old way of life with all of the mess that it involved.

Freedom is a gift...a gift of God's grace.

You can't earn it.

You can't buy it.

But you CAN choose to accept it.

Freedom begins with being free from yourself. If you've been walking around in the tattered, dirty

rags of the woman you used to be...you really need to consider a change of clothes!

I've met Christian women who were walking through life wearing some of the ugliest outfits! Sometimes it's the too small hand-me-downs from the family they grew up in. Sometimes it's the ratty sweats left over from a relationship with an abusive non-believer. Sometimes it's the miss-matched, faded bathrobe and bunny slippers worn on Sunday's when they chose to veg on the couch rather than drag themselves to a church where they had to listen to another sermon holding the form of religion but denying God's power. None of these outfits are suitable for the daughters of the King!

God, through His Son, has made provision for us to be free from ourselves. This means anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun. The old moral and spiritual condition has passed away. Thank God, the fresh and new has come!

Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

“Strip yourselves of your former nature, put off and discard your old un-renewed self, which characterized your previous manner of life and becomes corrupt through lusts and desires that spring from delusion; and be constantly renewed in the spirit of your mind

[having a fresh mental and spiritual attitude], and put on the new nature (the regenerate self) created in God's image, [Godlike] in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:22-24 AB

Dear Heart, your freedom from yourself is a result of salvation by grace and it is secured to all believers in and through Christ. To be free is to operate in the Spirit of God with an assurance and a knowledge of His power and His principles. To be truly free is to know he is able to provide and protect you. To be truly free is to trust His Spirit and His Word in all things – to look to Him in all things, to seek His way in all things. Freedom comes from knowing and understanding who you serve, who your source is, and who you are in Christ. The result of being truly free is a peace which passes all human understanding.

Thanks be to God, I have that peace in my life. For this reason the goal of my life today is to share with as many women as God will allow, at every opportunity, this truth:

“There is nothing in the world or in any firmly established world doctrine or tradition which will come anywhere near the wonderful, and totally fulfilling peace of placing Christ at the PERSONAL CENTER of your life.”

“How do I get that peace?” some may ask.

I’ve told you already. You must believe that God is alive; that He is willing and able to give you the good gifts of His Kingdom. Then you must begin to establish new ways of looking at yourself and those around you. You must accept responsibility for where you are allowing your life to go. The whole flow of the world we live in today is negative. To gain the peace of Christ, you must begin to swim against that negative current. Remember the widow who borrowed enough containers that God could change her life and her circumstances? To gain the peace of Christ in your life you must change the way you think, the way you talk and the way you act, but you can’t do it alone.

God doesn’t expect you to do it alone.

If you want God to change your life, establish some priorities... plant some seeds...borrow some vessels for oil and expect God to fill them.

I have one more thing for you to consider before you move on.

Imagine a person who has been taught that $2 + 2 = 3$ from their earliest stages of development. In preschool $2 + 2 = 3$. In middle-school, $2 + 2 = 3$. In collage, $2 + 2 = 3$. Then along comes somebody carrying a big Math book who tells

them, "You're wrong. Two plus two equals four."

It's been my experience that even though the book is truth-giving and all the teachers have been false teachers such a person will have a very hard time accepting a new way of thinking. Sometimes even laying out four blocks and asking them to count for themselves isn't enough to change their thinking. Dear Heart, $2 + 2$ is 4.

God IS love. And, the Bible is the final authority on all things pertaining to life and Godliness.

And...and, in order to live the abundant life Christ came to offer you, you must renew your thinking.



Bible Studies

The second half of this book contains a series of Bible Studies intended to be spread over a period of six weeks. I ask you to prayerfully consider committing six weeks to strengthening your relationship with Christ through these pages.

I know it will work. I know how far God's Word will go toward changing your life. I know because it has worked for me and for many others who have made the same commitment. God's Word promises it will work for "who-so-ever."

God is faithful. He will never leave you, nor forsake you. He holds your life in the palm of His hand.

I pray that the Spirit of the Living God will convince you to place Jesus at the center of your life. I pray that God's Holy Spirit will work the miracle of faith in God's Word in your heart, and that by putting Christ and His Word first in your life you will be filled with His perfect peace.

Don't Settle For Anything Less.

This Book of the Law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe and do according to all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall deal wisely and have good success.

Joshua 1:8(AMP)

Suggested materials for the study series include:

Your Bible – Any translation will do. Choose one that you will feel comfortable using as a text book. Give yourself permission to highlight significant verses, make notes in the margins and place Post-it-notes anywhere you want to make extended comments.

A Blank Personal Journal

Index Tabs or “Sticky Tabs”

Post-it-notes™

Highlighters that won't bleed through your Bible pages

Pens and Pencils



In this [union and communion with Him] love is brought to completion and attains perfection with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment [with assurance and boldness to face Him], because as He is, so are we in this world.

1 John 4:17 Amplified Bible (AMP)

Bible Study – Love

In this is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation (the atoning sacrifice) for our sins. 1 John 4:10 AMP

This Is Love

If you've been around a church at all in your lifetime you've probably heard, "You have to love God more!" or "You must have more passion for God!" You may even have tried your best to love God more passionately, only to feel yourself failing.

But what is the true definition of love? And why is it humanly impossible to force the mind and heart to produce more of it?

Why not let the Bible explain it for you:

*“... this is love, **not that we loved God, but that He loved us...**”*

Truly, it is not about your love for Him, but His love for you!

Doesn't the Bible say you must love God with all your heart, soul and strength?

Yes, in Deuteronomy 6:5. Even Jesus taught love as the great commandment when He walked on earth. (Matthew 22:37) But that was before He died on the cross.

At the cross, He (Jesus) became the very fulfillment of this commandment for you when He loved you with all His heart, soul and strength, by laying down His body and life on the cross for you. The Bible says that while you were still a sinner, Christ died for you! (Romans 5:8) That's how much He loves you!

God sees you trying your best to love Him. And because He loves you, He wants you to sit down and be still, and let Him love you instead. He wants to love you with all that He is and all that

He has. He loves you unconditionally regardless of who you are or what you have done, because **His love is not dependent on you** but on Himself. He will never stop loving you.

Change Your Negative God-Image

During the coming week let's work on establishing where you are, right now, with accepting God's love for you.

Let's begin thinking about accepting yourself.

This week don't worry about loving Him. The more of His love you receive, the more you will fall in love with Him!

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

Have you personalized this fact? "For God loved ME so much that he GAVE his only son, that when I believed in Him (Jesus) I received eternal life."

God Is Love

LOVE is giving with no thought of getting. It is tenderness enfolding with strength to protect. It is forgiveness without further thought of the thing forgiven. It is understanding of the thing forgiven. It is understanding of human

weakness, with knowledge of the true man shining through. It is quiet in the midst of turmoil. It is trust in God with no thought of self. It is the one altogether lovely, the light in the mother's eyes, the glory in the sacrifice, the quiet assurance of protection.

LOVE is in the expectation of our Father's promise coming true. It is the refusal to see anything but good in our fellow man. It is the glory that comes with selflessness and the power that comes with assurance of the Father's love for his Children. It is the voice that says "no" to our brother, though "yes" might be more easily said. It is resistance to the world's lust and greed, thus becoming a positive law of annihilation to error.

LOVE . . . the one thing no one can take from us . . . the one thing we can give constantly and become increasingly rich in the giving. Love can take no offense, for it cannot know that which it does not of itself conceive. It cannot hurt or be hurt, for it is the purest reflection of God. It is the one eternal, indestructible force for good. It is the will of God, preparing, planning, proposing always what is best for all His universe.

God does not see the way we see. We humans see the flesh; the natural, the physical. God sees the spirit. He sees us already **complete** in *Christ*.

In spite of your imperfections, God the Father sees you as a new creation, a partaker of His divine nature and more than a conqueror over your faults. And He wants you to see yourself the way He sees you, In Christ.

King David understood God's love toward him. David understood that the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. David knew that the Lord does not deal with us according to our sins, or punish us according to our faults and short-comings. The Bible calls David a man after God's own heart, but it also tells us that he was a great sinner. David took another man's wife to bed, fathered a son out of wedlock, then had her husband sent into battle to be killed, all to satisfy his own desires.

The point: God loved David in spite of his faults and short-comings. Don't misunderstand me. There were consequences for David's actions, and we can read about those in God's Word, too. But God saw David's heart, and David's heart recognized God's LOVE for him personally. Ever read the Twenty-third Psalm?

To begin this week's Bible Study – please read Psalms 23 and 103. Read them, and re-read them, until you understand, as David did, that the Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who hold him in awe.

Love Yourself

Truthfully, before you can love anyone else without pretense, even the Lord Jesus, you must love yourself. Here's what Jesus taught:

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:37-40

LOVE! It is the most critical ingredient when it comes to making changes in the negative attitudes and self-images associated with the old human nature. The unrenewed human-nature will keep you from loving yourself or anyone else. Your old attitudes and thought processes will keep you from experiencing the very best God wants for you each and every day.

Don't settle for less than God's best!

Little By Little...

Life changing LOVE has to be established in small steps. The first step: **recognize how much God loves you.**

The Apostle Paul recognized how much God's

loved him. In a letter to the Galatians he writes:

“I have been crucified with Christ [in Him I have shared His crucifixion]; it is no longer I who live, but Christ (the Messiah) lives in me; and the life I now live in the body I live by faith in (by adherence to and reliance on and complete trust in) the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”
Galatians 2:20 AMP

To the Romans he wrote:

For I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below—there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39 GNT

Because Paul understood God's love for him, he was able to write encouraging letters to new believers in the first-century churches throughout the known world. He understood God's love, even though he often wrote from a Roman prison cell. He understood God's love so well he was able to tell his readers:

“Actually, I don't have a sense of needing

anything personally. I've learned by now to be quite content whatever my circumstances. I'm just as happy with little as with much, with much as with little. I've found the recipe for being happy whether full or hungry, hands full or hands empty. Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am." Philippians 4:11-13 (MSG)

The Apostle John called himself *the disciple whom Jesus loved* (John 19:26). but frankly, I doubt Jesus loved John more or less than he loved the other disciples. I think the difference was John's understanding of how much Jesus loved each one of them, and I think he learned to accept and receive the Lord's love on a personal level.

These words are preserved in a letter John wrote to the Christians of his day.

My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God, because God is love—so you can't know him if you don't love. This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him.

This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they've done to our relationship with God. 1 John 4:17 (MSG)

Reading Assignment – Week One

Day One –Psalm 103; Psalm 23; Proverbs 3: 1-8 and Ephesians 1:3-10, 1:15-23 & 3:14-21

Day Two –The entire First Letter of John

Day Three –Romans, chapter 8 and Mark, chapter 4

Day Four –Proverbs 16:3, 9, 20; Psalm 103 and Colossians 1:9-14

Day Five –First John chapters 3, 4 & 5; Ephesians 6:10-20

Day Six –John chapter 20 & 21; First John 1:1-4

Writing Assignment – Week One

Begin a spiritual journal. Write in it daily.

Record your thoughts, prayers and the desires of your heart.

Keep a record of your growth, and God's answers.

Make note of each day's miraculous blessings in your life – even if the only miracle you recognized was a blue-bird or a sunset, or simply being alive.

Write down every Bible verse you read that tells you “God loves ME, personally.”

Jesus told his disciples.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. John 15:9

And let the peace from Christ rule (act as umpire continually) in your hearts [deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds, in that peaceful state] to which as [members of Christ's] one body you were also called [to live]. And be thankful (appreciative), [giving praise to God always]. _Colossians 3:15 (AMP)



Bible Study – Peace

Peace. It is possibly the most sought after commodity in our world today. Human beings seek peace on every level. From nations to individuals – peace is among the first things people ask for when they pray. Peace is defined as:

- 1) The state prevailing during the absence of war;
- 2) Harmonious relations; freedom from disputes;

3) The absence of mental stress or anxiety; and so forth and so on in general worldly terms. Peace is usually not defined as a gift from God. And yet in Proverbs 3 Solomon wrote:

Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding, for the gain from it is better than gain from silver and its profit better than gold.

She (wisdom) is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are the ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are PEACE. Proverbs 3:13-17

King Solomon, who is touted as both the richest and the wisest man who ever lived, understood peace.

Solomon loved the Lord, and the Lord appeared to him in a dream one night and said, "Ask me for anything." Solomon in that moment, with the wealth of the world at his command, asked for only one thing – an understanding mind.

It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this.

And God said to him:

“Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.” 1 Kings 3:3-14

Solomon understood peace because wisdom and understanding of God's Word and God's ways produce PEACE.

But...King Solomon wasn't so smart after all, for we are told:

“...when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.” 1 Kings 11:4

“And the LORD was angry with

Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice,” 1 Kings 11:9

As a result of the King's foolishness the victorious peace of a nation came to an end and God set up adversary after adversary against his people. Conflict and strife surrounded Israel for centuries.

Two hundred years after Solomon's reign the Prophet Isaiah wrote these words:

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear. Isaiah 59:1-2

The way of peace they know not, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked, no one who goes in them knows peace. Isaiah 59:8

No One Knows Peace!

God understood. God had a plan.

"And he will come to Zion as Redeemer, to those in Jacob who turn from

transgression, says the LORD. "And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the LORD: my spirit which is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your children, or out of the mouth of your children's children, says the LORD, from this time forth and for evermore." Isaiah 59:20-21

Jesus! God's plan for peace is Jesus Christ.

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, prophesied by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is coming. Jesus will guide our feet in the way of peace.

"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." Luke 1:76-79

The Way Of Peace

If you, like so many others in our crazy twenty-first century world, want peace in your life I have to caution you. Peace does not come with

things or money. Peace does not come through association with friends or family members. Peace does not come with being religious.

Stop thinking, "What if I were – richer, thinner, married, single, a mother...whatever. You fill in your blanks.

Stop thinking "If only had a newer house, a better car, granite counter-tops, stainless-steel appliances...whatever." Your blanks again.

Stop praying, "Oh God! Give me peace! Please give me peace!"

PEACE comes through Jesus Christ.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!" Luke 2:14

PEACE in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *shä·lōm*

It is a masculine noun meaning:

1) completeness, soundness, welfare, peace

a) completeness (in number)

b) safety, soundness (in body)

c) welfare, health, prosperity

d) peace, quiet, tranquility, contentment

e) peace, friendship

1) of human relationships

2) with God especially in covenant relationship

PEACE in the New Testament is the Greek word *ā-rā'-nā*

It is a feminine noun meaning:

- 1) a state of national tranquility
 - a) exemption from the rage and havoc of war
- 2) peace between individuals, i.e. harmony, concord
- 3) security, safety, prosperity, felicity, (because peace and harmony make and keep things safe and prosperous)
- 4) of the Messiah's peace
 - a) the way that leads to peace (salvation)
- 5) of Christianity, the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is
- 6) the blessed state of devout and upright men after death

IF you have Christ...YOU ALREADY HAVE PEACE. The peace of God—with all of the marvelous, amazing blessings it implies.

Do You KNOW You Have Peace?

Let me ask you something. What if some anonymous benefactor deposited a cool million dollars in your bank account? Thrilling! Right? But, what if you didn't know the money was there? Think of what you'd be missing out on!

The Apostle Peter wrote to Christians of the early church in a simple and unpretentious way, telling them, “seek peace and pursue it.” The Message Bible puts it this way:

Summing up: Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble.

That goes for all of you, no exceptions.

No retaliation.

No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless—that's your job, to bless. You'll be a blessing and also get a blessing.

Whoever wants to embrace life and see the day fill up with good, Here's what you do:

Say nothing evil or hurtful;

Snub evil and cultivate good;

run after peace for all you're worth.

God looks on all this with approval,

listening and responding well to what

he's asked;

But he turns his back

on those who do evil things. 1 Peter 3:8-15
(MSG)

The litmus test for PEACE is this: If you don't have peace about something, ask Jesus for guidance. If you think you have followed his guidance but still don't have peace, choose the other path. If you don't have peace, ask Jesus for protection. If you think you can continue along your current path because you have asked for protection, but you still don't have peace, change your direction. If you don't have peace...run to him. He is the good shepherd. He purchased your peace at the cross and deposited it in your life.

Reading Assignment – Week Two

Day One – The Gospel of Luke, chapters 1 and 2

Day Two – Psalm 103 & Psalm 84 & Psalm 23

Day Three – The entire First Letter of Peter

Day Four – Psalm 34 & Psalm 37

Day Five – The Gospel of John, Chapter 14

Day Six – Ephesians Chapters 1, 2 & 3

Writing Assignment – Week Two

This week run after peace for all you're worth!

As you read, write in your journal every day.

Write your prayers and conversations with God.

Search out scriptures that confirm you already have the Peace of Christ on deposit in your spiritual account and write them down.

Peace came as God's free gift. It is already waiting for you in your account. Start drawing on it immediately.

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man (Adam), much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:17



Bible Study – Righteousness

This week we are going to be looking at God's way of doing and being right. The Bible calls it righteousness. It comes before faith. It comes before joy. And, without understanding it believers cannot accept God's grace.

The most heartbreaking situations in the life of a Christian are caused by religious thinking. The words religion and legalism can be used interchangeably in the following statements.

- Religion kills faith!
- Religion kills joy.

- Religion killed the Lord Jesus.

Are you a victim of either religious or legalistic thinking?

If you're not certain, here are some thoughts that will show you where you stand.

- I am a Christian, but I am not certain God truly cares about me.
- I am a Christian, but I feel so unworthy.
- I am a Christian, but I do not believe I am righteous.

If you're a Christian who goes through life feeling unworthy and unrighteous it's time for you to learn the truth from God's Word.

Christ Is Your Righteousness

Romans 5:17 says grace and righteousness are free gifts in the lives of all Christians.

By accepting Christ's gift of grace and righteousness you can move away from your old ways of thinking; away from religious thinking and legalistic thinking, and into God's way of doing and being right.

... For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. Romans 10:2

What are you more conscious of today? Your

sins or the fact that you have been forgiven? Because of the Cross, you no longer need to be conscious of your sins. Because of the cross, you can instead be conscious of Jesus' finished work and count on the fact that you are a forgiven child of God!

No matter what has happened to you, or what you have done, God wants you to know that because of His Son's finished work, He will be merciful to you, and *your sins and lawless deeds He will remember no more.* (Hebrews 8:12)

Christ is the once, for all, sacrifice.

God Has Set Things Right

But in our time something new has been added. What Moses and the prophets witnessed to all those years has happened. The God-setting-things-right that we read about has become Jesus-setting-things-right for us. And not only for us, but for everyone who believes in him. For there is no difference between us and them in this. Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A

pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ.

God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin. Having faith in him sets us in the clear. God decided on this course of action in full view of the public—to set the world in the clear with himself through the sacrifice of Jesus, finally taking care of the sins he had so patiently endured. This is not only clear, but it's now—this is current history! God sets things right. He also makes it possible for us to live in his rightness. Romans 3:21-26 (MSG)

In his “*Word Studies In The Greek New Testament*,” scholar Kenneth Wuest comments on Romans 3:21-23:

“*In our time* – expresses the contrast between two relations; dependence on the law and non-dependence on the law. It reminds us of the words,

'Do this and live, the law commands, but gives me neither feet nor hands. A better word the gospel brings. It bids me fly and gives me wings.'”

God, through Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross, has made it possible for you and me to live in his right-standing.

Kenneth Wuest's expanded translation of Romans 5:17 says:

“For in view of the fact that by means of the transgression of the one (Adam), death reigned as king through that one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gifts of righteousness in life will reign as kings through the One, Jesus Christ.

“Grace here is *charis* which signified, in classical authors, a favor done out of the spontaneous generosity of the heart without any expectation of return. Of course, this favor was always done to one's friend, never to an enemy. But when *charis* comes into the New Testament, it takes an infinite leap forward, for the favor God did at Calvary was for those who hated Him. It was a favor done out of the spontaneous generosity of God's heart of love with no expectation of return. There are no strings attached to grace.”

Legalistic, religious teaching says you and I must work for right-standing with God. As a result we end up believing right-standing with God must be earned.

Religious teaching and thinking binds us hand and foot, telling us we can never be free, worthy or in right-standing with the Father unless and until we can somehow DO enough to EARN it.

WRONG! Two plus two does not equal three. Remember?

Righteousness Is A Free Gift

Righteousness (right-standing with God) is a free gift. Jesus Christ bought and paid for it on your behalf at the Cross.

The way to put aside your old religious thinking; your “I’m not worthy,” thinking, is to find out what God has to say about it.

There's nothing like the written Word of God for showing you the way to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us. (2 Timothy 3:14-17, The Message)

My Study Bible says:

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for

correction, and for training in righteousness, 2 Timothy 3:16

And the Amplified Bible puts it this way:

Every Scripture is God-breathed (given by His inspiration) and profitable for instruction, for reproof and conviction of sin, for correction of error and discipline in obedience, [and] for training in righteousness (in holy living, in conformity to God's will in thought, purpose, and action), 2 Timothy 3:16 AMP

He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; —
1 Corinthians 1:30

Reading Assignment – Week Three

Day One – 1 Corinthians Chapter 1

Day Two – Romans, Chapter 4; Psalm 23

Day Three – Psalm 103 & Psalm 112

Day Four – The Gospel of John, Chapter 16

Day Five – Hebrews, Chapter 11

Day Six – Galatians, Chapter 3

Writing Assessment – Week Three

Make a list of thoughts and feelings that keep you from accepting the free gift of righteousness IN Christ and kill your faith.

Print 1 Corinthians 1:30 at the beginning of this week's notes **and** write it on a Post-it-note for your mirror so you can see it every day.

Make a list of verses that speak to you of your righteousness IN Christ and build your faith.

I'm asking God to give you a gift from the wealth of his glory. I pray that he would give you inner strength and power through his Spirit. Then Christ will live in you through faith. I also pray that love may be the ground into which you sink your roots and on which you have your foundation. _Ephesians 3:16-17 GW



Bible Study - Faith

So faith comes by hearing [what is told], and what is heard comes by the preaching [of the message that came from the lips] of Christ (the Messiah Himself). Romans 10:17 AMP

What Faith Is

“Faith is...the conviction of realities I cannot see, or feel.

Not a leap in the dark nor a mystical experience nor an undefinable encounter with someone – but trust in One who has

explained Himself in a Person – Christ,
in an historical record – the Bible.

“Faith is...the handle by which I take
God's promises
and apply them to my particular
problems.

“Faith is...remembering I am
indispensable to God
when I feel I only clutter up the
landscape.

“Faith is...standing on the fact that God
has designed me
flawlessly for His purposes in the
universe when I feel
everything about me is a big mistake.

“Faith is...not a vague hope of a happy
hereafter but
but an assurance of heaven based on my
trust in Christ's death as payment for my
sins.” *—Faith is by Pamela Reeve*

Faith is more than just believing. It is trusting
our very lives to what we believe. For example,
you may believe that someone can walk across a
deep gorge on a tightrope. But are you willing to
trust that person to carry you across? Faith says
yes.

Faith in God says that you are willing to trust
God with your very life.

What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. Faith gives us hope. Hebrews 11:1 NLT

Faith is believing in something we cannot see or prove, but we trust to be true. Christian faith involves a belief both in God and in his Son.

And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11:6

... looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

Your faith is instrumental in your salvation, though your faith itself cannot save you, it is the conduit through which God's grace can.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – not because of works, lest any man should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

In Hebrews 11:1, the writer reveals two distinct dimensions of faith: Faith is a confidence in God's plan and provision for your future, as well

as an expectation that God will fulfill everything he has promised, though you haven't experienced total fulfillment as yet.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

What Faith Is Not

Faith is not something you can acquire by an act of your will. It must be planted in your heart by the Holy Spirit, through the knowledge of Jesus and his atoning work on the Cross. It grows upward and outward as you become more intimately acquainted with the Savior.

Faith is not a tool for manipulating God, although some religious circles have portrayed it as such in recent decades. When believers begin to develop faith in their faith, rather than faith in Christ, a type of self-worship, equal to idolatry, enters in and chokes out true and godly faith.

Faith is not works – although faith without works is useless.

“Isn't there something for me to do?” you may ask.

“Truthfully, the only thing for you to do is to believe God's promises. The more you see His heart for you, the more your faith will grow.

I cannot tell you, “All you need to do is just have faith!” You would still find it hard to have faith because I have not given you anything to build your faith. But if I were to tell you all about what God says He will do for you, what his promises are for your life, your faith could grow.

So the best thing you can “do” under the new covenant is not focus on what you must do for God, but what God says He will do for you!

Knowing what God says He will do for you produces faith. Studying God's Word, guided by the Holy Spirit, produces faith. Seeing Jesus, as He IS, produces faith. |

Living By Faith

Toward the end of the seventh century BC the prophet Habakkuk, a contemporary of Jeremiah, wrote:

Behold, he whose soul is not upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith. Habakkuk 2:4

This verse is quoted three times with some variation in the New Testament –

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Romans 1:17

Now it is evident that no man is justified before God by the law; for "He who through faith is righteous shall live"

Galatians 3:11

but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls. Hebrews 10:38-39

These verses are considered proof of the proposition that salvation is granted by grace through faith. Habakkuk 2:4 might be rendered, *"Behold his soul is puffed up; it is not upright in him; but a righteous man by his faith (or, faithfulness) shall live."*

The Jewish Talmud states that Habakkuk reduced the 613 commandments of Moses to one: "the righteous shall live by his faith." In effect this is true.

As you spend time reading God's Word and writing in your journal this week consider the words Jesus spoke:

"...your faith has made you well."

From those of "little faith" to those of "great faith" – seeing Jesus changed lives, healed the sick, set the captives free and built a following that has lasted more than two thousand years!

Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.
Seeing Him produces faith.

Reading Assignment – Week Four

Day One – James, Chapters One and Two

Day Two – Matthew 8:5-13 and 9:18–26; Luke
8:40-56

Day Three – 1 Corinthians, Chapters 12 and 13

Day Four – Hebrews, Chapter 11

Day Five – The Gospel of Mark, Chapters 4 and
5

Day Six – Psalm 103, Psalm 65; Psalm 66

Writing Assignment – Week Four

Each day write down at least three things that say, “I have faith in God because he has said he will _____.”

Each day, as you read, write down the scriptures that speak to you and increase your faith.

Look back through your prayers from the past three weeks and write down the answers you've received, even if the answers were “no” or “not right now.”

*Do not grieve,
for the joy of the LORD
is your strength.”*

—Nehemiah 8:10



Bible Study – Joy

This means tremendous joy to you, I know, even though you are temporarily harassed by all kinds of trials and temptations. This is no accident—it happens to prove your faith, which is infinitely more valuable than gold, and gold, as you know, even though it is ultimately perishable, must be purified by fire. This proving of your faith is planned to bring you praise and honor and glory in the day when Jesus Christ reveals himself. And though you have never seen him, yet I know that you love him. At present you trust him without

being able to see him, and even now he brings you a joy that words cannot express and which has in it a hint of the glories of Heaven; and all the time you are receiving the result of your faith in him—the salvation of your own souls. 1 Peter 1:6-9 (Phillips)

God's Will For You Is Joy

The Father's will for each of us is peace, love and joy, in Christ, in all circumstances, yet often we find ourselves struggling against His will in every way.

In week one of this Bible Study series we learned that God is Love. Joy and peace are gifts! As God's children, we can choose to accept his gifts and live in joy and peace – or not.

You are the one who determines how joyful or peaceful each day will be.

Words set the tone for how each day will go.

The first words out of your mouth each day are based on where you've allowed your thoughts to take you in the minutes or hours before you open your mouth for the first time.

If you've been worrying and fretting over your circumstances, listening to the voice of fear rather than the voice of the Lord, you open your mouth and out comes negative words;

complaints, fears and accusations.

If you've taken your thoughts captive, prayed over your circumstances, and invited Jesus to take control of your day, your first words will be positive and filled with faith.

You must **choose** to accept the gift of joy.

Delight yourselves in God, yes, find your joy in him at all times. Have a reputation for gentleness, and never forget the nearness of your Lord. Philippians 4:4-5 (Phillips)

The Apostle Paul, who traveled throughout the Middle East, spreading the Good News about Christ and establishing churches wherever possible, understood joy. In his letter to the church at Thessalonica he wrote:

Be cheerful no matter what; pray all the time; thank God no matter what happens. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17 (MSG)

From a Roman prison Paul wrote to the church at Philippi and his letter speaks of “*great joy*” and “*complete joy.*”

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again – rejoice!...I have learned the secret of living in every situation... Philippians 4:4, 12

Paul's secret? "*The joy of the Lord*" was his strength. Paul did not invent scenarios that caused him stress. Paul knew the only thing that could cause a problem was the attitude with which he approached a problem. And when he momentarily forgot, begging the Lord for a different solution, the Lord's reply was, "My grace is sufficient."

God does not promise temporary happiness; in fact the Bible assumes problems will come our way. But God does promise lasting joy for all those who believe in him. This kind of joy stays with us despite our problems.

Keep Your Eyes On Jesus

Praise the Lord! How joyful are those who fear the LORD and delight in doing what he commands. Psalm 112.1 NLT

Is joy a passing emotion or a permanent state? The Bible says it can be both. There is happiness (joy) that reacts to happenings (circumstances or situations) that is temporary and volatile, and there is happiness (joy) that overrules happenings (circumstances or situations) which is strong and lasting. Joy based on happenings is a part of life, but if that is all you can count on you have to keep feeding yourself with events to stay joyful. Those who know the joy that comes from God don't need happenings to keep

themselves happy. It is possible to learn to tap into that inner joy which is a product (fruit) of the Holy Spirit who resides within.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
 _Galatians 5:21-23 NIV

The psalmist David, shepherd boy – giant killer – Mighty King, understood joy. In Psalm One he outlines blessings God promises to those who delight in the Word.

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night.

They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do. _Psalm 1:1-3 NLT

In Psalm 32 David writes of the joy God's forgiveness brings to the life of someone whose eyes are focused on Jesus.

Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!

Yes, what joy for those whose record the

Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty! _Psalm 32:1-2 NLT

Jesus Turns Your Sorrow Into Joy

John, the disciple that Jesus loved, recorded a detailed eyewitness account of the Last Supper. Breathed into John's writing by the Holy Spirit, we read the words Jesus spoke to his closest friends and followers hours before the crucifixion.

...he said, "Are you asking yourselves what I meant? I said in a little while you won't see me, but a little while after that you will see me again. I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn over what is going to happen to me, but the world will rejoice. You will grieve, but your grief will suddenly turn to wonderful joy. It will be like a woman suffering the pains of labor. When her child is born, her anguish gives way to joy because she has brought a new baby into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again; then you will rejoice, and no one can rob you of that joy. At that time you won't need to ask me for anything. I tell you the truth, you will ask the Father directly, and he will grant your request because you use my

name. You haven't done this before. Ask, using my name, and you will receive, and you will have abundant joy. John 16:19-24 NLT

The joy of the Lord...wonderful joy...abundant joy...in every situation and under all circumstances IS your strength!

***... In Your presence is fullness
of joy;
At Your right hand are
pleasures forevermore.***

Psalm 16:11 (NKJV)

Reading Assignment – Week Five

Day One – The Gospel of John, Chapters 13 through 17

Day Two – Galatians, Chapters 3, 4 & 5

Day Three – 2 Corinthians, Chapters 5, 6 & 7

Day Four – Psalm 16; Psalm 30 and Psalm 32

Day Five – Ephesians 1:3-10, 1:15-23 & 3:14-21

Day Six – Isaiah, Chapters 55 and 61

Writing Assignment – Week Five

Write down every verse you find in this week's reading that speaks of joy.

Look for happiness (joy) in every day and write a *Thank You Note* to the Lord for each special moment.

Make special notes in your journal when you find yourself experiencing JOY in spite of the situation or circumstances.

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

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly. _ Psalm 84:11(NKJV)



Bible Study - Grace

Grace, the Gift of God

God's gift of grace is the most magnificent gift you could ever receive.

*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, **not of works**, lest anyone should boast.*
Ephesians 2:8-9 NKJV

Grace may be defined as the “unmerited favor of God.” It is *everything for nothing* to those who deserve the exact opposite.

Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of

God's grace.

Revelation may be defined as the act of *making something evident*; an *astonishing disclosure* or *communication of knowledge* to man by a divine or supernatural agency.

The birth, life, ministry, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ have transferred you from who you were into God's own dear child. And that by faith, which is the gift of grace.

*...And when [Apollos] wished to cross to Achaia (most of Greece), the brethren wrote to the disciples there, urging and encouraging them to accept and welcome him heartily. When he arrived, **he proved a great help to those who through grace (God's unmerited favor and mercy) had believed (adhered to, trusted in, and relied on Christ as Lord and Savior)..** Acts 18:27 AMP*

Everything we have studied over the past five weeks; love, peace, righteousness, faith and joy spring from grace. Every fruit of the Spirit and every gift of the Spirit has its roots deeply planted in GRACE.

May the Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father (who has loved us and given us unending encouragement and unfailing hope by his grace) inspire you with

*courage and confidence in every good thing you say or do. _2 Thessalonians 2:16
Phillips*

Grace says,

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:1

Therefore points back to a previous statement in Romans 7...

“When Christ died he took that entire rule-dominated way of life down with him and left it in the tomb...He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different.” Romans 7:5 & 25 (MSG)

“There is therefore now NO condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:1

Religious thinking says, “No! No, no, NO! You cannot be free from the legalistic rule-dominated traditions of this or that denomination. If you believe in favor and grace you will be more inclined toward sin. And, if you sin – your salvation will be lost.”

Jesus says,

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know

*them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and **no one shall snatch them out of my hand.** My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all and **no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.** I and the Father are one. John 10:27-30*

At this point the religious leaders of Jesus' day took up stones, to kill him...and from experience I can tell you...some of the religious leaders in our world today are not all that much different.

They deny Him by their deeds

Paul wrote to Titus, his “true child in a common faith” with instructions for the church under his leadership. Of the false teachers who had wormed their way into the group he said,

*They profess to know God, but they deny him by their deeds... **For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men,** training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope... Titus 1:16; 2:11-13*

Dear Heart, if you have gained nothing else from these studies, I pray you have come to the knowledge that Jesus Christ IS grace and truth. He is the *Good Shepherd*. He is the light in *all*

darkness. He is the door through which every believer may come boldly to the throne of God the Father. He is the Bread of Life and the Way where there seems to be no way.

In Christ you may have confidence in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. He gives you rest and peace.

“Delight yourselves in God, yes, find your joy in him at all times. Have a reputation for gentleness, and never forget the nearness of your Lord.

*Don't worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and the peace of God which transcends human understanding, will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest **in Christ Jesus.**”* Philippians 4:4-7 (Phillips)

*For the law was given through Moses, but **grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*** John 1:17

The Apostle Paul, writer of two-thirds of our New Testament, speaks forcefully to the believers in the churches of Galatia:

Grace to you and peace from God the

Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

He told them THERE IS Only ONE Gospel

*I am amazed that you have so quickly transferred your allegiance from him who called you in the grace of Christ to another “Gospel”! **Not, of course, that it is or ever could be another Gospel,** but there are obviously men who are upsetting your faith with a travesty of the Gospel of Christ.*

*Yet I say that if I, or an angel from Heaven, were to preach to you any other Gospel than the one you have heard, may he be damned! You have heard me say it before and now I put it down in black and white—**may anybody who preaches any other Gospel than the one you have already heard be a damned soul!** (Does that make you think now that I am serving man’s interests or God’s? If I were trying to win human approval I should never be Christ’s servant.).*

Paul pronounced a curse upon the false teachers

who were “bewitching” them and infiltrating the churches with legalism from the old Mosaic covenant. He reminded them of his calling and personal qualifications by grace. And then he wrote:

*O you dear idiots of Galatia, who saw Jesus Christ the crucified so plainly, who has been casting a spell over you? I will ask you one simple question: **did you receive the Spirit of God by trying to keep the Law or by believing the message of the Gospel?** Surely you can't be so idiotic as to think that a man begins his spiritual life in the Spirit and then completes it by reverting to outward observances? Has all your painful experience brought you nowhere? I simply cannot believe it of you! Does God, who gives you his Spirit and works miracles among you, do these things because you have obeyed the Law or because you have believed the Gospel? Ask yourselves that. Galatians 1 & 3 (J.B. Phillips New Testament)*

ASK YOURSELF....

Ask yourself the questions the leadership of the First-century church had to ask...

In Acts 15 we find this record:

4 *When they arrived in Jerusalem,*

*Barnabas and Paul were welcomed by the whole church, including the apostles and elders. They reported everything God had done through them. 5 But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, **“The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses.”***

*6 So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue. 7 At the meeting, after a long discussion, Peter stood and addressed them as follows: “Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. 8 God knows people’s hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. 9 He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. 10 So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? 11 **We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.”***

What do YOU believe?

Reading Assignment – Week Six

Day One – Galatians, Chapters 1, 2 and 3

Day Two – Philippians, Chapters 1 and 2

Day Three – Colossians, Chapters 1 and 3;
Psalm 91

Day Four – Psalm 116; Psalms 125, 126, 130 &
131

Day Five – Proverbs, Chapters 8 & 9 (Christ IS
wisdom incarnate)

Day Six – The Gospel of John, Chapters 3 & 6

Writing Assignment – Week Six

Now that you've come to the end of the book let's finish with a look at your new and improved **God**-image.

*therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a
new creation; the old has gone, the
new has come! 2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV*

As you started these studies you set-up a self-image evaluation based on a series of questions designed to point you toward some areas you could improve on, with God's help. The goal; change your negative outlook into a more

positive attitude; a more Christ-like image.

Today, please take the opportunity to re-evaluate those things, based on the same set of questions.

Be as honest with yourself as you possibly can.

Here Are The Questions...Again

Score them as follows:

0 if **not true**

1 if **somewhat true**

2 if **mostly true**

3 if **true.**

___ 1. I usually feel inferior to others.

___ 2. I normally feel warm and happy toward myself.

___ 3. I often feel inadequate to handle new situations.

___ 4. I usually feel warm and friendly toward people I contact.

___ 5. I habitually condemn myself for my mistakes and shortcomings.

___ 6. I am free of shame, blame, guilt and remorse.

___ 7. I have a driving need to prove my worth and excellence.

___ 8. I have great enjoyment and a zest for living.

___ 9. I am very concerned about what others think and say about me.

___ 10. I can let others be wrong without attempting to correct them.

___ 11. I have an intense need for recognition and approval.

___ 12. I am usually free of emotional turmoil, conflict and frustration.

___ 13. Losing normally causes me to feel resentful and "less than..."

___ 14. I usually anticipate new endeavors with quiet confidence.

___ 15. I tend to condemn others and wish to see them punished.

___ 16. I normally do my own thinking and make my own decisions.

___ 17. I often defer to others on account of their ability, wealth or prestige.

___ 18. I willingly take responsibility for the consequences of my actions.

___ 19. I am inclined to exaggerate and lie to maintain a desired image.

___ 20. I am free to give precedence to my own desires and needs.

___ 21. I tend to belittle my own talents, possessions and achievements.

___ 22. I normally speak up for my own opinions and convictions.

___ 23. I habitually deny, alibi, justify or rationalize my mistakes and defeats.

___ 24. I am usually poised and comfortable among strangers.

___ 25. I am very often critical and belittling of others.

___ 26. I am free to express love, anger, hostility, resentment, joy, etc.

___ 27. I feel very vulnerable to the opinions of others.

___ 28. I rarely experience jealousy, envy or suspicion.

___ 29. I am a professional “people pleaser.”

___ 30. I am not prejudiced toward racial, ethnic or religious groups.

___ 31. I am fearful of exposing my “real self.”

___ 32. I am normally friendly, considerate and generous with others.

___ 33. I often blame others for my handicaps, problems and mistakes.

___ 34. I rarely feel uncomfortable, lonely and isolated when alone.

___ 35. I am a compulsive “perfectionist.”

___ 36. I accept compliments and gifts without embarrassment or obligation.

___ 37. I am often compulsive about eating, talking, drinking, smoking, etc.

___ 38. I am appreciative of others achievements and ideas.

___ 39. I often shun new endeavors because I fear

mistakes or failure.

___ 40. I make and keep friends without exerting myself.

___ 41. I am often embarrassed by the actions of my family or friends.

___ 42. I readily admit my mistakes, shortcomings and defeats.

___ 43. I experience a strong need to defend my acts, opinions and beliefs.

___ 44. I take disagreement and refusal without feeling "put down" or rejected.

___ 45. I have an intense need for confirmation and agreement.

___ 46. I am eagerly open to new ideas and proposals.

___ 47. I customarily judge my self-worth by comparison with others.

___ 48. I am free to think any thoughts that come into my mind.

___ 49. I frequently boast about myself, my possessions and achievements.

___ 50. I accept my own authority and do as I myself, see fit.

_____ total score

today's date _____

TO OBTAIN YOUR SCORE: Add the individual scores of all even numbered statements [2, 4, 6,

etc.] From this total subtract the total of all the odd numbered statements [3, 5, 7, etc.] The net score give an indication of your level of self-worth.

Where your score falls on the scale between the highest possible score [+75] and the lowest possible score [-75] will give you an idea of how positively or negatively you see yourself today.

I can promise you that your score on this evaluation will be noticeably higher than it was a few weeks ago.

But, just in case you didn't see as much progress as you hoped for, please take some time in the coming weeks to study the following verses. Plant them in your heart by reading them several times, and ask God to give you wisdom and understanding of each one.

These seeds will produce fruit in your life. Watch them grow!

1. Galatians 2:20
2. Philippians 4:13
3. Romans 8:1-2
4. 2 Corinthians 2:14, 3:17, 9:15
5. 1 Corinthians 4:3-4
6. 1 Peter 2:9
7. 1 John 4:4

8. Matthew 5:43-47
9. James 2:1-4
10. Ephesians 4:22-25
11. Matthew 25:14-30
12. Colossians 1:9-14
13. Colossians 3:12-13
14. Philippians 4:6-9
15. Romans 6:16 & Ephesians 6:6-8
16. 1 Corinthians 3:16 & 2 Corinthians 5:17
17. Ephesians 4:29, 5:1
18. Job 38:4-5 & Proverbs 3:5-6
19. 1 Corinthians 6:12, 19
20. 1 Peter 5:7 & Proverbs 16:3, 9
21. 1 Corinthians 13:4-13
22. Colossians 1:21-23
23. Mark 11:22-24 & John 14:27
24. Romans 3:21-26
25. 1 Corinthians 1:30-31 & 2 Corinthians 10:17-18

Test yourselves to make sure your faith is solid. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourself regular checkups. You need firsthand

evidence, not mere hearsay, that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it.

I hope the test won't show that we have failed. But if it comes to that, we'd rather the test showed our failure than yours. We're rooting for the truth to win out in you. We couldn't possibly do otherwise.

We don't just put up with our limitations; we celebrate them, and then go on to celebrate every strength, every triumph of the truth in you. We pray hard that it will all come together in your lives. 2 Corinthians 13:5-9 The Message

The Apostle Paul, writing to the believers in Corinth, said –

“examine, test and evaluate yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it.”

He goes on to remind his readers they are not testing or proving Christ, but themselves so that by an ever increasing experience of Jesus their faith will grow and their lives improve.

As believers, we can chart our growth with occasional self-examination, measuring our growth against the yardstick of God's Word. As

we grow up into the beautiful children he desires, we will begin to comprehend the width and length, the height and depth of his love, and we will know and understand the LOVE of Christ which surpasses all human knowledge.

Up to this point you've spent a good deal of time looking at yourself in the mirror of God's Word, building a new and more Christ-like image; an improved picture of who you are *in him*.

By now, you know what your number one goal, as a daughter of the king is to..."seek first His Kingdom and His Righteousness."

Jesus is the answer to ALL your questions. Jesus is the carriage for your life's journey. Jesus is the fulfillment of ALL your goals.

In Christ – you **can** do ALL things.



The Doxology

And Now, may the LORD bless you
and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.

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