

**Prisoner
Of The
Lord**

Patricia L. Hulsey

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Abbreviations Used:

AMP The Amplified Version
KJV The King James Version
MSG The Message Bible
NIV New International Version
NKJV New King James Version
TPT The Passion Translation

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PREFACE

The book contains messages drawn from the Word of God that were shared during decades of prison ministry around the world.

My gratitude goes to the brothers and sisters behind bars who inspired this book by the dramatic changes I witnessed in their lives as they applied these truths from the Word of God.

The messages in this book have literally saved lives and changed eternal destinies. My prayer is that it will do the same for you. Open your heart and your mind to receive this revelation. You are about to become a prisoner of the Lord.

-Patricia Hulseay

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INTRODUCTION

This is a book for those doing time in jail or prison--whether short or lengthy sentences, life without parole, or on death row. It is for inmates, with portions written by and about inmates--people just like you, some of whom have previously been where you are, and others who are presently incarcerated as you are right now.

This book does not address legal matters. It is not a secular guide for prison life that deals with prison gangs, jail-house slang, or prison survival techniques.

This book is based on God's Word, the Holy Bible. Its purpose is to give you a new beginning and a new spiritual destiny. If you truly want to change your life, this book--which is based on God's book--will show you how to do it.

There are many good rehabilitation programs--and you should certainly avail yourself of those offered by your institution. But the plan of God is the only one that guarantees success. When you follow the guidelines of the Holy Bible, God promises that you will be successful:

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.
(Joshua 1:8-9, NIV)

The Word of God declares that if you abide by its precepts,

you will be successful. No matter what your past may be like. No matter how many times you have been in and out of prison. No matter how often you may have tried to change and failed.

True change does not result from education, legislation, or determination. True change comes from the inside and is manifested in outward, observable behavior. Only the Word of God can change you from the inside out. God's Word was not written to entertain you, rather its purpose is to transform you. It is not just a good book with comforting verses. It is the record of God's thoughts and words, inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21). It was written so that you could come to know God and live your life as He intended.

Actually--in a way--we are sorry that you are reading this book, for it probably means you are incarcerated and have lost your freedom. But at the same time, we are happy that this book has come into your hands. The reason? Because no matter what brought you to where you are today--whether you are innocent or guilty, whether you will be incarcerated for a lengthy or short time--this book brings a message of hope that will change your life, your future, and your eternal destiny.

You are incarcerated. That is your reality for the time, a fact that you cannot change. But you can experience a new life with true purpose and meaning. You can't change where you are or what has happened to you, but YOU can change. When you can't go back, you have no direction to go but forward!

The good news is, you are not alone in this difficult time in your life. God's Word says: *"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I*

ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there" (Psalm 139:7-8, NKJV).

Right now, you may feel like you have made your bed in hell, but you are not alone. God has not abandoned you. His supernatural presence is right there with you. Jesus understands your situation because He, too, was arrested and was an innocent prisoner facing execution (Matthew 27).

The title of this book, "*Prisoner Of The Lord*", is taken from the words of the Apostle Paul in the Holy Bible. Paul was a great man of God who was wrongfully incarcerated for his faith several times during the course of his lifetime.

Paul did not view himself as a prisoner of the government, however. Repeatedly he referred to himself as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 3:1); "an ambassador in chains" (Ephesians 6:20); and as "the prisoner of the Lord" (Ephesians 4:1). He saw his incarceration as having divine purpose:

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. (Philippians 1:12-14, NIV)

Paul willingly served as a prisoner of the Lord, a captive for Christ, strategically placed to advance the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Despite his incarceration, Paul fulfilled his divine destiny. He knew God was in control of his circumstances and he used them purposefully instead of

allowing negative circumstances to control him. He learned an important lesson that you must learn: How to be content in every circumstance (Philippians 4:11).

Whether you are innocent or guilty of the offense that resulted in your incarceration, you have a choice. Do you want to be just another inmate doing time, or do you want to be a prisoner of the Lord who is experiencing supernatural change and fulfilling divine purpose in your life?

Ask God to open your heart to the message of this book which is drawn from His book, the Holy Bible. This revelation will supernaturally free you from the chains of your past, change your future, and redefine your destiny.

Receive The Revelation

Accepting constructive criticism
opens your heart to the path of life,
making you right at home among the wise.

Refusing constructive criticism shows
you have no interest in improving your life,
for revelation-insight only comes
as you accept correction
and the wisdom that it brings.

The source of revelation-knowledge is found
as you fall down in surrender before the Lord.

(Proverbs 15:31-33, TPT)

CHAPTER ONE

Realizing Where You Are

Innocent or guilty, you are here.

You have been arrested and are awaiting trial or else you have been convicted and sentenced--whether it be to a short or lengthy term, life without parole, or a death sentence. Whatever the reason you are here, the free world is no longer an option.

You are experiencing the loneliness and frustration of everyday prison life where con games, hostilities, and violence are a way of life. You live in a concrete vault surrounded by guard towers and razor wire. You are told what to do, when to do it, how to do it, and the penalties for not doing it.

Your neighbors in prison may be racial or ethnic groups with whom you have never before interacted--people with various languages and cultures that are new to you and--in many cases--people who hold extremely different values.

Your days are filled with hours that seem endless. The hands on the clock seem stuck. Your nights are sleepless due to fear, nightmares, and the noises coming from up and down the cell block. You are made to feel like you are no longer a person, rather you seem to be just a number in a system that is governed by rules and regulations. You are separated from family and friends. Your personal freedom is a thing of the past. You feel like your life is over.

You are not the first to be here, nor will you be the last. Whether you are justly or unjustly imprisoned, whether you are innocent or guilty, you are here. The fact is, you are incarcerated and like it or not, you are doing time.

The question is, what will you do with that time? Will you simply be a ward of the state known as "inmate number xxx", or will you find a new beginning, new purpose, and learn how to live a meaningful life?

Why Are You Really Here?

Why are you *really* in prison?

You may think you are here because someone set you up, because of a crime you committed, or because of a lousy lawyer, a mistaken witness, or a bad judge. These factors may have played a part in your being here, but in order to begin your journey to a new life you must understand why you are *really* here.

To discover this, you must first understand what God's Word says about you. You are created by God in His image (Genesis 1:27). The Word teaches that you have a natural body which lives in the natural world, but you are also a spiritual being with an eternal soul and spirit. You are body, soul, and spirit. Your soul and spirit are part of a spiritual world, just as your natural body is part of the natural world. Within the natural realm, kingdoms are ruled by kings and leaders. The same is true in the spiritual world:

-The Kingdom of Satan consists of Satan, spiritual beings called demons, and all people who live in sin and rebellion to God's Word. These, plus the world and the evil desires of your own flesh are the spiritual forces of evil at work in the world.

-The Kingdom of God consists of God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, spiritual beings called

angels, and all people who live in righteous obedience to God's Word. These are the spiritual forces of good.

The Kingdom of God is not an individual church, a religious organization, or a denomination. Denominations are groups of churches that have voluntarily come together for practical purposes of administration and outreach. They are organizations like Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, etc. But the Bible speaks of the true Church which is composed of all those who have become citizens of the Kingdom of God by accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Behind Your Circumstances

To start on the pathway to true change, you must recognize that all of the difficulties in your life--whether physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, financial, or with human personalities--are outward manifestations of a spiritual cause. Behind every situation in your life--even the circumstances that brought you to prison--is the operation of spiritual forces representing either God's Kingdom or the Kingdom of Satan.

In the natural world, a king is the sovereign ruler of a kingdom. The territory and people in the kingdom belong to him and he has the power of life and death over his subjects. The same is true in the spiritual world. You are either part of the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Satan and either God or Satan has authority over your life.

Did you know that you were actually in prison before you were imprisoned? You were a captive of your own sin--your addictions, your negative emotions, and your sexual and carnal lusts. The Bible teaches that all people are born captive in sin, meaning that everyone has a basic sin nature and their natural inclination is to do evil:

Behold, I was brought forth in [a state of] iniquity; my mother was sinful who conceived me [and I too am sinful]. (Psalm 51:5, AMP)

Wherefore, as by one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. (Romans 5:12, KJV)

For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23, KJV)

So there you have it! If you are not a born-again believer who has accepted Jesus as Savior, you are living on Satan's turf. You are either part of the Kingdom of God or part of the Kingdom of Satan. There is no neutral spiritual territory. Jesus said, "*He who is not with me is against me...*" (Luke 11:23, KJV).

You got to where you are today by doing what you have done in the past. If you want things to change, you must do something differently because your decisions determine your destiny. You need to make the most important decision you will ever make--the one regarding Jesus Christ--a decision that will determine your future here on earth and your eternal destiny.

CHAPTER TWO

Making Decisions That Determine Destiny

Whether innocent or guilty, you got to where you are today by doing what you did. You may have made a terrible mistake in a moment of anger. Perhaps you were just in the wrong place with the wrong person at the wrong time. Maybe the people you hung out with had a part in where you are today or your addiction may have led to your incarceration.

The bottom line is that your decisions have brought you to where you are today. If you want your life to change, then you must do something different because your decisions determine your destiny. Have you been trying to live life on your own terms? How is that working for you? The fact that you are where you are right now most likely means it isn't working too well.

The first issue to settle is the fact that you cannot make it through your incarceration alone. You need a power greater than what you possess. You need God. The decision you make regarding His plan of salvation through Jesus Christ will not only determine your future in prison and for the remainder of your life, it will also determine your eternal destiny.

The Bible says that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to seek and save that which was lost: *"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10, KJV). If you are feeling a bit lost right now, the good news is that God is seeking you.

What does it mean when it says Christ came to save Athat which was lost?" What exactly was lost? To answer these

questions, let's go back to the first recorded sin of mankind. It occurred many years ago in a Garden called Eden. You can read the tragic story in Genesis chapters 1-3. The book of Genesis--the first book in the Bible--records the beginning of the world, of mankind, of sin, and of God's plan of salvation.

The first chapter of Genesis describes the creation of the world. The second chapter tells of the creation of the first man, Adam, who was created by God in the image of God from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7). God breathed into man the breath of life, and he became a living soul. Then God decided it was not good for Adam to be alone so He caused a deep sleep to fall on him and, from one of his ribs, created the first woman who was named Eve (Genesis 2:22).

Satan enters the scene in Genesis chapter 3. He is disguised as a serpent, which is one of the names used for him in scripture (Revelation 12:9). In this case, he actually appeared visibly to Eve in the form of a snake. To fully understand this first temptation, it is necessary to note God's original instructions:

And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17, NIV)

The first step in Eve's fall into sin was being in the wrong place. In Genesis 3 we find her near the forbidden tree. The Bible warns regarding the path of wickedness: *"Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away" (Proverbs 4:15, KJV).*

Second, Eve should never have entered into conversation with Satan. His first words were to question the instructions given by God: *"He said to the woman: 'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"* (Genesis 3:1, NIV). Questioning the truth of the Word of God is often how Satan starts the temptation process.

In answering Satan, Eve misquoted God's Word. She added to God's instructions as well as minimizing the penalty for sin:

"We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" (Genesis 3:2-3, NKJV)

Compare this verse with Genesis 2:16-17. God did not say "neither shall you touch it." This was added by Eve. Right from the beginning, man started adding his own ideas, interpretations, and legalistic rules to the Word of God. God also said "you shall surely die." This was the penalty for eating the forbidden fruit. Eve changed this to "lest you die," meaning "you might die."

Today, people still try to add to or subtract from the Word of God or interpret it differently from what it actually says. There is also the same tendency to minimize the penalty for sin. People often do not identify sin for what it is. Abortion is called a method of "birth control" instead of murder. Adulterous relationships are sometimes referred to as "affairs."

People say, "Surely a righteous God could not send anyone to Hell!" Actually, God does not send anyone to Hell. People choose to go there by their rebellious decisions and sinful actions. Your decisions determine your destiny, both

in this life and in the life to come. The penalty for continuing in sin and rejecting Jesus Christ is everlasting separation from the presence of God in Hell.

In answering Eve, Satan contradicted God's Word:

*Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
(Genesis 3:4-5, NKJV)*

It is important to recognize these strategies, as they are still used by Satan to tempt people to sin. He accuses the Word of God and tries to cause dissatisfaction. Eve was living in the sinless environment of a beautiful garden. God had provided all that was needed or desired, yet Satan made her discontent. A lack of contentment often leads to sin. For example, unhappiness with financial situations causes men to rob, steal, and cheat. Discontent with a marriage partner leads to adulterous relationships.

Satan wanted to alienate Eve from God. Satan claimed that Eve would receive great benefits from eating the fruit of this tree. She would become like God and know all things. In essence Satan was saying, "God must not think much of you, Eve, to deny you this wonderful opportunity to be like Him." Eve should have answered, "I am already like God," because she was created in God's image. Be aware: Sin usually comes disguised as opportunity.

Genesis 3:6 describes one of the darkest moments in human history:

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree

to desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.
(Genesis 3:6, KJV)

Note the progression that led to this sin. Eve was in the wrong place, listening to the wrong voice, admiring the wrong thing, and she ended up partaking of it. Then she enticed someone else to join her in sin--Adam.

Do you recognize this pattern in your own life? It is the same strategy Satan uses to entice you to sin: You look, and it appears to be good and quite pleasant. Despite God's specific instructions, you deliberately partake and when you do, you usually do not sin alone. If this cycle is not broken in your life, then you will influence others around you to sin and the cycle will continue in their lives. Thus, it becomes a continuous chain spreading throughout the world.

The good news is that this cycle can be broken at any point through the power of the cross of Jesus Christ. On the cross, Jesus paid the penalty for sin. He bruised the head (the power) of Satan so that you can be delivered from both the power and penalty of sin.

There are only two cycles in the world today in which men revolve. One is the cycle of sin: You sin, entice others to join you, and the evil cycle continues. The other is the cycle of salvation: You hear the Gospel, understand it, accept it as truth, accept the plan of salvation, and lead others to faith in Jesus Christ. In which cycle do you want to spend the rest of your life?

The decisions of Adam and Eve determined their destinies. They were removed from the beautiful Garden of Eden

because of their sin. Likewise, your decisions determine your destiny in life and for eternity.

Lost Through Sin

These are the tremendous losses that resulted from sin:

Loss of innocence. Immediately after the fall, Adam and Eve were no longer innocent. They recognized the difference between good and evil and realized that they were sinful (Genesis 3:7).

Loss of relationship with God. God did not remove Himself from man's presence, rather, it was man who removed himself from God. When God came to walk and talk with Adam and Eve as He normally did, they hid themselves from Him.

Loss of emotional well-being. Adam and Eve hid in shame and fear (Genesis 3:10). Fear over the future and shame over the past are basic emotions which are the root causes of all other negative emotional responses.

Loss of godly righteousness. Adam and Eve tried to make clothing from fig leaves which is a type (symbolic) of what man tries to do spiritually. Realizing we are sinners, we try to better ourselves. We think self-improvement will eliminate our sin (Genesis 3:7), but our self-righteousness is as inadequate as the fig leaves were to cover Adam and Eve: *"But we are all as an unclean thing and all our righteousness are as filthy rags"* (Isaiah 64:6, KJV).

Loss of positive relationships with others. When confronted with their sin, Adam blamed Eve and she blamed the serpent. Thus, we see the first dysfunctional family relationships emerge. It is not too long in the

biblical record before the first murder occurs when their son, Cain, kills his brother Abel.

Loss of eternal life. Adam and Eve would never have died had not sin entered into the world. Eternal life was lost through sin, which resulted in physical death coming into the world. The Bible says that all will die physically but, more importantly, it decrees that the result of sin is spiritual death through eternal separation from God.

Losses Restored

The good news is that all of these losses--and all of the other losses which you have experienced--can be restored through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ who came to seek and to save all that was lost (Luke 19:10).

Innocence is restored. The Apostle Paul, who was previously known as Saul, had persecuted and killed believers before his conversion to Christ. Yet Acts 20:26 records that he proclaimed ... *"I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men"*. How could he say that? Because Paul had experienced salvation through Jesus Christ. Having asked forgiveness and accepted Christ's sacrifice for his sins, Paul was innocent before God.

Relationship with God is restored. *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13, NIV).*

Emotional well-being is restored. Jesus dealt with the fear and shame that resulted from sin. He declared, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27, NIV).*

Godly righteousness is restored. *"For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous" (Romans 2:13, NIV).*

Positive relationships with others are restored. *"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers" (1 John 3:14, NIV).*

Eternal life is restored. Through Jesus, you can have eternal life restored. Your physical body will someday die, but you will live on in eternity with God: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17, NIV).*

Whatever your losses, Jesus came to seek you and to save you from them whether it be...

- Loss resulting from sin.
- Loss through addictions.
- Loss of relationships.
- Loss through tragic circumstances.
- Losses incurred through incarceration.

You have lost your freedom, but you do not have to lose your soul!

You Can Be Forgiven

No matter what violation brought you to prison--no matter how great your sin--you can be forgiven and restored to right relationship to God.

In Acts chapter 2, the Apostle Peter preached a powerful sermon to the people who had condemned Jesus Christ to be crucified. In the closing portion of his message, Peter declared: *"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36, NIV). Did you catch it? These people had actually been instrumental in killing God's Son, Jesus Christ. What greater sin could there be than that?

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:37-39, NIV)

These people were guilty of killing Jesus, yet God's message to them was that if they would repent, they would be forgiven. Peter also declared that whosoever called on the name of the Lord would be saved (Acts 2:21). Whosoever includes you!

One of the most notorious killers of all time in the United States was a man named Ted Bundy who was sentenced to die on Florida's death row for multiple murders. After more than a decade of denials, Bundy finally confessed to numerous murders he had committed in seven states.

The evening before he was to be executed, Bundy asked Dr. James Dobson, a noted evangelical Christian--an author, psychologist and founder of a ministry called "Focus on the Family"--to come and meet with him.

During the meeting with Dr. Dobson, Bundy discussed the role that pornography had on his psyche and his crimes. More importantly, he confessed faith in Jesus Christ as his Savior. Despite his numerous and horrific crimes, Ted Bundy was forgiven by God. And God will forgive you too. All you must do is ask.

Study the following verses regarding God's forgiveness:

-Jesus paid your entire sin debt and obtained your full pardon: Colossians 2:13-14.

-Your pardon is based on God's grace, which always exceeds your transgressions: Ephesians 1:7; Romans 5:20.

-God does not hold your past, present, or future sins against you after you repent and ask forgiveness: Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:19.

-Forgiveness is extended to all who believe in Jesus: Acts 10:43.

-Forgiveness is extended to believers who sin after conversion to Christ: 1 John 1:8-9

God's grace in forgiving you is not an invitation or license for you to continue in sin. Rather, it should instill in you a passion for righteous and holy living.

Covering Your Sin

The Bible declares:

*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom
the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose
spirit there is no deceit. (Psalm 32:1-2, KJV)*

Wouldn't you like to have all of your sins covered--including the crime that brought you to prison?

-You cannot cover your sins by blaming someone else. It didn't work for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3).

-You cannot have your sin covered by hiding it. A man named King David, whose story is recorded in the Bible, tried to hide his adulterous affair to no avail (2 Samuel 11-12).

-You cannot cover your sin by attacking the one who reproves you of it. Stephen, whose story is told in Acts 6-7, was killed by his audience after he preached against sin and called them to repentance. Their reaction did nothing to change the truth of his message or to cover their sins.

-You cannot lie about your sin to cover it up. A couple named Ananias and Sapphira tried this and were struck dead (Acts 5:1-10).

-You cannot cover your sin by criticizing others, because Jesus said you must deal with your own sin first (Matthew 7:3-5).

-You cannot cover your sin by self-improvement education, rehabilitation, or counseling.

You need forgiveness for your sin, even if you are unjustly imprisoned, because according to the Word of God all have sinned. Whether one is justly or unjustly convicted in a court of law, all men have sinned and stand guilty in God's court of judgment.

Your sin can only be covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. Here are the steps to take to deal with your sin:

Accept what God says about your sin. *"... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, NIV).*

Understand that the penalty for your sin is death. *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23, NIV).*

Believe that your sins can be covered. *"Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18, KJV).*

Accept God's plan for covering your sin. Jesus dealt with your sins at the cross. *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him might be saved" (John 3:16-17, NIV).*

Repent of your sin. *"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out" (Acts 3:19, NIV).* To

repent means to turn around and go a different direction, turning from a life of sin to a life of righteous living through Jesus Christ.

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

When you have taken these steps, you can be assured that your sins are forgiven. The Bible declares, *"As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12, NIV).* God blots out your sins, and remembers them no more:

"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more." (Isaiah 43:25, NIV)

By taking these steps, you have made a decision that will change your life and secure your eternal destiny. Now you must learn how to live your new life. That is the subject of the next chapter.

There Are No Door Knobs Here
By Catherine Thompson
California Death Row For Women

There are things I took for granted all my life that I now consider a privilege, such as a phone call, going out for sun and fresh air, or even simple things like turning a door knob. There are no door knobs here. My door is electronically controlled by a corrections officer from a booth.

I sit and wait on the state to appoint an attorney to represent me on appeal because I cannot afford to buy justice. In our society, justice--as everything else--comes with a large price tag.

In the meantime, I spend my days upholding my dignity. My freedom was taken and my heart was broken, but no man can take my dignity.

Through this experience I have learned what I call the daily three "Ps" of my existence: Patience, perseverance, and purity. I take one day at a time, and there are some days I have to take only one hour at a time.

CHAPTER THREE

Living Your New Life

Can your life change? Yes, it can. And you took the first step towards that change when you asked forgiveness for your sins and accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior. When you did this, you became a new creature in Christ--not a patched-up version of your old self. That is why the term "born again" is used to describe this experience. You have been born-again spiritually. Now, like a baby in the natural world, you must learn how to live your new life.

If you haven't yet accepted Christ as Savior, then the remainder of this book won't work for you. As we said in the Introduction, this study is based on God's Word, the Holy Bible. Its purpose is to give you a new beginning. If you truly want to change your life, this book which is based on God's book, will show you how to do it. But you can't just read it and give it mental assent. You must act upon what you learn, and the first step is receiving Christ as Savior as was detailed in chapter two.

The Bible teaches that man is body, soul, and spirit. When you accepted Christ as Savior, the change that occurred was a spiritual one. You experienced a spiritual rebirth (John 3:5-8). It is your spirit that was born again. You are not a patched-up version of your old self, but you are an entirely new creature:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV)

After this spiritual rebirth, your soul--which is your mind, will, and emotions--must be supernaturally changed as you live out this new life.

For years, your soul has ruled your spirit and your flesh--your desires, thoughts, and actions. Whatever you desired, you did--whether it be drugs, alcohol, pornography, or immorality. You did not exercise control over negative emotions such as anger, unforgiveness, and bitterness. You went where you wanted to go and did what you wanted to do.

Repetition of sinful behavior leads to more of the same, until certain actions are so entrenched in your life that you become enslaved to habitual sin and spiritual strongholds are erected. This is the struggle the Apostle Paul faced after his conversion:

*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do...I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.
(Portions of Romans 7:15-21, NIV)*

You cannot change your life on your own. Self-effort will not rid you of habitual sin--Paul found that out. Addictions cannot be broken through self-effort. You must let God supernaturally change your soulish realmByour carnal mind, your selfish will, and your negative emotions.

For years, your sinful soul has controlled your body and your spirit. Now you must learn to let your redeemed spirit control your body and soul. That is the only way you will truly experience a new life. The fact that you experience

temptation and battle in certain areas confirms that you are a new creature in Christ. You are seeking to live a new life while surrounded by those living a worldly lifestyle, and that creates friction.

Your new life is not lived out through self-effort. God has promised to put a new heart in you, one that is dedicated to doing His will:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezekiel 36:26-27, NIV)

Programs like anger management, Narcotics Anonymous, and Alcoholics Anonymous are beneficial. If the prison offers these, be sure to avail yourself of them. You will learn many helpful principles to apply in your life. But note that these are called "rehab" programs--meaning they take who you are and try to remake you.

Rehabilitation programs are good, but they have a high rate of recidivism--meaning people often fail and must return for more rehab. If you will follow the mandates of God's Word, however, there is a 100% guarantee that your life will change. God's Word to you is:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the

*Lord your God is with you wherever you go.
(Joshua 1:8-9, NKJV)*

In most guarantees, there are exclusions that limit the terms. In this promise however, there are no exclusions. If you will live by God's Word, you will be successful. And you don't have to do this through self-improvement or self-effort. God declares, "I am with you wherever you go." He is there with you right now, in that lonely cell, assuring you that things can be different in your life.

You Are A New Person

When you accepted Christ, you became a new person. You were changed on the inside and that change will be manifested outwardly in how you live your life. This outward change might not be immediately observable because you have been used to letting your soulish nature control you. But eventually, as you learn and apply the guidelines given in Scripture, your outward actions will change to match the new spiritual you.

True change does not come through legislation, education, demonstration, or rehabilitation. These are all attempts at change imposed from the outside. True change comes from the inside out, through the power of God's Word that is manifested in your life through the blood of Jesus Christ:

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 and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:17-19, NIV)

Reconciliation means *“to change from one condition to another; a change of one party induced by the action of another.”* The biblical message of reconciliation is that because God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer and die for your sins, you can be reconciled to God. Your soul and spirit, your mind, relationships, and even your physical body can be changed. The truth of reconciliation—this change from one condition to another—will be manifested in every area of your life. New life—that is the essence of the Gospel message.

Following Christ always requires a change in lifestyle. Andrew, Peter, James, and John were fishermen when Jesus called them to become His disciples. Their entire lives focused on their occupation--their boats, their fishing equipment, weather conditions, catching fish, and making a profit. Matthew was a rich tax collector when called to follow. When Jesus invited these men to become His followers, they willingly made a dramatic change and left the past behind.

In contrast, a rich young ruler who came to Jesus turned away when he realized what he would have to give up in order to follow (Matthew 19:21-22). The Bible says that this young man went away sad. How many times in his life did this man look back on that decision and regret it?

You have been given the opportunity to change your entire life, to become a new creature, and live in a new Kingdom. This will require different choices and difficult changes in habits, friends, attitudes, actions, and your mind-set. Do not make the same mistake that was made by the rich young ruler.

Living In The Kingdom Of God

The Gospel of the Kingdom is an invitation for you to return to the realm of life that God originally intended. But God does not set up a standard of morality and declare that when you have achieved it you can enter the Kingdom. There is one requirement for entrance: Repenting from sin. Through repenting and accepting Jesus Christ as Savior, you are born again and become a Kingdom resident.

The foundation of the Kingdom. The foundation of God's Kingdom rests on righteous men living righteous lives:

*But the firm foundation laid by God stand sure and unshaken, being this seal and inscription: The Lord knows those who are His and let everyone who names himself by the name of the Lord give up all iniquity and stand aloof from it.
(2 Timothy 2:19, AMP)*

There are two levels of commitment to this righteousness. These are evident in the following passage:

Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and

*you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.
(Matthew 19:16-22, NIV)*

There is one level of righteousness necessary to "enter into life." This is the righteousness that comes through the new birth experience when you are cleansed from sin. But there is another level of righteousness known as perfection. The word perfection, as used in the Bible, means spiritual maturity--not flawless behavior in thought, word, and deed. To achieve spiritual maturity is an ongoing process that requires the relinquishing of worldly values, standards, and relationships.

This does not mean that all believers must sell what they own and give it to the poor. Jesus required this of this particular young man because his riches were more important to him than his spiritual commitment. Nothing in the world can be more important to you than following the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lifestyle of the Kingdom. Residency in the Kingdom of God requires a new lifestyle governed by the laws of the Kingdom. If you were to relocate to a different country, you would have to learn their language and customs. The same is true in God's Kingdom. Residents act and talk differently than those who are part of the kingdom of Satan.

Living in this spiritual Kingdom of God affects your life in the visible world. The lifestyle of the Kingdom is exactly opposite of the lifestyle of the kingdoms of the world. It is different in both structure and principles. When you enter the Kingdom of God, it is like immigrating to a new country. You must learn a different culture.

The Bible is the handbook for living in God's Kingdom because it reveals His will for your life and principles to govern your attitudes, thoughts, and actions. It explains how to become part of the Kingdom and how to maintain residency in God's Kingdom because...

*"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."
(Matthew 7:21, NIV)*

Living a Kingdom lifestyle is to be your first priority as a believer. If you do this, every other need in your life will be met. God promises: "... seek first the Kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you " (Luke 12:31, KJV).

When you live in the Kingdom of God, you are no longer serving Satan. Sin no longer has dominion over you:

Sin can't tell you how to live. After all, you're not living under that old tyranny any longer. You're living in the freedom of God. (Romans 6:14, MSG)

You are no longer a slave to Satan. According to 1 Samuel 2:8, you have been lifted out of a dunghill. That is pretty graphic, isn't it? Your former gang is no longer in charge of your life. You are not in charge. You are living in a new Kingdom where God is sovereign. (See Appendix Three of this book for guidelines for living in God's Kingdom.)

Basic principles of the Kingdom. There are two great principles upon which all other Kingdom principles are based. Jesus said:

... "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40, NIV)

The two basic principles of God's Kingdom are loving Him with all your heart, soul, and mind and loving others as you love yourself. All other Kingdom principles are based upon these two commandments regarding your relationship with God and your relationship with others.

The basic principles upon which the Kingdom of God operates are exactly opposite of those of earthly kingdoms:

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28, NIV)

Although Jesus was dealing with a specific matter of leadership here, He also established a general principle for life in His Kingdom: "It shall not be so among you." Although residents of the kingdoms of this world embrace various socially accepted principles, the principles of God's Kingdom are different--"It shall not be so among you."

The Psalmist declared, "*He restores my soul*" (Psalm 23:3). God uses the original plan--where you were created in the

image and glory of God--and He restores you to what He originally intended you to be. The Bible warns:

Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.
(Romans 12:2, MSG)

We are not talking about renovation, rehabilitation, or reformation. We are talking about true change.

Evidences And Blessings Of A New Life

When you accepted Jesus, you become a new creature and observable changes will be manifested as you incorporate Kingdom principles into your life. There will be external evidences of inward change. The evidences and benefits of living a changed life are detailed in the following passage:

Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, And the Lord listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the Lord And who meditate on His name. "They shall be Mine," says the Lord of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.
(Malachi 3:16-18, NKJV)

Here are the evidences of a changed life:

-You demonstrate a fear of the Lord, meaning you have a respectful reverence for Him (verse 16). The fear of the Lord is the foundation upon which all biblical knowledge and wisdom for living are based. When you respect God, you love Him, honor the precepts in His Word, and want to please Him in all you do. The fear of the Lord governs every aspect of your life. If you don't fear God, then you will continue to live just like you did before you professed Christ as Savior.

-You develop Godly relationships with others (verse 16).

-Your communication patterns are affected--you talk about the things of God (verse 16).

-Your thought patterns are changed--you think on His name (verse 16).

-You have a sense of belonging instead of alienation--you are His precious jewel, His child, and a member of a great spiritual family (verse 17).

-You develop discernment between good and evil and right and wrong (verse 18).

-You will be able to discern the difference between those who serve God and those who do not (verse 18).

Here are the blessings of a changed life:

-Your words are heard by God (verse 16).

-Your name is in God's book of remembrance (verse 16).

-You are one of His jewels (verse 17).

-You are His child (verse 17).

-You will be spared on the day of judgment (verse 17).

Maintaining Your New Life

Study the Word of God. Just as food supplies the energy for your physical growth, the Holy Bible supplies the energy for your spiritual growth. Your spiritual growth will be in direct proportion to your increasing knowledge of God's Word. Personal Bible study must become a part of your daily routine in order to learn to live in God's Kingdom. When you purchase a new product, it usually comes with instructions for how to use it. The Bible is your instruction book for living in God's Kingdom. See Appendix One of this book for Bible study guidelines and reading plans. Start reading the Kingdom guidebook today!

Pray. Prayer is basically talking to God. See Appendix Two of this book for guidelines on how to develop your prayer life.

Imitate God. In the past, you imitated the lifestyle, thinking, and conduct of the world. Now you must become an imitator of God: *"Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6, NIV).*

Do not defile your body. Your body is now the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:17). Respect your body because the Holy Spirit lives there and it is God's instrument to fulfill His purposes on earth. Do not ingest anything or do anything that harms God's temple.

Fellowship with other believers. Most prisons offer Christian-faith based Bible studies or services. Become active in these groups. If such meetings are not offered, ask permission to start a Bible study. When you are released from prison, immediately find a Bible-believing church to

attend so that your new faith will be strengthened and you can continue to grow in the Lord.

Make new friends with others who are desiring to change their lives through applying Kingdom principles. Stay away from trouble-makers and become a problem-solver instead of a problem. Pray this prayer:

*Guide me away from temptation and doing evil.
Save me from sinful habits and from keeping
company with those who are experts in evil. Help
me not to share in their sin in any way!
(Psalm 141:4, TPT)*

Experiencing A New Life

The Bible relates a powerful story of a woman who experienced a changed life. This woman was caught in the act of adultery, and the religious leaders were livid with anger. Her sin was punishable by death according to the laws of the time. An unruly mob pushed her roughly through the crowd to Jesus.

This woman symbolizes all those in the world who are bound by sin and condemned by society, those without a future and without hope:

Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. (John 8:3-6, NKJV)

“She deserves to die,” the Scribes and Pharisees declared. The adulterous woman trembled under the accusations of these legalistic leaders. Her reputation was shattered. Her hope was gone. Her very life was hanging in the balance, as the penalty for adultery in those days was death by stoning. The angry mob began to pick up stones.

Maybe you can identify with her. Perhaps your family and friends have abandoned you, your reputation is ruined, and society has rejected you. Like this woman, death may be the legal sentence for your crime.

Jesus did not deny this woman's guilt, psychoanalyze her past, or suggest a rehabilitation program. He did not argue with the scribes and Pharisees or start gathering up stones to join them in executing judgment. Jesus didn't say a word. He simply stooped down and began to write on the ground:

But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. (John 8:8-9, NKJV)

We are not told what Jesus wrote in the sand that day, but we do know that whatever it was, the angry mob quietly departed without another word.

When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to

her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." (John 8:6-11, NKJV)

When it seemed all hope was gone, Jesus blotted out this woman's transgressions, freed her from condemnation, and released her from sin and shame to embrace a new life.

What About You?

Jesus told the woman, "You are no longer condemned." Do you long to hear these same words? Does your heart cry out for release from the shame of sin and your past? Are people around you picking up stones--so to speak--and hurling accusations at you because of your failures? Don't give up. Don't turn away in despair. Don't listen to the negative words of those who declare that you cannot change. Do not let your past dictate your future. God's message to you is just as powerful as the words Jesus wrote in the sand that day so many years ago.

His message over your life was written in His blood on the cross of Calvary and it is the message of reconciliation--the message of new life!

Without Jesus as your Savior, you are condemned to death just like the adulterous woman because, "*...the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*" (Romans 6:23, KJV).

But the Word declares...."*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9, KJV). If you have not yet done this, ask God right now to forgive your sins and give you a new life.

If you are a new or professing believer but feel condemned and rejected like the adulterous woman because of past or present failures, the message is the same to you: Your future does not have to be like your past. Where you are today is not where you are going to be. Your past does not dictate your future.

The angry mob spoke a negative verdict over the woman caught in adultery—"She is guilty. She deserves to die!" Jesus spoke a different message. Are you going to listen to the accusations of those around you, or will you listen to the words Jesus is speaking over your life?

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."
(Jeremiah 29:11, NIV)*

Jesus is not condemning you (John 3:16-17). He is not focusing on the guilty verdict handed down to you by the court. He is speaking words of hope, forgiveness, a new destiny, and a new life. The question is, to whom will you listen? Will you listen to the words of accusation from the enemy or will you listen to the words God speaks over your life? You may have tried and failed in the past, but this is a new day.

God is speaking a new opinion over your life and your future. God is also giving you tremendous spiritual power to guarantee that you will be able to successfully live your new life. The next chapter provides strategies that will keep you from returning to the old life and repeating the failures of your past.

CHAPTER FOUR

Refusing To Turn Back

Once you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, the Bible warns that you should *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage"* (Galatians 5:1). In other words, don't go back to the old life.

Recidivism is one of the main problems of the penal system in every nation. According to a national study by *The Urban Institute* in the United States, within three years almost seven out of ten inmates who are released will be rearrested. But that statistic does not have to include you!

The Bible describes returning to the old life in graphic terms:

If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."
(2 Peter 2:20-22, NIV)

The question is, how can you refrain from becoming a recidivism statistic? How can you make a decision--once and for all--to refuse to return to the "mud and vomit" of your old life?

This chapter and the following one deals with this question. You will learn how to make Jesus the Lord of your life and how to release the tremendous power of the Holy Spirit that is resident within you. If you follow the guidelines in these two chapters, you will never again return to the old life.

What Do People See?

Before continuing with this chapter, read John chapter 9 in the Bible which records details of the healing of a blind man.

When the disciples of Jesus saw this man, they questioned, *"Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2, NIV)*. As the disciples looked at this man, they thought that either he or his parents had sinned and that his blindness was the penalty for their transgressions.

What do people see when they look at you? Are they like the disciples and condemn you? Society is continuously desiring an explanation for the unexplainable, always seeking someone to blame. Who was guilty--this man or his parents?

People may see you as a convict, bound by addictions, a person whose life is marked by criminal behavior. They may write you off as hopeless--"been that way since birth...won't change." They may falsely accuse you.

Jesus answered the disciples' question saying, *"Neither this man nor his parents sinned...but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:3, NIV)*.

Jesus did not see this man as he was--a blind beggar. Jesus saw him as he would be when the work of God had been

manifested in his life. Jesus does not see you as you are--incarcerated in prison or condemned to death row. He sees you as you will be when you allow Him to become the Lord of your life.

Jesus saw the blind man as he was, but looked beyond his present condition to see the man as he would be--free from the bondage of blindness. Jesus is passing by today--right there in that cell where you are--and He looks at your spiritual blindness with compassion, not condemnation. He is reaching out to touch you, heal you in every area of your life, and give you new purpose and destiny. Everything that is in your past that you cannot understand--the bad things that happened to you--He will use them all for His purposes and His glory when you make Him Lord of your life.

Jesus Heals Blindness

Jesus then proclaimed to His disciples, "*I am the light of the world*" (John 9:5, NIV). Note that Jesus is *the* light, not *a* light. He is *the* way to God, not *a* way to God (John 14:6). All roads do not lead to God. When you accepted Christ as Savior, your spiritual blindness was healed by the one and only light of the world--and that is what is about to happen for this blind man in both the physical and spiritual realms.

After making this proclamation, Jesus spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. Then Jesus told the man to go wash in the pool of Siloam. The man obeyed, and he came back seeing!

How many people would ask for prayer if they knew the minister was going to make mud with spit and put it in their eyes? Carnal reasoning would say that this method might make a seeing man blind rather than make a blind man see!

Carnal thinking would also say that the story of someone dying on a cross for your sin is not reasonable and that believing this will not change your life.

But God's ways are not your ways. When you come to Him, He heals your spiritual blindness. Not according to your pre-conceived ideas, not according to your professed religion, not in the way people think it should be done--but according to His purposeful plan which has existed from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-6). That plan is that forgiveness and redemption from sin comes only through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

The pool of Siloam in which this man was told to wash was supplied with water from Mount Zion where the sanctuary was, meaning that the waters flowed from the temple of God. Ezekiel speaks of this spiritual river:

...Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river. When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other. Then he said to me: "This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes." (Ezekiel 47:6-9, NKJV)

The pool of Siloam represents the river of God's power. Those who go there weak come away with strength. Those who go there doubting come away convinced. Those who go there thirsty come away satisfied. Those who go there mourning come away rejoicing. You may go there

trembling, but you will come away triumphing. You may be blind spiritually when you wash there, but you will come away seeing. When you experience the river of God's supernatural, life-changing power, you will be able to see clearly for the first time in your life! The Lord's plan was not just to patch up this man's eyes by giving him reading glasses or artificial glass eyes that looked good but would not enable him to see. Jesus gave him new eyes!

Reactions To The Miracle

Let's look at the various reactions to this miracle, as they are representative of those you will experience in response to the changes God is making in your life.

Friends and neighbors: John 9:8-12. These people questioned, "Is this the same blind man who used to sit and beg?" When you make Jesus the Lord of your life, people may question: "Isn't this the guy we saw drunk at the local bar? Didn't I see you stoned at the drug house? I think I met you in jail." Friends and neighbors may bring up your past and refuse to acknowledge the reality of the change in your life.

The religious leaders: John 9:13-16. The concern of the religious leaders was that Jesus had healed this man on the Sabbath, which was against their rules. One would have expected that such a miracle would have silenced all opposition. One would think that they would have congratulated the man and rejoiced with him. But religious leaders are not necessarily spiritual leaders. Many, like these men, do not understand the works of God because they are blinded by their own rituals and traditions.

The Jews: John 9:18. The Jews were not convinced. They doubted whether this man had even been born blind, and

demanded proof of his healing (John 9:18). No matter what you do or say, there will be some people who refuse to acknowledge the change in your life. Do not argue with them. Do not try to convince them. The greatest evidence of true change is how you live it out in your everyday life. Don't tell them--show them! This man was blind, but now he could see. A man with an experience is never at the mercy of one with only an argument. Your critics have only an argument. You have an experience.

The man's family: John 9:18-20. When questioned by the Jews, the blind man's family said, "That's our son. We know how he used to be, but we don't know what happened to him." Your own family may not understand the changes in your life. They may say you have "jailhouse religion" or expect you to fail again. Always remember: The greatest evidence that you have really changed is to faithfully live it out in your everyday life.

What Do You Have To Say?

During the course of events recorded in John 9, the man who had been healed was asked several times about his miracle. His responses are a type--a symbolic example--of the spiritual progression that must occur in your life.

Jesus is a man. When the previously blind man was questioned by his neighbors regarding his healing, he said, "I don't know where the man came from. I don't really understand who He is or how He did it. But a man called Jesus put mud on my eyes and told me to go wash in Siloam. I did, and now I can see." When you first come to Christ, you know Him only as the "man called Jesus" who has healed you of your spiritual blindness. You may not understand everything about Him, but you do know that your life has changed. You see things you never saw

before. Initially, the blind man considered Jesus as merely a great man. But Jesus is more than just a great man.

Jesus is a prophet. Next, the Pharisees questioned the man saying, "What do you have to say about Him. It was your eyes that He opened." Despite their objections to the miracle being done on the Sabbath, the Pharisees could not dispute the man's experience. The man does not have to present a detailed account of his life before his healing or the methodology of the change. He doesn't have to do this because the miraculous change is evident in his life. In answer to their questions, the previously blind man said, "The man is a prophet." He is beginning to see that Jesus is more than a mere man. Now he views Him as a great prophet. But Jesus is more than just a great prophet.

Jesus is from God. The Pharisees questioned the man a second time and tried to get him to acknowledge that Jesus was not who He claimed to be. The blind man replied, "*Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind, but now I see!*" (John 9:25, NIV).

When they continued to question him, the formerly blind man said, "*I have told you already and you did not listen*" (John 9:27, NIV). Then the Pharisees began to hurl insults at him saying, "*You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from*" (John 9:28-29, NIV).

Then the man answered, "*Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing*" (John 9:30-33, NIV).

The formerly blind man has moved beyond considering Jesus to be a mere man or a great prophet. He now realizes Jesus is sent from God--that Jesus is God! To this proclamation the Pharisees replied, "*You were completely born in sin; how dare you teach us!*" And they threw him out of the synagogue. (John 9:34, NIV).

Some people will not believe you have changed, nor will they accept the fact that Jesus Christ is responsible for it. Some of your old friends and perhaps even your family will reject the "new you" or claim you only have jail-house religion. As Jesus graciously came to this man after he was cast out of the synagogue, He will also come to comfort you when you are rejected by friends or family.

Jesus is Lord. Jesus went looking for the ostracized man and asked one simple, yet profound, question: "*Do you believe in the Son of God?*" (John 9:36, ASV). Jesus comes to you with the same question: "Do you believe in me?" If you truly believe, your life will change. If you believe, your dead dreams can be resurrected. If you believe, your spiritual blindness will be healed and you will be able to see clearly. You will have a new life.

Note the man's response: "Lord, I believe." Jesus is no longer a mere man to him. He is no longer just a great prophet. He is no longer just someone sent from God. Jesus is now Lord of this man's life.

Note the spiritual progression this man has experienced:

- Verse 11: He considered Jesus to be just a man.
- Verse 17: He called Jesus a prophet.
- Verse 33: He acknowledged that Jesus was sent by God.

While all of this is true, Jesus must become more in your life than a great man, a prophet, or someone sent by God. He must be the Lord of your life. In verse 38, the formerly blind man calls Him "Lord" as he confesses, "Lord, I believe."

So, what do you have to say about Jesus? Do you consider Him to be just a great man, a prophet, someone sent by God--or is He the Lord of your life? Your decision will determine your destiny. If you truly make Him Lord of your life, you will never again return to the old life.

Once he was healed, the blind man never went back to his old life of sitting in darkness and begging by the side of the road. Jesus not only healed him of his blindness, He became the Lord of His life. Jesus delivered you from the blindness of sin. Now He is becoming the Lord of your life as you apply what you are learning through the pages of this book which is based on His book, the Holy Bible.

Counting The Cost

Jesus emphasized the importance of counting the cost before you make spiritual decisions. He used two natural examples to illustrate this: A man building a tower and a king going to war:

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming

against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."
(Luke 14:28-33, NIV)

By these examples Jesus illustrated the importance of counting the costs before you make a commitment. You need to understand what it really means to make Jesus Lord of your life. It is a commitment that costs.

When Jesus called His twelve disciples, He told them to come and follow. He did not outline a career path. He did not give them details of the plan. The disciples had to leave their old lives behind because of the call. The same is true for you. What decisions, partings, and sacrifices this might require remained unknown. Your commitment is not to a program, but to a person. That person is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read Luke 9:57-62 in your Bible. This passage records how three men approached Jesus wanting to follow Him. To each of these potential disciples, Jesus reveals a different aspect of the costs of becoming a follower.

Considered Costs: Luke 9:57-58. The first man attempts to become a disciple through self-effort. He does not wait to be called by Jesus. Discipleship is not an offer man makes to God. It is the call of God to man. If you try to follow Christ by self-effort, you will fail. Jesus told this man, "If you follow me, this is what you must do." The cost of discipleship includes sacrifices. It is not just about you anymore. It is about serving the purposes of God by ministering to others instead of conning, hating, using, or abusing them:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. (1 John 3:16, NIV)

The Apostle Paul admonishes:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. (Ephesians 4:1-2, NIV)

Paul, a man who was imprisoned because of his faith, knew the cost of following Christ.

Proper Priorities: Luke 9:59-60. The second man called by Jesus to follow wanted to go bury his father first. Jesus would never suggest that a person ignore the needs of his parents (John 19:25-27). Rather, it is a matter of priorities that is emphasized in this account. In Bible times when a person said he was waiting to "bury his father," it did not necessarily mean his father had died. It meant he was waiting until his father died so he could receive his inheritance. So, when this man used this excuse, he was placing his future inheritance before the call of the Lord Jesus Christ.

At the critical moment when Jesus calls you to follow Him and make Him Lord of your life, nothing must come before that call:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." (Matthew 16:24-25, NIV)

Self-denial must become part of your life. The old selfish and sinful nature must be denied. The cross must become your priority. The cross is symbolic of the sacrifice, pain, rejection, insult, and hardship involved in doing God's will. The cross may even mean a call to death by martyrdom for the sake of the Gospel. Are you willing? Will you respond to the call?

"Taking up the cross" does not refer to the burdens of life which are common to all men--the afflictions, trials, disappointments, etc., that come because of living in a sinful world. As a believer, you are not excluded from such burdens of life. You may experience illness, accidents, fire, natural hazards, and injustice because you live in a world marred by sin. But these burdens are not "taking up your cross." Cross-bearing is voluntary, not something imposed upon you by the burdens of life. It is a daily choice to deny your selfish desires and do God's will.

In order to take up the cross, you must empty your hands of the things of the world. If your heart is set on money and material things, your hands are too full to take up the cross. If your time is consumed by pleasure and things that please the flesh, your hands are too full to take up the cross.

After denying your selfish nature and taking up the cross, the next step is to follow. You must abandon the old life. Matthew could have remained at the tax table and Peter at his fishing nets. They could both have pursued their trades and might have enjoyed some level of spirituality. But if they wanted to become true followers with a divine destiny, they had to leave the old life behind. Matthew left the tax tables and Peter left his fishing nets.

This does not mean everyone must leave his present job or home. What it means is that it will require a change in

lifestyle. In some cases it may also mean leaving your home, job, or loved ones for the sake of the Gospel. You must leave the good to embrace the best. As a true disciple, you cannot live the "settled for" life.

Absolute Aims: Luke 9:61-62. The third man who asked to follow Jesus wanted to do so on his own terms. Bidding his family farewell was a normal thing to do, but Jesus had called him to follow right then. Which was his priority--his family or the call? What was his real aim in life? Did he want to become a follower of Jesus or continue to follow his own agenda? This man's aims in life were not settled. He was hesitating, torn between the old life and the new to which Jesus was calling him. His absolute aim in life was not the call of God. Your commitment to Jesus must be absolute or else you will be tempted to return to the old life.

Burning The Bridges

A commonly used phrase which speaks of "burning the bridges behind you" means that you deliberately eliminate a way to retreat. The slogan comes from a military strategy used by Captain Hernando Cortes who conquered Mexico and the Aztec Empire--a nation of five million people--with less than 1,000 soldiers. There is great controversy and many negative factors regarding the details of the invasion, but what is known is that Cortes was so committed to winning that he convinced his soldiers to destroy their own ships so that they could not retreat or escape. This strategy called for total commitment by his soldiers, and it worked. There was no other option but to go forward.

In order to live your new life in Christ, you must make Him the Lord of your life and burn all the "bridges" back to the old life. Don't ask God to deliver you from addiction while you are carrying drugs in your pocket--"just in case it

doesn't work". Have no "Plan B" in case your new life doesn't work out. Commit yourself totally to God and deliberately burn all of the bridges back to your old life.

This may mean abandoning some ungodly relationships. You may need to relocate when you are released from prison so that you will not return to join the same people doing the same old thing. You may not be able to engage in your previous occupation. You got to where you are today by doing what you did. If you want something different in your life, then you must do something differently.

Total Commitment

There is a great story in the Bible that illustrates this concept of total commitment. It is the story of an old prophet named Elijah who selected his successor, a young man named Elisha:

So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother good-bye," he said, "and then I will come with you." "Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?" So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.
(1 Kings 19:19-21, NIV)

Elisha was busy plowing when Elijah came by and threw his cloak around him. You must understand that this was

not just any kind of coat. The word “mantle,” as used in this passage, means “covered with a covering.” Elijah’s mantle was more than just a piece of cloth. It very possibly was the traditional prayer shawl worn by Hebrew men. More importantly, this mantle was a divine token that was symbolic of three powerful spiritual truths.

First, it represented divine intimacy. The first mention of Elijah’s mantle is in 1 Kings 19:13 when Elijah fled to Mt. Horeb, tired and discouraged from his conflicts with Ahab, Jezebel, and the evil prophets of Baal. It was here that God spoke to Elijah in a still, small voice and comforted him. Elijah wrapped himself in his mantle while he communed with God and it became a symbol of his intimate relationship with his Master. Developing an intimate relationship with your new Master will keep you from returning to the old life.

Second, it represented a supernatural calling. The second mention of Elijah’s mantle is when it is cast over Elisha. There was something so powerful invested in this mantle that when Elijah threw it across Elisha’s shoulders, it caused him to leave life as he knew it and follow the prophet without reservation. No words were exchanged. No long debate about the pros and cons of responding. Only a supernatural call and an immediate response. There was something so powerful that when Jesus walked by and said “Follow Me,” Matthew left his position as a tax collector and Peter, James, and John left their fishing business. There is something so powerful about the spiritual mantle that has descended upon you that it will cause you to abandon everything in your past life in order to follow the destiny God has for you.

Third, it represented invested authority. The authority of God was invested in this mantle. Elijah had used it to

open rivers and cross on dry ground. He used the mantle to perform supernatural healings, for it was symbolic of the authority of Almighty God which rested upon him.

Elijah's mantle cast upon Elisha's shoulders caused him to abandon life as he knew it. He killed the oxen, destroyed the plow, and held a great feast for the people. In essence, Elisha was "burning his bridges" back to the old life. He wouldn't be needing the plow and those oxen ever again. He would faithfully follow Elijah until the day that he was called to heaven, and then Elisha would pick up that sacred mantle and continue the work of God.

The Mantle Upon You

The spiritual mantle which descended upon you at the time of your salvation is one that is calling you to abandon the past, make no plans for retreat, and advance in the name of your Lord.

There is a mantle of divine intimacy, supernatural calling, and invested authority that God is placing over you today. That divine mantle is the mantle of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus came to minister on this earth, God sent Him to destroy the works of the devil: "*...For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil*" (1 John 3:8, KJV). Jesus could not fulfill His purpose in the flesh without supernatural power, and neither can you! Jesus had to receive the mantle of the Holy Spirit before He could heal the sick and raise the dead. One day, down by the Jordan River, the mantle of God descended upon Him:

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus

was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Mark 1:9-11, NIV)

The mantle of the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove, which was symbolic of His **divine calling**. The heavens opened and God commissioned His Son to take up the mantle of His **invested authority** and accomplish the purposes for which He had been sent to earth. God spoke concerning His pleasure in His beloved Son, confirming their relationship of **divine intimacy**.

Like the Prophet Elijah, Jesus placed His mantle upon His disciples before He returned to Heaven. Jesus said, *"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever..." (John 14:16, KJV).*

The Comforter that Jesus sent was the Holy Spirit who was to abide with believers and lead them into **divine intimacy** with God. The Holy Spirit teaches you all things, brings all things to your remembrance, and makes intercession through you according to the will of God. He leads you into a new depth of intimacy with God.

Jesus said, *"...As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21, NIV).* The mantle of God's purpose was passed from Jesus to you as a follower of Christ. Jesus has commissioned you to do the same miracles, work the same works, and accomplish the same purposes. He wants you to pick up the mantle of His **divine calling** and use it as He did--to minister to others.

Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus left you with the mantle of His **invested authority**. Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued with power (Luke 24:49). If they couldn't face life in this sin-filled world without it, then neither can you. You certainly cannot face the challenges of prison without it.

Jesus has given you the mantle of His supernatural power over all the power of the enemy:

*Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.
(Luke 10:19, KJV)*

When you make Jesus the Lord of your life, the Holy Spirit becomes your "secret weapon" against the enemy. You will learn more about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the next chapter as you study about your secret source of power.

CHAPTER FIVE

Utilizing Your Secret Power Source

You are going to need powerful spiritual resources in order to survive prison. As a believer, God has provided just that. In this chapter you will learn about the power of the Holy Spirit that will enable you to not only survive prison, but to be successful in your Christian walk for the remainder of your life. It is your secret power source, an inner strength that is not visible to the world but is manifested within you and through you.

If you have received Jesus Christ as Savior and “...*if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you*” (Romans 8:11, NKJV).

As a believer, you have the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwelling in you! All you must do is allow the Holy Spirit to operate in you and through you in order to live out your new life victoriously.

Just prior to returning to heaven, Jesus told His followers:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.
(John 14:16-17, NIV)

The Spirit of which Jesus spoke is the third person of the Trinity of God, the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would "endue" or literally "clothe" the disciples in spiritual power:

Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.
(Luke 24:49, NKJV)

Note that the disciples were commanded to wait for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. It was not optional, because they needed this supernatural power in their lives in order to fulfill God's plans and purposes for their lives. So do you!

The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit

This supernatural spiritual power comes through an experience called "the baptism of the Holy Spirit." Jesus spoke of this baptism:

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:4-5, NIV)

Peter also spoke of this baptism:

"Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 11:16, NIV)

In Acts chapter 2, when the gift of the Holy Spirit was first manifested, the experience was not exclusive. All who were in the upper room prayer meeting received the Spirit.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was confirmed through the major ways we process information and experiences:

Through the eyes, ears, and mouth--audibly, visually, and orally. It was "like a mighty rushing wind" and "like fire"--not actual fire, but like fire it could be heard and seen.

The wind was representative of the life-giving Spirit of God (Ezekiel 37:9 and John 3:7-8). The fire apparently looked like a human tongue, as the tongue would be the vessel through which the Gospel would be shared. James 3:5-6 indicates that your tongue will either be set on fire by heaven or hell. The fire was symbolic of the purging and refining work of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 48:10).

As Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit was given by the Father as the disciples waited in Jerusalem (Acts 2). The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a gift but, like salvation, each believer must receive it by faith.

Some believers think that this baptism happens at the time of salvation. Others think it is a second, separate experience. Do not let these minor disagreements prevent you from allowing the power of the Holy Spirit to be manifested in your life. Ask God for His power to be manifested in you and through you, then accept it as done, and believe it by faith.

For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. (Acts 2:39, KJV)

There are three places in the New Testament where we are told what happened when people were baptized in the Holy Spirit. These include the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2:2-4; at the house of Cornelius in Acts 10:44-45; and when converts at Ephesus received the Holy Spirit as recorded in Acts 19:6. In comparing these passages, one spiritual sign

common to all three was the power to become witnesses. One physical sign common to all three is that those who received the Holy Spirit spoke in languages other than their native tongue. These were not languages they had learned. They were languages given through the power of the Holy Spirit. These "tongues" of the Holy Spirit were actual languages used on earth:

Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?"
(Acts 2:7-8, NIV)

The Apostle Paul also speaks of the unknown tongues of the Holy Spirit, languages that are not known to man:

For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit.
(1 Corinthians 14:2, NIV)

In 1 Corinthians 14, the purposes of unknown tongues are defined as prayer to God (verse 2); a sign to unbelievers (verse 22); for self-edification (verse 4); for edification of the church when interpreted (verse 12); to empower praise (verses 15 and 17); and to enable effective intercession (verse 14 and Romans 8:26-27).

While there is some disagreement over the issue of tongues in various denominations, we suggest you put aside what others say, read the scriptures for yourself, and open your heart to the Holy Spirit to work in your life as He desires.

Gifts Of The Holy Spirit

Jesus left His followers with a responsibility to extend the Gospel to the ends of the earth:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20, NIV)

The Holy Spirit was given to believers to enable us to fulfill this great commission of evangelizing the world. That world includes the prison where you are incarcerated. The task is too great to be accomplished with natural abilities. Spiritual gifts are powerful abilities given by the Holy Spirit to enable the task of ministry...

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine...But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. (Ephesians 4:12-15, KJV)

The main passages listing the spiritual gifts available to believers through the Holy Spirit are Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:1-16; and 1 Peter 4:7-11. The Bible does not list spiritual gifts by categories. They are listed here by groups for study purposes only.

-There are what may be called **leadership gifts** of being an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher.

-There are also the **speaking gifts** of prophecy and teaching--where one teaches or prophecies but does not serve in a leadership capacity. The speaking gifts also include exhortation and words of wisdom and knowledge.

-There are what might be called the **sign gifts** of miracles, healing, tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

-The **servicing gifts** include discerning of spirits, giving, administration, faith, helps, leadership, serving, hospitality, and showing mercy.

This is not a book on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but you definitely should study the New Testament further to learn the purposes of these gifts and observe how they were manifested in the lives of believers. Spiritual gifts are essential to spiritual life and ministry. Without them, it is like trying to do a job in the natural world without the proper tools.

No spiritual gift is more important than any other, and they all function effectively together to accomplish God's purposes. In Acts 9:36-43 there is a story about a woman named Dorcas who served widows by making clothing for them. She wasn't a great teacher or preacher. She simply blessed others with her gift of serving. God thought her ministry was so important, however, that He empowered Peter to raise her from the dead!

Some people believe that these gifts of the Holy Spirit were only for the early church, but the Bible reveals that these manifestations were given for the following purposes:

*For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.
(Ephesians 4:12-15, KJV)*

Have all of these purposes been fulfilled? No, they have not. We need perfecting more than ever in these evil times. We still need unity. There is increased deception, and we need spiritual maturity to be manifested in our lives so we will not be diverted by various doctrines. So why would God withdraw any of the gifts of the Holy Spirit until all of the purposes for which they were originally given have been fulfilled?

We encourage you to study the New Testament regarding these issues and make a decision based on the Word of God. For sure, do not let differences on this subject separate you from others in the Body of Christ.

The Fruit Of The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit also enables you to live a Christ-like life. This is accomplished through qualities the Holy Spirit develops in your life that are called "spiritual fruit". The fruit of the Holy Spirit includes:

...love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith. meek-ness, temperance; against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23, KJV)

Never excuse your sinful behavior by saying, "I am just human." Indeed, you are human, but you have a power source that enables you to overcome all of the power of the enemy and live a Christ-like life. You have the manifested power of God living within you.

Purposes Of The Holy Spirit

The power of the Holy Spirit is manifested in the following ways in your life:

The Holy Spirit dwells in you. You are the temple, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.
(1 Corinthians 6:19, NIV)*

The Holy Spirit intercedes for you. This powerful intercessor prays according to God's will, speaking through you when you don't know how to pray about situations.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Romans 8:26-27, NIV)

The Holy Spirit guides you. The Holy Spirit directs you into the perfect will of God.

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (John 16:13, NIV)

The Holy Spirit imparts the love of Christ to you and through you. The love that the Holy Spirit imparts through you will enrich your life and the lives of those with whom you come in contact.

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Romans 5:5, NIV)

The Holy Spirit comforts you. The Holy Spirit comforts you in times of sorrow, discouragement, depression, and grief.

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever...(John 14:16, KJV)

The Holy Spirit conforms you to the image of Christ. You are powerless to change yourself into the image of Christ. Self-improvement plans, apart from God, are doomed to failure. But through the power of the Holy Spirit, you can be conformed to the image of Jesus.

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV)

You are conformed to the image of Christ as the Holy Spirit develops spiritual fruit in your life. These qualities include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV).

Self-control is perhaps the most confusing of these fruits of the Spirit. How can one be self-controlled and Spirit-controlled at the same time? The Bible does not indicate that the Holy Spirit seizes control of your will. You must allow the Holy Spirit to exercise His fruits, gifts, and power through you. You cannot blame your failures on the Holy Spirit. They occur because of your failure to allow Him to operate in you and through you.

The Holy Spirit teaches you. The greatest teacher, the Holy Spirit, resides within you. Knowledge is powerful, and the Holy Spirit imparts spiritual knowledge to you which enables you to understand God's Word.

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:26, NIV).

The Holy Spirit inspires you to true worship. Praise and worship are powerful spiritual strategies. In some Old Testament battles, they were the methods used to defeat the enemies of God. The Holy Spirit inspires you to true worship:

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. (John 4:24, NIV)

The Holy Spirit convicts you of sin. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin and leads you to repentance:

When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (John 16:8-11, NIV)

The Holy Spirit sanctifies you. You do not have to try to live a holy life through self-effort. The power of the Holy Spirit sanctifies your thoughts and actions and enables you to live a holy life.

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, NIV)

The Holy Spirit gives assurance of salvation. The Holy Spirit assures you that you are in right standing before God through salvation by Jesus.

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. (Romans 8:16, NIV)

The Holy Spirit gives you liberty. You can be free in your spirit, even though you are incarcerated.

...because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:2, NIV)

The Holy Spirit speaks through you. The Holy Spirit speaks God's Words of power and authority through you.

*Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.
(Mark 13:11, NIV)*

The Holy Spirit demonstrates God's power through you. The Holy Spirit demonstrates God's power in every area of your life.

*My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.
(1 Corinthians 2:4-5, NIV)*

The Holy Spirit strengthens you. When you are weak, spiritual strength is manifested in you and through you.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, (Ephesians 3:16, NIV)

The Holy Spirit quickens you. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you to quicken you, meaning you are endued with resurrection-like power while still living in your mortal body.

*And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.
(Romans 8:11, NIV)*

The Power Of The Holy Spirit

These are all vital and necessary purposes of the Holy Spirit in your life, but one of the greatest purposes of the Spirit is revealed in the promise made by Jesus: *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"* (Acts 1:8, NIV).

The promise is that you shall receive power to be a witness. This is an all-inclusive statement. All believers are to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and are to be witnesses for Christ. A witness is one who tells what he has seen, heard, or experienced.

Jesus didn't say to attend classes on methods of witnessing, although these are good. He said to receive the infilling of the Holy Spirit that will empower you to be a witness. Many people pray for more power in their lives, but do they really understand the purpose for spiritual power? Are they being witnesses to others by their conversation and actions? Are they boldly sharing Jesus with their friends, family, and coworkers?

God bestows His power for a specific purpose: To enable you to live a new life and to be a witness for Him--and you can do that right where you are in prison. Especially there in prison--as you are surrounded by many lost souls that need God. You can go where other people cannot go. Prison ministries and the chaplain cannot access some of the places you are permitted to go within the prison. This is your mission field.

The power to become a witness for Jesus is the true evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. This power was immediately observable in the life of the

Apostle Peter. Before receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Peter fearfully denied that he knew Jesus. After receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Peter gave a powerful witness to the Gospel that resulted in the salvation of 3,000 people. It was the power of the Holy Spirit in the early church that resulted in the spread of the Gospel throughout the world.

God wants to empower you by the Holy Spirit to be an effective witness, just as He did His first followers. The greatest witness, of course, is the silent witness of a changed life, but you are also mandated to share your spiritual experience with others. People who are spiritually blind, lost in sin, and captive to emotional pain need the same good news of the Gospel that has changed your life. Appendix Four will help you formulate your personal testimony and Appendix Five will show you how to lead a person to saving faith in the Lord. You are Christ's ambassador to the mission field of your prison. You can reach people in your housing unit, on the yard, and staff and officers who do not know the Lord.

The Holy Spirit is your secret power source. Just like an electrical connection, as long as you remain plugged in to God and His Word, this supernatural power will function within you and through you to protect, guide, strengthen, and teach you. The power of the Holy Spirit will make you successful not only during the term of your incarceration, but for the remainder of your life.

CHAPTER SIX

Breaking Bondages

If you are to live a changed life, you will need to close the door on the enemy and refuse to allow him access to your life. Satan is a liar and the father of lies. Jesus told the Pharisees:

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44, NIV)

In the first temptation, Satan lied to Eve which resulted in her subsequent sin:

-God said:

"Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Genesis 2:16-17, NKJV)

-But the enemy said:

"You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:4-5, NKJV)

Satan tried the same strategy on Jesus during His temptation. You can read about this in Matthew 4, Mark 1, and Luke 4. Satan's strategies have not changed in all

these years. If you open the door of your heart, mind, and emotions to him, he will lie and contradict God's Word in order to entangle you once again in sin and bondage.

Jesus said: *"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:32, NKJV). If the truth sets you free, then what does a lie do? It leads you into bondage. In this chapter you will learn how Satan deceives you in order to entangle you again in the old life.

The good news is that Satan cannot gain access into your life unless you open the door to him. The bad news is that you can open the door to his deception unknowingly in the following ways.

By continuing to live in sin. When you continue to live in sin and refuse to confess and forsake it, you open the door for Satan to operate in your life. Continuing in sin of any kind opens the door to the enemy.

By harboring negative emotions. Bitterness, anger, unforgiveness, hatred, and other negative emotions give the enemy access into your life.

For example, you chose to harbor unforgiveness, even though you know the Bible teaches you must forgive. Paul declares that it is important to forgive lest Satan gets an advantage over you:

Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.
(2 Corinthians 2:10-11, NKJV)

Another example is anger. The Bible says:

Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.
(Ephesians 4:26-27, NIV)

These verses make it clear that when you remain angry, the devil takes advantage of your anger and gains a foothold in your life.

By living in the past. As long as you are living in the past, you will never have a future. Satan accuses you by constantly bringing up the past. He tells you that because of your past, there is no way you can live a new life. When you make a mistake, he tells you that you might as well give up since you have already blown it!

By thinking wrong thoughts. The thoughts you think either agree with God's Word or with the enemy's lies. Proverbs 23:7 declares, "*As you think in your heart, so are you.*" Your thoughts affect your actions. Murder, adultery, dishonesty, etc.--all of these start as thoughts.

By speaking wrong words. Your own words create a spiritual snare and allow Satan access into your life: "*You are snared by the words of your mouth; You are taken by the words of your mouth*" (Proverbs 6:2, NKJV). Proverbs 12:13 declares, you are "*snared by the words of your lips.*"

By keeping bad company. The Bible says: "*Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character*" (1 Corinthians 15:33, NIV). The Bible also warns: "*Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, Lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul*" (Proverbs 22:24-25, NKJV).

This and subsequent chapters will discuss these important areas in detail and show you how to deal with sinful bondages, negative emotions, the past, your mind, your mouth, and your relationships. Let's begin by learning how to break the bondages in your life.

Breaking Bondages

Everyone experiences bondage at one time or another. For some, it is the bondage of bad habits like pornography, drugs, or alcohol. It may be the bondage of physical illness, mental problems, or emotional instability. For others, it is anger, hatred, bitterness, and unforgiveness. Whatever bondage may be affecting your life, it is erecting a powerful force--a spiritual stronghold--that must be dealt with if you are to successfully live out your new life.

The Biblical account of a blind man named Bartimaeus reveals seven powerful strategies that, if you employ them, will break the power of every bondage in your life.

Now they came to Jericho. As He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you." And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus. So Jesus answered and said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?" The blind man said to Him,

"Rabboni, that I may receive my sight." Then Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road. (Mark 10:46-52, NKJV)

Bartimaeus was bound by the extremely limiting physical condition of blindness. The principles that he applied as he received his miracle can also be appropriated as you seek deliverance from bondages in your life.

Believe that things can change. Bartimaeus had been sitting there for years, living as a blind beggar. You too may have been in bondage for years. You may have been in therapy for mental or emotional conditions for a decade. You may have been bound by alcohol, drugs, or other habits for years. You may have been in and out of prison repeatedly. To break the cycle of these bondages, you must first believe that things *can* change. If you don't have faith to believe this, then pray as the man in Mark 9:24 who cried out, "*Lord I believe. Help my unbelief!*"

Assume responsibility for the bondage in your life. By assuming responsibility, it does not necessarily mean that the bondage in which you are entangled is your fault. The word "responsibility" simply means assuming the "ability to respond."

Bartimaeus was certainly not personally responsible for his blindness, but he took the responsibility for it and the fact that his condition could be changed. He realized, "I am blind, I am a beggar, and I want things to change!" If you want to break the bondages in your life, then you must assume responsibility for your negative relationships, your mental or emotional problems, and your addictions. Your bondages might have resulted from the negative influence

of others, but if things are ever to be different, then you must take responsibility in order to experience change.

Cry out to God. Bartimaeus began to cry out because he believed things could change. If you don't cry out to God for deliverance, then things will remain as they are. Where has your silence gotten you? What is the result of your refusal to deal with the issues in your life?

The good news is, if you will cry out to Jesus, He will change your circumstances just as He did for Bartimaeus. You may think, like Bartimaeus, that you are lost in the crowd, but He knows right where you are. Keep on crying out to Him until things change!

Remember, however, that crying out to just anyone isn't enough. You must cry to someone who can do something about your need. That someone is Jesus! Are you going to keep sitting there begging for sympathy, imprisoned by your bondage, or are you going to do something about it?

And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. (Isaiah 65:24, KJV)

Clarify what you need. In the past, Bartimaeus asked for money from those who passed by, but this time he did not ask for alms. He asked for healing. Have you been asking for the wrong thing? Perhaps you have been seeking rehabilitation when what you need is not a makeover of the old you, not a better way of life, not more counseling--you need a brand new life:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV)

Bartimaeus further clarified what he needed when Jesus asked him, “What do you want?” Bartimaeus replied, “I’m blind. I want to see!” Tell God exactly what you need. What are the bondages in your life that need to be broken?

Don’t let others discourage you. Many people in the crowd told Bartimaeus to be quiet, but he didn’t care what the “many” said because he knew that the majority are not always right. It doesn’t matter what the majority says about you. Let God speak His opinion over your life.

Sometimes even your dearest friends will stand in the way of your miracle. They may say that you cannot change. They may entice you to keep quiet and remain where you have been for years--similar to a blind beggar who is begging by the side of the road. But even if--like Bartimaeus--you were born that way or if you have lived in bondage for years, things can change in an instant when you have a true encounter with Jesus.

Bartimaeus came to the place that he said, “I don’t care what anyone thinks. I’m tired of going through life begging!” That is the point to which you must come. Do not worry about how many times you have failed in the past or about what people may say about you.

Never give up, despite the circumstances. It was crowded, noisy, hard to be heard, and people were telling him to shut up, but Bartimaeus didn’t care. The circumstances were not ideal. There was no soft music or powerful worship service. There was only a dusty road and a noisy crowd. If you are waiting for ideal circumstances to be freed from the bondage in your life, they may never materialize. It is in the midst of difficult circumstances that miracles are most often manifested. Right there in prison

where you are, you can experience the miracles of salvation, healing, and deliverance.

Leave the old behind and embrace the new. Bartimaeus wore a garment that identified him as a blind beggar--similar to how blind people today carry a white cane to identify themselves as visually impaired. When Jesus called him, Bartimaeus did something bold. He cast this garment aside. He threw off the symbol of his physical bondage. He made no provisions for failure. He cut his ties to the past. He had no back-up plan to return to the old life just in case the new one didn't work out. If you are to break the bondages in your life, you will have to do something bold. You will have to take a step of faith and make no provisions for failure.

In one of our prison services, we felt led to pray for those bound by addictive substances. "Don't come up here with drugs or cigarettes in your pocket and ask us to pray for you," we said. "If you are sincere, you must get rid of these things and make no provision for failure!" At the end of the service, the chapel platform was littered with cigarettes and drugs discarded by the inmates. Many who had sought deliverance for years received their miracle that night because they made no plans for a relapse, no provisions for failure.

Jesus told Bartimaeus that his faith had made him whole. That faith was demonstrated as Bartimaeus stepped out and left behind the garments that chained him to his past bondage. The change in his life was instant. The Scriptures say that immediately, he received his sight.

How? We can't explain this physically, because it was a miracle of God. But we do know this: When you appropriate biblical strategies such as those evident in the

story of Bartimaeus, it allows God to make powerful changes in your life:

*For He (God) says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.
(2 Corinthians 6:2, NKJV).*

If you have been bound by sinful habits, you are no longer the servant of sin.

For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey--whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (Romans 6:14-18, NKJV).

When Jesus was resurrected, He took the keys of hell and death (Revelation 1:18). Satan doesn't even have the keys to his own dwelling place in Hell, so how can he keep you in bondage? Jesus has the keys and He has given to you the keys to the Kingdom of God (Matthew 16:19). These spiritual keys include deliverance through His blood that was shed on Calvary and the binding and loosing of bondages through the Word of God and prayer. Satan doesn't have the keys. You do. So use them!

The Place Of No Return

The Apostle Paul warned: "*Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*" (Galatians 5:1, NKJV). Once you have been set free from bondage in your life, do not get entangled with it again.

This may involve some adjustments in your lifestyle, your friendships, and maybe even your family relationships. You can no longer go where you used to go or hang out with the sinful people you used to pal around with. You may even have to distance yourself from your family if they are the ones pulling you back into a sinful lifestyle.

Today is the day for your deliverance. Not "someday"--but right now! Your physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual bondage is not too big for God. Your habit is not too great. Like Bartimaeus, you can be set free from every bondage and leave the cloak of your limitations in the dust of your past.

Bartimaeus never returned to take up the garment that identified him as a beggar. He didn't need it anymore. He did not want it anymore. You can do the same. Walk away from every bondage in the name of Jesus, and then never go back!

Forever Free

Debbie was introduced to her abuser when she was just 15 years old. The man presented himself as a kind and charming person. He took Debbie out on dates and gave her gifts. Then one night, he told her to make him some money by becoming his prostitute. When Debbie refused, he beat her with his fists, kicked her, and threatened to kill her. Fearing for her life, Debbie did her abuser's bidding for years. During that time he whipped her with a bullwhip, raped her, and made her hold hot ashes in her hands. She tried to escape, but each time she was brought back with a combination of violence and death threats.

In early 1982, when the man began to abuse Debbie's six-year-old daughter, she fled again but her abuser came after her with a shotgun and a band of armed men. He was arrested for assault with a deadly weapon, but was later released. Fearing for her life and that of her child, Debbie turned to two friends to "Amake him leave me alone." These men subsequently had a violent altercation with the man and they killed him.

Debbie and the men were prosecuted and she was charged with conspiracy to commit murder and first-degree murder. Her public defender did not ask her about the abuse she had suffered, nor did he present any evidence of such to the district attorney's office. The prosecutor sought the death penalty, and--even after he determined he did not have sufficient evidence to support it--he used it as a threat to coerce Debbie into entering a guilty plea to the charge of first degree murder. She received a term of 25 years to life.

When we first met Debbie, she came to one of our Harvestime classes at a central California prison. The only reason she had come was because the parole board at the time was telling inmates to attend our classes, as they could see a change in the lives of those who were completing the courses. Debbie came because she thought it would look good on her record and expedite her parole. But it did not take long for the power of the Gospel to penetrate her defenses and she accepted Jesus as Savior. After her conversion, Debbie had an exemplary record. She earned two associate's degrees. She worked in an inmate manufacturing plant, served as the chaplain's assistant and as choir director, graduated from a battered women's support group, and mentored other inmates, leading many of them to the Lord.

Debbie was incarcerated for nearly 27 years, despite many factors indicating she should not have been charged with first-degree murder because of the abuse she had suffered. In the year 2000, a new law was enacted in California to ensure that battered women prosecuted for crimes against their abusers received a fair trial. It was determined that Debbie should be released, but years of legal wrangling prevented her from getting out. Finally, an attorney took up her case pro-bono and worked tirelessly until she was released in August, 2009. Debbie was at last able to share her love for her siblings, children, and grandchildren without the restrictions of prison rules. She was able to seek forgiveness from her victim's family, bringing closure to decades of anguish endured by two tragically intertwined families.

Prior to her release from prison, Debbie had embroidered some lovely guest towels and sent them to us. We decided that we would not hang them up until the day she was released from prison. We called them our "faith towels". On the day Debbie was released, we hung up the towels. In June, 2010, Debbie went to be with the Lord after an 18 month long battle with lung cancer. She was 50 years old, and had spent 27 of those years behind bars. The "faith towels" remain right where we hung them when she paroled, a testimony to the fact that she is now forever free with her Father in Heaven.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Eliminating Negative Emotions

We are opening this chapter by taking a peek at the journals of three believers.

One believer writes: *"Therefore now oh lord, take, I ask you, my life from me...for it is better for me to die than to live..."* The second person writes: *"It is enough, now oh Lord, take away my life..."* The third believer declares: *"We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life."*

These comments were not written by "losers" or people with mental disorders.

The first statement was by an evangelist who had just preached one of the greatest revivals in history that stirred an entire city to repentance. His name was Jonah.

The second statement was made by a great prophet who had challenged false prophets and literally seen the fire of God fall from Heaven. His name was Elijah.

The third statement came from a man named Paul, one of the greatest apostles in New Testament times.

The common theme of these statements is that they reflect the thoughts of believers who were wrestling with negative emotions.

Because incarceration is a fearful, depressing, and isolating experience, you will also struggle with negative emotions.

Knowing that you are not alone in this--that even great men of God have experienced such difficulties--should bring some comfort. Each of the examples cited, however, were men who did not settle for their negative mind-sets. They learned how to eliminate negative emotions through the power of God--and that is the purpose of this chapter.

Understanding Emotions

Emotions are defined as strong feelings about something or someone. God created you in His image and He is an emotional being, expressing feelings such as love, righteous anger, mercy, compassion, etc. As a human being created in God's image, you have many positive emotional responses that will bless you and bring great joy in your life. It is your negative emotional responses that cause problems and which you need to eliminate.

The emotions that you experience and express can be divided into two broad categories: Negative and positive:

Negative emotions: A negative emotion is any response that results in adverse thoughts or actions.

Positive emotions: A positive emotion is any response that results in positive thoughts or actions.

There is a broad range of emotions in each of these categories. A person may also express combinations of various emotional responses. We cannot list all the possible emotions one can experience--there are far too many--but the following are common negative emotions.

Negative emotions may make you feel:

Abandoned

Misunderstood

Angry

Moody

Bitter	Neglected
Confused	Nervous
Cynical	Obsessed
Defensive	Pessimistic
Depressed	Powerless
Discouraged	Regretful
Disillusioned	Resentful
Embarrassed	Sad
Fearful	Self-pity
Frustrated	Shamed
Guilty	Skeptical
Hostile	Suspicious
Humiliated	Trapped
Inferior	Unforgiveness
Inhibited	Unimportant
Insignificant	Untrusting
Intimidated	Unwanted
Lonely	Violated
	Worthless

Eliminating Negative Emotions

Positive emotions such as love, joy, hopefulness, etc., are not a problem. What you must deal with are the negative emotions such as anger, rejection, fear, etc. Here are some strategies that will help you eliminate negative emotions.

Recognize that your negative emotions are powerful. Unbridled negative emotions can cause you to react in ways that can impact your life forever. Many people who had never violated the law previously are now serving lengthy prison sentences because of one illegal act done in a fit of anger.

Do not try to excuse your negative emotions. Deal with them, because they are powerful and--left unchecked--they

will control your life. Do not make excuses or think you are too weak to conquer negative emotions. The Apostle Paul freely admitted that he felt lonely and abandoned. He said that no one stood with him in his time of need. (2 Timothy 4:16-17). But Paul did not wallow in these feelings. He wrote some of his greatest epistles while incarcerated. He dealt with his emotions through the power of God. You, too, have the ability to do this because the Word of God declares that "*...He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*" (1 John 4:4, NKJV). The same power that raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you (Romans 8:11).

Understand that negative emotions do not represent the truth. For example, you may feel fearful when there is nothing to fear. You may worry when in reality, there is nothing about which to be concerned. It is God's Word that speaks the truth into your life, not your own negative emotions, your limited perception of situations, or the people around you.

Take responsibility for your emotions. What negative emotions do you experience or express when you are in a difficult situation? Acknowledging that these are problems will make you more aware of them when they try to surface in your life. Do not blame your emotions on others, ie., "I am like my Uncle Jack. I have his temper!" Take responsibility for your own negative behavior. You are only responsible for how you react to situations, not for how others respond.

Make a decision to change. All change begins with a decision. Your decision to become a believer was the first step toward a new life. Now you must make a decision to allow God to rule in every area of your life, including your emotional responses. You are the only one who can initiate

changes in your emotions. You do this by making the decision to be transformed instead of being conformed. God's Word to you today is:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2, NIV)

Eliminating volatile situations when you can do so will help, but you may not be able to escape certain people and problems in prison. You can, however, make a decision to change your attitudes and responses to difficult people and circumstances and refuse to respond negatively.

Realize that negative emotions call for an immediate response. Whenever you recognize a negative emotion beginning to surface, it is a signal that something is wrong. You need to stop what you are doing, stop what you are saying, or stop what you are thinking. Do not allow the emotion to be strengthened by your actions, words, or thoughts. In the name of Jesus and through the power of the Holy Spirit, take control of these negative emotions immediately:

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:4-5, NIV)

Be willing to forgive. If you follow the biblical directive to forgive others, many negative emotions will be

eliminated right from the start. You have been forgiven by God and people whom you have offended. Extend this same grace to others. (You will learn more about forgiveness when you study chapter eleven of this book which concerns relationships.)

Choose to be a victor instead of a victim. In the prison cell where they had been incarcerated for preaching the Gospel, Paul and Silas had every reason to be negative (Acts 16). Their backs were bruised and bleeding from a beating they had received and they were shackled in chains. They had been unjustly imprisoned. They were, no doubt, hungry and physically exhausted but they did not respond negatively to their situation. They were not fearful, worried, angry, or filled with self-pity because of their circumstances.

Instead of complaining and feeling sorry for themselves, Paul and Silas sang praises to God. As they worshiped Him, God supernaturally intervened and delivered them. Paul joyfully declared: "*We are troubled on every side—yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed...*" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9, KJV).

When you praise and worship God, you actually prepare the way for Him to come on the scene to bless and deliver you:

He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God. (Psalm 50:23, NIV)

Praise is not a sacrifice when everything is going good. It is only a true sacrifice when you lift it to God despite your adversity. By so doing, you prepare the way for God to

show you His salvation--which includes freedom from sin and deliverance.

Wait before you respond. In difficult situations, think about the response you are about to express. Is it an attitude that honors God, His Word, and your commitment to Christ? How does this emotion reflect on you as a believer? Is it an emotion by which you want to be known? For example, being angry all the time will make you known as an angry person.

Take the way of escape. Sometimes, you need to remove yourself from a volatile situation or an aggravating person. God's Word has promised:

No temptation (trial) has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted (tried) beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted (tried), he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Corinthians 10:13, NIV)

This is God's guarantee that no circumstance, trial, temptation, or attack of the enemy will come into your life that you are unable to bear. In every adverse situation you face, God makes a way of escape that will bring you out victoriously. Joseph, a young man who was tempted by immorality, fled the scene so fast that he left his coat behind (Genesis 39:6-11). Ask God to show you how to escape from emotionally-charged situations, and then don't let the door hit you on your way out, so to speak!

Respond as you would like to be responded to. Ask yourself how you would like for someone to treat you in a similar situation. Apply what is called the "golden rule" that is the thesis statement of the Word of God: *"So in*

everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12, NIV).

Avoid toxic people and toxic situations. Toxic people are those who speak negative things into your life such as "you are stupid, you should be ashamed, you will never amount to anything." Avoiding such people does not give you license to treat them rudely. You can be friendly without being friends. But do not make annoying, insensitive, rude, toxic people your close friends and confidants. Toxic people ignite the sparks of negative emotions in your life. The Bible says:

*Make no friendship with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways And set a snare for your soul.
(Proverbs 22:24-25, NKJV)*

Substitute any negative emotion for the words "angry" and "furious", and the warning is the same because you learn the ways of those with whom you associate. Your own attitudes, actions, and emotions are affected by the company you keep. If the people you hang out with are angry, you will soon become an angry person. If they are depressed, you become depressed. If they are constantly expressing a spirit of fear, soon you will be doing the same. If they are continually complaining about things, you will also develop a critical spirit. Toxic situations, similar to toxic people, are negative environments that you do not need to be in unless absolutely necessary. Simply refuse to go there.

Form positive relationships. Make friendships with people who are aggressively following the Lord and will

Speak the truth of God's Word into your life to encourage you. Make this declaration:

*My innermost circle will only be those
That I know are pure and godly.
They will be the only ones I allow to minister to me.
(Psalm 101:6, TPT)*

Learn what God's Word says about your negative emotions. For example, if you are struggling with anger, study all the Bible teaches about it. Commit to memory such verses as: "*A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control*" (Proverbs 19:11, NIV).

Pray about your negative emotions. Make your negative emotions a matter of prayer. God wants you to be set free from every emotion that has you in bondage. As you pray about your emotions, God will give you wisdom and power to deal with them.

Ask God to give you joy to replace your negative emotions. Spend your time with people who increase your joy in God. Speak positively, because many times you are less than joyful because you speak negatively and convince yourself that everything is bad. Find sources of joy in prayer, God's Word, a beautiful picture, a special letter, a good devotional book, worshipful music, or by ministering to others.

Don't give up if you fall. If you fall back into a negative emotional reaction, do not give up in your quest to eliminate these responses. You never fail until you quit trying! Remember that after your new spiritual birth, your soul—which is your mind, will, and emotions—must be supernaturally changed as you live out your new life.

You cannot change your soulish nature on your own. Self-effort will not rid you of habitual sin. Negative emotions cannot be broken through self-effort. You must let God supernaturally change your soulish realm—your mind, will, and emotions. For years, your sinful nature has controlled your body and your spirit. Now you must learn to let your redeemed spirit control your body and soul.

Do not become discouraged or give up. Eliminating negative emotions is a continuing process of spiritual growth. You never truly fail until you quit trying, and it is always too soon to quit.

Robbed Of Destiny

For God sees everything you do and His eyes are wide open as He observes every single habit you have.

Beware that your sins don't overtake you and the scars of your own conscience become the ropes that tie you up.

Those who choose wickedness die for lack of self-control, for their foolish ways lead them astray carrying them away as hostages--kidnapped captives robbed of destiny.

(Proverbs 5:21-23, TPT)

CHAPTER EIGHT

Forgetting The Pain Of The Past

One thing every prison inmate has in common: Plenty of time to think about the past. What you did wrong or right. What others did to you, wrong or right. About your parents and how you were raised. What you should have done differently in certain situations that would have prevented you from coming to prison.

Modern psychologists sometimes employ strategies that review the past of a troubled patient and emphasize that their present problems have resulted from their past. Many who undergo such therapy do not get relief from the pain of their past. They merely learn to blame others for their present conduct instead of taking personal responsibility for it.

There are two major areas of the past that affect your life. One is environmental: The parents you had, the home you came from, and the place where you grew up. The other is experience: The circumstances--whether bad or good--which you have personally encountered.

Some people were blessed to grow up in a loving, sharing, caring family. But others grew up in dysfunctional homes marked by disharmony, divorce, and physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse. Many wrestle with terrible memories of horrible situations through which they have passed along life's journey.

As long as you are living in the past, you will never have a future. You must deal with the pain of your past in order to fully embrace the future. Your past ended last night. That was yesterday. Today is a new day. Yesterday is over. You cannot change it. But as a believer in Jesus Christ,

you are no longer held captive by the past. Yesterday's dung can be today's fertilizer--meaning that the difficulties you have gone through in the past can actually be used to help you grow and mature spiritually.

A Man With A Painful Past

In the book of Genesis (chapters 30-50), the Bible tells the story of a young man named Joseph who endured a painful past through both environment and experience. Joseph's father, Jacob, had a history of deception. His mother, Rachel, was continually in conflict with Leah, Jacob's other wife, trying to gain his exclusive affection.

There was partiality in the home, which created rivalry and jealousy. Jacob preferred Rachel to Leah and favored Joseph before his other sons (Genesis 37:3-4). The special coat given to Joseph by his father was more than just a beautiful garment. It set Joseph apart as the favored child, one who would not work as the other brothers did, as it was not a garment that was worn by working shepherds.

Joseph's brothers were jealous, hated him (Genesis 37:8) and could not speak peaceably to him (Genesis 37:4). His brothers were also involved in a terrible sin of immorality at Shechem (Genesis 34).

Joseph lived in a family dominated by deceit, immorality, manipulation, envy, and hatred. For seventeen years, he was raised in this dysfunctional family. He could have blamed this environment for ruining his life and, in so doing, thrown away his future. (Are you doing this?)

Joseph had some pretty horrible personal experiences also. In Genesis 37, we learn how his brothers stripped him of his coat of many colors and threw him into a pit. Then they

sat down, cold and uncaring, their ears deaf to his cries. (Maybe you have also been crying for help, with no answer from those you love the most.)

Little did Joseph think that he would someday look back on this great tragedy as the most significant event in God's plan for his life. (Will the same be true for you? Will your incarceration actually be the turning point in your life?)

When an Egyptian caravan passed by, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. In Genesis 39, you can read how Joseph suffered another major setback when he was falsely accused of immoral conduct and thrown into prison. (If you are incarcerated for something you didn't do, you aren't the first. This happened to many innocent people in Bible days.)

In every difficult situation, the Lord was with Joseph (Genesis 39:3). God has been with you also, in that dysfunctional family and in the tragic experiences of your past. He saw the abuse. He saw the effects of alcohol and drugs in your family. He witnessed the dysfunctional behavior. Like Joseph, you have not been abandoned by God. He knows the pain you are experiencing, whether innocent or guilty of the offense that brought you to prison. God has been with you through it all. Otherwise, you might not even be reading the pages of this book! You could be dead, had it not been for His hand upon you.

Confinement is hard at any age, but Joseph was young and used to roaming the hillsides of Judea. Yet, he refused to give in to despair. In Genesis 39-40 we learn that Joseph was placed in a position of responsibility in the prison. He did not just barely make it through his prison sentence, he excelled. You can be an overwhelming success, even in

prison, because through Christ you are more than a conqueror (Romans 8:37).

Joseph faithfully ministered to others confined with him, yet they forgot their promises to help him in return. Humanly speaking, Joseph had every right to develop a bitter spirit. He was failed by family and friends, falsely accused, and forgotten. Instead of bemoaning his fate, however, Joseph used each setback to the best of his ability. Little did he know that every negative circumstance was bringing him nearer his God-given destiny. And this is what God wants to do for you too. Every painful situation of your life can be used by God to help you achieve your destiny if you will keep your focus on Him instead of your past or present circumstances.

Joseph was supernaturally accelerated into his destiny when he was called upon to interpret a dream for Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. Pharaoh said to Joseph: *"I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it"* (Genesis 41:15, NIV).

Through revelation from God, Joseph interpreted the dream and gave sound advice regarding how to prepare for the forthcoming famine of which it warned. Joseph was immediately released from prison, became a ruler in Egypt, and saved the then-known world from death by famine. Every tragic circumstance of Joseph's life led him to this divine destiny. God was not only raising him up to save the world, but also to save his own life.

Have you stopped to think that coming to prison may have saved your life? If you were not incarcerated, you might have been killed had you continued on the path you were

traveling. You also would not be holding this book in your hands and learning how your life can change.

Negative experiences and difficult environments cannot stop God's purpose for your life unless you allow them to do so. If you hold on to the pain of the past with bitterness and unforgiveness, then you will abort your own future.

When Joseph married, the names he gave his two children were symbolic of the experiences through which he had passed (Genesis 41:51-52). The first child was named Manasseh, meaning "*God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house.*" Joseph didn't actually forget his father's house, but he forgot the pain associated with the events that happened there. You may never forget the difficulties of past events, but God wants to heal you of the pain of these experiences. Joseph's second son was named Ephraim, meaning "*God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.*" Joseph was fruitful in affliction because he let God heal him of the pain of his past.

The only way you will be able to embrace the future God has for you is to let go of the past. When you do this, something supernatural happens. You will remember past events, but like Joseph, the pain of those events will be healed. It is much like the scar left by a serious injury. You still have a scar and you can recall the injury that caused it, but you no longer experience the pain. Don't keep picking the scab off your old scars by rehearsing all of the bad things you experienced. Let the scars of your past heal.

Joseph went through many difficulties, but God used them all to prepare him to rise up in a time of need and save the then-known world from famine. What great thing does God have planned for you? How will He use the experiences of your painful past to fulfill your destiny? Who will be saved

or lost based on the decisions you make and the attitudes you demonstrate when you confront difficulties?

When Joseph's brothers stood before him in Egypt, they didn't even recognize him. Joseph declared:

... "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God."
(Genesis 45:4-8, NIV)

Joseph realized that the painful events of his past were not just "tough luck" or "unfortunate circumstances." He declared, "*It was not you who sent me here, but God!*" His brothers meant it as evil, but God meant it for good (Genesis 50:20).

These two words--but God--can change your world! The pain of your past can be healed when you come to realize that God is using all that has happened to you--both the good and the evil--to work together to accomplish His purposes in your life:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28, KJV)

As a child, Joseph had dreams and visions of being in a place of responsibility and authority. All through the long and difficult years, Joseph never lost that dream. When at last he stood in the place of his God-appointed destiny, he remembered the dream: *"And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed"* (Genesis 42:9).

God has a plan for your life. He has a destiny for your future. Don't let the pain of your past abort your future. In order to begin to dream again, you must relinquish the "if only I had" and the "if only I hadn't" regrets of the past. Do not let your past define your future.

In Genesis 50, we read the story of Joseph's death. On his deathbed, Joseph requested that his body be placed in a coffin so that someday when Israel returned to their promised land, his bones could be taken with them.

Even in death, Joseph looked towards the future instead of the past. For hundreds of years, through all the dark days of Israel's slavery, his coffin provided hope. It was a silent promise that someday God would move in behalf of His people.

Today, we do not have a coffin, but we look back to the empty tomb of Jesus Christ. It stands as a silent witness that dead hopes and dreams can be supernaturally resurrected.

The enemy will seize every opportunity to remind you of your past, but you are no longer living on the basis of what you have or have not done. You stand righteous before God on the basis of what He has done. If you want to move ahead, you can't keep looking in the rear-view mirror. Do not remain a prisoner of your past.

Putting The Past In The Past

A young woman named Denise, who had served many years in a state prison, was angry and bitter against God. She blamed Him for her circumstances and blamed others for her incarceration. One night she came into the prison chapel where we were ministering and unloaded her negative feelings on one of our Christian workers who listened patiently until she finished her tirade.

Then the worker told her, "Denise, there is nothing I can do to help you, but I want you to know that God loves you. If you will come to this class to learn and act upon what is in this book--the Bible--things will change in your life. I can't help you, but God can!"

Denise listened to this advice, returned to the Bible studies, and eventually gave her heart to the Lord. She finished her education, became a leader in the prison church, and served on the prison praise and worship team and as the chaplain's assistant. She shared the Gospel with other inmates, and lived an exemplary life before both inmates and staff. She put her past where it belonged. In the past!

Years later, Denise died in prison. She never again experienced freedom in the outside world, but she was freed spiritually and she fulfilled her divine destiny. Over the years of her incarceration, Denise impacted so many lives that there had to be a lottery drawing, so to speak, to determine who could attend her memorial service in the prison gym. After about 1,000 inmates had been selected, the service had to be closed due to lack of space.

After her conversion to Christ, Denise lived the remainder of her life behind high walls, barbed wire, and in the shadow of the guard towers. But Denise discovered and fulfilled her divine purpose! The ministry that began through her life continues to this day in the lives of the many women she led to the Lord. Although Denise never walked out of those prison gates, she walked through Heaven's gate as a free woman, right into the presence of her Lord and Savior.

CHAPTER NINE

Controlling Your Mind

Prison gives you a lot of time to think, and the thoughts that flood your mind are not always good. Some of the greatest challenges you will have in living a new life will occur in your mind.

Your mind is one of the major spiritual battlefields. That is where Satan brings up accusations of your past, plants his deceiving lies, and aborts your hope for the future. If you are to live a changed life, you must--through the power of the Holy Spirit--take control of your mind.

True change comes from the inside out which means that your heart and mind must be changed. Spiritual change must be understood with a spiritual mind because...

...the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14, NKJV)

Ask God right now to give you a spiritual mind to understand the revelation that He wants you to receive from the message in this chapter.

The Major Battlefield

The major battlefield where Satan wages war against you is in your heart and mind--at the very center of your being--where your moral, spiritual, and mental abilities are located. He attacks at your most vulnerable point where your thoughts originate, where you receive God's Word and have faith to believe His promises.

Throughout the ages, the heart has been referred to as a source of virtue, love, and intelligence. Many ancient cultures, including the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and the Greeks assert that the heart is the primary organ responsible for influencing and directing your emotions and decision-making abilities. Similar perspectives are found in many religions. Even with all of these traditions and common metaphors such as "I love you with all my heart", most of us have been taught that the heart is just a muscle that pumps blood and maintains circulation.

Neuroscientists have recently discovered new information about the heart, however, that reveals it is far more complex. They have found that the heart has its own independent complex nervous system referred to as "the brain in the heart." There are at least forty thousand neurons (nerve cells) in the heart—as many as are found in various parts of the brain.

The heart communicates with the brain and the rest of the body in three ways: Neurologically (through transmissions of nerve impulses); biochemically (through hormones and neurotransmitters); and biophysically (through pressure waves). Growing scientific evidence suggests that the heart may communicate with the brain and body in a fourth way—energetically through electromagnetic field interactions. Through these complex communication systems, the heart has significant influence on the function of the brain, continually sending the brain extensive emotional and intuitive signals.

This scientific data makes it clear why Satan's objective is to attack at the very center of man's existence--his innermost being which is his heart and mind. In explaining the source from which man is defiled and where sin is

conceived, Jesus said:

*For from within, (that is) out of the heart of man, come base and wicked thoughts: sexual immorality, stealing, murder, adultery, Coveting (a greedy desire to have more wealth), dangerous and destructive wickedness, deceit; unrestrained (indecent) conduct; an evil eye (envy), slander (evil speaking, misrepresentation, abusiveness); pride—(that is) the sin of an uplifted heart against God and man; foolishness (folly, lack of sense, recklessness, thoughtlessness). All these evil (purposes and desires) come from within, and they make the man unclean and render him unhallowed.
(Mark 7:21-23, AMP)*

Understanding this relationship between your heart and brain is essential if you are to win the battle for your mind.

Where Sin Is Conceived

It is in man's heart—in his innermost being—where sin is conceived. It was in Satan's heart that sin originated when he became lifted up because of his beauty (Ezekiel 28:17). It was in his heart that he exalted himself above God (Isaiah 14:13-14). The sin of Ananias and Sapphira also originated in their hearts (Acts 5:3).

The Greek word for "heart" is *kardia*, which includes man's entire mental and moral activity—in other words, the inner man. The heart and mind are linked and are where the emotions, desires, perceptions, thoughts, understanding, reasoning powers, conscience, intentions, will, and imagination reside. What is in a man's heart and mind determines what he is: "*For as he thinks in his heart, so is he*" (Proverbs 23:7, NKJV).

Jesus told the Pharisees:

Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. (Matthew 12:34-35, NKJV)

These verses reveal that man's heart is his innermost being where either good or evil resides. A person's words and actions are determined by what is in his heart, and his heart is influenced by his mind. If there is hatred, anger, jealousy, or pride in an individual's mind, then these negative emotions will affect his heart and will be manifested in his words and actions.

The heart is the center of man's existence. It is in the heart that man receives the Word, is convicted by the Holy Spirit, and is saved (Romans 10:8-10). It is in the heart—within man's innermost being—where he has faith to believe God's Word and His promises or else harbors doubt and unbelief that hinders him from receiving what he needs from God. Jesus said, *“Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen it shall be granted him” (Mark 11:22-23, NAS).*

The Greek word used to refer to the mind is *nous*, which is used to describe the mental functions of perception, understanding, knowing, feeling, judging, and determining. The mind is comprised of the will, emotions, thoughts, and imagination.

Now do you understand why the mind is the most important spiritual battlefield?

The Battle Is Spiritual

Your mind is Satan's major arena of attack and is where spiritual battles must be fought and won. It is in your mind where Satan is unleashing his all-out war. The war you are fighting is not against flesh and blood. It is not a battle with your cell-mate, your employer, or your family. It is a battle with the spiritual powers operating behind them.

This is not a battle that can be fought through the power of positive thinking, carnal knowledge, modern psychological techniques, or your limited mental abilities. It is a spiritual battle which must be fought and won by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Satan's strategy is to bombard your mind with fiery darts of unbelief, fear, worry, confusion, temptation, depression, oppression, and deception. He will try to fill your mind with evil desires and lusts of the flesh. Anxiety, fear, defeat, and discouragement are all mental tactics that result in hopelessness and despair. Shame is another weapon that the enemy will use to defeat you.

But Satan's power over your mind has been broken! God has made total provision for you to be victorious in every battle, including the battle for your mind. Satan has no claim over you whatsoever! *"For sin shall not have dominion over you..."* (Romans 6:14). You are no longer living in the kingdom of darkness under Satan's dominion. You are a joint-heir with Christ in the Kingdom of God.

Your mind is Satan's major point of attack, and it is here where the war must be fought and won. Paul referred to this

battle of the mind explaining:

For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. (Romans 7:22-23, NIV)

In these verses, Paul was speaking of the carnal desires of the flesh which war against the mind and try to make it a slave to the old carnal nature. Paul continues by explaining that through Christ believers have been set free from this old nature with its sinful desires, thoughts, and attitudes. You are now empowered to serve God with your mind and your heart. In Romans 8:2-3, Paul explains how sin is deprived of its power over you. The power of sin which once ruled your heart and mind has been broken, and you are no longer a slave to the sinful desires of your carnal nature.

Jesus destroyed the works of the devil and set you free from the power of sin. You were once alienated, with your mind separated from God. You were bound by your own stubborn, selfish will and you were living your life to please your flesh. But now, through Jesus, your heart and mind have been cleansed and set free from the power of sin. It no longer has dominion over you. You are no longer under Satan's control. You are now a prisoner--a servant--of the Lord. You have been taken captive by Jesus Christ! You are being renewed spiritually each day because you have been reconciled to God (Colossians 1:21-23).

Take Aggressive Action

James told believers, “*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*” (James 4:7,

KJV). The word "submit" as used here means to yield by an act of your will. Do not succumb to the attacks of the enemy on your mind. Submit your mind to God and yield it to Him.

The Greek word for "resist" in this verse means "to set against and to withstand." You must rise up in the power of God and battle the evil powers that are coming against you. You must actively and aggressively oppose Satan by ejecting evil and negative thoughts from your mind.

The type of resisting of which James speaks that forces Satan to flee is not mind over matter or positive thinking. It is not just a matter of repeating some sort of positive mantra or waiting passively to see what will happen in your spiritual battles. If someone was attacking a child, a friend, or a pet that you love, would you sit passively by and let them beat the life out of them? No you would not! You would take aggressive action to stop the attack.

The same is true in the spirit world. Satan is out to destroy you by controlling your mind. Do not sit by and let him do it. Do not try to use carnal weapons of your own wisdom, but use the power of the Holy Spirit to demolish arguments and every sinful thought that rises up within you. You must aggressively take captive every thought that comes into your mind.

If you submit to God and resist the devil, he will flee. He will actually take off running! That is the promise. Satan is not afraid of you. He is not going to retreat from you. But he will run from the one who is in you, as you resist in the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Six Powerful Strategies

Here are six powerful spiritual strategies to use in the battle for your mind.

Strategy Number 1: Set your mind for victory.

Determine that you will be a victor, not a victim of Satan's attacks on your mind. You can either set your mind for victory or for defeat. If you are continually thinking thoughts of failure, you are going to be defeated. If you have your mind continually fixed on the victory Jesus made possible for you through His death on Calvary, then you will be victorious. *"For as he thinks in his heart, so is he..." (Proverbs 23:7,NKJV).*

Strategy Number 2: Refuse to give Satan access to your mind.

The minute Satan tries to seize control of your mind with improper thoughts, stop him in his tracks. When evil thoughts come, resist them immediately in the name of the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit. What you program into a computer is exactly what is going to come out. If what you program is one-hundred percent correct, the output will be one-hundred percent accurate. If you program errors, you will retrieve erroneous output.

The same principle is true regarding your mind. The thoughts, desires, and imaginations which you allow to fill your mind are exactly what will be expressed through your words and manifested in your life.

Take aggressive action against the enemy. Refuse to allow Satan to plant even one thought in your mind. If your mind is in turmoil, filled with fear or worry concerning your circumstances, then you must take control of these negative thoughts. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, take authority over the enemy and reject every thought he tries

to plant in your mind.

Whenever Satan tries to attack your mind, tell him: “Satan, you are a liar! You no longer have control over me. You have no control over my mind, thoughts, will, or emotions. God has not given me a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound, well-disciplined mind.”

Do not let Satan enter your mind through ungodly thoughts, pornographic material, bad reports from others, or negative emotions. Stop these things before they take control of your mind.

Strategy Number 3: Arm yourself with the mind of Christ. You do this by confessing and believing what the Word declares--that the same mind that is in Christ dwells in you.

Paul told the Corinthians, “*But we have the mind of Christ, the Messiah, and do hold the thoughts (feelings and purposes) of His heart*” (1 Corinthians 2:16, AMP). God has planned that believers be transformed into Christ’s image (Romans 8:29), and this transformation takes place by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18).

As you fill your mind with the Word of God, you will be continually transformed. As your mind, thoughts, will, emotions, desires, and purposes are renewed through the Word, you become governed by the Holy Spirit and will begin to manifest the mind of Christ in your thoughts, your words, your attitudes, and your actions.

Paul told Timothy: “*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind*” (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV). The Greek word for *sound* is

sophronismos, which is a calling to soundness of mind or self-control. It means "to discipline". Paul was encouraging Timothy to develop a strong, sound, well-disciplined mind. He was instructing him to discipline his mind by taking authority over it and focusing his thoughts on fulfilling the ministry to which God had called him. Take authority over your mind today. Fill your mind with thoughts of the destiny God has planned for you and how you will fulfill it.

Paul warned New Testament believers not to become weary and faint in their minds, due to the great opposition and persecution they were facing. He told them:

Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of (our) faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that hath endured such gainsaying of sinners against himself, that ye wax not weary, fainting in your souls.
(Hebrews 12:1-3, ASV)

The Greek word for *faint* means "to unloose, relax, and make weak." Satan wants you to become so overwhelmed by your circumstances, and so weary fighting the battles that you face day-after-day, that you faint spiritually.

You may be at this dangerous point right now where you are spiritually weary and have fainted in your mind. You may be so tired of spiritual battles that you are ready to give up. You may be weary of resisting temptation. Your mind may be in constant turmoil. You may be depressed or

severely oppressed by the enemy.

Whatever strategy Satan may be using to attack your mind, don't give in to it! God has made it possible for you to walk in one-hundred percent victory over all the power of enemy. The moment you faint in your mind and stop resisting Satan's attacks, you are surrendering yourself into his hands. You are defeated only when you fail to fight.

Strategy Number 4: Strengthen your mind for battle.

There will never be a day that Satan will not try to seize control of your thoughts. That is why it is important to fill your mind each day with God's Word and pray each morning for God to protect and program your thoughts that day.

Strategy Number 5: Use your spiritual weapons. God does not expect you to face Satan and the evil forces of wickedness in your own strength. God has given you authority over all the power of Satan through the Holy Spirit within you. He has provided powerful spiritual armor that makes you invulnerable and invincible against Satan's attacks. He has armed you with weapons of spiritual warfare, enabling you to pull down every stronghold of the enemy:

*The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.
(2 Corinthians 10:4-5, NIV)*

God has given you the power to pull down Satan's strongholds and totally demolish them. But your victory

over Satan is not automatic. Victory is yours only as you arm yourself for battle, use your spiritual weapons of warfare, resist Satan, and enforce the victory Jesus secured on the cross.

Strategy Number 6: Remain true to the faith. You were once alienated from God mentally, but now your mind has been reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ. Remain true to the faith you received through the gospel and you will eventually be presented before the throne of God without blemish:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation--if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven... (Colossians 1:21-23, NIV)

A Totally Victorious Mind

Use the strategies discussed in this chapter to defeat Satan's attacks against your mind. Refuse to be intimidated. Become spiritually aggressive. Face every circumstance, every problem, every challenge, and every opportunity in the power of a one-hundred percent victorious mind.

Keep your focus on God as you implement these strategies and you will have peace, despite the circumstances around you and despite the attempts of the enemy to seize control of your mind. The Word declares:

You will guard him and keep him in perfect and constant peace whose mind [both its inclination and its character] is stayed on You, because he commits himself to You, leans on You, and hopes confidently in You. So trust in the Lord (commit yourself to Him, lean on Him, hope confidently in Him) forever; for the Lord God is an everlasting Rock [the Rock of Ages]. (Isaiah 26:3-4, AMP)

You cannot function successfully in your new life until you eliminate your old mentality. You may be incarcerated physically, but you can be liberated mentally. True freedom is a state of mind rather than a state of being. There are many people outside prison walls who think they are free but who are living in mental, emotional, and spiritual bondage.

True freedom is not doing as you please, but it is willingly serving God rather than being controlled by the dictates of your flesh.

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (Romans 6:17-18, NIV)

You were imprisoned as a slave to sin before you ever came to prison. You are now a captive of Christ, a servant of righteousness, a prisoner of the Lord.

Keep Your Mind Focused On God

Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Hebrews 7:25, NIV)

"You may feel isolated because it appears no one truly understands what you are experiencing. but take heart, Jesus knows and is praying for you.

Such was the case for Peter. As the crucifixion neared, Jesus discerned Peter would face especially rigorous sifting by the enemy. So the Savior told His disciple, *'I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers'* (Luke 22:32). In other words, "The time ahead will be tough, but I'm with you. And when you've made it through, support others who are hurting.'

The same is true for you. You will survive this. So don't give up or stop trusting Him. Just focus on the wisdom and power of Jesus' prayers for you and know that He is sustaining you every step of the way."

-Dr. Charles Stanley

CHAPTER TEN

Mastering Your Mouth

In generating electricity, both a positive and negative wire are required to produce power. The insulation from each must be stripped down and fastened into a switch or receptacle. This stripping down process is not easy, but it is necessary in order to produce power. If you hook up only the positive wire, you cannot generate power because you get no electrical current. There is no light to dispel the darkness. You must put the negative and the positive wires together. When you do that and then flip the switch, the light comes on.

The same is true in the spiritual world. We must strip down and expose the negatives in our lives in order to receive positive input from God and produce spiritual power. We must deal with the negative first so we can see where positive input is needed.

That is what we are doing in this section of this book. In the previous chapter, we discussed how to eliminate sinful thoughts that control your mind. This chapter concerns mastering the words that come out of your mouth and--as you will learn--we are not just talking about eliminating profane curse-words.

Words Are Important

The Bible declares that your words are extremely powerful. In fact, it says that *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and they who indulge it shall eat the fruit of it (for death or life)"* (Proverbs 18:21, AMP). Your words affect your life and destiny! You are either speaking words of blessing or cursing, faith or unbelief, victory or defeat, abundance or lack, life or death.

If you continually speak negative words of defeat and discouragement, then you are setting the course of your life to live in defeat and discouragement. If you constantly talk about your problems, you will continue to live with the focus on your problems. The words coming out of your own mouth will hinder you from taking ownership of God's promises and fulfilling your destiny.

If you take control over your tongue, however, and fill your mouth with the Word of God and speak it forth by faith, you will be setting your course to live in victory. By your own confession, you will take possession of God's promises. Through confession, you received salvation:

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10:9-10, NIV)

Other spiritual promises--such as healing and deliverance--are received by confession also.

The words you speak are powerful in another way, in that the angels of God are released or hindered to work in your behalf by the words that come out of your mouth. Hebrews 1:14 reveals that angels are spirits sent from God to minister in behalf of the heirs of salvation.

Angels are not your personal errand boys and you cannot command them to do your selfish bidding. They are not entertainers, nor are they just mere spectators of what is going on in your life. Angels are divine messengers dispatched by the Word of God:

Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, Heeding the voice of His word. (Psalm 103:20, KJV)

Angels heed the voice of God's Word. Negative words of fear and unbelief do nothing to improve your situation when you face challenges. Speak God's Word into your circumstances, and angels will be dispatched to minister in your behalf. Of course in order to do this, you must know God's Word and that only comes by applying yourself diligently to study it:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15, NKJV)

As a believer, the angels of God encamp around you. The Bible says, "*The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and he delivers them*" (Psalm 34:7, NIV). If you fear God--and you do this by honoring and respecting Him--then an angel is camping out right there in your cell with you.

This is why God wants to bring you into a new dimension of spiritual authority where your words, spoken with power and invested in the promises of God, will enable you to conquer every stronghold of the enemy. Before you can enter this powerful realm of spiritual authority, however, you must gain control of your tongue.

The Untamable Tongue

Although the tongue is a little member of your body, it is very powerful:

For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.
(James 3:1-8, NKJV)

As you read through this passage did you note the fact that through the tongue, your whole being can be defiled: Your mind, soul, and spirit. Did you also notice that the tongue can never be tamed by man? Only when you yield your tongue to God can it be controlled. Just like a ferocious animal, your tongue can never be left unguarded!

The Bible compares the tongue to:

- A fire: James 3:5
- A burning fire: Proverbs 16:27
- A world of iniquity: James 3:6
- A beast that needs taming: James 3:7-8
- A fountain of fresh or bitter water: James 3:11
- A tree bearing either good or evil: James 3:12
- An unruly evil: James 3:8
- Deadly poison: James 3:8

- A sharp razor: Psalms 52:2
- A sharp sword: Psalms 57:4
- A poisonous serpent: Psalms 140:3
- A deep pit: Proverbs 22:14

As these scriptures reflect, the tongue is a powerful force of evil. When brought under the control of the Holy Spirit, however, this power can be used for good--to speak forth God's Word of hope, salvation, faith, healing, and deliverance.

It Comes From Your Heart

As you learned in the previous chapter, the heart and mind are intricately related and that is why the Bible says what is in a man's heart determines his actions and the words coming out of his mouth. If an individual's heart is filled with negative thoughts of hatred, anger, jealousy, pride, bitterness, and strife then that is exactly what will come out of his mouth. If his heart is filled with carnal thoughts and lusts of the flesh, then these sins will be manifested in his thoughts and through his words.

On the other hand, if an individual's heart and mind are filled with positive thoughts of faith, love, joy, and peace, that is what will come out of his mouth. If his desires are centered on God and fulfilling His will, then he will speak faith-filled words.

Even though a person claims to be a Christian and has an outward appearance of righteousness, if his heart and mind are not pure, the words coming out of his mouth will not be pure. James warns that with our tongues...

...we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.
(James 3:9-12, NKJV)

A heart that is corrupted by jealousy, anger, pride, and bitterness cannot produce the fruit of good, wholesome words. The heart and mind must first be cleansed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. The good treasure stored up in a believer's heart and mind is the powerful, living Word of God. Jesus said, "*..the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life*" (John 6:63, NKJV). The Word is not just a slogan or a mantra. The Word of God is living and active, meaning it can accomplish great things in your life and circumstances.

When your heart and mind are saturated with the Word of God, then you will speak forth pure, powerful, faith-filled words that are spirit and life to those who hear them. If the treasures in your heart are evil--filled with lust, carnal desires, greed, jealousy, pride and bitterness--then your mouth will spew forth evil things.

Disciplining Your Tongue

God requires you to discipline your tongue and bring it under the control of the Holy Spirit. You are commanded: "*Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit*" (Psalm 34:13, AMP). King Solomon warned: "*Do not allow your mouth to cause your body to sin*" (Ecclesiastes 5:6, AMP). The Apostle Peter said: "*Whoever*

would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech” (1 Peter 3:10, NIV).

Controlling your tongue does not happen automatically. Like King David, you must purpose in your heart that you will not sin with your mouth. David said, *“I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress” (Psalm 17:3, NKJV).* He also said, *“I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me” (Psalm 39:1, NKJV).* The word "keep" is translated from a Hebrew word which means to guard or protect. You must guard your tongue and keep close watch over the words you are speaking. You must restrain your tongue just as a horse is restrained with a bridle in its mouth.

Paul told the Ephesians: *“Let no foul or polluting language, nor evil word, nor unwholesome or worthless talk (ever) come out of your mouth; but only such (speech) as is good and beneficial to the spiritual progress of others, as is fitting to the need and the occasion, that it may be blessing and give grace (God’s favor) to those who hear it” (Ephesians 4:29, 31-32, AMP).* Paul said you are to speak blessings instead of cursing.

Analyze your words today. Are you speaking foul words or polluted language? Are you conversing with evil and unwholesome words, telling dirty jokes, and using profanity? Determine to speak only what is good and beneficial and what is wholesome and fitting to the need or occasion.

Mandatory Control

It is one thing to fall into a trap set by Satan--as he has many devious methods to ensnare you. It is quite another to snare yourself by your own mouth! Meditate on these powerful verses today. They illustrate why gaining control of your tongue is mandatory.

You can snare yourself with your own words. *"You are snared by the words of your mouth; You are taken by the words of your mouth" (Proverbs 6:2, NKJV).*

Your words can separate you from God. The Bible speaks of those *"Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?" (Psalms 12:4, KJV).*

Your words can create a breach--an opening--in your spirit. *"A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit" (Proverbs 15:4, KJV).*

Satan uses your lips to affect your soul. *"A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul" (Proverbs 18:7, KJV).*

You keep yourself from trouble by controlling your tongue. *"He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity" (Proverbs 21:23, NIV).*

Your tongue affects your whole body. *"And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell" (James 3:6, NKJV).*

Your tongue affects your whole life. *"He who guards his mouth preserves his life, But he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction" (Proverbs 13:3, NKJV).*

Biblical Warnings

Here is a list of the types of speech that the Bible warns against. We are commanded to refrain from speaking:

Covetous words. *"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have..." (Hebrews 13:5, NIV)*

Idol words. *"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36, KJV).*

Foolish words. *"The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly" (Proverbs 15:14, NIV).*

Unprofitable words. *"Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen" (2 Timothy 2:14, NIV).*

Fables and commandments of men. *"Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth" (Titus 1:14, KJV).*

Evil about things you do not understand. *"But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption" (2 Peter 2:12, NKJV).*

Flattering words. *"You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed--God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else" (1 Thessalonians 2:5-6, NIV).*

Vain words. *"They speak vanity every one with his neighbor" (Psalms 12:2, KJV).*

Proud words. *"...with their mouth they speak proudly" (Psalms 17:10, KJV).*

Enticing words. *"And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words" (Colossians 2:4, KJV).*
Enticing words sound wise but are not plausible.

Boastful words. *"How long shall they utter and speak hard things? And all the workers of iniquity boast themselves" (Psalms 94:4, KJV).*

Words that misuse God's name. *"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name" (Exodus 20:7, NIV).*

Cursing and bitter words. *"Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (Romans 3:14, KJV).*

Lies. *"Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous" (Psalms 31:18, KJV).*

Malicious words against others. *"So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us" (3 John 10, NIV).*

Backbiting words. *"...and has no slander on his tongue,*

who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman" (Psalms 15:3, NIV).

Words of discord. *"...one who sows discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:19, NKJV).*

Contentious words. *"A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calls for blows" (Proverbs 18:6, NKJV).*

Words of strife. *"You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues" (Psalms 31:20, NKJV).*

Devouring and deceitful words. *"You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue!" (Psalms 52:4, NIV).*

Froward and perverse words. *"Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips" (Proverbs 4:24, NIV).*

Mischievous words. *"They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things and imagine deceits all the day long" (Psalms 38:12, KJV).*

Tale-bearing words. *"A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter" (Proverbs 11:13, NKJV).*

Filthy words. *"But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips" (Colossians 3:8, NIV).*

Victory Over The Tongue

Your tongue is a powerful force, but through the power of the Holy Spirit and the application of principles from God's Word it can be controlled. Here are some biblical strategies that will enable you to gain control of your tongue.

Get your heart right with God. The first step in gaining victory over the tongue is to get your heart right with God because...

...the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him unclean.
(Matthew 15:18-20, NIV)

Your mouth speaks what is in your heart. If your heart is not right, your tongue will reveal it. Take the first step in using your tongue properly and get your heart right with God. The Bible explains...

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.
(Romans 10:9-10, NIV)

Recognize your responsibility. Recognize that you will be held responsible for the words that come out of your mouth:

But I tell you that men will have to give account on

the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned. (Matthew 12:36-37)

Keep your words few and simple. The more you talk, the greater the opportunity to sin with your words.

When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. (Proverbs 10:19, NIV)

Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. (Matthew 5:37, NIV).

Realize that your words reflect on the Gospel. Your conversation reflects on the Lord, so you must set a good example by what you say:

...set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12, NIV)

What comes out of your mouth, both positive and negative words, are observed by those around you:

Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." (Psalms 126:2, NIV)

Think before you speak. Take time to think about what you are going to say. The Bible warns:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear; slow to speak, slow to wrath. (James 1:19, KJV)

If you have played the fool and exalted yourself, or if you have planned evil, clap your hand over your mouth! (Proverbs 30:32, NIV)

The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil. (Proverbs 15:28, NIV)

Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue. (Proverbs 17:28, NIV)

Before you speak, think on these verses:

The wise in heart are called prudent, understanding, and knowing, and winsome speech increases learning [in both speaker and listener]. (Proverbs 16:21, AMP)

The mind of the wise instructs his mouth, and adds learning and persuasiveness to his lips. (Proverbs 16:23, AMP)

A man has joy in making an apt answer, and a word spoken at the right moment--how good it is! (Proverbs 15:23, AMP)

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. (Proverbs 25:11, KJV)

He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity. (Proverbs 21:23, NIV)

He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin. (Proverbs 13:3, NIV)

Here are some practical questions to think about before you speak:

- Will what I am about to say bring glory to God?
- Is it the truth?
- Is it fair to all concerned?
- Will it be beneficial to all concerned?
- Will it edify others?
- Have I talked to the person I am talking about?
- Is what I am saying a fact that needs to be shared or is what I am saying based on rumors and does not need to be said?
- Is it absolutely necessary that I share this?

Separate yourself from those who cannot control their tongues. Here is a great verse to remember in prison: *"Stay away from a foolish man, for you will not find knowledge on his lips"* (Proverbs 14:7, NIV). Do not hang out with such people and permit them to pour their filthy and godless conversations into your spirit.

Learn the power of peaceful words. *"Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone"* (Proverbs 25:15, NIV).

Recognize your tongue is a weapon. Your tongue is a weapon you can use to overcome the enemy: *"And they overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony..."* (Revelation 12:11, KJV).

Taking Control

As you have learned, scriptures confirm that your tongue can be controlled through the power of God, but *you* must take the initiative to control it. The following verses indicate actions you must take:

*For he that will love life, and see good days, **let him** refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. (1 Peter 3:10, KJV)*

***Let your** conversation be without covetousness... (Hebrews 13:5, KJV)*

*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to **put off** your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to **put on** the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you **must put off** falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. (Ephesians 4:22-25, NIV)*

*But now also **put off**...filthy communication out of your mouth. (Colossians 3:8, NKJV)*

***Let** no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. (Ephesians 4:29, KJV)*

***Let all**...evil speaking be put away from you... (Ephesians 4:31, KJV)*

*...**be** holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, **be** holy; for I am holy. (1 Peter 1:15-16)*

***Put away** perversity from your mouth; **keep** corrupt talk far from your lips. (Proverbs 4:24, NIV)*

***Keep** your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. (Psalms 34:13, NIV)*

*I said, **I will take heed** to my ways, **that I sin not** with my*

*tongue: **I will keep** my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. (Psalms 39:1, KJV)*

Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; And to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God. (Psalms 50:23, NKJV)

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. (Exodus 20:7, NIV)

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. (Exodus 20:16, NIV)

Speaking God's Word

Life and death are in the power of your tongue. As you bring your tongue under the control of the Holy Spirit and enter into a new dimension of spiritual authority, you will be able to confront the enemy successfully. By speaking God's Word in every situation that you experience, you will destroy the strongholds of the enemy by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As you speak God's Word, it will be a mighty, indestructible weapon in your mouth that will force the enemy to retreat out of your life and circumstances. The words you speak will demolish every obstacle of the enemy that is blocking you from taking possession of God's promises.

As you take authority over your tongue, God will give you words of wisdom and knowledge beyond your natural understanding. His Word will be a powerful spiritual weapon which will enable you to overcome Satan and his horde of demons.

When you know the written and living Word is resident within you and you speak what He directs you to speak, there will be no struggle, no striving to make something happen, no uncertainty. You will speak with authority in the name of Jesus and it will be done. You will not have to "pray it down" or "work it up." You simply speak, and it will happen. God has promised:

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11, NKJV)

The Word of God in your mouth is alive with the power of God. Paul said, *"For the Word that God speaks is alive and full of power—making it active, operative, energizing and effective"* (Hebrews 4:12, AMP).

Promises, Prayers, And Purpose

In closing, here are some promises to claim in regards to your tongue, some prayers to pray, and an important purpose to establish regarding the words that come out of your mouth.

Claim these promises:

...I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness; there is nothing froward or perverse in them. (Proverbs 8:6-8, KJV)

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I

*please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.
(Isaiah 55:11, NKJV)*

Pray these prayers:

*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right
spirit within me. (Psalm 51:10, KJV)*

*Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my
lips. (Psalms 141:3, KJV)*

*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart,
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my
redeemer. (Psalms 19:14, KJV)*

Establish this purpose:

*You have tested my heart; You have visited me in the night;
You have tried me and have found nothing; I have purposed
that my mouth shall not transgress. (Psalms 17:3, NKJV)*

As a believer...

"Your motives and aspirations can only be understood by those who have attained the same spiritual level.

So do not, vainly and foolishly, expect understanding from others.

Do not misjudge them for not giving it. Yours is a foreign language to them."

(May 14 devotional
God Calling,
edited by A.J. Russell.)

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Retaining And Repairing Relationships

A personal relationship is a significant connection between two or more people and includes those forged through friendship, family, and marriage.

Incarceration affects all of your personal relationships in one way or another. In order to retain or repair personal relationships, you must understand how your imprisonment affects your children, parents, spouse, friends, relatives, and society at large.

Because you are living for a time in prison, you must also learn how to form positive relationships and avoid negative ones during your incarceration. In prison, just as in the outside world, there are both positive and negative influences. You must make a decision relative to the type of life you want to live, who you will choose as friends, and how you will respond to authority.

Your Relationships

Here is a list of relationships, some or all of which may relate to you.

Prison staff, inmates, and visitors. Because you are incarcerated, you have a unique set of relationships that involve prison staff, inmates, and visitors.

Children. Your children can develop feelings of anger, resentment, and abandonment in the absence of a parent.

Parents. The parents of an incarcerated person often feel they are at fault for their son or daughter being in jail. They may think they were not good parents.

Other relatives. Extended family, such as grandparents, siblings, aunts or uncles, and others can also be affected by your incarceration. Some may blame you and abandon you. Others may feel partially responsible for your situation.

Spouse. The loss of a spouse through incarceration--especially if it is a lengthy sentence--sometimes results in a reevaluation of the commitment to the absentee mate. Your spouse may feel abandoned and resentful. They may adjust to life without you, divorce you, or form new significant relationships.

Friends. Friends may feel betrayed and abandon you. They may also feel uneasy about maintaining contact with you, not knowing what to say or do.

Society. Upon your release from prison, you may have to battle stereotypes imposed by society on those who have been incarcerated. You may have difficulty in finding a job after your release. You may encounter discrimination from people who think that you cannot possibly reintegrate to become a productive member of society.

If this all sounds quite negative, it is because this is a worst case scenario. If you have the support of your spouse, parents, relatives, and friends and your children remain unaffected by your incarceration, then you are greatly blessed. Nourish and cherish these relationships! But if your personal relationships are suffering, you need to know how to repair and retain them.

General Guidelines

Here are some general guidelines to help you repair and retain relationships.

Develop a positive relationship with God. You will never be able to develop positive relationships with others until you get your relationship with God straightened out. If you have accepted Christ as Savior and are living by the guidelines of God' Word, then you are well on your way to developing positive relationships. The Bible says: *"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7, NKJV)*. You are able to have positive relationships with others as you live by the light of God's Word. Continue to develop your relationship with God through prayer, Bible study, and by attending Christian services and programs offered by the institution.

Pray about your relationships. Pray for God to give you wisdom to retain and reestablish positive relationships. Ask God to guide you in forming new relationships during your incarceration. Through prayer and by applying the principles you learn in God's Word, you will know which relationships you should pursue and which you must abandon.

Avoid reestablishing harmful toxic relationships. Some relationships do not need to be pursued. If you were in an abusive relationship before your incarceration, do not try to reestablish it. Do not maintain contact with gang members, drug dealers, or others who were part of your old life. If you are a believer and your fiancé or the person you were dating before incarceration is not a Christian, do not pursue this relationship unless they make a commitment to the Lord.

The Bible warns:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers [do not make misdated alliances with them or come under a different yoke with them, inconsistent with your faith]. For what partnership have right living and right standing with God with iniquity and lawlessness? Or how can light have fellowship with darkness? What harmony can there be between Christ and Belial [the devil]? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?
(2 Corinthians 6:14-15, AMP)

This does not mean that you must totally exclude unbelievers from your life, but it means that as a Christian you should not establish or renew close relationships with unbelievers. Your closest friends should be believers.

Maintain contact. Unless you are prohibited from doing so by court order, take the initiative to maintain contact with your children, parents, relatives, spouse, and friends. You must take the initiative because sometimes they are hesitant, unknowledgeable, or even fearful as to how to relate to you. Write them, call them, and invite them for a visit. Get over your self-pity and take the initiative to maintain contact, despite any initial negative responses you may experience.

Do not try to force a relationship. If a person totally rejects your attempts at maintaining or renewing a relationship, consider that a closed door for now. It does not mean that you will always be estranged. Remember that you probably have greatly disappointed or failed that person. The best thing you can do is to prove by how you live your life that you have truly changed. Over the years, we have even witnessed victims of a crime develop positive

relationships with the responsible party because of the tremendous change they saw in that person's life.

Now let's look at some guidelines for specific relationships. We will start with prison, because that is where you are living right now.

Relationships In Prison

Prison staff. You have no choice but to relate to the prison staff because their job is to be responsible for you. When you first enter prison, you are given an orientation and a manual of rules, regulations, and procedures. You are told how to avoid getting disciplinary infractions. You are also advised of the programs offered by the prison, including religious, employment, and educational opportunities.

There will be many new rules, both official and unofficial. Learn these and determine that you will abide by them. Do what you are told to do when you are told to do it, and do it quietly and respectfully. Your quality of life in prison will be much better if you will respond in this way.

Some staff members will be kind, others may be rude and abrasive. How you respond to them often determines how they will treat you. If you respond with respect, even when they are disrespectful, you will have the satisfaction of knowing you are doing right. You cannot be responsible for their behavior, but you are responsible before God for your own.

In Acts 27, the Apostle Paul was placed in the custody of an officer named Julius. Because Paul treated the officer with respect, he was given special privileges (Acts 27:1,3) and Julius was later instrumental in saving Paul's life (Acts 27:42-43). Develop allies, not enemies.

As you are learning in this book and through your study of God's Word, even though you are physically living in prison, that is not your true place of residency. As a believer, you are already living in the Kingdom of God. You should relate to staff properly because your conduct reflects on God's Kingdom and His Word. If they see you studying the Bible, praying, and going to chapel services and your conduct is incorrigible, they may judge all believers by what they see in you.

You must understand that all authority--yes, even that of correction officers--comes from God. The Bible is clear as to how you should respond to authorities:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. (Romans 13:1-5, NIV)

When you rebel against authority, you are actually rebelling against God! Knowing that it is God who has established all authority--including those in positions of

authority in prison--should make it easier for you to be obedient and submissive.

If the person over you--the officer, the warden, or your boss--is totally abrasive or out of line in their conduct or requests, you should respect their authority even if the person themselves are not worthy of respect. When the Apostle Paul was appearing before the Sanhedrin court in Acts 23:1-5, the high priest commanded someone to hit Paul on the mouth. Paul responded by saying: *"God shall smite you, you white wall: For do you judge me after the law, and command me to be smitten contrary to the law?"* The act of striking Paul was illegal, as he had not yet been charged with a crime. The analogy of a "white wall" refers to a deteriorating wall that is disguised by white wash.

Those who witnessed the event advised Paul that the man who had ordered the assault was the high priest. Then Paul responded by saying: *"I did not know that he was the high priest: For it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of the ruler of your people.'"* Ananias was not behaving as a high priest should, so it is no wonder Paul did not recognize him. Yet when Paul was told who Ananias was, he quickly apologized, showing respect for the office even though the man who held that office was unworthy of such respect.

Show respect for officers and staff members, including your boss if you are working and your instructors if you are enrolled in an educational program. The only time you should ever refuse to obey their instructions is if you are asked to do something contrary to the Word of God. Then you should obey God rather than man (Acts 4:20).

Inmates. You are living, working, and going to school with people whose backgrounds, ethnicity, and values may be

totally foreign to you. It is vital that you learn to get along with them. Here are some guidelines to help you do so.

Be respectful to others. You may think the crimes of others are worse than your own, but you are all fellow-residents now. Actually, it is like that in God's Kingdom. No matter what the depth of our sin, when we become believers we are all brothers and sisters in Christ living in the same Kingdom. God views murder as sin, just as His does lying. He forgives a thief just as easily as He does a person who gossips.

And speaking of gossip: Do not gossip about or judge others and you will save yourself a lot of grief in prison. Do not make fun of others. Don't even stare at them, as this can silently convey a negative message or a challenge. Watch your mouth, because that is the biggest problem you will have in relating to other inmates. Be respectful.

Do not succumb to peer pressure. Peer pressure is the influence that a group or an individual exerts over someone that encourages them to change their attitudes, values, or behaviors to conform to group norms. Do not be pressured by others to act or think in ways that are contrary to your conscience, your morals, or to God's Word. Respectfully decline. Just say "no thanks" without being judgmental of their behavior or their request. Always ask yourself, "Will God be pleased if I agree to do this?"

Peer pressure is blindly following the crowd. A sad example in the natural world is what occurred with a large flock of sheep in Istanbul, Turkey. One sheep jumped off a cliff to its death and 1,500 others followed. Not knowing which way to go, each one mindlessly followed other members of the flock to their death. The Bible says that we are like sheep in need of a shepherd. Follow the Good

Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and you will not succumb to peer pressure.

Heed these words of advice from the Passion Translation of the Bible:

When peer pressure compels you, to go with the crowd, and sinners invite you to join in, you must simply say, "No"! When the gang says, "We're going to steal and kill, and get away with it. We'll take down the rich and rob them. We'll swallow them up alive and take what we want. from whomever we want. Then we'll take their treasures and fill our homes with loot. So come on and join us. Take your chance with us. We'll divide up all we get--We'll each end up with big bags of cash!" My son, refuse to go with them and stay far away from them. For crime is their way of life and bloodshed their specialty. To be aware of their snare is the best way of escape. They'll resort to murder to steal their victim's assets, but eventually it will be their own lives, that are ambushed.

(Proverbs 1:10-18, TPT)

Deal properly with confrontations. If a confrontation does arise--and in prison it is almost guaranteed that it will--respond firmly by standing up against the pressure. Do not become physically aggressive, but do not back down or you will become a target for bullying. Speak calmly and deliberately. Do not use slang or cursing to reinforce what you say. Simply say what you mean, and mean what you say. Whenever possible, walk away from an impending confrontation.

Form positive relationships. Make friends with fellow-believers who are trying to change their lives and do what

is right. You can be friendly to others, but your core relationships should be developed with those who have like goals and want to not only do their time, but to do it successfully and with positive purpose. Become friends with those who attend the Christian services. In some institutions, you will find inmate-led Bible studies or Christian discussion groups that will welcome you to participate. Find a prayer partner as well, one with whom you can pray about your problems.

Owe no one anything. Do not take anything on credit from anyone in prison, including food, supplies, money, or other items. The Bible says to owe no man anything. Being a debtor to someone in prison gives them power over you. Prison is a give and take balance of power, so do not give your power away by becoming indebted to another person.

Do not become involved in the trouble of others. If you see an incident occurring--like a heated argument, a fight, or the passing of drugs or other contraband--simply walk away. Whenever you become involved in another person's issues, you become part of their troubles:

Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. (Proverbs 4:14-17. KJV)

Some inmates want to involve you in their messes, and if you get involved you very well may take the fall for it. Some people actually take delight in getting you into trouble. Those who are serving life without the possibility

of parole have nothing to lose if they cause others to get disciplinary infractions. Avoid troublemakers...

*For troublemakers are restless
If they are not involved in evil.
And they are not satisfied
Until they have brought someone harm.
(Proverbs 4:16, TPT)*

Here is some good advice:

*Say good-bye to a troublemaker and you'll say
goodbye to quarrels, strife, tension, and arguments,
for a troublemaker traffics in shame.
(Proverbs 22:10-11, TPT)*

Visitors. If you want to relate to your visitors successfully, avoid comments like these:

-“What took you so long to get here?” Your visitor has a life in the outside world, and there may have been unavoidable delays. They may have also been waiting a long time themselves--standing in the crowded processing line to get in to see you!

-“You don't care about my situation. You can get up and walk out of here when visiting is over!” While the statement is true that they can get up and walk out, you must realize that it is often very painful for them to leave you behind. Also you should realize that if they didn't care to some extent, they wouldn't be visiting you in the first place.

-“Why can't you put more money in my account? Why didn't you send me my box yet?” Your visitor is not your personal servant or financier.

- "Why can't you come more often?" Your visitor may have many new responsibilities because of your absence--especially if they are caring for your kids. Also, if they come from a great distance, gas, food, and lodging costs may be prohibitive.

Sometimes it may be your visitor who creates a negative atmosphere with comments like:

- "You don't know what it's like having to take care of your kids by myself."

- "We would not be in this mess if it weren't for you!"

- "Thanks to you, I don't have money to do that!"

Instead of responding in anger, ask what you can do to help. Agree together that you will not make unreasonable demands on each other and that you will seek ways to help one another through this difficult time. There are many issues involved in separation from a loved one. Give each other--both yourself and your visitor--the freedom to express problems and feelings without becoming angry or argumentative.

Take time to pray about the problems and issues you discuss--right then, right there in the visiting room. Prayer changes things!

Relationships With Your Children

Even if you love your child immensely and you have never been abusive to them, children are often deeply affected by having an incarcerated parent. They may experience feelings of loneliness, isolation, and abandonment. They

also may experience rejection from society or be labeled as "the kid whose parent is in jail."

If the court forbids you to have contact with your children or you lose contact for other reasons, continue to pray for them. God can answer prayer and bring them back to you in His perfect timing.

Here are some guidelines to reestablish or maintain positive relationships with your children.

Forgive yourself. If you have guilt about your previous treatment of your children, you must forgive yourself. Read again the chapter in this book on "Forgetting The Pain Of The Past." You will never have a future as long as you are living in the past. Here are some steps to take to forgive yourself:

-Acknowledge your sin, confess it to God, and repent. Ask Him to forgive you and heal your emotions of guilt and shame. Take personal responsibility for your sin. Do not be like those who "*...ruin their own lives and then blame it all on God*" (Proverbs 19:3, TPT).

-Recognize that when God forgives, He forgets--He casts away your sins as far as the east is from the west.

-By an act of your own will, release yourself from condemnation. Control future thought patterns by doing what the Bible says--casting down "vain imaginations" and "forgetting those things behind."

-Claim these verses:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he

is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

(1 John 1:8-9, NIV)

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1, NIV)

Forgive your children unconditionally. Even if your children are adults, remember that you are still the parent regardless of their ages. Forgive your kids even if they are unwilling to forgive you. Do not set conditions for extending forgiveness. Forgive them without reservation. As a parent, you should take the initiative.

Be honest. Do not try to make excuses for your failures. Admit them. Even a young child will understand and be willing to forgive you if you are honest. Encourage your children to tell you honestly how they feel about your incarceration. Make sure that they understand that your absence is not their fault.

Make a fresh start. Rebuild your relationship with your children without focusing on past conflicts. Leave the past where it is: In the past.

Maintain an atmosphere of respect. If discussing a problem leads to arguments or disrespectful behavior, simply say, "Let's not talk about that right now." Refuse to deal with certain issues until you can discuss them calmly without anger.

Be understanding of deviant behavior. Your young child may be acting out of hurt and pain because of your absence. Be understanding, but do not be permissive. For example, you could say "I hear that you got in a fight at school. What was that about?" Then after they share with you, you might say "Can you think of other ways you might have dealt with this?" Encourage positive change without being judgmental.

Encourage your child. Tell them you love them and are proud of them. Write encouraging letters and call them. Pray for them regularly and pray with them when they come to visiting. Find out what they are interested in and study the subject together. Become a fan of their interests--athletics, drama, music, and other programs.

Take responsibility for your child's spiritual growth. As a Christian parent, you are responsible to train your child in the ways of the Lord (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Hebrews 12:5, 6,11). Even if the caregiver with whom your children are staying is not a believer, you can pray for your children and send letters explaining how you are changing and what God is doing in your life. Order Christian books and materials to be sent to them. Suggest a Bible verse for them to learn and share with you during their next visit or phone call.

Respect your child's caregiver. Whether it is a foster home, a friend, or a relative, the person caring for your child is providing for them during your absence. They may not do things exactly as you would, but usually they are doing the best they can. Show them respect and be sure to clear with them any plans you have regarding the kids. Pray for the caregiver and be sure to express your gratitude frequently for what they are doing.

Take parenting classes. Many institutions offer parenting classes. If your prison does not do so, perhaps you can be instrumental in getting one started. Study Christian books on parenting to prepare you to assume this role again after your incarceration. Learn all you can about how to be a good parent.

Never give up. Do not expect your relationship with your children to change overnight. It may take time, but never give up! Failure is not an option.

Relationships With Relatives

Here are some guidelines for positive relationships with parents, relatives, and your spouse.

Forgive yourself. If you have guilt about your previous treatment of your relatives, you must first forgive yourself for your failures. Read again the chapter in this book on "Forgetting The Pain Of The Past." You will never have a future as long as you are living in the past.

Forgive and seek forgiveness. Seek forgiveness from those you have hurt or offended. Do not try to justify your behavior by saying things like , "I am sorry for what I did, but you made me so mad!"

If your relatives have been abusive, angry, and aloof, forgive them. Forgiveness is not justifying someone else's wrongs which they have done to you--for example by saying, "They were under a lot of pressure." Forgiveness is not denying you were hurt or accepting with resignation what was done to you. Forgiveness does not come by waiting for time to heal the hurt--it usually doesn't. Forgiveness is not an emotion. It is an act of the will. You

must choose to forgive whether you feel like it or not because it is God's command to do so.

True forgiveness comes by:

-Recognizing what was done to you was wrong, the result of sinful men in a sinful world. It is not necessary to go back and rehearse the event, but neither can you deal with it by denying it. Acknowledge what happened and how it affected you.

-Confessing the hurt to God and asking Him to heal you of the harmful emotions. You may not ever forget the fact of the incident, but what you are in need of is healing for the negative emotions relating to it.

-Asking God to help you forgive others even as Christ forgives you. Recognize that God extends forgiveness to you as you forgive others. Part of the Lord's prayer is: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." God has not dealt with you according to your sin (Psalms 103:10). Extend this same grace and mercy to others.

-Setting no conditions for your forgiveness. To forgive actually means to give up all claims to punish or enforce a penalty for an offence. It is like a legal pardon: No conditions attached, or else it ceases to be a pardon.

In true forgiveness you no longer *nurse* it, *rehearse* it, or *converse* about it. By an act of your will, you *reverse* the

power that unforgiveness has over your life by forgiving those who have hurt you.

If your relatives are unwilling to forgive you at first, give them time. They may need to see a true change in your life in order to be able to forgive you.

If someone refuses to forgive you, do not continue to obsess over it, as this would be selfishness by arrogantly demanding your own way.

Maintain an atmosphere of respect. If discussing certain topics leads to arguments or disrespectful attitudes, simply say, "Let's not talk about that right now." Refuse to deal with certain issues until you can discuss them calmly and respectfully.

Make a fresh start. Begin to rebuild your relationships without focusing on past conflicts. Leave the past where it is: In the past. Write to your relatives, call them, pray for them, and express your love for them in creative ways.

Give it time. Do not expect things to change overnight. Move forward together at a pace that is comfortable for both you and your relatives.

Relationships With Friends

Always remember that your best friend is Jesus. He has called you a "friend" (John 15:15), and He is a friend who will stick by you closer than a brother (Proverbs 18:24). Maintaining your friendship with Him through the Word, prayer, and worship should be your priority.

It is important to have Christian friends as well. Do not try to make it through your prison experience alone. In

addition to developing godly friendships in prison, you need to find friends outside who will visit you and write to you.

There are organized programs in the prison that will find someone to visit you. You can also ask for a visitor through the chaplain or the institution programs manager. Local churches often provide visiting friends, as do volunteers who come into the institution to conduct church services. Request a Christian friend to help you grow spiritually in your new life.

There are three basic types of relationships you can form or renew with other believers, both in and outside of prison:

A mentor friendship: This is a relationship in which you are the mentor and you disciple a friend in God's Word to help them grow spiritually

A mentee friendship: In this relationship, you are the one being mentored by a godly friend who is helping you grow spiritually.

A mutual friendship: A mutual friendship is when you are closely associated with another person who is on the same spiritual level, and you minister to each other.

As in the outside world, so it is in prison. There are positive and negative people, the saved and unsaved. As a believer, your close relationships should be with other believers. You should maintain contact with unbelievers of course, showing them respect and concern and sharing the Lord with them. At some point when they receive Christ they may move from being an acquaintance to being a close friend.

Peer pressure is very strong in prison, but there is a positive aspect to this. You can be a positive influence on someone, instead of being part of the negative peer pressure that is being brought against them. Ask God to send someone to mentor you and guide you to someone to mentor. Seek to develop mutually beneficially friendships.

A good place to develop friends is in the Christian chapel services and classes and in the inmate-led Bible studies or prayer groups. You must take the initiative to make positive friendships. The Bible says: "*A man who has friends must himself be friendly*" (*Proverbs 18:24, NKJV*).

In friendships you had in your former life, you may have experienced abuse or someone taking advantage of you. A positive Christian friendship may be new to you, so here are some statements that describe true Christian friendship.

Christian friendships are based on Jesus Christ. This mutually significant factor provides a sound foundation upon which to build a friendship. He is the one who ...

...has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. (Ephesians 2:14-16, NKJV)

Christian friends love one another unconditionally. When difficult times come in the relationship, they continue to love and accept one another despite faults and differences: "*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity*" (*Proverbs 17:17, NIV*). As believers,

we are to accept one another as Christ accepts us--unconditionally (Romans 15:7).

Christian friends love sacrificially. They are not selfish, rather they give freely of their time, energies, and abilities. The Bible says, "*Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends*" (John 15:13, NIV). Jesus is the best example of a true Christian friend. His love for you is sacrificial, never selfish. He demonstrated this through His gifts of salvation, healing, and deliverance and ultimately when He gave His life on the cross of Calvary.

Christian friends do not use one another. Philippians 2:3 says, "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves*" (NIV). By placing your friend's needs before your own, you will gain a true friend.

Christian friends edify one another. "Edification" means to build another person up emotionally, spiritually, and physically. This is accomplished by encouragement based upon God's Word (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Christian friends are honest with one another. Proverbs 27:6 indicates that "the wounds of a friend are faithful"--meaning that even when your friend says something difficult to you that may be painfully true, they are being a faithful friend. Christian friends can be honest and confront one another when necessary without fearing a loss of relationship.

Christian friends respect confidences. You are free to share anything with your friend, knowing that it will be kept in confidence.

Christian friendships are mutually rewarding. If you feel used, abused, or even smothered in a friendship, then something is wrong. Seek to correct this if possible. If not, back off of the relationship.

Christian friends respect boundaries. Christian friends will not try to come between you and God or you and your spouse. They will respect boundaries you set in regards to time spent together and will recognize your need to develop other relationships.

Do not be close friends with:

- Gossips: Proverbs 20:19
- The bad tempered: Proverbs 22:24-25
- Those given to change: Proverbs 24:21-22
- Those given to addiction or gluttony:
Proverbs 23:20-21
- Liars, the untrustworthy, and the inconsiderate:
Proverbs 25:18-20
- Those given to violence: Proverbs 1:10-19

The type of friends you want:

- Those who display wisdom: Proverbs 13:20
- Those who give wise counsel: Proverbs 27:9;
13:14
- Those who do not drag you down: Proverbs
17:17; 18:24

Things to avoid in friendship:

- Repeating everything you hear: Proverbs 17:9
- Senseless arguments: Proverbs 17:14; 26:21
- Overstaying your welcome: Proverbs 25:17
- Bad jokes at the expense of your friend:
Proverbs 26:18-19
- Meddling in affairs that do not concern you.
Proverbs 26:17

-Insincere flattery: Proverbs 27:14

Solving problems in friendships:

-Be slow to anger. Proverbs 16:23

-Be slow to respond: Proverbs 18:13

-Avoid quarreling: Proverbs 20:3

-Speak gently: Proverbs 15:1

-Remember that rebuke is better than flattery:
Proverbs 28:23.

-Make sure you are at peace with the Lord before
trying to solve a problem: Proverbs 16:7.

-Be quick to show love: Proverbs 10:12

Remember: *"Bad company corrupts good character (1 Corinthians 15:33).* You are a believer who is living in the Kingdom of God. Not everyone will understand this, nor will they agree with the standards by which you have chosen to live your new life. You may need to follow the advice of a popular professional speaker who said: "My friends didn't believe I could become a successful speaker. So I did something about it. I went out and found me some new friends."

Societal Relationships

Upon your release from prison, you may have to battle stereotypes imposed by society on those who have been incarcerated. You may have difficulty in finding a job after your release because of your record. You may encounter discrimination or those who say that you cannot reintegrate and become a productive member of society.

If you have established good relationships with Christian friends and family in the outside world, they will certainly be helpful in adjusting. First thing, be sure to find a Bible-believing church and get active in it. Very often, the other

needs you have for a job, housing, and material things will come from within the church body.

If someone is reluctant to hire you because of your prison record, tell them you will work for two weeks for free. Tell them that at the end of that two weeks, if you are not the best employee they ever had, they can dismiss you and owe you nothing. During that time, come early, stay late, work hard--and usually, you will end up getting hired. If all you can find is work as a pizza delivery guy, be the best one ever!

It is not up to society to welcome you with open arms. The responsibility falls on you to reestablish your relationship with society at large. Nothing will do it faster than living a changed life.

The Biblical Emphasis On Relationships

The reason we have dedicated an entire chapter to this subject is that God is vitally concerned with all of your relationships. The two greatest commandments in the Bible upon which all the others depend are concerned with relationships:

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

(Matthew 22:37-40, NIV)

Amazingly, the whole message of the Word of God can be viewed in terms of these two commandments--your relationship with God and others.

In Galatians 5:16-26, Paul contrasts the qualities of character that result in bad relationships with those that foster good relationships. Attitudes and actions that abort positive relationships are hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy. Positive relationships that are produced by the Holy Spirit being manifested in your life are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These qualities result in good relationships.

The biblical emphasis on relationships is evident when we note the number of times the words "one another" occurs. We are commanded to:

- love one another: John 13:35
- be devoted to one another: Romans 12:10
- honor one another: Romans 12:10
- live in harmony with one another: Romans 12:16
- comfort one another: 1 Thessalonians 4:18
- encourage one another: Hebrews 3:13
- stir one another to love and good works: Hebrews 10:24
- show hospitality to one another: 1 Peter 4:9
- employ your gifts for the benefit of others: 1 Peter 4:10
- pray for one another: James 5:16
- confess your faults to one another: James 5:16
- speak to others in encouraging ways: Ephesians 5:19
- submit to one another: Ephesians 5:21
- consider others better than yourself: Philippians 2:3
- be concerned about one another: Philippians 2:4
- bear with one another: Colossians 3:13
- teach one another: Colossians 3:16
- build up one another: Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- be likeminded towards one another: Romans 15:5
- accept one another unconditionally: Romans 15:7
- admonish one another: Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16
- care for one another: 1 Corinthians 12:25

- serve one another: Galatians 5:13
- bear one another's burdens: Galatians 6:2
- forgive one another: Ephesians 4:2, 32; Colossians 3:13
- be patient with one another: Ephesians 4:2
- be kind to one another: Ephesians 4:32

This list should keep you busy for awhile incorporating these virtues into your relationships! From time to time, use this checklist to review how you are doing.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Trusting The God Of What Is Left

As you sit there in that lonely prison cell, do you sometimes feel as if you have lost everything? You have definitely lost your freedom. You may have also lost your home, your business, and your finances. Your family may have abandoned you. You may be suffering emotionally, mentally, and physically.

God wants to restore everything the enemy has stolen from you! In this chapter, we will look at an innocent man named Job who lost everything through no fault of his own, but persevered to receive total restoration. We will also examine the story of Nebuchadnezzar, a man who lost everything through his own fault and was graciously restored by God.

Job's Story

Job is a classic example of a man who lost everything through no fault of his own. The Bible says that Job was a righteous man:

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. (Job 1:1, NIV)

Job had many possessions and a great family. Most importantly, he feared and served God:

He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He

was the greatest man among all the people of the East. His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom. (Job 1:2-5, NIV)

But there came a day when everything changed:

One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord. (Job 1:6-12, NIV)

Satan's contention was that Job served God only because of the great blessings he received. He maintained that if Job lost these benefits, he would no longer serve God. With

God's permission, Satan was allowed to attack Job through the circumstances of his life.

In a series of devastating blows, Job lost all of his earthly possessions:

A messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (Job 1:14-17, NIV)

Next, Job lost his children:

While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (Job 1:18-19, NIV)

Then Satan appeared before God again and challenged:

On another day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came

with them to present himself before him. And the Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." "Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face." The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life." (Job 2:1-6, NIV)

The next trial was that Job lost his health as “...*Satan.. afflicted Job with sore boils from the sole of his feet to the top of his head*” (Job 2:7,NIV). Finally, Job lost the comfort and support of his wife who said, “...*"Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"* (Job 2:9, NIV).

Job also had to contend with the negative attitudes of his friends who accused him of sin and were judgmental and uncompassionate. Their extensive dialogues are recorded in Job chapters 2-37. (You may recognize their attitudes and advice as similar to that of some of your own so-called friends!)

Job’s losses were staggering and occurred in such quick succession that before he could recover from one blow, another was delivered. (And you think you had a bad day!) Job lost everything except his faith in God.

Amazingly, Job's first response to these tragedies was to worship God and declare His righteous judgments:

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing. (Job 1:20-22, NIV)

At one point in his intense suffering, Job could no longer even sense God's presence. He said:

But if I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him. (Job 23:8-9, NIV)

Yet, in the midst of this, Job declared:

But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread. (Job 23:10-12, NIV)

Stripped of his possessions, suffering agonizing pain, forsaken by his family and friends, Job eventually became weary and lost hope. He even cursed the day he was born:

May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!' That day--may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no

light shine upon it. May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more; may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm its light. That night--may thick darkness seize it; may it not be included among the days of the year nor be entered in any of the months. May that night be barren; may no shout of joy be heard in it. May those who curse days curse that day, those who are ready to rouse Leviathan. May its morning stars become dark; may it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn, for it did not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide trouble from my eyes. Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? (Job 3:3-12, NIV)

Job lost everything—and when he turned his eyes on his losses, he became despondent and lost hope. Job didn't have the book of Job like we do. He couldn't see behind the scenes as we are privileged to do through the pages of God's Word. He didn't realize that there were spiritual reasons behind the circumstances he was experiencing in the natural world. We are privileged to have Job chapters 1 and 2 which reveal the reasons for the spiritual battle that was raging over Job and help us understand our own challenges in life.

As you face your losses, you must understand that there is a spiritual battle raging over you also. Satan wants your worship, your allegiance, and your very life. Worship is what Satan craved from the time he tried to assume God's place. The Prophet Isaiah says of him:

You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the

utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." (Isaiah 14:13-14, NIV)

Always remember: Behind every negative circumstance in your life is a spiritual battle for your mind, body, spirit, and soul. You may say, "I would never worship Satan!" But that is what you are doing when you reject Jesus Christ and continue in your sins. Jesus said that whoever is not with Him is against Him (Luke 11:23).

At the conclusion of Job's adversity, God speaks to him in a powerful monologue and Job repents of his doubting, questioning, and complaining. Then he prays for his unsympathetic friends, and all that he lost during his intense time of suffering is restored. In fact...

After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before. All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord had brought upon him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring. The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. And he also had seven sons and three daughters. The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers. After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their

children to the fourth generation. And so he died, old and full of years. (Job 42:10-17, NIV)

Although Job experienced periods of despondency during his trial and at times seemed to lose hope, there are eight powerful spiritual keys revealed in his story which led to his restoration. These strategies will also enable you to experience restoration of your losses.

Step One: Seek forgiveness. If your losses are due to your own sin or bad decisions, repent and ask God for forgiveness. You may need to repent, as Job did, for wrong attitudes, complaining, and lack of understanding. After God answered Job's many complaints in a lengthy monologue (recorded in Job chapters 38-42), Job declared, "*Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*" (Job 42:6). When you are in a difficult situation it is easy to fall into fear, doubt, and unbelief and say things you shouldn't. Ask God to forgive you.

In the book of James, the patience of Job is commended (James 5:11). God did not comment on his despondency and complaints during his ordeal, because those sins were forgiven. All that is remembered is that Job endured his difficulties and emerged still loving and serving God.

Step Two: Don't blame God for your losses. Settle it in your heart: It is Satan who comes to kill, steal, and destroy—not God. Jesus wants you to have an abundant life:

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. (John 10:10, NKJV)

You often hear people exclaiming after personal tragedies, "Why would God do this?" If the event you experienced killed, stole, or destroyed something, then it wasn't from God! The Bible is clear. All that kills, steals, and destroys comes from Satan who works against you through circumstances and others around you. Satan also tries to work in you and through your own bad decisions to try to destroy you.

God's ultimate purpose for you is good:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning (James 1:17, NKJV)

James said to count it joy when you encounter difficulties:

Consider it wholly joyful, my brethren, whenever you are enveloped in or encounter trials of any sort or fall into various temptations. Be assured and understand that the trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience. But let endurance and steadfastness and patience have full play and do a thorough work, so that you may be [people] perfectly and fully developed [with no defects], lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4, AMP)

You can rejoice in God, not because of your losses, but in spite of them. How are you able to do this? Because you know the promised outcome: Your faith will be proven and circumstances will be turned for your good. You will learn endurance, steadfastness, and patience--and in the end--you will lack nothing!

Step Three: Worship your way through it. We find Job worshipping God despite his losses (chapter one) and worshipping again when everything was restored to him (chapter 42). Even when he could not feel God’s presence, Job declared:

*But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.
(Job 23:10-12, NIV)*

When confronted with devastating loss, David also “*encouraged himself in the Lord*” (1 Samuel 30:6, KJV).

You may wonder, “How can I praise God when I have lost everything?” You can praise Him because He is still in control. A major revelation in Job’s story is that God limits what Satan brings into your life. God is in control of your circumstances, even when you lose everything. There is no loss that comes into your life of which God is not aware. Satan cannot touch you without permission from God (Job 1:8-12).

You can be assured that God will never allow you to experience circumstances that you are unable to bear:

For no temptation (no trial regarded as enticing to sin), [no matter how it comes or where it leads] has overtaken you and laid hold on you that is not common to man [that is, no temptation or trial has come to you that is beyond human resistance and that is not adjusted and adapted and belonging to human experience, and such as man can bear]. But

God is faithful [to His Word and to His compassionate nature], and He [can be trusted] not to let you be tempted and tried and assayed beyond your ability and strength of resistance and power to endure, but with the temptation He will [always] also provide the way out (the means of escape to a landing place), that you may be capable and strong and powerful to bear up under it patiently.
(1 Corinthians 10:13, AMP)

You can worship your way through the difficulties because you know that every negative circumstance that enters your life will work together for good:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28, NIV)

We tend to focus on the bad things and wonder how they will work out for good. God says that all things, taken together--both positive and negative--work together for good.

Step Four: Focus on God. Turn your eyes from your circumstances and fix them upon God and His Word. Set your mind on God's faithfulness and allow His peace to guard your heart and mind:

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal.
(Isaiah 26:3-4, NIV)

Despite Job's suffering, he continued to focus on God. When Job lost everything, he "...arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and

worshipped” (Job 1:20, KJV). Job declared concerning God’s Word: “Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:10-12, KJV). Get into the Word of God. Consider it more important than your necessary food!

There are two aspects of peace: Peace with God is the relationship you enter into through the finished work of Jesus Christ when you receive forgiveness for your sin (Colossians 1:20). The peace of God is beyond all understanding, which means it is beyond the power of natural thinking. In the natural, you cannot be at peace in prison but in the supernatural realm, you can continually experience peace:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7, NIV)

Anxiety is being troubled by fearful, distressing thoughts and worrying about real or imagined problems. The peace of God is unruffled serenity. It is not the absence of conflict, but rather the presence of composure, faith, and trust in the face of it. Its source is supernatural because it comes from the God of peace and Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace. Stop striving, be still, and know that God is in charge of your circumstances (Psalm 46:10).

As you focus on God and seek His direction, He will show you the way to total restoration:

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." (Isaiah 30:21,NIV)

Step Five: Resist the enemy. The Bible instructs us to "... submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (James 4:7, NKJV). Repeatedly throughout the story of Job we find him submitting himself to God in statements such as: "...though God slay me, yet I will trust Him" and "the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." (Job 13:15 and 1:21, NIV). Job repeatedly stood his ground and refused to retreat or curse God. In the midst of your trouble, refuse to retreat or give up. Refuse to turn your back on God. Use the spiritual armor described in Ephesians 6:10-18 to war against the attacks of the enemy.

Step Six: Release your faith. Release your faith for total restoration of all the enemy has stolen from you. Act upon what you are believing as if it is already done. Be like faithful Abraham who...

*Against all hope...believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.
(Romans 4:18-21, NIV)*

Believe God for total restoration in your life:

So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust... (Joel 2:25, NKJV)

God uses the analogy of locust to describe the devastating effects of loss. Despite the utter destruction and whether or not it was caused by your transgressions, He promises restoration. Job demonstrated this kind of faith when he proclaimed

*But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.
(Job 23:10, NIV)*

Step Seven: Forgive others. You may need to forgive others who have contributed to your suffering. God directed Job to intercede for his friends--Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar--who were very accusatory, judgmental, and extremely uncompassionate:

*After the Lord had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the Lord told them; and the Lord accepted Job's prayer. After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before.
(Job 42:7-10, NIV)*

Job's restoration was linked to forgiveness and your restoration may be also. What good things might God be waiting to restore to you that are being hindered by your spirit of unforgiveness? By an act of your will, forgive those who have wronged you. If you are not willing to do this, pray for God to make you willing. Your own forgiveness from God is vitally linked to your willingness to forgive others:

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:14-15, NIV)

Unforgiveness blocks the restoration God wants you to experience. It does not hurt the person you refuse to forgive, but it hurts you. It is like poison working its way through your body, soul, and spirit.

Step Eight: Wait on the Lord. Job waited a long time, but finally God intervened in his circumstances. Do not become weary of waiting. Instead, "...Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:3, NIV).

Wait on God in prayer, worship, and Bible study, knowing that...

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (Isaiah 40:29-31, NIV)

Regardless of how long you must wait for God to move in your circumstances--regardless of the extent of your losses and the pain and heartache you have suffered--continue to wait for total restoration. Keep on believing and releasing your faith, expecting God to restore all. Here is God's Word to you today:

Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs. (Isaiah 61:7, NIV)

Nebuchadnezzar's Story

God can restore you even if all that remains is a stump--a shadow of your former self--not much in the natural to work with! We see this marvelous truth evident in the life of King Nebuchadnezzar whose story is told in Daniel chapters 3-4.

Nebuchadnezzar was an evil king who lived during Old Testament times. Daniel 3 opens with Nebuchadnezzar building a golden idol which he required everyone to worship or else be put to death. How often, like Nebuchadnezzar, we set up images in our hearts--things that we hold more precious than the Lord. Perhaps it is a person, a material possession, an activity we cherish, or a habit.

Three Hebrew men stood faithful to God and refused to worship the image, so Nebuchadnezzar had them thrown into a fiery furnace. Although he witnessed their supernatural deliverance and issued a decree about the power of God, Nebuchadnezzar never acknowledged Him personally. Knowing about God and even talking or acting

like a believer is not the same as knowing God personally and acknowledging Christ as your Savior.

Daniel chapter four records an open letter from King Nebuchadnezzar to all people, nations, and languages of the then-known world. His purpose in writing was to testify of the signs and wonders that God had done in his life. He is telling what "God has wrought toward me." It is no longer just an official decree like he made in Daniel 3:29. It is his own personal testimony.

Nebuchadnezzar begins with praise to God saying, "How great are His signs! How mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. His dominion is from generation to generation." After the fiery furnace miracle when the three Hebrew men were supernaturally delivered, Nebuchadnezzar knew there was a God, but did not acknowledge Him personally. Now he is praising and worshipping God. So, what happened in the intervening time that changed him so dramatically? Nebuchadnezzar's letter gives us the answer.

Nebuchadnezzar tells how he was at rest in his house and flourishing in his palace when he received a dream. He sought an interpretation for it by calling the wise men of Babylon to come and reveal the meaning. In response to the king's summons, here came the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers, but despite their best efforts, they could not give the interpretation. The world cannot understand the things of God because...

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

(1 Corinthians 2:14, NIV)

At last, Daniel--a young prophet of God whose Babylonian name was Belteshazzar--was called to come before the king. "Tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen and give me the interpretation," requested the King. And that is exactly what Daniel did (Daniel 4:19-27).

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream, there was a great tree in the midst of the earth. Its height reached to heaven and it could be seen from the ends of the earth. The leaves were vibrant and the tree had much fruit--enough for every living creature. The beasts of the field took refuge under it and the fowls of heaven perched on its boughs.

Then Nebuchadnezzar saw what he called a watcher and a holy one come down from heaven with the command to:

Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit. Let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from off his branches. Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field. Let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his heart be changed from that of a man, and let a beast's heart be given unto him. Let seven times (seven years) pass over him. (Daniel 4:14-16, NIV)

Daniel was so shocked by Nebuchadnezzar's dream that he sat quietly for an hour with troubling thoughts. He was not only troubled by the interpretation, but most likely concerned about how to present it to the king in an appropriate way.

Finally the king told Daniel, "Don't let the dream or its interpretation trouble you." Daniel answered, "My lord, let

this dream be to them that hate you and the interpretation to your enemies rather than to you!"

Having witnessed previous demonstrations of the wrath of the king, Daniel was quite courageous to tell him the interpretation. Daniel was not afraid to deliver a difficult message, but he did so with respect.

The tree which grew tall and strong and provided for every creature symbolized Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel told him, "The tree is you, oh king. You have grown and become strong. Your greatness reaches even unto heaven and your dominion to the end of the earth." (Trees are often used in scripture to represent men or nations. See Ezekiel 31:3; Psalm 1:3; Jeremiah 17:8; and Isaiah 56:3.)

The watcher and the holy one were heavenly messengers who declared that the tree should be cut down and destroyed, although its stump and roots would remain. The tree stump would be bound by iron and brass, left in the field with the beasts, and grow wet with the dew of heaven. Daniel declared, "This is the interpretation, Oh king, and this is the decree of the most High, which is come upon my lord the king." Then Daniel declared:

- You shall be driven from men.
- Your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field.
- You shall eat grass as oxen do.
- You shall be wet with the dew of heaven.

The stump of the tree and its roots would be left, meaning that Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom would eventually be restored. Only a stump would remain where previously animals and birds took shelter. No longer would there be any fruit. The stump, however, would be surrounded by brass and iron so that it could not be destroyed. Perhaps

this referred to a fence that confined the mentally distraught king in safety or perhaps it is spiritually symbolic. Whatever it meant, it implied supernatural protection of the stump that remained.

All that Nebuchadnezzar had and all that he had been in the past was lost because of his own sin and rebellion. But God said, "Leave a stump, because someday this man will be restored to all I intended him to be." That is the same word God is speaking over your life today. He is the Lord of what is left, even if all that is left in your life is a stump! He will use what is left to restore what was lost.

Seven years would pass until the king acknowledged the Most High God. This was the purpose of the judgment: To cause Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge the one true God. Events in your life have been orchestrated by God to bring you to the same place so that you might come to acknowledge the one true God.

After giving the interpretation, Daniel made a passionate plea to the king to forsake his sins, repent of his iniquities, and do what was right. Daniel suggested that if he repented, perhaps judgment could be avoided:

Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.
(Daniel 4:27, NIV)

It is interesting to note that God allowed an entire year to pass before executing judgment on the king. God's judgment sometimes seems slow in coming, but it inevitably comes. God is sovereign over all judgment. Delay is only because of His great mercy and grace.

Nebuchadnezzar had twelve long months in which to contemplate the prophetic word he had been given and seek forgiveness for his sins, but he refused to do so. What about you? What is it going to take to get you to acknowledge your sin, ask God for forgiveness, and be restored?

After a year passed, King Nebuchadnezzar was walking through his palace admiring its beauty. He said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" Nebuchadnezzar did not acknowledge that God was the one who had blessed and prospered him. His statement is reminiscent of that made by the captain of the ill-fated ship, the Titanic, who said, "Not even God can sink this ship." It went down on its maiden voyage when it hit an iceberg and hundreds of lives were lost.

While the words were yet in the king's mouth, a voice from heaven confirmed all Daniel had prophesied:

- The kingdom will depart from you.
- They shall drive you from men.
- Your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field.
- They shall make you eat grass as oxen.
- Seven years shall pass until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whoever He will.

Immediately, Nebuchadnezzar became mentally deranged and was driven from men. He ate grass and his body was wet with the dew of heaven. His hair grew out like eagles' feathers and his nails grew like birds' claws. The king's mental problems are actually recognized by modern psychology as being related to a rare condition that is called

"boanthropy", a severe form of schizophrenia in which a person believes and acts as if he is an animal.

Nebuchadnezzar continues his testimony by saying:

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.
(Daniel 4:34-37, NIV)

Prior to the events recorded in Daniel chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God, but only as an addition to the other pagan deities in which he believed (Daniel 2:47 and 3:28-29). When Nebuchadnezzar finally acknowledged the one and only Most High God, his reason returned to him. Many of the mental conditions with which we struggle would be alleviated if we would only acknowledge God, ask and receive forgiveness, and deal with things like pride, anger, and rage.

When Nebuchadnezzar finished his declaration regarding the one true God, his reason returned to him along with the glory, honor, and brightness of his kingdom. It is quite rare to recover from such a debilitating mental condition, so we know this was a miracle of God.

Nebuchadnezzar's counselors and lords sought him out once more, which was also miraculous as in those days they normally would have executed a king who had become powerless. But Nebuchadnezzar was completely restored and reestablished in his kingdom.

Nebuchadnezzar lost all he had through his sin. But God left a stump--and the stump grew again! In a final declaration of praise, Nebuchadnezzar said: "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven. His works are truth and His ways just. Those who walk in pride He is able to abase."

It is one thing to acknowledge the existence of God, but quite another to come to know Him as your God. Nebuchadnezzar had witnessed the miracle of the preservation of the Jews in the fiery furnace. Daniel had been mightily used of God in his life by giving interpretations to his dreams and visions. But none of this drew Nebuchadnezzar to repentance. It took seven long years of severe judgment, but finally he acknowledged the one true God as his God!

How long will it take for you to acknowledge God as the Lord of your life? It is one thing to accept Him as your Savior, but is He exalted as Lord over every situation, every habit, every circumstance, and bondage? If not, ask Him to take control of every area of your life right now.

It does not matter whether you have lost everything due to your own sin, because of negative circumstances of life, or because of the sins of others--God has promised: *"I will restore or replace for you the years that the locust has eaten...and you shall praise the name of the Lord, your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you..."* (portions of Joel 2:25-27, NKJV).

Your losses may be great, but God is Lord over what you have left--even if all you have left is a stump

Give us gladness in proportion to our former misery!

Replace the evil years with good.

Let us see your miracles again; let our children see your glory at work.

(Psalms 90:15-16, NLT)

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Refusing To Fall

When Satan appeared before God during the encounter recorded in Job chapter one, God asked the enemy what he had been doing. It wasn't that God didn't know, rather He wanted Satan to confess to his evil deeds.

Satan responded that he had been roaming through the earth going back and forth in it. From this conversation we learn that Satan is real, he has an agenda that targets believers, and although he is not omnipresent, he does get around.

What, exactly, was Satan doing as he roamed the earth? Peter provides the answer when he warns:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.
(1 Peter 5:8-9, NKJV)

Satan roams the world like a lion, seeking someone to devour. The fact that he is seeking someone indicates that he can't devour everyone because there are some people who are wise to his tactics. And you can be one of them! You can recognize his agenda and vigilantly resist him, standing steadfast in the faith. You can be a strong believer who refuses to fall for his tactics.

You might be questioning, "Who? Me?" The answer is, "Yes. You." Your insecurities regarding standing strong in the Lord may have resulted because you started to serve God previously and then fell back into sin. Now you are

afraid to confess your new life publicly for fear that you will return to the old lifestyle again. But the Bible assures that you need not fall ever again!

When people start falling all around you, do not become frightened and assume it will happen to you. Psalm 91:7 declares that although a thousand--or even ten thousand--fall around you, you do not have to fall. The New American Standard version states that *"it shall not approach you"*. The New Living Translation says *"...these evils will not touch you"*. The Message Bible declares *"Even though others succumb all around, drop like flies right and left, no harm will even graze you. You'll stand untouched, watch it all from a distance."*

The word "thousand" used in this passage means an infinite number in Hebrew. So the passage is actually saying that even if an infinite number--or ten thousand times infinity--should fall around you, you can remain standing.

But hold on! This promise isn't to just anyone. It is made only to those abiding in the shadow of Almighty God (Psalm 91:1). In order to stand securely in your faith, you must be walking with Him, going His way instead of your own way.

Why People Fall

People fall in the natural world because of obstacles and imbalance. That is pretty much true in the spiritual world also. If you are following in the shadow of Almighty God, He will remove the obstacles that try to block your way. You can stand secure in your relationship with God and, even though a thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, it will not affect you.

People wonder how great men and women can fall into sin when they have apparently known God intimately and ministered effectively for Him. The answer is simple: Anyone is capable of falling if they stop walking in God's shadow. When you go your own way, do your own thing, and your time for intimate fellowship with God is crowded out--even by ministry--that is when you get into trouble.

Recovering From A Fall

If you have fallen spiritually or you feel you are in danger of falling, review these directives given to the church at Ephesus:

*Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works...
(Revelation 2:1-5, KJV)*

The believers at Ephesus were great workers for God. They were patient and abhorred evil, but they had fallen away from their first love. God directs them to remember from where they had fallen, repent, and do their first works again.

If you have fallen or are in danger of falling, ask God for forgiveness and then do your first works again. The first works include the basics of prayer, worship, and study of the Word. In the natural world, many falls are caused by weakness because of inadequate food or dehydration due to lack of water. Jesus is the spiritual bread and water of life. Get back into God's presence and into His Word and you will regain the spiritual strength to stand securely once again.

If you have lost or are losing your passion for God, He doesn't want more service from you. He wants you to repent, remember from where you have fallen, and renew your experience with Him. The Prophet Hosea admonished God's people:

O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. (Hosea 14:1-2, KJV)

Because of your fall, you may feel hopeless, alone, and abandoned, but Jesus said:

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. (Matthew 10:29-31, KJV)

God sees when a sparrow falls. You are of much more value and He knows exactly where you are, what caused your fall, and He stands ready to help you get back up again.

The good news is that if you have fallen, the Lord will lift you up again if you will repent. The Bible says that "*The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all those that be bowed down*" (Psalm 145:14, KJV). The psalmist declares:

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.
(Psalm 37:23-24, KJV)

...And an old Japanese proverb says, "Fall seven times. Stand up eight."

The Prophet Isaiah declared:

Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. (Isaiah 40:28-31, KJV)

Even if you have "utterly fallen" as mentioned in this passage, you can renew your strength by waiting before God in His presence. You can rise up again, walk without fainting, and run without growing weary. You can once again stand strong in the Lord.

Standing Strong

God wants your Christian experience to be one of going from strength to strength, not from failure to failure (Psalm 84:7). You can stand against the wiles of the devil and withstand evil by appropriating your spiritual armor which is detailed in Ephesians 6:11-17. The Bible says having done all to stand, then stand--meaning hold your ground!

Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet. (Ephesians 6:13, MSG)

The Word admonishes us to "...*be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*" (Ephesians 6:10). The word "strong" means "explosive strength and ability, excessive manifested strength." It is from a Greek word *dunamis* from which we get the word dynamite. It is not just intellectual power, it is manifested power. The power of His might is the power of the Holy Spirit within you. It is the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11) and it is a power that is greater than all the power of the enemy (1 John 4:4). The word "might" conveys the image of an extremely strong man. You have the strength, power, and might of Almighty God within you. How can you not remain standing?

Here are some biblical guidelines to keep you from falling and help you stand strong in the Lord:

Abide in the Lord. ...*Stand fast in the Lord.*
(Philippians 4:1, KJV)

Establish your life on the Word of God. *The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. (Isaiah 40:8, KJV)*

Rely on God's grace. *By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:2, KJV)*

Put your faith in God's power. *That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:5, KJV)*

Have faith in God. *Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand. (2 Corinthians 1:24, KJV)*

Stand in the power of the gospel. *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand. (1 Corinthians 15:1, KJV)*

Remain free from bondage. *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. (Galatians 5:1, KJV)*

Listen to Godly counselors. *Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. (Proverbs 11:14, KJV)*

Equip yourself with spiritual armor. *Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having*

your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness. (Ephesians 6:11,13-14,KJV)

Do God's will. *...that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. (Colossians 4:12, KJV)*

Obey God's Word. *Therefore shall ye keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that ye may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither ye go to possess it... (Deuteronomy 11:8, KJV)*

Seek God's strength. *Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually. (1 Chronicles 16:11, KJV)*

Let God's strength to be manifested in your weakness. *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:9, KJV)*

Confess the Lord as your strength to stand. Here are some biblical confessions to make regarding your spiritual strength:

The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. (Exodus 15:2, KJV)

God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect. (2 Samuel 22:33, KJV)

For thou hast girded me with strength to battle... (Psalms 18:39, KJV)

The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.
(Psalms 18:2, KJV)

You Will Never Fall

Is there any way to insure that you will never fall spiritually? The Scripture says yes! The Apostle Peter details exactly how to do this:

*According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, **ye shall never fall**: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*
(2 Peter 1:3-11, KJV)

Peter says that if you do these things, you will never fall. What things is he referring to? The things discussed in the preceding passage. First, Peter states some important facts:

- God has already given you all things that are necessary to live a godly life.
- You have His exceeding great and precious promises.
- You are a partaker of His divine nature.
- You have escaped the corruption of the world.

Then Peter says to be diligent to add to your faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. He says that if you do these things, you will be fruitful in the knowledge of the Lord. He also warns that if you do not develop these qualities, you are spiritually blind, you will have no vision for the future, and you will forget that you were purged from your old sins. His final admonition is that you give diligence to assure your calling and election to salvation in Christ. Having done all this, Peter assures you that you will never fall.

God declares, *"I have set you free; now walk with your heads held high"* (Leviticus 26:13, CEV). Jude writes a great benediction at the conclusion of his book:

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

God is able to keep you from falling back into sin. You can refuse to fall by following scriptural guidelines. But what if you have already fallen? The next chapter addresses this subject.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Finding Hope In The Valley Of Achor

The Old Testament contains many stories about Israel, the nation God selected to represent Him to the world and through whose genealogical line Jesus Christ would come to earth. These stories were recorded so that we could learn spiritual truths from them: *"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1 Corinthians 10:11, NKJV).*

God promised the nation of Israel a beautiful land, including what is now called the state of Israel. The people of Israel traveled many miles and endured many failures and difficulties along the way to their promised land. The book of Joshua records how, finally, Israel entered into their promised land to claim their possession. God told Israel to eliminate the evil people occupying their territory because He had repeatedly dealt with these nations, yet they had not turned to Him. Now it was time for divine judgment upon them because of their gross immorality, child sacrifice, idolatry, and other terrible evils.

The first great battle faced by Israel after crossing the Jordan River occurred at the city of Jericho and is recorded in Joshua chapter 6. God gave Israel a unique strategy for taking this city. They were to march around the walls of the city in silence for six days. On the seventh day they were to march around seven times, then the priests were to blow their trumpets and the people were to shout because *"the Lord has given you the city" (Joshua 6:16, NKJV).*

As you advance towards your new life, you will undoubtedly face a battle with a spiritual "Jericho", which

is representative of the appeal of the world. Whatever your "Jericho" may be--whether it be temptation, habits, or uncontrolled emotions--God will give you a specific strategy for the battle. Sometimes God's plan may seem as foolish as the one given Joshua for Jericho, but if you follow God's directions carefully your victory is assured.

But we are not going to dwell on Jericho in this chapter because you usually do not have a problem with the victories in life. It is exciting to walk in our "Jericho" successes. Where we have our problems is when we face defeat. So we are going to move on to Joshua chapters 7 and 8 which record a major defeat experienced by God's people. Take time to read these chapters before proceeding with this lesson, for they contain important strategies which provide the reason for, the results of, and the remedy to correct spiritual defeat.

The Reasons For Spiritual Defeat

The word "Achor" means "trouble," and that is exactly what Israel faced when they staged their attack against the small city of Ai. The story of Ai and the Valley of Achor begins in Joshua 7:1 with the key word "but." In Joshua 6 Israel was walking in victory, "but" chapter 7 finds them in trouble. When you are defeated in spiritual battle there are always reasons. In the story of Achor, there were four reasons for defeat, all of which are common in the defeats we experience. These violations are in the areas of principles, pride, perception, and prayerlessness.

Principles. Violating the principles of God--sin--results in defeat. God told Israel not to take any of the spoils of Jericho. They were to be dedicated to the Lord as they were the "first fruits" of battle:

"And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the Lord; they shall come into the treasury of the Lord." (Joshua 6:18-19, NKJV)

Joshua 7:1 records how a man named Achan took some of the accursed spoils of battle. His temptation followed the same pattern as that of Eve in the Garden of Eden. Like Eve, Achan "saw, desired, took, and hid." He said:

"When I saw among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And there they are, hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it." (Joshua 7:21, NKJV)

Sin always begins in the mind. Thoughts of sin always precede the act. Achan thought, "Who will see? Who will know?" He saw only the immediate pleasure these things would bring and not the terrible long-term effects of his actions. If Achan had looked with eyes of faith instead of eyes of lust, he would have seen these items as accursed. Instead, he viewed them with his natural senses only.

Normally, Israel was allowed to keep the spoils of their battles, but in the first battle at Jericho the enemy's treasures were to be dedicated to the Lord. Sometimes, what was considered acceptable in the past is declared wrong. There is no need to seek counseling or prayer for guidance about something that God explicitly forbids. When God says something is wrong, then it is wrong--

whether He speaks this through His Word or specifically into your spirit.

Your spiritual battles are with the world, your flesh, and the devil. These work together to tempt you by the lust of the flesh, the lust of your eyes, and the pride of life. If you look on temptation with eyes of faith instead of eyes of lust, you will see it as that which is forbidden and as an "accursed thing." When you violate God's principles, it always affects others as well as yourself. Achan's sin affected all of Israel. God said:

"Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff." (Joshua 7:11, NKJV)

Pride. Achan is not the only one at fault in this story. When Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai to view the city prior to the invasion, the men returned and told Joshua:

..."Do not let all the people go up, but let about two or three thousand men go up and attack Ai. Do not weary all the people there, for the people of Ai are few." (Joshua 7:3, NKJV)

Ai was a small city in comparison to Jericho which Israel had just conquered. These men thought, "Ai should be no problem. We have faced bigger things and been victorious. This is nothing to worry about." Israel was proud and self-confident instead of being confident in God. There is no mention of "if it is the Lord's will," an attitude we are advised to have according to James 4:13-17.

In our own battles of life we often believe we can handle the lesser problems ourselves. But there is no encounter with the enemy so small that you do not need all of the resources God has provided in order to face it successfully. When you begin to move in self-confidence and pride and think that there is nothing to worry about, then you are moving into dangerous territory. There is no spiritual battle for which you do not need all of the available spiritual resources provided by God.

Perception. The men sent to survey Ai viewed things with their natural senses. They did not have enough spiritual perception to see beyond the surface appearances and recognize the power of the enemy.

Following natural perception instead of spiritual insight led to inaccurate reporting. These men claimed that the warriors of Ai were just a few (Joshua 7:3), when in reality, there were 12,000 of them. When you live a carnal life based on your natural senses, you will make decisions based on fleshly perceptions. This leads to carnal plans which, when acted upon, always lead to defeat.

Prayerlessness. Joshua also bears some blame for the defeat at Ai. He listened to the reports of the men who returned from viewing the city, but there is no record that he prayed about the information that he received. He immediately organized only 3,000 warriors to go up to Ai to battle.

Had Joshua taken time to pray, undoubtedly God would have revealed that there was sin in Israel and warned him not to go to battle. Had Joshua taken time to pray, he would have also discovered that the pattern for attacking Ai was not to be the same as for Jericho. The "Ais" of life--representing the battles with the flesh--are not won the

same way as the "Jerichos" of life which are representative of the appeals of the world.

You cannot live in past victories or by what worked successfully yesterday. God has new strategies for each battle you face. In the book of Judges, a man named Gideon is told to reduce his army. In Joshua's case, he is told to take all the warriors to battle. You cannot limit God to a certain pattern. He is the One who continually declares, "I will do a new thing."

But Joshua apparently did not take time to pray. He sent a few of the troops to Ai. Some men were killed and the others fled before the enemy.

The Results Of Spiritual Defeat

Israel's defeat at Ai was due to violations in the areas of principles, pride, perception, and prayerlessness. These same issues will result in defeat if you allow them to operate in your life.

Just as there are always reasons for defeat, there are always dire results:

Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you. (Joshua 7:12, NKJV)

Because of sin, Israel was soundly defeated at Ai:

So about three thousand men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about

thirty-six of them. They chased the Israelites from the city gate as far as the stone quarries and struck them down on the slopes. At this the hearts of the people melted and became like water. Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. And Joshua said, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?" (Joshua 7:4-9, NIV)

Note the results of Israel's defeat:

Joshua 7:4-5: Fleeing before the enemy.

Joshua 7:5: Death.

Joshua 7:5-6: Fear and despondency.

Joshua 7:7: Looking back to the past.

Joshua 7:8-9: Questioning.

What a sad picture! No longer is Israel a motivated and mobilized force for God. They are a discouraged people with a disheartened leader and they are questioning, fearful, and fleeing before the enemy.

Moses had warned Israel that if there was sin in their midst they could not defeat the enemy. If they were following the Lord, however, one soldier would chase 1,000 and two would put 10,000 to flight. Three Israeli soldiers could

have defeated the entire army of Ai, had not sin separated them from God (Leviticus 26:8).

Violation of God's principles, your pride, carnal perception, and prayerlessness always render you immobile in the face of the enemy. But never view the final outcome on the basis of temporary defeat. Just as there are reasons and results for failure, there is always a remedy to correct these issues.

The Remedy For Spiritual Defeat

There is a remedy for every failure, whether it be in the past, the present, or the future. If you have started your new life in Jesus and failed--if you have been defeated and taken captive by your enemy--you can recover!

...that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:26, NKJV)

When you are walking in defeat, you are fulfilling the will of the enemy. God will help you recover, but you must also take steps to escape by following the Biblical principles of recovery. Joshua 7:10-13 reveals four steps to recover from defeat. These are revelation, repentance, restoration, and return.

Revelation. The first step of recovery is to receive a revelation concerning your problem. When Joshua finally went to prayer after their failure, God revealed to him that Israel had sinned: *"And the Lord said...Israel has sinned..." (Portions of Joshua 7:10-11).*

Ask God to reveal the "accursed thing" that is causing your spiritual defeat and standing between you and total victory

over the enemy. It may be a habit, a recurring sin, unforgiveness, anger, etc.

It is important to note that individual sin affected the entire corporate body. God told Joshua that "they" (all of Israel) had sinned, not just Achan (Joshua 7:11). Never underestimate the damage one person's sin can do. David's disobedience resulted in the deaths of 70,000 people! Why would God blame a whole nation for the disobedience of one man? Because Israel was considered one people in the eyes of the Lord.

As the Body of Christ, all true believers are one in the Lord and sin in our midst affects us all. Your sin affects the cause of Christ. People around you in prison know that you claim to be a Christian and when you act inappropriately, then they may think that all believers act that way and that you really haven't changed much. Individual sin does corporate damage, as demonstrated by one man's sin coming upon all men (Romans 5:12,15,17).

Repentance. The revelation of a problem is not enough to recover yourself from the snare of the enemy. You must deal with the issue on the basis of God's Word. There is a time to stop praying and begin to act upon what God has revealed to you.

God not only revealed the problem to Joshua, He told him exactly how to deal with it: *"So the Lord said to Joshua: 'Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face?'"* (Joshua 7:10, NKJV). God instructed Joshua to call the people together and deal with the sin in their midst. If you are to recover yourself from the snare of the enemy, you too must confront your sin. Joshua was quick to obey. It says he "rose up early in the morning" to follow God's instructions (Joshua 7:16).

The tribes appeared before Joshua man-by-man. Finally it was revealed that Achan was guilty. Joshua told him to confess and give glory to God. When you confess your sin, you are agreeing with God and this glorifies Him. As soon as Achan confessed, Joshua sent men running to his tent to retrieve the sinful items. We cannot be too quick to deal with sin. Delay is disobedience, but...*"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9, KJV).

Restoration. The next step after repentance is restoration. In this case, the accursed items are removed and Achan's entire family is punished. They are stoned to death in the Valley of Achor. The separation from God caused by Israel's violation of principles, carnal perception, pride, and prayerlessness is corrected. Israel is restored to fellowship with God when sin is eradicated.

You may question why the entire family was punished along with Achan. The family most likely knew of and agreed with Achan's sin, as the items were hidden in their tent. Deuteronomy 24:16 reveals that innocent children cannot be held accountable for the sins of their parents, so the family would not have been punished had they not been participants in Achan's sin. Also, these were the days of Old Testament law, not the era of the grace and forgiveness that are now freely available through Jesus Christ. This sad event serves as a classic example of how desperately men needed a Savior to die for sin once and for all so that we could be saved from the penalties of sin--spiritual death and eternal judgment.

Return. When fellowship with God is broken by sin, recovery comes by returning to the point of failure and conquering the enemy. You must return to deal with your defeat. So, after the revelation of their sin, their repentance,

and restoration, God's instructions to Israel were "Go up to Ai."

There can be no truce and no neutrality with the enemy. When you have failed, the enemy will speak words of defeat to you:

- "You might as well give up."
- "Everyone has lost confidence in you."
- "You are weak and good for nothing."
- "You will just fail if you try again."

But you must return to the battlefield. You can never move on and be successful in other battles until you win at "Ai," your place of defeat. Read Joshua 8 which tells the story of Israel's return to Ai. This time Joshua took all the warriors of Israel and they were victorious in battle.

The Door Of Hope

Here is the Biblical remedy for recovery from failure as revealed in Joshua chapters 7-8: Revelation, repentance, restoration, return.

How many times you fail is not as important as what you learn from your failure: *"...for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again" (Proverbs 24:16).*

The Apostle Peter failed by denying the Lord Jesus Christ at the time of the crucifixion, but he was restored again by Jesus after His resurrection. The Lord not only restored Peter to relationship with Him, He also gave him a divine commission to "feed my sheep" (John 21:16). The one who had failed was restored and commissioned to bring hope to others. God will do the same for you!

When you follow God's remedy for recovery, He takes your valley of Achor (trouble) and turns it into a door of hope: *"I will give...the valley of Achor for a door of hope..." (Hosea 2:15).*

Joshua chapter 7 opens with dark picture of the Lord's anger kindled against His people, but in chapter 8 we find Israel marching forward again in victory. God can turn your Valley of Achor into a place of hope instead of defeat.

A Hope Crisis

There is a hope crisis in the world today. Banks are failing, jobs and businesses are being lost, and governments are falling. Natural disasters seem continual: Earthquakes, floods, typhoons, hurricanes, fires, and tornados. People have lost hope that their lives can change. Many have no hope for the future.

Sitting there where you are in prison, you may have lost hope. But in your darkest hour, right there in your personal "valley of Achor", God wants to restore your lost hope because...*"...faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1, KJV).* The Amplified Version renders this verse as follows:

Now faith is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses]. (Hebrews 11:1, AMP)

If you are discouraged, depressed, and feeling spiritually dead you may think you are having a faith crisis. But quite often, such an experience is a hope crisis because the two are related. Hope is confident expectation and joyous

anticipation regarding the future. You need your hope restored because your faith is closely related to hope. Faith gives substance to things hoped for. If you have no hope, you have nothing to which faith can give substance.

Faith provides the proof and conviction of things you do not see. Faith reveals things you cannot understand with your natural senses. If you lose hope, your faith is affected and you no longer feed substance to your faith. Your spiritual vision is also affected, because hope feeds the faith that gives you the assurance of the things you do not see. If you lose hope, your heart is affected because...*"Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Proverbs 13:12, NKJV).*

Hope is related to your salvation because you are "... saved by hope..."(*Romans 8:24*). Hope provides a spiritual anchor for your soul: *"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul..."(Hebrews 6:19)*. As long as you maintain your hope in God, you won't drift spiritually and be tossed around by the waves of circumstances.

Your faith, vision, peace, spiritual stability, heart condition, joy, and salvation are all affected by hope. That is why it is important to keep your hope renewed. Do not look to the world for this. Your hope is not in people, your attorney, a financial inheritance, or even in your release from prison.

To renew your hope, look only to God and His Word. Be like Abraham who believed God's promise of a son even though he was old and his wife was barren. He...

...contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a

hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. (Romans 4:18-21, NKJV)

Joseph never lost hope even though he was sold into slavery, wrongly imprisoned, and forgotten. Moses never lost hope during forty long years in the wilderness. Job lost everything, was suffering physically, and was abandoned by his wife--yet he never lost hope that he would emerge victoriously from this dark chapter of his life.

The woman with the issue of blood had hope for healing if she could just touch the hem of Christ's garment. Jairus had hope that if Jesus came to his house, his daughter would be healed. In Asia, the Apostle Paul lost hope and despaired of life so that he might learn that he could not trust in himself, but rather in Almighty God.

Renewing Your Hope

When Jesus approached the disciples on the Emmaus Road, they had lost hope. He asked them "Why are you so sad?" they answered, "*...we were hoping that it was He Who would redeem and set Israel free*" (Luke 24:21, AMP). Note the past tense--"we were hoping." These men had lost their hope due to the difficult circumstances surrounding Christ's death.

How did Christ renew their hope? He began to preach the Word of God to them! (Luke 24:27). It is God's Word that provides hope for the future:

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

God is your source of hope. He fills you with joy and peace so that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God's prophetic Word to you is: *"You are wearied in the length of your way; Yet you did not say, 'There is no hope.' You have found the life of your hand; Therefore you were not grieved" (Isaiah 57:10, NKJV).*

Hope or hopelessness? Chose hope. Spiritual life or death? Choose life.

The nation of Israel was facing 79 years of captivity when God spoke through their prophet, Jeremiah, and declared:

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."
(Jeremiah 29:11, NIV)*

God declares the same for you, regardless of your circumstances or the terms of your incarceration. There is hope for your future. The Message Bible puts it this way:

*I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out-- plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for.
(Jeremiah 29:11, MSG)*

No matter what you are facing, you can praise your way out of hopelessness into hope. Make these positive declarations of praise right now:

*For in you, oh Lord, I hope...
(Psalm 38:15, NKJV)*

*And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in you.
(Psalm 39:7, NKJV)*

*Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are
you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall
yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.
(Psalm 42:5, NKJV)*

*But I will hope continually, and will praise you yet
more and more. (Psalm 71:14, NKJV)*

Praise Your Way Out Of Hopelessness

"The way out of despair is through an act of faith--
choosing to praise God when it is the last thing you
feel like doing. Strength to endure comes when we
find our pleasure in God instead of in good
circumstances."

-Charles Stanley

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Conquering The Giants

When the nation of Israel entered the land which God had promised them, they found giants residing there:

There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight. (Numbers 13:33, NKJV)

Spiritually speaking, "giants" stand for the great difficulties you face in life, the obstacles that would try to hinder you from fulfilling your God-given destiny. You will meet "giant" problems in prison as well as in your family, social relationships, and in your own heart. Your giant may be an addiction, negative emotions like anger or unforgiveness, or a person that is pulling you down into the mire of sinful bondage.

If you are meeting "giant" problems in your life, the good news is that you are progressing in God! It is in the way of duty that you find giants. When the nation of Israel was going forward they met giants. When they turned back into the wilderness, they found none.

The land of Canaan was populated by very evil people who defied God, practiced gross immorality, and offered child sacrifices to their idols. God told Israel to totally destroy the inhabitants of Canaan, including the giants, but they did not heed God's warning:

But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore...they shall be thorns in your

*side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.
(Judges 2:2-3, NKJV)*

Israel conquered much of Canaan, but they left just "a few giants" in three cities (Joshua 11:22). As God had warned, the few giants they allowed to remain became "snares and thorns" to them.

Giants beget giants in the natural world as well as in the spiritual world. If the giants of your life are not eliminated, they will become "snares and thorns" in your spiritual experience. This chapter will show you how to conquer spiritual giants in your life.

Cities Of The Giants

None of the Anakim were left in the land of the children of Israel; they remained only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod. (Joshua 11:22, NKJV)

The Anakims who were permitted to remain were giants, evil Canaanites whom God had commanded to be destroyed. In Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod, Israel allowed a few of these giants to remain. It is in these three locations that the nation of Israel later experienced major problems.

Gaza. It is in Gaza that we find God's man, Samson, in trouble (Judges 16). In this city where the giants were spared, Samson finds Delilah, he is deceived, stripped of his spiritual strength, and taken into captivity. No matter how strong you are in the Lord, if spiritual giants are allowed to remain unconquered, they have the capacity to destroy your life and ministry.

Ashdod. Ashdod was one of the cities where the evil Philistines took the Ark of God which they captured from

Israel. The Ark was the symbol of God's presence and glory in the midst of His people (1 Samuel 4-5). This is the same Ashdod where Israel left just "a few giants." Unconquered giants will rob you of the glory of God's presence.

Gath. One bad thing about leaving giants in the land is that giants give birth to giants. In 1 Samuel 17, God's people are being held hostage by a giant named Goliath. This man was from the city of Gath, where Israel left a few giants.

If Israel had destroyed all of the giants as they had been commanded, they would not have been faced with this problem. But here we find the armies of Israel cowering in fear as, day-after-day Goliath came out to taunt them. Israel was all set in battle array (1 Samuel 17:2). They had the armor for battle and the warfare training, but they were rendered immobile by the giant, held captive by fear and dismay (2 Samuel 17:11).

Unconquered giants in your life give birth to more giants. These giants will return to taunt you and will eventually multiply and increase in strength until you are held hostage spiritually by them. You can have your biblical armor on and be trained in spiritual warfare, but you will be rendered immobile unless you get down on the battlefield and face the giant.

Gaza, Ashdod, and Gath were the cities where a few giants were allowed to remain. Interestingly, the name "Gaza" means "strong"; "Ashdod" means "stronghold"; and "Gath" means "winepress". Giants left unconquered in your life will increase in strength, establish a stronghold, and eventually squeeze all that is good out of your life.

Techniques Of Giant-Killing

Somebody had to face the giant! It was at Gath that God used a young man named David--upon whom His Spirit and anointing rested--to kill the giant. The "techniques of giant-killing" used by David in this actual battle can be applied spiritually to conquer the giants in your life. Read 1 Samuel chapter 17 before continuing with this section on techniques of giant-killing.

First: Prepare. In order to conquer the giants of life, you must prepare in the lesser battles you face. David recalls how he conquered a lion and a bear that attacked the sheep for which he cared:

*But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."
(1 Samuel 17:34-37. NIV)*

David knew he could conquer the giant because he had prepared himself in the smaller battles of life.

When you determine to face a giant, prepare yourself for attacks from others! Those who walk by faith are always challenged by those who walk in fear. David was criticized by those closest to him--his own family (1 Samuel 17:28).

He was also attacked by leadership (1 Samuel 17:33) and he was mocked by the giant himself (1 Samuel 17:44).

When you prepare to face the giants in your life, those closest to you--including your family--may attack you. Leadership may say it is impossible. The criminal justice system may say you cannot change. The giants themselves will rise up to mock you. But if you have prepared yourself spiritually in the lesser battles to face the greater ones, you can confidently declare, "I can conquer this giant!"

Second: Profess. David had a powerful profession of faith. He repeatedly professed his confidence in God saying, "I know I can conquer this giant in the name of the Lord" (1 Samuel 17:26, 32,37,45-46). You are saved by confessing your sins and professing Christ as Savior. Other spiritual battles are also won by your confessions of faith.

Third: Prove. If you are to be successful in slaying giants, you must have proven your weapons:

*Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. "I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off. Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.
(1 Samuel 17:38-40, NIV)*

Saul tried to equip David with his own armor, but David had not proven Saul's armor. You cannot conquer giants on the basis of someone else's power or experience. You must

put on the whole armor of God described in Ephesians 6 and prove it yourself. You prove the armor of God as you use it to face the everyday problems and challenges of life. Then, when you face the really big giants in life, you are prepared.

Fourth: Penetrate. Your preparation may be good, you may have proven your spiritual armor, and you can have a good profession of faith in God, but if you do not confront the giant you will never conquer him: *"As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him" (1 Samuel 17:48, NIV).*

David "ran" towards the giant. You must do the same if you are to prevail over your enemy. You must penetrate the giant's territory. No victory is possible while you sit on the sidelines immobilized by rationalizing, compromising, and excusing your continued failure.

When the twelve Israeli men returned from spying out Canaan, Joshua and Caleb said of the giants, "They are bread for us. We will eat them up." In essence they were saying, "We will be stronger by overcoming them than if there had been no giants to overcome." You will either face the giants or continue to wander in the wilderness of your bondage. When you face and defeat a giant, you will be stronger than if there had been no giant to overcome.

Fifth: Proper Motive. When you face the giants of life, you must do so with the proper motive:

"This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that

there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands."
(1 Samuel 17:46-47, NKJV)

David's motive was not to gain glory for himself or demonstrate how strong or spiritual he was. His motive was to bring glory to God.

Sixth: Perfect Pattern. God had a perfect pattern for David's victory. It was a sling shot and five smooth stones, the first of which hit its mark and toppled the giant. Your giant is God's enemy and you must fight with His weapons. Although the weapons described in Ephesians 6 seem as unlikely as five stones were to conquer giants, they do work! You cannot fight spiritual giants with natural, carnal weapons. You must follow God's perfect pattern.

Seventh: Prevail. You must prevail over the giant, meaning you must totally destroy him. You don't want to just incapacitate your giants for a time. You want to totally annihilate the giants in your life. When the enemy fell from the stone which was slung with accuracy and precision, David rushed in and took the giant's own sword and beheaded him. When you fight God's way, you will use the very thing that the enemy has threatened you with to defeat him. But remember--you must totally prevail over the giant or it will return to trouble you.

Now It Is Your Turn

Giants birth giants. If you don't get rid of the giants in your life, they will increase and become more powerful.

Are there any spiritual giants in your life that you need to eliminate--things like negative emotions, secret sins, unforgiveness, addictions, etc.? Face them today in the power of the Lord so that they do not reproduce and strengthen their hold in your life.

Here are the steps to take:

- Prepare properly.
- Profess confidence in God.
- Prove your spiritual armor.
- Penetrate the giant's territory.
- Have the proper motive.
- Follow the perfect pattern.
- Prevail totally over the enemy.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Standing Strong In The Storm

In New Testament times when the Apostle Paul established new churches, he made it a point to teach believers that they would experience much tribulation (Acts 14:22). While it is true that your new life in Christ will bring much joy, new hope, and dramatic change in your life, you will also experience problems in this sinful world. Especially in the difficult environment of incarceration, you will sometimes experience what are called "spiritual storms".

The Bible defines a natural storm as a tempest. The dictionary calls it a disturbance of normal atmospheric conditions. In military terms, a storm is defined as a violent assault. Natural storms provide great parallels of spiritual truths. A spiritual storm is any disturbance or assault on your life--whether it be mental, emotional, financial, physical, or spiritual.

Building On The Rock

Believers and unbelievers both experience storms in life. What makes the difference in the outcome of a storm depends upon whom and what you have built the foundation of your life. Jesus told the following parable to illustrate this truth:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on

sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash. (Matthew 7:24-27, NIV)

Both men in this story were industrious, in that they took time to build their houses, which is symbolic of carefully building their lives. The difference was that one man built his life on a firm foundation--representing Jesus Christ and His Word--while one did not. Both houses experienced storms. The house built on the foundation of Christ stood firm. The other house collapsed in the storm.

The question raised by this story is this: Upon what are you building your life? Are you building your life your own way and disregarding the master plan in the Bible? Are you building your life on what your peer-group thinks or says? Will your foundation stand firm in the midst of the storms of life? If you build your life on Jesus Christ and the Word of God, you will be able to withstand the fiercest gale.

Types Of Storms

All spiritual storms of life fall into one of two categories.

Storms that are your fault. These are caused by your own sin and are difficulties you experience because of your sinful decisions.

Storms that are not your fault. These come through the circumstances of life, because of the actions of others, as a result of your ministry, and by Satanic attack.

The Bible provides two excellent examples of these categories. One is the account of a prophet named Jonah who experienced a storm because of his own rebellious

decisions. The other is the story of the storm experienced by the Apostle Paul, one he had to endure through no fault of his own.

The story of Jonah's storm is recorded in Jonah chapter 1. The story of Paul's storm is recorded in Acts 27. Take time to read these two passages before you continue with this chapter.

Jonah's Storm

Jonah chapter 1 records how the Word of the Lord came to Jonah and instructed him to go to the city of Ninevah to preach repentance. Nineveh was the capitol of the Assyrian empire, the world power at that time, and a very evil city.

Jonah was apparently acquainted with God's voice because he recognized it. The problem was in how he responded to the Lord's direction. Sometimes, like Jonah, you can be in a comfortable place and have your life disrupted by God directing you to go elsewhere. How will you respond?

Jonah was told to "arise, go, and cry", which denotes the urgency of the message he was to bear to these wicked people. Instead of obeying the Lord and going to Ninevah, Jonah fled to Tarshish trying to escape the presence of the Lord. Note the key word "but" in Jonah 1:3. Jonah knew what he was supposed to do, but he didn't do it. Jonah hated the Ninevites because they were among the most brutal nations in the ancient world. He refused to go to minister to them because he didn't want them saved. He wanted them destroyed.

So instead of obeying God's Word, Jonah went to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. He paid the fare and went down into the ship, fleeing from the presence of the

Lord. Or so he thought. He actually was heading into a storm that resulted because of his disobedience.

Positive circumstances do not always indicate you are in God's will. Note that providentially there was a ship available, they had space for a passenger, Jonah had the money to pay the fare, and he apparently had peace in his decision because he fell fast asleep. The easy way is not always the right way. Jonah thought he would flee from God's presence, but he was trying to do something that cannot be done. The psalmist wrote:

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.
(Psalms 139:7-12, NKJV)

God Himself declared:

"Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I shall not see him?" says the Lord; "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the Lord.
(Jeremiah 23:24, NKJV)

Like Jonah, you will pay a price when you rebel against God. But God loves you so much, that He will send a spiritual storm in order to get you back on course. In Jonah's case, the Lord sent an actual tempest at sea, so great

that it appeared that the ship might break apart. This was a supernatural storm because God sent it.

When you encounter such a storm spiritually, you may be rowing hard in the other direction, but the storm will be used by God to bring you back to His purposes and the direction He has planned for your life. For some reading these pages, prison is your spiritual storm. God didn't send you there, but He allowed the storm to occur and He will use this terrible experience to get your life back on course.

The crew was immensely frightened and each of them began praying to their gods. They cast out the goods that were on the ship, trying to lighten their load so the vessel would not sink. Meanwhile, Jonah was down in the belly of the ship fast asleep. A spiritual parallel of this is seen in disobedient believers who are traveling the wrong direction, asleep in the midst of a storm, and do not even realize the peril that lies ahead. Do not be one of them!

Finally the captain of the ship woke Jonah and told him, "What are you thinking, sleeping in such a fierce storm!" He told Jonah to get up and begin to call on his God so that they would not perish. Good advice if you are sleeping in a storm caused by your own sin!

Eventually, the crew decided that this storm was happening because someone had angered the gods. They decided to cast lots--a practice that would be like the rolling of dice today. Their purpose was to determine who had caused this evil to come upon them. So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah.

As the crew questioned Jonah, he admitted that he was a Hebrew who served the true God and that he was running from the Lord. Then the men were exceedingly afraid and

asked him, "Why have you done this? What can we do to calm the storm?" These are good questions to ask yourself when you are experiencing a storm resulting from your own sin. "Why have you done this? What can you do to calm the storm raging around you?"

At Jonah's insistent request, the crew finally took him and threw him overboard and the storm ceased. But God wasn't done with Jonah. The prophet would not drown in the storm--and the same is true of you. You will not perish in the storm, even though you may be responsible for it by your own sinful decisions.

In Jonah's case, God had prepared a great fish which swallowed him. Whale sharks are big enough to swallow a man whole--often their mouths measure 7 feet high by 7 feet wide. But the Bible says God prepared this fish, so there may be no other fish like it in the past or present.

Some of us must go to the lowest depths in life--maybe even prison--in order to get back on track with God. A spiritual storm is often permitted in order to prepare you to accomplish His purposes. You will not die in the raging sea. You will not perish in the darkness. The question is: How long do you want to stay in the belly of the fish? Your time there has a lot to do with you. What will it take to make you yield to God and obey Him?

There is no remedy for a storm resulting from disobedience other than repenting of the sin that caused it. So, there in the darkness of the fish's belly, Jonah repented. You can read his great prayer of repentance in Jonah chapter 2. He acknowledged God's judgment, calling the waves and billows "Your waves and billows". God is in control of every storm in your life, even when it results from your

own sin. There, imprisoned in the fish's belly, Jonah acknowledged his sin and repented.

Then, by faith, Jonah declared "You have brought up my life from corruption, oh Lord my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord, and my prayer came unto You in Your holy temple."

And indeed, Jonah's prayer of repentance did come before God. The Lord spoke to the fish and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land. As you read the remainder of this short book, you will learn how after this experience, Jonah readily obeyed God's direction. He went to Ninevah, preached the Word, and experienced one of the greatest revivals in biblical history. The entire city repented!

You may feel like you are in the "belly of a fish" sitting there in prison because you messed up your life. But God is bringing you out of hiding, out of the depths of the sea so to speak, and giving you another chance. When you come to the end of yourself and there is no way out, when you repent and determine to go God's direction, that is when you will be supernaturally delivered from your spiritual storm.

Paul's Storm

The storm experienced by the Apostle Paul is recorded in Acts 27. Paul had been arrested because of his witness for the Gospel and was sailing to Rome as a prisoner. Why does the writer of Acts spend so much time recording details of this storm? Because there are many spiritual analogies to be drawn from Paul's experience. These strategies will help you face spiritual storms for which you are not at fault.

Recognize that storms do not necessarily mean you are going the wrong way. Jonah experienced a storm because of rebelling against God, but Paul was on the way to his next mission field--Rome--when his storm occurred. When Jesus told the disciples to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, they too experienced a storm that hindered their mission. They were on the way to where Jesus had directed them to go and where they would be part of a great ministry, yet they experienced turbulence on the way (Mark 4:35-41).

Maintain confidence in God. Paul knew where he was going. He had been told by the Lord that he would make it to Rome. The disciples crossing the Sea of Galilee also knew their destination. Jesus told them they were going to the other side. No matter how the elements raged, the disciples would not die in the storm. God told Paul that he would not perish in the storm. Neither will you. Maintain confidence that God will get you to where you need to be despite the storms of life.

Realize you are not alone in your storm. Paul had with him a young man named Mark, who wrote the account of this storm. Paul also had Julius, the centurion who had befriended him. Most importantly, Paul had God. You may not have a "Mark" or a "Julius", but you certainly have God with you in the midst of your storm.

Do not blame God for the storm. Paul told the crew, "You should have listened to me." He realized that the storm was not his fault, but he was experiencing it because of bad decisions made by others. God allows storms in life, but He is not the source of them. Spiritual storms are caused by either your own sin, because of circumstances of life, through others around you, for the sake of the Gospel, because of your ministry, or through Satanic attacks. You

live in a sinful world with the effects of sin all around you. You are not immune from the storms of life just because you are a believer.

Maintain communion with God. Paul communicated with God in the midst of the storm. He did not get mad at God or become discouraged because of the tumult, nor did he stop praying.

Replace fear with faith. Paul not only maintained his own faith in God, he encouraged those around him to have faith. Paul told those on board not to fear and to be of good cheer. He said:

"But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me." (Acts 27:22-25, NIV)

Your faith will see you through the storms of life and enable you to encourage others along the way.

Reject unbelief. Paul said, "...I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" (Acts 27:25, KJV). This is the kind of simple faith you need: If God said it, believe it! Paul was clear about who he was in God, who he served, and who had promised deliverance. Paul was prepared by God, possessed by God, protected by God, and served the purposes of God. You are being prepared by God to be possessed by Him. You will be protected through every storm and emerge victoriously to serve His purposes.

Do not be concerned if there is silence. The Lord was on board with Paul in the midst of his tempest. Jesus slept during the storm the disciples experienced at sea. The important thing was that He was on board. God is still on board with you in the midst of your storm, even if you do not sense His presence or hear His voice

Do not be concerned if you have no direction. The sun and moon were not visible in the midst of the storm Paul experienced. This was a problem because this was how navigation was done. There was no GPS system in those days. God is still in control of your "ship", even if the way ahead seems dark and without direction.

Do not try to escape the storm. In the natural world, many people have been killed trying to outrun a storm. Stay on board with Christ during your storm. Despite the tempest, you are heading the direction God wants you to go. Do not abandon the "ship" of your faith and calling. Realize that--as Paul--you are being propelled towards your spiritual destiny by the storm. You will get to where God wants you to be!

Undergird yourself spiritually. The crew undergirded the ship with ropes to hold the timbers to the hull. In the midst of your storm, undergird yourself with the Word of God, prayer, and worship. The King James Version indicates that they undergirded the ship so they would not get mired in the quicksand (Acts 27:17). Your spiritual undergirding will prevent you from being pulled down into the "quick sands" of this world.

Get rid of the baggage. The crew tossed all of the excess lading overboard. Storms of life are a good time to examine the "baggage" you are carrying and see what you need to eliminate--things like anger, bitterness, unforgiveness--any

weights that will hinder you from reaching your destination. Do all you can to lighten your load, then trust God for deliverance from the storm.

Cut off the ropes. Paul told the soldiers to cut off the ropes to the life boats so that the crew and passengers could not escape. This represents rejecting any man-made ways of escaping your storm.

Take up the anchors. Do not hold on to things that anchor you down in the storm. Refuse to be anchored to the past and the things that characterized your old life--negative relationships, addictions, habitual sins, etc. Anchor yourself to Jesus Christ, the secure anchor for your soul (Hebrews 6:19). In the account in Acts 27:40, the King James version says that by taking up the anchors the crew "committed themselves to the sea". Let go of everything that anchors you to the old life and commit yourself to the God who controls the waves and billows of your life (Psalm 42:7).

Take down the sails. Relinquish control. Stop struggling. Take down the battered sails of your own efforts and let God direct your course.

Exercise spiritual authority over the storm. Jesus calmed the storm for the disciples, but Paul had to go through it--yet both emerged victoriously. When you exercise spiritual authority, sometimes the storm will cease. At other times, God will give you the supernatural strength to endure the turbulence. In either case, God will be glorified.

Abide in the ship. Paul told those on board to stay in the ship if they wanted to be saved. This ship, like Noah's ark, is symbolic of Jesus Christ. Remain in Christ in the midst of your storm.

Act decisively in the proper timing. When it was time, the crew, passengers, and prisoners all jumped in the water and headed for shore. Sometimes, in the midst of your storm, God will give specific directions as to what you are to do to escape the storm. When He speaks, act immediately and decisively.

Avail yourself of your refuge from the storm. The ship ran aground near an island named "Melita", which means "refuge". God is your refuge in your storm. The psalmist said: *"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, until these calamities have passed by"* (Psalm 57:1, NKJV). Immerse yourself in God, prayer, worship, and the Word until your storm has passed and fair skies return in your life.

Know that the storm is taking you where you need to be. Paul thought his destination was Rome, and ultimately it was. But God had need of him in Melita, an island where there was a great spiritual need, and that is exactly where the storm took him.

Two Storms Compared

The following chart compares the storms experienced by Jonah, whose disobedience resulted in a storm, and Paul who experienced a storm through no fault of his own.

Jonah

- Chose to go.
- Cause of the storm.
- Slept during the storm.
- Didn't have God's blessing.
- The crew was fearful because of Jonah.
- To be saved, Jonah must be cast out.

Paul

- Told the crew not to go.
- Remedy for the storm.
- Fasted and prayed.
- Had God's blessing.
- The crew was of good cheer because of Paul.
- To be saved, all must abide in the ship.

Here are some powerful conclusions to be drawn from the study of these storms.

Storms come to all believers. For sure, spiritual storms will come when you sin. But even if you walk in perfect obedience to God, like Paul, you will sometimes experience storms. Know that you are not alone. Many others are going through similar physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and financial gales.

Storms are not pleasant. No one wants to experience a spiritual storm because they are not pleasant. The psalmist expressed this in Psalm 107:

For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits' end. (Psalm 107:25-27, NIV)

This passage speaks of being at your wit's end in a storm. Read through Psalm 107 and you will discover that it describes a storm as a place of instability, a place where your soul melts, you are lonely, hungry, and thirsty. It is a

place of trouble, darkness, bondage, staggering, fainting, and falling. You seem to be without direction. Indeed, a storm is not a pleasant place to be, but it can have positive results in your life if you persevere and remain faithful to God.

God uses the storms of life to position you spiritually.

Jonah's storm got him back on track to minister in a great revival in Ninevah. Paul's storm landed him on the Island of Melita where he ministered to spiritually receptive people. God loved Ninevah and Melita so much that He used storms to bring His servants to them. God loves the people you are called to serve so much that He will use everything--including the storms of your life--to position you where you can serve them. Despite the difficulties you may experience, there is always divine purpose in the storms of life. The psalmist declared regarding the storm:

Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven.

(Psalm 107:28-30, NKJV)

Yes...even prison can be used by God to get you to your desired destination! That is the testimony of the Old Testament patriarch, Joseph who was enslaved and falsely imprisoned. He declared: *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives"* (Genesis 50:20, NIV).

God uses storms of life to give you new responsibilities.

Jonah was a prophet, but after the storm he became a tremendous evangelist in Ninevah. Paul began his voyage as a convict, but ended it directing the ship. It doesn't

matter who man says you are, it is who God says you are that counts.

The storms will not last forever. Jonah's storm ended when he repented. Paul finally landed on shore through supernatural intervention by God. Likewise, your storm will not last forever.

God knows exactly where you are. Whether you are in the midst of a storm because of your own sin or you are faultless as to its cause, you can be assured that God knows exactly where you are. He knew where Jonah and Paul were, and He knows where you are right now. God understands the rough waters you are sailing. He knows about your difficulties. Like the people of Israel, who experienced many spiritual storms, you can "*...trust and listen believingly that God was concerned with what was going on with them and knew all about their affliction*" (*Exodus 4:31, MSG*).

The storms of life will not prevent you from reaching your destiny. Jonah made it to Ninevah. Paul made it to Melita and later on to Rome. The disciples made it through the storm to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. You, too, will make it through the storm to your destiny.

Your storm will not last forever. God will still your storm and you will emerge victoriously with new vision and purpose in your life.

God Stills The Storms

For when God spoke he stirred up a storm
Lifting high the waves with hurricane winds.
Ships were tossed by the swelling sea,
rising to the sky, then dropping down to the depths.

Reeling like drunkards, spinning like tops,
Everyone at their wits' end.
Until even sailors despaired of life, clinging in terror.

Then we cried out,
"Lord help us! Rescue us!"
And He did!

God stilled the storm, calmed the waves.
and He hushed the hurricane winds to only a whisper.

(Psalm 107:25-30, TPT)

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Fulfilling Your Destiny

When asked what you wanted to be as a child, you didn't say: "I want to be a prison inmate." You had hopes and dreams. You certainly did not envision yourself sitting behind bars. Yet here you are. And you feel that you have aborted your destiny and lost your chance to fulfill your dreams.

Don't let the enemy feed you this lie. No matter how far you have strayed from your Heavenly Father or from His plans for you, you can still have a blessed future. This truth is evident in a parable that Jesus told that has come to be known as the story of the prodigal son. Actually, it is the story of three sons.

Before we examine this passage, let's take a look at the circumstances in which this story was shared by the Lord. Luke chapter 15 records three parables told by Jesus in response to the murmuring of religious leaders against sinners. In the first two verses, Luke provides the setting for the story:

Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." (Luke 15:1-2, NKJV)

In response to the criticism of the Pharisees, Jesus tells the story of a lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7); a lost coin (Luke 15:8-10); and a lost son (Luke 15:11-16). In each example, the love and compassion of God for lost and straying humanity is emphasized.

The first two parables emphasize God's love and concern for lost souls. The shepherd sought for his lost sheep and the woman sought her lost coin until they were found. The third parable emphasizes that not only will God save unbelievers, He will welcome back a son or daughter who has strayed into sin.

If you have known God and walked away from Him, if you are backslidden and alienated from God, living far away from the Heavenly Father--then this revelation is for you. You can return to the Father's house. You may not be able to return to your natural home right now, but you can return to your spiritual home--and that is far more important.

The First Son: Delayed Destiny

Let's look at the story of the first son:

Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything."

(Luke 15:11-16, NKJV)

This parable relates the story of a young man who had been living in the Father's house. He was a son. He had an

important destiny as an heir of the father's wealth and he enjoyed the good life in his father's house.

But one day, this young man told his father, "Give me my inheritance now." He wanted his share of his father's fortune, and he wanted it right then so that he could leave home and do as he pleased. Why did this young man want to leave the Father's house with all of its rich provisions? We are not told. Perhaps he did not like the rules or he mistrusted his father's management. He may have thought he was missing out on the good things in life. Perhaps he was tired of living in the shadow of his older brother. Maybe he wanted to manage his own life and do his own thing.

These are some of the reasons believers leave the Father's house spiritually. Some people turn against God when circumstances that they don't understand occur in their lives. They don't trust God's management. Others don't like the rules. Some feel they don't measure up to other believers in the house. There are also those who think they are missing out on the good things in life, so they decide they want to take charge of their own lives and do their own thing. Can you see yourself in any of these descriptions?

This young man went to a far country, and when you walk away from God that is exactly where you are spiritually. He had lots of friends, lived recklessly, and the good times rolled for a season. But riotous living always comes to an end and always leaves you empty and unfulfilled. The young man wasted his inheritance. If you are not in the Father's house, you are wasting your substance. Your sinful state is a waste of your energy, time, wealth, health, talents, and abilities. What you perceive as the "good times" will ultimately come to a bitter end.

Eventually, a famine came to the country where the young man lived. Your spiritual famine may be a disaster, an accident, or sickness. God did not cause it, but He will use it to drive you back to the Father's house. And yes--God will even use prison to bring you back to your Heavenly Father.

This young man lost everything--his home, his money, his friends, and his sustenance. Eventually, he was starving and trying to fill his stomach with corn husks from the pig pen where he worked. Have you been trying to satisfy yourself with the corn husks of the world? Fleshly, carnal living will always leave you spiritually hungry. You will starve spiritually feeding on the world's garbage of pornography, drugs, alcohol, immorality, etc.

A husk is an empty thing. It has no nutritional value and it is not satisfying. There is a void in you that the husks of this world cannot fill. Think about it for a moment: What have you been living on spiritually? Food from the Father's table or pig's food, the empty husks of the world? How did you feel the day after that drinking party? What was it like when you were coming down from the drugs? What emotions did you experience after that one-night sexual encounter?

Finally, the money ran out, his friends were gone, and the young man came to the end of himself. Like this young man, as long as you are relying on friends, money, and your own resources, you don't get this desperate. When everything is gone--there is no one that can help, no friends, no money, nothing you can do to change your life--then these dire circumstances are used by God to draw you back home to the Father.

You have a choice. You can stay where you are--hoping your friends will come through for you, remaining in the filth of the world and eating its empty husks--but a year from now you will be in the same pig pen. Same problems. Same emptiness. Same dismal future.

Finally, this young man made a decision--the best one he had made in a long time:

"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!'"
(Luke 15:17, NKJV)

Perish--that's the key word! This young man, who had deliberately walked away from God, was now lonely, dissatisfied, lost, starving, and perishing spiritually. Do you want to keep living that kind of life, or do you want to do something to change your destiny?

When the young man "came to himself," he remembered that in his father's house there was enough bread for everyone with plenty left over. No matter what you need--forgiveness, deliverance, finances, healing--there is ample provision in the Father's house.

The prodigal son's affliction caused reflection, which resulted in a change of direction. He said:

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"
(Luke 15:18-19, NKJV)

When this young man left the father's house, he was saying "Give me, give me..." When he returned, he was saying, "Make me!" He knew that he needed a completely new life.

It is not enough to make a decision to change. You must act upon that decision. Faith is a fact, but it is also an act. You can decide that things need to be different in your life, but if you don't act on that decision there will be no change.

The prodigal son acted upon his decision, got up, and started his journey home:

And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. (Luke 15:20, NKJV)

Do you notice the pattern here? It is a spiritual cycle of realization, repentance, returning, and restoration. If you have walked away from God, this is the same pattern you must follow. You must realize your sinful condition, repent, return to the Father, and receive His restoration.

While this young man was a great distance down the road from home, his father saw him and came running to meet him. Your Heavenly Father sees you too. He was watching you in that far country and He has been waiting for your return. This is the only time in scripture we have an analogy depicting God the Father running--and it is in welcoming response to a wayward child who deliberately walked away but wants to return home.

There is no sin so great, no land so far, no prison so dark, and no pit so deep that you cannot return home to the Father. The way back home is open to you because...

...now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.
(Ephesians 2:13-17, NIV)

You, too, can return to the Father's house. Every partition between you and God that was erected by your sin has been broken down through the blood of Jesus. There is peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness awaiting you when you return. A new life awaits!

And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet." (Luke 15:21-22, NKJV)

The prodigal son felt he was no longer worthy to be a son. "But the father said." His father had a different opinion. You may view yourself as unworthy to return to the Father because you have failed in the past. "But God says"--meaning that He speaks a different opinion over your life. Who will you listen too? The voice of Satan, your own voice, or the voice of your loving Heavenly Father?

They stripped the rags of the far country off of this prodigal son--the rags being representative of the old life. The father called for the best robe to be put on him, which is representative of the new life. Did you notice the father called for the *best* robe? Just because you rebelled, walked away from God, and lived in the far country of sin for a time does not mean you have to settle for second best when you return. Even though your original destiny was derailed through your own sinful decisions, God still has the *best* plan for you. No second rate plan. No second hand clothes. No Plan B. The best! God's desire is...

...that you put on the new man, which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:24, NKJV)

Then the father gave his ring to his son. This gave the young man authority, as rings were used in Bible times to seal important documents with wax impressions. When you return to God the Father, He not only gives you the robe of righteousness for the rags of your sin, but He gives you His power and authority, signifying that you are His heir. You are His son or daughter.

Then the father called for shoes to be given to his son. In Bible days, servants went barefoot. Shoes were only worn by the sons:

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Galatians 4:6-7, NKJV)

Then the father held a great feast for his returning son. He commanded his servant to...

"...bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." And they began to be merry. (Luke 15:24, NKJV)

“Bring the fatted calf,” said the father. “All this time I have been preparing it for my son’s return. Let’s celebrate” God is just waiting to give you another chance. He has been waiting a long time for you to return to the Father’s house where you belong.

The Second Son: Aborted Destiny

There is a second son in this story, the older son who remained with his father during the prodigal’s absence:

Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, "Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf." But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, "Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him." And he said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found." (Luke 15:25-32, NKJV)

This young man was indignant with his father for accepting his younger brother back and forgiving him. He could not believe that one with such poor character and such a sinful past should have a place in the father's house! He would not even call him "brother". He referred to him as, "This your son." When you come back to the Father's house, there may be some people who criticize you. Do not look to others for approval or affirmation.

The older brother was indignant with his father because he did not understand his merciful ways. He remained isolated by his religious, self-righteous, critical attitudes. He said, "I served you"--revealing that he had a religious spirit in that he thought his relationship was based on what he did. He declared, "I never left you and I never sinned like he did"--revealing a spirit of self-righteousness. He was also critical and focused on his brother's faults and failures, showing a judgmental spirit.

The older son was not shut out of the feast by the Father, but he shut himself out through his lack of compassion and his refusal to accept a fallen brother. The Father begged the older son to come inside, but he refused.

My dear brother and sister--standing outside in the darkness refusing to accept the Father's invitation into His house--there may be a great deal that you think justifies your attitude. But your Father appeals to you as the father did to his elder son. Come in out of the cold of your self-imposed isolation and you will find warmth and joy in the Father's house. Do not permit your wrong attitudes to keep you from entering in to the house.

The Third Son: Enabled Destiny

Did you know that there is another son in this parable? It is the Son of God who told this story. God loves you so much that He sent His Son to the far country of this sinful world to take you back to the Father's house. To give you a new life. To give you another chance. To enable you to fulfill a worthwhile destiny.

Why not take hold of His extended hand right now, rise up from the pig-pen of your life and come on home to the Father's house? He is waiting just for you--and this time, you will not fail. You will be able to fulfill your the God-given purpose for which you were created.

You still have a divine destiny. It is not a second-hand plan, it is the best plan--just as the prodigal received the best from his father. The destiny for which you were created is to worship and have fellowship with God. You can do that right where you are. Prison does not prohibit fulfilling this destiny because as a believer...

...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

(1 Peter 2:9, NIV)

You are chosen by God. You are spiritual royalty. Your greatest ministry, your divine destiny, is to know and worship God. Declare His praises. Share with others what God has done and is doing in your life. Tell them about how He brought you out of darkness into new life. This is the purpose for which you were created and destined.

Just because you are incarcerated does not mean that you cannot fulfill your destiny. Through the third son--the Son of God--you can reestablish your relationship with the Father and He will guide you step-by-step into the wondrous plan He has for you.

Three Sons, Three Destinies

A story of three sons: One with a delayed destiny, one with an aborted destiny, and one who will enable you to fulfill your destiny.

But the first move is yours. You must return to the Father's house. And once you head homeward, don't ever look back to the pig-pin of your past.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Pursuing Purpose In Prison

Many times over the years we have heard people express gratitude to God for being sent to prison. One inmate even wrote the judge thanking him for the sentence she received. The reason? It was in prison that they found faith in Jesus Christ and discovered their true purpose in life.

The Apostle Paul was frequently imprisoned for his faith over the years of his ministry. Despite the injustices of his circumstances, he discovered an amazing divine purpose in his incarceration. He wrote:

Now I want you to know and continue to rest assured, brethren, that what [has happened] to me [this imprisonment] has actually only served to advance and give a renewed impetus to the [spreading of the] good news (the Gospel). So much is this a fact that throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest [here] my imprisonment has become generally known to be in Christ [that I am a prisoner in His service and for Him]. And [also] most of the brethren have derived fresh confidence in the Lord because of my chains and are much more bold to speak and publish fearlessly the Word of God [acting with more freedom and indifference to the consequences].
(Philippians 1:12-14, AMP)

Whether you are guilty or innocent, and regardless of whether you are serving a short or lengthy sentence, you can find new purpose in prison.

Perhaps you had goals and dreams that were shattered by your incarceration. Maybe you never had any ambitions at all--you just hung out with the crowd partying, doing drugs and alcohol, and engaging in sinful activities. Regardless--God can restore your broken dreams and give you new purpose in your life if you use your time in prison properly.

Setting Practical Goals

New purpose won't just come to you. You must pursue it. You won't find it if all you do is eat, sleep, watch television, and play games during your incarceration. Ask God to help you set practical goals in every area of your life so that you can redeem the time while serving your time.

Educationally. What educational opportunities are offered in your institution of which you can avail yourself? With the increasing accessibility of distance education, you may be able to pursue an advanced degree or training for a specific profession. If you do not have your high school diploma, make that a major goal. Your prison counselor or case worker can assist you in pursuing available educational opportunities.

Financially. Get a job and work while you are in prison. Despite no pay or low pay, you will gain experience and skills that will help you find employment in the outside world. When funds are made available to you, don't spend it all on junk food at the canteen. Use some to repay any court-imposed restitution and then save a portion to finance your reentry into society.

Mentally. Instead of staring at the television mindlessly hour after hour, participate in activities that will keep you sharp mentally. Work puzzles. Read informative books.

Watch educational documentaries. Keep a journal. Write a book. Learn a language or a new skill.

Physically. Exercise regularly, including stretching and aerobic exercises such as walking. Some institutions offer exercise classes and even provide gym equipment. Be careful about your diet. Just because they serve something doesn't mean you have to eat it. Be selective, because prison food is not always the best quality or the most nutritious diet.

Socially. Make new Christian friends. You can reach out to others and help them--especially first time offenders, the young, and the elderly. You can make a difference in someone's life right where you are, right now, today. You can teach others the skills you possess--how to read and write, how to speak other languages, arts and crafts, or music. Invest your time and talents in other people.

Spiritually. As a believer, spiritual growth should be your main focus also. Pray each day, study the Bible, attend Christian services, and participate in faith-based small groups. Pray for your children, your friends, and your family. Write letters of encouragement to them if this is allowed by the institution. Serve in the ministries in your institution--sing in the choir, teach a Bible study, help prepare the chapel for services.

By setting goals in each of these areas, you will find new purposes for your life while you are incarcerated.

Spiritual Goals

Because this book is addressing true change through the Word of God, spiritual change is the major focus. That is why the remainder of this chapter is based on a story recorded in the Bible in Acts 16. It concerns two innocent men who were unjustly incarcerated. Just as they found spiritual purpose despite their imprisonment, so can you!

Paul and Silas, ministers in the early church, were on a missions trip. They were planning to go to Asia to spread the Gospel, but Acts 16:6 says they “were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.” So they tried to go to Bithynia, but Acts 16:7 says “the Spirit did not permit them to do so.”

Natural reasoning would question, "Why wouldn't God want the gospel to go to Asia and Bithynia?" But you must learn that closed doors are as much God's direction as open doors. Sometimes God puts a big "stop" sign in your life, and you have no choice but to comply. Paul and Silas wanted to go to Asia and Bithynia, but God was supernaturally controlling their destinies:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9, NIV)

While Paul and Silas were ministering in a place called Troas, Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia who pleaded with him, saying, "*Come over to Macedonia and help us*" (Acts 16:9, NIV). So Paul and Silas traveled to Philippi, a colony of Macedonia. There, on the Sabbath

day, we find them out by a river speaking to a few women who opened their hearts to the Word (Acts 16:13-16).

Paul and Silas might have been thinking, "If we could have just gone to Asia, we could have reached so many more people. Here we are with a few ladies by a river--not even speaking in a synagogue or church. Just having a little prayer meeting with only a few people getting saved." But God had a plan. It was not the plan Paul and Silas would have chosen, but it would culminate in the salvation of an entire family and the eventual planting of a church in Philippi.

Always remember that behind every circumstance in your life there is spiritual purpose. Whether you are in prison because of your own actions or through no fault of your own, God still has a divine purpose for you and He can accomplish great things through your life if you allow Him to do so.

As Paul and Silas were ministering in Philippi, a demon-possessed girl began following them:

This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. (Acts 16:17-19, NKJV)

The Bible says that Paul became greatly annoyed by this woman. Sometimes, your circumstances can be annoying--this is especially true in prison. The reason Paul was annoyed was that the claim this woman was making insinuated that there was more than one way to God other than through Jesus Christ. In Greek, the words she used meant "they proclaim to us *a* way of salvation."

Paul dealt with annoying circumstances in the power of the Spirit--not by whining, in anger, or through manipulation. Paul commanded, "In the name of Jesus, come out!"--and the demons came out of the young woman. You need to deal with annoying circumstances spiritually instead of trying to wish them away, psychoanalyze them, or medicate them.

Now as long as you are a "secret service Christian", so to speak, and remain a low profile believer, Satan is not overly concerned. Paul and Silas praying by the river with a few women was of little concern to the enemy, but when they moved in the power of the Spirit and began to confront demons, that was another matter. Be aware that when what you say and do begins to cause change in the lives of those around you, you will become a target for the enemy!

The men who owned the slave girl made their living by her fortune-telling. When the evil spirit came out of her, she could no longer tell fortunes and their source of income dried up. They were so angry that they brought Paul and Silas before the authorities and claimed they were advocating customs that were unlawful for Romans to follow. A crowd joined in the attack, and Paul and Silas were beaten, thrown in prison in the inner chamber, and their feet were fastened securely in stocks. The remainder of the account in Acts 16 occurs in prison at the midnight hour.

In Prison At Midnight

There, in the depths of the prison at midnight, Paul and Silas could have complained to God and said, “We didn't want to come here in the first place. We wanted to go to Asia! Now here we are beaten, in prison, and fastened in stocks. This was not our plan, it was yours! How could you allow this to happen?” Perhaps you, too, have blamed God for the situation you are presently experiencing.

You must come to realize that two things are common to us all:

Prisons of life. Everyone faces prison-like circumstances of life which represent limitations of:

- Difficult circumstances.
- The environment in which you live.
- The people with whom you live.
- Your job.
- Addictions and sinful lifestyles.
- Mental and physical limitations.

Midnights of life. Everyone faces midnights in life. As used here, midnight represents dark times of testing and trials of your faith.

- When you stand by that open grave of a loved one--it's midnight.
- When your business fails and you lose everything--it's midnight.
- When your friends turn their backs on you--it's midnight.
- When your marriage falls apart--it's midnight.
- When like Job, you have lost all--it's midnight.
- When the things you gave your life to fall apart--it's midnight.

-When you walk through the doors of a prison
and the gates close behind you--it's midnight.

The question is: What will you do in your prison-like
circumstances? What will you do at your midnight hour?

Paul and Silas did not gripe, complain, manipulate, or grow
angry. They sang praises to God!

*But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and
singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were
listening to them. Suddenly there was a great
earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison
were shaken; and immediately all the doors were
opened and everyone's chains were loosed.
(Acts 16:25-26, NKJV)*

Can God trust you in a prison at midnight? Does God have
divine purpose for you there, despite the darkness that
surrounds you? Remember--Paul and Silas were innocent,
They were incarcerated for their faith, but God had a divine
purpose for them. Right there in prison. At the midnight
hour.

Embracing God's Purpose

Begin to look at your prison and your midnight experiences
as ways to embrace God's purposes. It is not about you, it
is about His purposes and plans.

*For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having
spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving
to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not
lose heart. Even though our outward man is
perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day
by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a*

moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:15-18, NKJV)

In the biblical record, God walked into prison and...

-He released Joseph to be the leader of the land.

-Samson's hair began to grow. He was given a second chance, and he conquered more of the enemy in death than in life.

-Prophets authored books that extend to our day.

-Jeremiah bought property while he was still incarcerated, knowing someday his deliverance would come.

-Daniel was elevated from the lion's den to a position of leadership.

-John, imprisoned on Patmos, received a great revelation of the end-times as he was worshipping on the Lord's Day. (By the way...note that he was worshipping instead of griping, complaining, or trying to build a raft to get off the Island.)

God will walk into your prison also, moving in the darkness of your midnight. He will accomplish great things in you and through you if you allow Him to do so.

You are not alone in the prisons and the midnight hours of your life. Paul said...

At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. (2 Timothy 4:16-18, NKJ)

Three Hebrew men walked into a fiery furnace because of the stand they took for God, but they were not alone (Daniel 3). They walked out of the fire unhurt and without even the smell of smoke on them.

Paul was not alone. The three Hebrew young men were not alone. And you are not alone.

Prison With A Purpose

When you praise God at midnight in the depths of your prison, six amazing processes are set in motion.

First: Receptivity. People around you take notice. In the case of Paul and Silas, “...*the prisoners were listening to them.*” The other inmates became receptive because they saw that these men were different. Instead of whining and complaining, they were praising God and spreading joy in their dark environment. People are watching how you respond in the dark times of your life. They are listening to the words coming out of your mouth and observing the attitudes and emotions you express.

Second: Rectification. When you have a proper attitude in the midnight experiences of life, God takes notice and your

circumstances are rectified--meaning that things are eventually set right. In this case, as Paul and Silas worshipped God, He sent an earthquake and their circumstances changed immediately and drastically!

There is another powerful example in the Old Testament where God set an ambush against the enemy when His people praised Him during dark times:

*And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.
(2 Chronicles 20:22, KJV)*

Despite an advancing enemy, Israel began to praise God and the Lord Himself ambushed the enemy. Who knows what will happen when you begin to praise God in the midnight prisons of your life.

Third: Release. People's lives are changed when you demonstrate a positive attitude in the midst of your difficult circumstances. In this account, the chains of the prisoners were loosed. The actual prison gates may not open for you, nor may your handcuffs be removed, but spiritual chains will be broken through God's power. Then, through your example and ministry, you can be instrumental in bringing others out of bondage:

I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, To open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house. (Isaiah 42:6-7, NKJ)

Fourth: Reversing. The plan of the enemy is reversed. Often, the very ones who have been the keepers of your prison, so to speak, will be touched by God to help you. In this account, the jailer is saved and ministers to Paul and Silas. If you will let God accomplish His purposes in your prison and in the midnights of your life, the very thing Satan sought to destroy you with will be reversed and used for your benefit.

There is a tremendous Old Testament example of this. There was an evil enemy of God's people named Sisera, whose army had invincible iron chariots that assured their victory in battle. Eventually, this man was defeated by one iron nail in the hands of a godly woman (Judges 4).

Another example is that of a man named William Tyndale who devoted his life to translating, printing, and distributing the Word of God. One powerful bishop was angry about the common man having access to the Word of God. He wanted to take the Bibles out of circulation, so he sent someone to buy up all of the Bibles Tyndale had printed. Tyndale set an exorbitant price on the books, hoping to discourage the sale, but in spite of this the man bought all of the Bibles. Then Tyndale used the money to buy equipment and supplies to print thirty times as many Bibles and distributed them all over the country. When the bishop discovered more Bibles flooding the community, he asked where Tyndale had gotten the funds to print them. Tyndale replied, "You paid for it!"

God can use the very thing that brought you to prison to accomplish your purpose. Over the years, we have seen women who were molested start a ministry to abused women. We have seen drug addicts start rehab centers. Ex-convict Chuck Colson started a great prison ministry. Your purpose very well may emerge from your problems in the

past. For sure, your purpose will provide the passion to see you through your problems. Your test will become your testimony.

Fifth: Restoration. Continue to worship God in your prison at midnight, and eventually He will restore all you have lost. In the case of Paul and Silas, their freedom was restored and they were given the food and medical attention that had been withheld from them. God has promised:

And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. (Joel 2:25, KJV)

Sixth: Rippling. If you remain faithful in prison, a divine ripple effect occurs. Like a pebble dropped into a pond, the results of your faithfulness to God will ripple out to others. Because of the faithfulness of Paul and Silas while they were incarcerated, the jailer was saved, his entire household was converted, and a church was planted in Philippi. When you are truly changed and your life reflects that change, you will greatly impact the lives of others. Then, as they are changed, they will reach additional people as the spiritual ripple effect continues to expand. In fact, the story of Paul and Silas in jail has just rippled down through the centuries to you!

Praising God In The Prisons Of Life

If you will praise God in the midst of your prison in the midnight of your life you, too, can experience these amazing results:

- Receptivity: People around you will notice.
- Rectification: Your circumstances will change.
- Release: Your spiritual chains will be loosed.
- Reversing: The enemy's plan will be reversed.
- Restoration: What you have lost will be restored.
- Rippling: The divine ripple effect will extend to others and their lives will be changed.

The Bible says: "*In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you*" (1 Thessalonians 5:18, KJV). Note that it says not *for* everything, but *in* everything give thanks. You may not be able to thank God *for* the prison or midnight hours of your life, but you can thank Him *in* the midst of them. That is what Paul and Silas were doing when God supernaturally intervened in their circumstances.

An Old Testament prophet named Habakkuk put it best when he declared that even if he lost everything, he would still continue to praise God:

Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls--Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength; he will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills.
(Habakkuk 3:17-19, NKJ)

You are in a prison physically, but are you incarcerated in other areas of your life as well? Are you imprisoned by the past, bitterness, or unforgiveness? Are you bound by your addictions or circumstances? The question is: What will you do at the midnight hour in the prison of your life?

Pursuing God's Purpose
By Dina Gritz
California Institute For Women

The deep seated anger in my life and my criminal lifestyle resulted from the pain of being rejected and abandoned by my mother at age five. Anger became my coping mechanism for my pain. At age ten, I was molested, which brought more pain and shame. By the time I was about fourteen years old, I had become very rebellious. My pain and shame went unchecked, so as I grew into a young adult I did not have the secure identity of someone who was loved and affirmed.

Wanting to feel loved and accepted opened me up to experimenting with drugs and alcohol. In time, it became a way of life. The alcohol made me feel good about myself and enabled me to find relief from my pain and shame. I lacked goals, dreams, and coping skills. I was disillusioned to believe that things would get better with a new relationship, a new job, or a new place to live. But my weekend drinking and experimenting with drugs turned into weekdays and then into a lifestyle which involved various arrests for drugs and violent behavior. My life began to spin out of control and I was not accountable to anyone. The night of my crime, I blamed my boyfriend for everything bad in my life--all of my loss, pain, and shame. In the flash of a moment I turned a gun on him and shot him. It cost him his life and I ended up in prison with a 15 years to life sentence.

But that was not the end. It was only the beginning. Jesus met me inside those gates. I experienced a new beginning and learned how to follow God's plan for my life. I eventually earned an associate's degree in Biblical ministry, a bachelor's in Christian counseling, and a master's in chaplaincy. I was ordained to ministry and served as a prayer director in the institution. I sang in the prison choir and I worked at various jobs to gain marketable skills. I paid tithes from my income, and paid off my court ordered restitution. Granted this took years, but through it all God has totally changed me! There is no greater joy than pursuing God's purpose for your life.

Finding New Purpose
By Catherine Thompson
California Death Row For Women

In the outside world, I lived what I now refer to as a fast and turbulent life of ups and downs which resulted in a lot of losses. These losses included loved ones and the path that I had been raised to follow. I lived recklessly. It was not drugs or alcohol, but my lifestyle was still not of God. On June 8, 1993, after my life had been turned upside down by a trial and conviction in which I received the death penalty, I was transported some 300 miles away from a city that I had called home since 1967.

I arrived on death row in Chowchilla, California, with no idea how I was going to survive. I joined whatever organizations were available to me as a death row inmate. I formed new friendships and I had my family's love and support, but I still did not feel fulfilled. Something was missing from my life. I was just existing. All the canteen shopping and quarterly packages were not sufficient, I was still lacking something. I would stare at my TV and not see or hear the program because I was trying to figure out what was missing in my life. I tried meditating, but my mind wandered. I read the Bible, but retained little. I had visits and enjoyed them, but once my visitor left I returned back to the hum-drum life in my housing unit.

One day while looking out of my window, I questioned God, "Why me Lord? Now what?" I was shocked at the response that I received. The answer was that it was not all about me! When I finally turned my life over to God, people began to see changes in my conduct. Eventually, some ladies on the row asked me to lead a Bible study. I was flattered, but scared. At first, I used the Bible Trivia game while I studied and prepared until I felt confident that I could teach the Word. I started to conduct weekly Bible studies and to counsel some of the ladies and pray with them. Spiritual walls were tom down and burdens were lifted. I had found new purpose, my purpose, in His purpose.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Facing The Future

As you read the title for this chapter, you might be asking:

"Do I have a future? You don't understand that...

...I am on death row.

...I am serving life without parole.

...I am innocent, but no one will listen to me.

What future do I have?"

While it is true that you may be on death row or serving life without parole, the fact is that you can either be a ward of the government for the remainder of your life or you can be a prisoner of the Lord. You can choose, as did the Apostle Paul, to live a meaningful life and fulfill your destiny despite your incarceration.

-A young woman named Maria received an eighty year sentence for a terrible crime she committed against her children. She is serving her term as a prisoner of the Lord. She is determined to reach young people coming to prison for short terms and see their lives changed--so "they won't have to be where I am for life," she says.

-There is Catherine, a death row inmate, who leads Bible studies on the row and counsels other inmates. She contributed several articles and ideas for this book. She is an inspiration to all who are blessed to be called her friends.

-And there was Karla, a young woman who remained on death row for years for a brutal crime she committed. She impacted the entire world with her amazing testimony and led many inmates to the Lord prior to her execution.

-And there are the stories of many others we have known and loved down through the years who served or are serving their time as prisoners of the Lord.

Where you are physically does not have to dictate where you are spiritually. In the natural world, you are a prisoner of the government. Spiritually, you can be a prisoner of the Lord with divine purpose and eternal hope.

If you are innocent of the crime for which you were convicted, never give up in your quest for justice. Never cease praying that the truth will be revealed. Many states have innocence projects that will review your case and fight for justice in your behalf without charge. If so, avail yourself of these wonderful services. Always place your trust in God, however, not in lawyers or people and their promises. Your ultimate deliverer is God!

Meanwhile, while you are waiting for justice to take its course, do not sit around wasting your time. Take the opportunity to grow in the Lord spiritually. Improve yourself educationally, mentally, and physically. Reach out to help others and prepare yourself for the future.

Injustice and unjust judges are not new. The psalmist David who wrote centuries ago under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, detailed concerns over the lack of justice in Psalm 58. Rather than allow the injustices he witnessed and experienced to consume him, he declared "*...there is a God who judges the judges...*" (*Psalm 58:11, TPT*). No matter how unfairly you have been treated, you can be assured that God knows the truth of your situation and will eventually judge those who judged you falsely. God judges you fairly on the basis of His Word:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.
(Hebrews 4:12, NIV)

If you are guilty of the crime for which you are incarcerated, be aware that statistics indicate that ninety-five percent of people in prison will be released, but over half of them will return. Sad facts, but true. These statistics do not have to be true of you, however, if you follow the guidelines of God's Word.

Whether you are innocent or guilty, remember the exclusion-free guarantee from the Word of God provided at the beginning of this book:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.
(Joshua 1:8-9, NKJV)

If you follow the mandates of God's Word, you will be blessed whether you remain in prison for the rest of your life or you are released back into society. God is with you wherever you are, and your success is assured. You do have a future!

Facing Difficult Circumstances

As a believer, you will face difficult circumstances because you live in a sinful world surrounded by ungodly people. Many of the circumstances you encounter will be completely independent of who you are and whether or not you are serving God "*... for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*" (Matthew 5:45, NKJV). Blessings are bestowed upon both the evil and the good because of God's loving compassion. It is actually His goodness that draws men to repentance (Romans 2:4).

Some circumstances in life--both positive and negative--happen independently of who you are or what you have done. Some difficult circumstances of life are caused by others, some because of your own decisions, and others are caused by naturally occurring events of life. Some of these negative circumstances arise through no fault of your own, while others occur because of bad spiritual seed you have sown in the past. Regardless of the reason for your circumstances, you can be assured that God is in control.

Many of the issues that disrupt and disturb our lives continue because of lack of understanding of the true purpose of circumstances. Many who are going through difficult times are good Christian people who love the Lord, yet they do not know how to cope with their difficulties.

Negative circumstances often seem like crushing burdens, beyond your ability to bear. In the natural realm, there seems to be no answer. But you are no longer living only in the natural realm. You are living in the realm of the supernatural. You are serving an Almighty God for whom nothing is impossible! There is never a time when you do not have the ability to get an answer for your problems,

because Jesus is the answer to every circumstance of life. Not only is God in control of your circumstances, He uses them to manifest His power and glory in the midst of adversity.

When Lazarus was sick to the point of death, Mary and Martha sent for Jesus to come pray for him, but the Lord remained where He was for two more days. By the time He arrived at Mary and Martha's house, Lazarus had died and been buried for four days. But this delay enabled Jesus to manifest His glory in a greater way. He had previously performed many miracles of healing, but now He was able to demonstrate God's authority in an even more adverse circumstance by raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43-44).

Jesus is the answer to every challenge of life you may face. He manifests His power and glory in the midst of seemingly hopeless circumstances. If there is a delay in answering your cries for help, it is because a greater demonstration of His power is going to be manifested in the future.

It is normal to want to escape difficult circumstances, but as a believer in Jesus Christ it is no longer about you or your desires. It is about God's purposes. For example, the New Testament records the stories of Stephen, who was martyred for his faith, and the Apostle Peter who was delivered from prison and impending death. The question may be asked, why did God allow Stephen to die and Peter to be spared?

Peter was freed from prison because his destiny was to be a key leader in the early church. He was just beginning his ministry. Through the death of Stephen, as believers scattered elsewhere because of the persecution that occurred in Jerusalem, the Gospel spread throughout the world. Paul, who witnessed Stephen's death, was so

impacted that he later accepted the Lord and was raised up as a believer and a great apostle of God. Stephen's work was concluded, and his death was not without purpose. Events in the lives of believers are always orchestrated by God to accomplish His purposes.

Hebrews 11 lists the names of believers who were delivered by faith and others who died in faith. God wants you to have both living and dying faith. Sometimes, God's purposes are advanced through suffering--as in the case of Stephen. At other times, His purposes are served by deliverance, as when Peter was delivered from prison. While the reasons for some things may be revealed to you, other questions without answers are secret things you must leave with the Lord: *"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us..."* (Deuteronomy 29:29, NIV).

Do not compare yourself to others. One person may be released from prison, while you remain incarcerated. It is about God's purpose and plan, not about you.

Preparing For The Future

Joshua chapters 23-24 record Joshua's final speech to Israel prior to his death. The major battles of Canaan had been fought and won and Israel finally had rest from their enemies. The nation was preparing for the future, getting ready to live in their promised land. In this powerful farewell message, Joshua gave some important guidelines to Israel that will help you prepare for the future.

Look back. Joshua recalled God's faithfulness to His promises in helping Israel secure their Promised Land. He said "The Lord your God has fought for you. He has divided the land to you for an inheritance." Always

remember to look back on how far God has brought you from the old life. Looking back on His faithfulness in the past generates faith for the future.

Look ahead. The major battles for the promised land had been fought and won, but it was now up to each tribe to secure their own inheritance. This is true in terms of your future. Your major battles were fought and won by Jesus Christ who defeated the devil and secured your salvation, healing, deliverance, and eternal destiny. Your mandate is to live in obedience to God's Word, claim His promises, and take possession of your spiritual inheritance.

Joshua told the people, "You shall possess the land as the Lord your God has promised." Despite the fact that you may be sitting in prison as you read these words, be assured that you, too, can claim the promises of God recorded in His Word.

Remember the story of Joseph which we studied--the man who was sold into slavery, falsely accused of immoral conduct, and incarcerated? Joseph had dreams that he most likely thought would never come to pass. But one day, his time came and God elevated him to a position of leadership that resulted in saving many lives. Like, Joseph, all of God's promises to you will be fulfilled--maybe just not in the specific way or in the exact timing you expected.

When Joseph died, he was still looking ahead to the fulfillment of God's promises. On his deathbed, Joseph commanded that his body be placed in a coffin so that someday when Israel traveled to their promised land, his bones could be taken with them. Even in death, Joseph looked towards the future. For hundreds of years, through all the dark days of Israel's slavery, that coffin provided hope. It was a silent promise that someday God would

move in behalf of His people. You do not have a coffin to look at, but you have something much greater. You can look back to the empty tomb of Jesus Christ, a silent witness that God's promises will be fulfilled.

Look around. Joshua warned the people about the enemies that surrounded them. Israel would face new challenges after Joshua's death as they confronted these enemies, but God gave them a tremendous promise that *"One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the Lord your God is he that fights for you, as He promised you"* (Joshua 23:10). The people of Israel were still surrounded by the enemy--as they are yet today--but they had the promise that God would fight for them and give them supernatural abilities to conquer the enemy. You are surrounded by the enemy in the prison where you now reside, but you have the power of the Holy Spirit resident within you that will empower you to face every challenge. Learn how to do this where you are now, and you will be successful when you are released.

Look out. Joshua warned the people to refrain from forming ungodly alliances with unbelievers. He told them that if they did this, then these people these would become snares and traps, scourges in their sides, and thorns in their eyes. He told them that such alliances would result in them perishing from off the land God had given them.

Joshua warned the people not to mix among the heathen nations around them, or become part of their idolatrous life style. Instead, they were to cling to the Lord their God. The word "cling" denotes intimacy similar to that of a marriage relationship.

As you face the future, you must make a commitment to separate yourself from the world. Their standards are not your standards. Their idols of wealth, popularity, and

measures of success are not to be your guidelines. You are to keep the mandates of God and not be turned aside by the things of the world.

You are called to spiritual separation:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate," says the Lord. "Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:14-18, NIV)

You are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers in any kind of a business arrangement, intimate friendship, close relationship, or scheme. You are to be separated, but not isolated because in order to minister to people you obviously must have contact with them. Separation is not the same as isolation.

Joshua also warned the people to look out for the peril of prosperity, as one can be as easily defeated by prosperity as by difficult trials. He warned:

Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all the good things have come upon you which the Lord your God promised you, so the Lord will bring upon you

all harmful things, until He has destroyed you from this good land which the Lord your God has given you. (Joshua 23:15, NKJV)

Moses had given Israel a similar warning, that they should not forget God when He brought them into their land and they were enjoying all of the blessings of fulfilled promises. You, too, must guard against the peril of prosperity. When the promises of God are fulfilled in your life--when you are released back into society or when your appeal is successful--do not forget that it is God who has blessed you for divine purposes.

Look up. Joshua told Israel to keep their focus on God. He told them:

Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed. (Joshua 23:14, NKJV)

Joshua instructed the Israelites to focus on God and how He had kept every promise. Not one promise had failed. All had come to pass. You, too, must keep your focus on God instead of the circumstances around you, believing that every promise will be fulfilled.

Making A Permanent Choice

Joshua's farewell message continues in Joshua chapter 24 when he gathers all the tribes of Israel together, along with their leaders, their judges, and their officers. When the people were assembled, Joshua reviewed the faithfulness of God from the time of Abraham, through the days of Moses,

and throughout his own lifetime. Joshua recalled how God had delivered the nation of Israel from slavery, driven the enemy out before them, and given them their Promised Land. Joshua reminded the people that God had given them a land for which they did not labor, cities which they did not build, and productive lands which they had not planted. When you come into the fulfillment of God's promises to you and are experiencing His blessings, never forget who provided these things. It was God working for you, in you, and through you that made it possible.

Then Joshua challenged the people to make a new and permanent commitment to God (Joshua 24:14-24). He told them to put away the gods which their fathers served on the other side of Jordan and in Egypt and serve the Lord. He told them, *"Choose you this day whom you will serve, whether it be the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell."* Then Joshua declared, *"But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!"* To live in the land of promise--in order to successfully face the future--you will need that kind of commitment. You must make a once-and-for-all choice. Choose this day who you will serve, both now and forever!

Joshua warned the people that in their own strength, they would not be able to serve a holy and righteous God. As long as they continued to serve idols and reject God, there would be no forgiveness. The same is true for you. You cannot serve God through self-effort and as long as you continue to serve your idols of sex, drugs, materialism, etc., you cannot walk in fellowship with Him. Who you choose to serve affects not only your own destiny, but that of your immediate family and future generations. If you do not choose to serve God, then by default you are choosing to serve the enemy (Luke 16:13).

Joshua was asking the people to make a definitive decision for God. No more waffling. No more looking back. God was the one who had brought them out of Egypt, performed great miracles, preserved them in the wilderness, and brought them into their Promised Land. The question was: Would they continue to serve Him?

The same is true for you. God wants you to make a definitive decision for Him. No more waffling. No more looking back to the old life. God has brought you out of sin, done great things in your life, and is preserving you in the wilderness of prison. The question now is: Will you continue to serve Him?

Focus On The Future

Do not live in the regrets of your past. Focus on the future, because you can be assured that every promise God has made will come to pass. The Bible explains that...

Men indeed swear by a greater than themselves, and with them in all disputes the oath taken for confirmation is final [ending strife]. Accordingly God also, in His desire to show more convincingly and beyond doubt to those who were to inherit the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose and plan, intervened [mediated] with an oath. This was so that, but two unchangeable things [His promise and His oath] in which it is impossible for God every to prove false or deceive us, we who have fled [to Him] for refuge might have mighty indwelling strength and strong encouragement to grasp and hold fast the hope appointed for us and set before us. (Hebrews 6:16-18, AMP)

God didn't want the standard of how men make promises to be the final word, so He goes beyond that. He swears on the basis of Who He is and upon His infallible Word. His purpose is to confirm convincingly and beyond the shadow of a doubt that His promises will be fulfilled to those who have fled to Him for refuge.

If you have applied what you have learned in this book, then God has made you a new creature. He has made promises to you through His Word. He has assured that you have a divine destiny. Now you must adopt the attitude of the great patriarch, Abraham, who "...believed God even though such a promise just couldn't come to pass!" (Romans 4:18, TLB).

Do not look to your own abilities to face the future. Look to Almighty God who has declared:

*Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness And rivers in the desert.
(Isaiah 43:19, NKJV)*

For some reading this book, the new thing God will do may lead you out from behind prison bars back into society. For others, you may remain incarcerated indefinitely. Either way, you can experience the rivers of God's presence because His blessings are not limited by prison bars. His peace is not dependent upon your circumstances because it is supernatural and passes human understanding.

Whether you are released or remain where you are, receive this Word from the Lord who has said:

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." (Isaiah 30:21, NIV)

Look by eyes of faith to the future knowing that He who has promised is able to perform it. God will lead you each step of the way on your journey into the unknown.

Once I was hemmed in and surrounded by those who don't love you, but by your supernatural power I overcame them all!

Yes, they surrounded me, like a swarm of killer bees; swirling around me I was trapped like one trapped by a raging fire; I was surrounded with no way out and at the point of collapse.

But through your supernatural power I overcame them all.

They pushed me right up to the edge, and I was ready to fall.

But you helped me to triumph, and together we overcame them.

(Psalm 118:10-13, TPT)

CHAPTER TWENTY

Finishing Well

Judas, Demas, and Diotrophes. Three men with one thing in common: They started to serve the Lord, but did not finish well. Then there are those who failed at some point in their lives, but who repented, were restored to God, and finished well. These include men like Moses, David, Jonah, Peter, and John Mark. All of their stories are recorded in the Bible.

The difference between those who finished well and those who did not was perseverance. Those who succeeded set their hearts and minds to finish their course, no matter what the cost. They began with the end in mind. They refused to give up. They refused to fail. If they fell down, they got back up again. They had one goal: To live their lives and ministries commendably and finish well.

Running The Race

Paul compared the Christian life to running a race. He said, *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it"* (1 Corinthians 9:24, NKJV). Reaching your God-given destiny is not a brief sprint. Facing the future can be a lengthy and sometimes grueling race.

A tremendous true-life example is drawn from the 1954 British Empire Games held in Vancouver, British Columbia. The mile race that was held there is considered to be one of the greatest races of all time. It pitted the two fastest men in the world against each other: Roger Bannister and John Landy.

From the start, the race was clearly between Bannister and Landy. Unlike most runners, Landy's method was to move to the head of the pack early and by the sheer power of his physique outlast the other runners who would reserve strength for a final thrust at the finish.

Following his usual approach, Landy started fast. Soon the other runners were dropping back, leaving Landy out in front with Bannister trailing him. Landy and Bannister were maintaining a blazing pace, one that would surely set a new world record. But who would get to the finish line first?

As the runners came to the final lap, Landy was in the lead ahead of Bannister, as he had been throughout the race. Ahead of him stretched the finish line. Somewhere behind him was Bannister. Suddenly, a deafening roar arose from the crowd in the stands. Landy knew what it meant. Bannister was making a last desperate effort to catch him.

The finish line was getting closer and closer, and the roar of the crowd was growing louder and louder. Landy knew that Bannister was catching up, but where exactly was he? Just before crossing the finish line, Landy turned his head to the left so he could see where Bannister was. Seizing the opportunity, Bannister threw himself past Landy on his right side and beat him across the finish line. Looking back had cost Landy the race! This famous race, called the "miracle mile", is enshrined in stone in a monument in Vancouver. There are two runners, one turning his head to look back as the other thrusts himself toward the finish line.

As runners in this race of life, we are to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and focused on our destiny. Don't be distracted by the roar of the crowd. Don't compare yourself to other runners. Don't look back to the old life. Focus on the future:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3, NIV)

There is a great cloud of witnesses--in heaven, here on earth, and right there in prison--who are watching how you run your spiritual race.

Jesus endured His journey to the cross because of the joy of what lay ahead--His resurrection. You can make it through your incarceration with joy by keeping your focus on Jesus and the finish line of your faith. The Apostle Paul declared: "*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!*" (*Philippians 4:4, KJV*). The joy of the Lord is to be experienced always--not just when things are going good. Even when facing the cross, Jesus endured because of the joy that was ahead. You can face dark days in prison because you know that a better life awaits you--an eternal, abundant life!

The Spirit Of A Finisher

The story is told of a 19th century violinist named Nicolo Paganini. He was playing before a packed house, when one of his violin strings snapped. He continued to play, improvising beautifully. A second string broke. Then a third. Three limp strings dangled from the violin, but the master performer completed the difficult composition on

one remaining string. The audience jumped to their feet and filled the hall with shouts of "Bravo, Bravo." This is the kind of perseverance you will need in order to fulfill your destiny. If you feel like you have only one string left, play it well!

Like Paganini, a virtually unknown young man named Abe also had this spirit of a finisher. At age 22 he failed in business. He ran for the position of legislator in the United States at age 23 and was defeated. He failed again in business at age 24. He had a nervous breakdown at age 27. He ran for speaker of the US house of representatives at age 29 and was defeated. Subsequent defeats followed as he ran for the congress--three times--for the senate twice, and tried to get elected as vice president. Still, he didn't give up and finally, at age 51, Abraham Lincoln was elected as president of the United States and guided the nation through one of the darkest periods of its history.

Then there was the minister whose journal recorded his repeated failures:

- Preached at St. Anne's asked never to return.
- Preached at St John's--deacons said get out and stay out.
- Preached at St Jude's--can't go back there either.
- Preached by the highway and was kicked off the street.
- Preached in a meadow and was chased out because someone turned a bull lose during the service.
- Sunday night I preached in a pasture and 10,000 people attended.

That man was John Wesley, who became one of the most revered ministers of all times.

In order to fulfill your spiritual destiny and live a successful life, you must determine that you will never give up... *"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6, NIV).*

Don't allow where you started from to determine where you finish. Ask God to give you the spirit of a finisher so that you can finish well.

Facing The Future With A Clear Conscience

The Apostle Paul--previously known as Saul--had a dark and sinful past. From his own confession he declared: *"I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison" (Acts 22:3, NIV).*

Despite this tragic chapter in his life, Paul was able to declare: *"My conscience is clear..." (1 Corinthians 4:4, NIV).* How could Paul possibly claim this, when he had killed people and severely persecuted God's people? It was because Paul's life was changed one day on the Damascus Road when he met Jesus Christ and became a new creature in Christ (Acts 9).

Paul had learned the secret of facing the future without the sin, shame, or the pain of the past. He declared:

*Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 3:13-14, NIV)*

Paul forgot the past and looked to the future. He had only one goal: To fulfill the destiny to which he had been called through Christ Jesus.

Our final picture of Paul in the book of Acts finds him under house arrest in Rome, chained to a Roman guard. This is not what he had in mind when he first dreamed of ministering in Rome.

We are told that for at least two years, Paul was restricted to this room. How he must have longed for freedom to share the Gospel as he had previously done during his mission trips. Paul could not change what others were saying about him during this time. He could not eliminate the charges against him. He could not change the fact that he was under arrest. He could not conduct a crusade or preach to a large crowd.

But Paul did what he could. He preached to everyone who came to his house. Some were persuaded by the things he shared, others would not believe (Acts 28:24). Yet Paul continued to be faithful to God. He overcame the many limitations of his imprisonment. So can you.

Standing At The Crossroads

You will face many decisions in your spiritual walk with the Lord. Each day you will have to make a choice to walk God's way or your own way. When you face difficult choices in the days ahead and you are standing at the crossroads of decision, remember that...

This is what the Lord says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls." (Jeremiah 6:16)

Take a look back at how far you have come in order to strengthen your faith so you can move ahead. The purpose in looking back is to find the good way. Look for the good way in the Word of God and in the wise counsel of mature believers. Then take it! Always remember that you are a new creature in Christ, not a patched up version of who you were.

You will succeed in living your new life, because you are kept by God's power:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9, NIV)

As you face the future, do not focus on the difficult problems ahead. Live one day at a time--that is what Jesus said to do (Matthew 6:34). Do not look around to see what others are doing. Focus only on Jesus, who is the author and finisher of your faith (Hebrews 12:2). He has begun

the work in your life, and He will complete it if you allow Him to do so.

If you continue to live your new life--regardless of your past sins and regardless of the crime for which you were incarcerated--someday Jesus will present you faultless before God because...

*He has reconciled you by His physical body through His death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before Him--if indeed you remain grounded and steadfast in the faith.
(Colossians 1:22-23, HCSB)*

You are a prisoner of the Lord, an ambassador in chains, and you have been taken captive by Christ.

The Beginning Of The End

It was November of 1941 in London, England, during the turbulent days of World War II. Darkness cloaked the city as Hitler's planes invaded English skies. Air raid sirens shattered the nights and people were scrambling for shelter as the bombs fell.

On November 10, Prime Minister Winston Churchill addressed the fearful people of London. He said: *"This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."* History reveals that his statement was true. It was not the beginning of the end, nor was it the end for England. It was, however, the end of the beginning. Things would not be as they were previously. Their end would not be as their beginning had been.

You have come to the end of this book, but it is not really the end. It is only the beginning of the end--living out the remainder of your life as a believer. Your end will not be like your beginning. Your beginning may have been dismal. You may have come from a broken home. You may not even know who your mother or father were. You may be from a dysfunctional, drug-addicted family or you may have been born into a family where crime was accepted as the norm. On the other hand, you may have been blessed with wonderful parents, a good home, and a great environment, but yet somewhere along the path of life you lost your way.

As you have learned in this book, when you became a new creature in Christ your past ended. As a believer in Jesus, you no longer are held captive by the guilt, shame, and dark memories of the past. Yesterday's dung can be today's fertilizer--meaning that the gross difficulties you have gone through can actually be used by God to help you grow spiritually.

You may be in prison, but through this book you have learned how to live as a free person in a new Kingdom. You are no longer a prisoner to the past, held captive by your previous conduct and sinful behavior. You are not a patched-up version of the old you. You are a new creature in Christ who is living a new life.

You are adequately prepared to finish well. You have been taken captive by Christ and you are a prisoner of the Lord.

In closing out our time together, we make the following declarations of faith over you:

*Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling,
and to present you faultless before the presence of*

*his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.
(Jude 1:24-25, KJV)*

...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:5, NKJV)

We look forward to meeting you around the throne where God shall *"wipe away all tears from your eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away"* (Revelation 21:4, KJV).

There will be no death.

There will be no more sorrow, no crying, no pain.

Former things will all pass away.

And there will be no more prisons.

APPENDIX ONE

Bible Study Guide

The Bible is the written Word of God. The Bible is divided into two major sections called the Old Testament and the New Testament. The four divisions of the Old Testament books are:

- Law
- History
- Poetry
- Prophecy

The four divisions of the New Testament books are:

- Gospels
- History
- Letters
- Prophecy

The following is a summary of each of the 66 books of the Bible.

Old Testament Books (39 Books)

The Books Of Law.

Genesis: Records the beginning of the universe, man, the Sabbath, marriage, sin, sacrifice, nations, government, and the biographies of key men of God like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

Exodus: Details how Israel became a nation with Moses as leader. The Israelites are delivered from bondage in Egypt and travel to Mt. Sinai where the law of God is given.

Leviticus: This book was a manual of worship for Israel. It provides instruction to the religious leaders and explains how a sinful people can approach a righteous God. It relates to the coming of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Numbers: Records Israel's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness which was a result of disobedience to God. The title of the book is from two numberings (population censuses) taken during the long journey.

Deuteronomy: Records the final days of Moses' life and reviews the laws given in Exodus and Leviticus.

The Books Of History.

Joshua: Details how Joshua, the successor of Moses, led the people of Israel into the Promised Land of Canaan. It records the military campaigns and the division of the land among the people.

Judges: Israel turned away from God after Joshua's death. This book records the sad story of their repeated sins and the judges God raised up to deliver them from punishment by enemy forces.

Ruth: The story of Ruth, a woman of the Gentile nation of Moab, who chose to serve the God of Israel. She became the great grandmother of David.

1 Samuel: This book centers on three persons: Samuel who was the last of the judges of Israel; Saul, the first king of Israel; and David who succeeded Saul as king.

2 Samuel: The glorious 40 year reign of King David is recorded in this book.

1 Kings: King Solomon's reign and the kings of the divided kingdom through the reigns of Ahab in the north and Jehoshaphat in the south are the subjects of this book.

2 Kings: The decline of Israel and Judah because of sin is detailed in this book.

1 Chronicles: The reign of David and preparations for building the temple are recorded. The time of this book is the same as 2 Samuel.

2 Chronicles: This book continues Israel's history through Solomon's reign with focus on the southern kingdom. It closes with the decree of Cyrus which permitted the return of God's people from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Ezra: The return of Ezra and the Jews from Babylonian captivity is detailed.

Nehemiah: The rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls under the direction of Nehemiah is recalled by this book. The project was begun about 14 years after Ezra's return.

Esther: Queen Esther and Mordecai are used by God to deliver His people.

The Books Of Poetry.

Job: This book is the story of Job, his adversities, and his restoration by God.

Psalms: The prayer and praise book of the Bible.

Proverbs: Divine wisdom for practical problems of everyday life.

Ecclesiastes: A discussion of the futility of life apart from God.

Song Of Solomon: The romance of Solomon and his Shulamite bride. The story represents God's love for Israel, the Church, and individual believers.

The Books Of Prophecy.

Several of these books were written during a period when the nation of Israel was divided into two separate kingdoms: Israel and Judah.

Isaiah: Warns of coming judgment against Judah because of their sin against God.

Jeremiah: Written during the decline and fall of Judah, Jeremiah warned of the judgment that was coming upon God's people for their sin.

Lamentations: Jeremiah's lament (expression of sorrow) over the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon.

Ezekiel: Warns first of Jerusalem's impending fall and then foretells its future restoration.

Daniel: The prophet Daniel was captured during the early siege of Judah and taken to Babylon. This book provides historic records and prophetic teaching which are important in understanding biblical prophecy.

Hosea: The theme of this book is Israel's unfaithfulness, their punishment, and restoration by God.

Joel: Tells of the plagues which foreshadowed future judgment.

Amos: During a period of material prosperity marked by moral decay, Amos warned Israel and surrounding nations of God's future judgment on their sin.

Obadiah: God's judgment against Edom, an evil nation located south of the Dead Sea.

Jonah: The story of the prophet Jonah who preached repentance in Ninevah, capitol of the Assyrian empire. The book reveals God's love and His plan of repentance for the Gentiles.

Micah: Another prophecy against Israel's sin. It also foretells the birthplace of Jesus.

Nahum: Tells of the impending destruction of Ninevah which had been spared some 150 years earlier through Jonah's preaching.

Habakkuk: Reveals God's plan to punish a sinful nation by an even more sinful one. Teaches that "the just shall live by faith."

Zephaniah: Judgment and restoration of Judah.

Haggai: Urges the Jews to rebuild the temple after an extended delay resulting from enemy resistance.

Zechariah: Further urging to complete the temple and renew spiritual commitment. Foretells Christ's first and second comings.

Malachi: Warns against spiritual shallowness and foretells the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus.

New Testament Books (27 Books)

The Gospels.

The four books known as the Gospels record the birth, life, ministry, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The approach of each book differs:

Matthew: Emphasizes Jesus Christ as King and was directed especially to the Jews. The book opens with the royal genealogy and closes with the King commissioning His disciples.

Mark: Emphasizes Jesus Christ as the Servant of God and was directed to the Romans. No genealogy is given since Jesus is portrayed as a servant and no one is interested in the pedigree of a servant. The book closes with the Lord "working with them," laboring as a servant with His disciples.

Luke: Presents Jesus Christ as the Son of Man, the perfect man and Savior of imperfect men. Luke traces the human genealogy of Jesus back to Adam. and concludes with Jesus ascending back up to Heaven to His Father.

John: Emphasizes Jesus in His position as the Son of God. The book opens with Jesus, the Word, revealed as God. The closing verse of John indicates that the world could not contain all Jesus did during His earthly ministry. This is further evidence He was truly the Son of God.

The Book Of History.

Acts: The one history book of the New Testament records the growth of Christianity from the time of Christ's return to Heaven through Paul's imprisonment in Rome. The book emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Letters.

Romans: A presentation of the Gospel which emphasizes salvation by faith alone.

1 Corinthians: Written to correct errors of conduct in the local church.

2 Corinthians: Focuses on the ministry of the Gospel, stewardship, and Paul's apostolic authority.

Galatians: Deals with the error of mixing law and faith. The theme is justification by faith alone.

Ephesians: Encourages believers by revealing their position in Christ.

Philippians: Emphasizes the joy of Christian unity.

Colossians: Deals with the error of "Gnosticism," a false teaching which denied Jesus was truly Son of God and Son of Man. The book also emphasizes Jesus as head of the Church.

1 Thessalonians: Counsel in Christian living and emphasis on the return of Jesus.

2 Thessalonians: Further instruction on the Lord's return and how this knowledge should affect everyday life.

1 Timothy: Emphasizes sound doctrine, orderly church government, and principles of guidance for the church in the years to come.

2 Timothy: Describes the true servant of Jesus Christ. It also warns of the apostasy (spiritual decline) which had already started. It presents the Word of God as the remedy to correct all error.

Titus: Paul's letter to a young minister named Titus who was serving God on the island of Crete. Doctrine and a Godly life are emphasized.

Philemon: Paul's intercession for a runaway slave of a wealthy Colossian Christian. It illustrates the intercession of Jesus in behalf of believers who were once slaves to sin.

Hebrews: Explains the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Presents Jesus as the Great High Priest and the mediator between God and man.

James: Teaches that true faith is evidenced by works, although salvation is by faith alone.

1 Peter: A letter of comfort and encouragement to believers, especially those suffering spiritual attacks from unbelievers.

2 Peter: A warning against spiritual attacks from within, i.e., false teachers who had crept into the Church.

1 John: Written to combat Gnosticism which denied Christ's position as Son of God. The book emphasizes fellowship and love among Christians and assures true believers of eternal life.

2 John: Warns against any compromise with doctrinal error and emphasizes that the truth must be guarded in love.

3 John: Warns of the sin of refusing to fellowship with those who are true believers.

Jude: A warning against apostasy and false doctrine. The theme is similar to that of 2 Peter.

The Book Of Prophecy.

Revelation: This prophetic book tells of the final events of world history, explaining things which were, are, and will be in the plan of God (Revelation 1:19).

Reading The Bible

Here are four suggestions for successful Bible reading:

Read daily. God made your physical body so you must have food daily in order to remain healthy. In a similar manner, your spirit must be fed daily with the food of the Word of God if you are to be spiritually healthy:

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:2, NIV)

...It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word of God. (Luke 4:4, NKJV)

Read selectively. Start by reading what is called the "milk" of the word. These are the simple truths of the Word of God:

*...as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.
(1 Peter 2:2, NKJV)*

As you mature spiritually, then you will be able to eat what is called the "meat" of the Word of God. This means you will be able to understand more difficult teachings of the Bible:

*For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.
(Hebrews 5:13-14, NKJV)*

Read prayerfully. Before you start to read, ask God to help you understand the message He has given you through His written Word.

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord... (Ezra 7:10, KJV)

Let your prayer be as the Psalmist David prayed:

Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law. (Psalm 119:18, NKJV)

Read systematically. Some people do not understand God's Word because they do not have a systematic plan for reading. They read a chapter here and there and fail to understand how it all fits together. This is like reading a few pages here and there in a text book on medicine and then trying to set up a medical practice. The Bible tells us to search the scriptures (John 5:39). This means to study them carefully. The Bible is similar to a school textbook.

You must read it in an orderly way if you are to understand its content. Select one of the reading schedules provided in this appendix and begin reading your Bible systematically.

Studying And Applying The Bible

Take time to study and apply the Bible as you read. You can study a single word, one verse, a passage, an entire chapter, or a book. Regardless of your method of study, the most important thing is to apply what you learn to your life. Look for...

An example to follow. Is there an example to follow in this portion of Scripture?

An error to avoid. Is there an error or sin which should be avoided?

A duty to perform. Does this portion of Scripture call for action. Are you told to do something? If so, what action are you to take?

A promise to claim. Is there a promise in this passage which you can claim?

A relationship to develop. What does this passage teach about your relationship with God through Jesus Christ? What does it teach about God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit? What does it teach about your relationship with others in your family, community, profession, church congregation, and the world? What does it teach about your relationship with yourself?

A change to make. What changes should you make in your life in view of what you have learned in this passage? Be specific.

A prayer to pray. Ask God to help you apply the truths you have learned through your studies. Prayer personalizes the principles taught in God's Word.

Biographical Bible Study

You can grow spiritually by studying the lives of biblical characters and applying what you learn to your own life. Use this outline to do biblical biographical studies.

Step one: Select the person to be studied.

Step two: Gather the information.

List Bible references concerning this person.

Step three: Analyze the information.

Name and meaning of name:

Relatives: Parents, brothers and sisters, ancestors, children:

Birth: Location, importance, events at the time of birth:

Childhood and early training:

Geographical setting:

Friends and associates, personal relationships:

Occupation or vocation:

Physical description:

Positive character traits:

Negative character traits:

Significant spiritual events:

 First encounter with God:

 Conversion:

 Call to service:

 Greatest crisis or turning point:

Death:

Step four: Apply what you have learned.

Positive traits I should develop:

Negative traits I should avoid:

The greatest truth I learned from this study is:

A Bible Reading Plan For Beginners

If you have never read the Bible before, start with the book of John in the New Testament. This book was written by one of the disciples of Jesus Christ named John. He tells the story of Jesus in a way which is easy to understand. Read one chapter in John each day in the order in which they are found in your Bible. Use the following chart to check off each chapter as you read it.

The Gospel Of John

- ___1
- ___2
- ___3
- ___4
- ___5
- ___6
- ___7
- ___8
- ___9
- ___10
- ___11
- ___12
- ___13
- ___14
- ___15
- ___16
- ___17
- ___18
- ___19
- ___20
- ___21

The Short Schedule. The short schedule of Bible reading is designed to provide a basic knowledge of the Bible through selected portions of Scripture. Read the selected scriptures in the order in which they are listed.

The New Testament:

_____ John	_____ 1 Thessalonians
_____ Ephesians	_____ Mark
_____ 1 Corinthians	_____ 2 Timothy
_____ Luke	_____ Romans
_____ 1 Peter	_____ Acts
_____ Philemon	_____ 1 John
_____ Romans	_____ Philippians
_____ Revelation 1-5; 9:6-22:21	

The Old Testament:

_____ Genesis	_____ Amos
_____ Exodus 1-20	_____ Isaiah 1-12
_____ Numbers 10:11-21:35	_____ Jeremiah 1-25;39-33
_____ Deuteronomy 1-11	_____ Ruth
_____ Joshua 1-12; 22-24	_____ Jonah
_____ Judges 1-3	_____ Psalms 1-23
_____ 1 Samuel 1-3,9-18	_____ Job 1-14, 38-42
_____ 2 Samuel 1	_____ Proverbs 1-9
_____ 1 Kings 1-11	_____ Daniel 1-6
_____ Nehemiah	

The Longer Schedule. This reading plan covers the Bible in greater depth.

New Testament:

_____ Mark	_____ Philippians
_____ Matthew	_____ Ephesians
_____ John	_____ 2 Timothy
_____ Luke	_____ Titus
_____ Acts	_____ 1 Timothy
_____ 1 Thessalonians	_____ 1 Peter
_____ 2 Thessalonians	_____ Hebrews
_____ 1 Corinthians	_____ James
_____ 2 Corinthians	_____ 1 John
_____ Galatians	_____ 2 John
_____ Romans	_____ 3 John
_____ Philemon	_____ Jude
_____ Colossians	_____ 2 Peter
_____ Revelation 1-5; 19:6-22:21	

Old Testament:

_____ Genesis	_____ Jer. 1-25;30-33
_____ Exodus 1-24	_____ Nahum
_____ Leviticus 1-6:7	_____ Habakkuk
_____ Num. 10:11-21:33-39	_____ Ezekiel 1-24;33-39
_____ Deut. 1-11; 27-34	_____ Obadiah
_____ Joshua 1-12; 22-24	_____ Lamentations
_____ Judges 1-16	_____ Isaiah 40-66
_____ 1 Samuel	_____ Zechariah 1-8
_____ 2 Samuel	_____ Malachi
_____ 1 Kings	_____ Joel
_____ 2 Kings	_____ Ruth
_____ 1 Chronicles	_____ Jonah
_____ 2 Chronicles	_____ Psalms
_____ Ezra	_____ Job
_____ Nehemiah	_____ Proverbs 1-9
_____ Amos	_____ Song of Solomon
_____ Hosea	_____ Ecclesiastes
_____ Micah	_____ Esther
_____ Isaiah 1-12	_____ Daniel
_____ Zephaniah	

The Complete Schedule. The complete schedule is to read through the entire Bible. You begin in Genesis and read right straight through to the book of Revelation. Or, you may also choose read a portion in the Old Testament and the New Testament each day until you complete both sections.

APPENDIX TWO

Prayer Guide

Prayer is communicating with God. It takes different forms, but basically it occurs when man talks with God and He talks with man. Prayer is described as:

- Calling upon the name of the Lord: Genesis 4:26
- Crying unto God: Psalms 27:7
- Drawing near to God: Psalms 73:28
- Looking up: Psalms 5:3
- Lifting up the soul: Psalms 25:1
- Lifting up the heart: Lamentations 3:41
- Pouring out the heart: Psalms 62:8
- Pouring out the soul: 1 Samuel 1:15
- Crying to Heaven: 2 Chronicles 32:20
- Beseeching the Lord: Exodus 32:11
- Seeking God: Job 8:5
- Seeking the face of the Lord: Psalms 27:8
- Making supplication: Jeremiah 36:7

Prayer is not just talking to God, but it involves listening also. Prayer is communication, and a one-way conversation does not last long. When you pray, expect God to speak to you. Most often He will do this through His written Word or by a "still small voice" that seems to speak to your heart.

Don't just rush in and dump all your requests on God and then end your prayer. Allow time for Him to speak to you. He will give answers to your questions, guidance for the day ahead, and help you order your priorities. Sometimes He will give you a word of encouragement to share with someone for whom you are interceding.

When you pray, there is no one approved posture for prayer. You may pray while:

- Standing: 1 Kings 8:22
- Bowing down: Psalms 95:6
- Kneeling: Psalms 95:6
- Falling on your face: Joshua 5:14
- Spreading out your hands: 2 Chronicles 6:13
- Lifting up your hands: Psalms 28:2

The Bible reveals that prayer is answered:

- Immediately at times: Isaiah 65:24;
- Delayed at times: Daniel 10:12-13
- Different from your desires: 2 Corinthians 12:8-9
- Beyond your expectations: Ephesians 3:20

Levels Of Prayer

There are three levels of intensity in prayer. These are asking, seeking, and knocking:

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.
(Matthew 7:7-8, NIV)*

Asking is the first level of prayer. It is when you present a request to God and receive an immediate answer. In order to receive, the condition is to ask: "...you do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2, NKJV).

Seeking is a deeper level of prayer. This is when answers are not as immediate as at the asking level. The 120 gathered in the upper room prayer meeting is a good example of seeking. These men and women sought fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit and continued seeking until the answer came (Acts 1-2).

Knocking is a deeper level of prayer that persists when answers are longer in coming. It is illustrated by the parable Jesus told regarding a person who went to a friend's house at an inconvenient time and continued to knock on the door despite extensive delays (Luke 11:5-10). It is also evident in the persistence of Daniel who continued to pray despite the fact he saw no visible results (Daniel 10).

Types Of Prayer

Paul calls for believers to pray always with "all prayer" (Ephesians 6:18). Another version of the Bible reads "praying with every kind of prayer" (the Goodspeed Translation). Various kinds of prayer include the following:

Worship And Praise. You enter into God's presence with worship and praise (Psalm 100:4). Worship is giving honor to God for who He is. Praise is thanksgiving and an expression of gratitude for what God has done and is doing. You must worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Worshiping God in truth means that you worship Him on the basis of what is revealed in the Word of God. To worship Him in spirit is to do so sincerely from your innermost being, putting Him first above all others. When you worship in spirit, you also allow the Holy Spirit to direct your worship. You do not use man-made formulas or rituals. You do not just repeat chants or prayers with your mind somewhere else. Instead, you open the innermost recesses of your heart and mind and give God praise and adoration in your own words.

Praise and worship can be with:

- Singing: Psalms 9:2,11
- Audible praise: Psalms 103:1
- Shouting: Psalms 47:1
- Lifting up of the hands: Psalms 63:4

- Clapping: Psalms 47:1
- Musical instruments: Psalms 150:3-5
- Standing: 2 Chronicles 20:19
- Bowing: Psalms 95:6
- Dancing: Psalms 149:3
- Kneeling: Psalms 95:6
- Lying down: Psalms 149:5

Commitment. These are prayers of consecration, commitment, and dedication to God, His work, and His purposes.

Petition. Petitions are requests regarding specific needs and should be made according to the will of God as revealed in His written Word. Supplication is another word for this type of prayer. The word supplication means "beseeching God or strongly appealing to Him in behalf of a need." Be specific in your prayers. Do not just pray "bless my family". Make specific requests for your family, friends, your nation, the world, and regarding your circumstances. Pray also for the institution in which you are incarcerated--for the warden, officers, staff, and inmates.

Confession And Repentance. Confession is when you admit your sin and repentance is when you ask forgiveness for it. *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, KJV).*

Intercession. Intercession is prayer for others. An intercessor is one who takes the place of another or pleads another's case: *"Intercession may be defined as holy, believing, persevering prayer whereby someone pleads with God on behalf of another or others who desperately need God's intervention" (Notation from Full Life Bible).*

Through effective intercession, you can travel spiritually anywhere in the world. Your prayers have no limitations. They can penetrate unreached nations and cross through geographical, cultural, and political barriers. You can affect the destiny of individuals and entire nations. You can actually help save lives and souls of men and women, boys and girls, and extend the Gospel of the Kingdom of God around the world as you intercede in prayer. Intercession is not hindered by the gates, fences, and bars that surround you in prison.

Delegated Power And Authority

When you intercede in prayer you are battling with your enemy, Satan, for the souls of men and women, boys and girls, for nations, and spiritual and political leaders. You do not do this in your own ability or strength, but on the basis of the spiritual power and authority delegated to you by Jesus. Satan has limited power, but he has no authority. Jesus gave you authority over all the power of the enemy. The power Jesus gave is directed power to be used for specific purposes. It includes:

Power over the enemy. You have authority to intercede in prayer for those who need healing and deliverance: *"Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases" (Luke 9:1, NKJV).*

Power over sin. You have authority to intercede for those who need salvation: *"If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:23, NIV).*

Power to extend the gospel. You have authority to pray for laborers to extend the Gospel: *"Then He said to His*

disciples, The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Matthew 9:37, NKJV).

Power to bind and loose. The term "to bind" originates from the Hebrew word *asar* meaning "to imprison, tie, gird, to harness." Jesus said:

*...if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or else how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.
(Matthew 12:28-29, NKJV)*

It is impossible to take the possessions of a strong man without first binding him. The strong man Jesus is referring to is Satan. Those possessions which are to be taken from him are his most prized possessions of all, lost individuals enslaved by him in sin.

Jesus gave believers the power to bind and loose:

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:19, NIV)

Jesus taught the importance of binding evil spirits before casting them out, but the principle of binding and loosing extends to more than casting out demons. You can bind the power of the enemy to work in your life, your family, and your circumstances. You can free men and women from the bondage of sin, depression, and discouragement caused by the enemy. In every situation--every problem and every

challenge--there is a spiritual key. That key is binding and loosing through intercessory prayer.

Power in the name of Jesus. The Name of Jesus is the authority upon which you intercede. Jesus promised:

Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.
(John 16:23-24, NKJV)

Power in the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus is another powerful spiritual resource that enables you to intercede. It is through His blood that you have access to God the Father:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.
(Hebrews 10:19-23, NIV)

The "Most Holy Place" is the place where God dwells. You do not access God's presence by religious ritual or complicated procedures. The blood enables you to enter right into the most holy place where God dwells and minister through intercession.

How To Intercede

Look up each of the following references in your Bible. These passages provide Biblical guidelines for intercession:

- Prayer is to be made to God: Psalms 5:2
- Quality rather than quantity is emphasized: Matthew 6:7
- Meaningless repetition is forbidden: Luke 11:5-13
- Pray in your own language: Ephesians 6:18
- Allow the Spirit to pray through you: Romans 8:26.
- Intercede according to the will of God: 1 John 5:14-15
- Pray in secret: Matthew 6:6
- Pray always: Luke 21:36
- Pray without ceasing: Romans 12:12
- Intercede in the name of Jesus: John 14:13-14
- Pray with a watchful attitude: 1 Peter 4:7
- Pray using the model prayer: Matthew 6:9-13
- Pray with a forgiving spirit: Mark 11:25
- Pray with humility: Matthew 6:7
- Accompany prayer with fasting: Matthew 17:21
- Intercede fervently: James 5:16
- Pray with submission to God: Luke 22:42
- Use the strategies of binding and loosing: Matthew 16:19

Principles For Effective Intercession

-Praise God for who He is and for the privilege of engaging in the ministry of intercession and cooperating with Him in the affairs of mankind through prayer.

-Make sure your heart is clean before God by giving the Holy Spirit time to convict you, should there be any unconfessed sin (Psalms 66:18).

-Acknowledge that you cannot really pray without the direction of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26). Ask God to

control your prayers by His Spirit, believe by faith that He does, and thank Him for it (Ephesians 5:18).

-Deal aggressively with the enemy. Come against him in the all-powerful Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and with the "sword of the Spirit" which is the Word of God (James 4:7).

-Abandon your own desires and ideas of what you think you should pray for (Proverbs 3:5-6; 28:26; Isaiah 55:8).

-Wait before God in silent expectancy, listening for His direction (Psalms 62:5; Micah 7:7).

-Pray about what God brings to your mind. Ask God for direction in your prayers, expecting Him to give it to you. He will (Psalms 32:8). Don't move on to the next subject until you give God time to speak to you regarding your present prayer point.

-Have your Bible with you when you pray, should God want to give you a word of direction, confirmation, or encouragement (Psalms 119:10-15).

-When God ceases to bring things to your mind to pray for, conclude your prayer time by praising and thanking Him for what He has done.

What To Intercede For

Study the following Biblical references which reveal what you are to intercede for:

- Laborers in the harvest: Matthew 9:38
- To not enter temptation: Luke 22:40-46
- Your enemies: Luke 6:28
- All the saints: Ephesians 6:18
- The sick: James 5:14
- Others: 1 Samuel 12:23
- For those in authority: 1 Timothy 2:1-4
- For daily needs: Matthew 6:11
- For wisdom: James 1:5
- For healing: James 5:14-15
- For forgiveness: Matthew 6:12
- For God's will/Kingdom: Matthew 6:10
- For relief from affliction: James 5:13
- For unity in the Church: John 17:20-21
- For the persecuted church: Hebrews 13:3

Hindrances To Effective Intercession

Study the following Scriptures which reveal hindrances to effective intercession. Remember that in addition to identifying these hindrances, you must also ask God to help you to eliminate them from your life. Remember also that what seems to be unanswered prayer does not mean there are hindrances or sin in your life. Answers to prayer may be delayed (Luke 18:7) or answered differently from our desires (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).

- Sin of any kind: Psalm 66:18
- Idols in the heart: Ezekiel 14:1-3
- An unforgiving spirit: Mark 11:25
- Selfishness, wrong motives: James 4:3

- Power hungry, manipulative prayers: James 4:2-3
- Wrong treatment of your spouse: 1 Peter 3:7
- Self-righteousness: Luke 18:10-14
- Unbelief: James 1:6-7
- Not abiding in Christ and His Word: John 15:7
- Lack of compassion: Proverbs 21:13
- Hypocrisy, pride, meaningless repetition: Matthew 6:5
- Not asking according to the will of God: James 4:2-3
- Not asking in Jesus' name: John 16:24
- Satanic demonic hindrances: Daniel 10:12-13
- Not seeking first the Kingdom: Matthew 6:33
- When you do not know how to pray as you should. This is why it is important to let the Holy Spirit pray through you: Romans 8:26

Using The Model Prayer To Intercede

There are two versions of what is called the "Lord's Prayer" or the "model prayer", one recorded in Matthew 6:9-13 and the other in Luke 11:2-4. Most Bible scholars agree that the similarities between them justify regarding the two versions as forms of the same prayer rather than different prayers.

Matthew's version was given when Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount. The passage in the book of Luke was given some time later when the disciples came to Jesus asking Him to teach them to pray. During this interim period, the disciples watched Jesus pray and witnessed the power that resulted from His prayers. This created in them a desire to learn to pray as He did, so they asked their Master, "Teach us to pray."

Jesus responded with the words of what has come to be called the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:9-13, NIV)

When the disciples came to Jesus, they said "Teach us to pray," not "Teach us a prayer." Jesus responded to their request by using a method commonly employed by Jewish rabbis who taught by listing certain topics of truth, then under each point providing a complete outline.

In this model prayer, Jesus used this same teaching pattern. He gave topics and then instructed the disciples, "After this manner, therefore, pray" which in Greek means "pray along these lines." Jesus did not command His followers to repeat the prayer word-for-word, but rather to pray "after this manner."

The prayer begins with the plural possessive "our." In the body of the prayer we also see statements like "give us," "lead us," and "forgive us." The model prayer is an intercessory prayer because you pray for others as well as yourself.

The following section is an analysis of this model prayer.

Our Father which art in Heaven. When you pray to "Our Father in Heaven," it immediately brings you from the natural world into a powerful spiritual dimension. It assures you that God has at His disposal the entire resources of the supernatural realm with which to respond to the requests presented in the remainder of the model prayer. When you pray "Our Father in Heaven," you are immediately linked

through Christ to a supernatural God with unlimited supernatural resources.

Hallowed be your name. God's name is not just a term of recognition, but it is an expression of His nature and identity. When you say "Hallowed be Your Name" you proclaim the person, power, and authority of God. When you pray for others, you can use these names to intercede for God to work in their lives. Here is an example:

"I pray for my wife, that you will be Jehovah-shalom to her. I pray that you will be her Jehovah-jireh, providing her every need this day. Jehovah-nissi, I ask that your banner will reign over her life. I pray that as Jehovah-m'kaddesh you will sanctify her this day... (etc.)"

The following list identifies the compound names of God and their meanings:

Name: Jehovah-tsidkenu
Means: Jehovah Our Righteousness
Reference: Jeremiah 23:6

Name: Jehovah-m'kaddesh
Means: Jehovah Who Sanctifies
Reference: Exodus 31:13

Name: Jehovah-shalom
Means: Jehovah Is Peace
Reference: Judges 6:24

Name: Jehovah-shammah
Means: Jehovah Is There
Reference: Ezekiel 48:35

Name: Jehovah-rophe
Means: Jehovah Heals
Reference: Exodus 15:26

Name: Jehovah-jireh
Means: Jehovah My Provider
Reference: Genesis 22:14

Name: Jehovah-nissi
Means: Jehovah My Banner
Reference: Exodus 17:15

Name: Jehovah-rohi
Means: Jehovah My Shepherd
Reference: Psalms 23:1

Your Kingdom come. The Kingdom of God refers to the kingship, sovereignty, reign, or ruling activity of God. It is the expression of God's nature in action. God's realm of operation can be viewed in terms of its inclusive universal organization as the Kingdom of God; its local visible organization as the Church through which the Kingdom is extended; and individual believers of which the Kingdom is composed.

Sometime in the future, the Kingdom of God will be established in visible form. We do not know the exact timing of this (Acts 1:7), but according to the Word of God it is certain. All the kingdoms of the world will become the property of God, the evil Kingdom of Satan will be defeated, and our King will reign forever (Revelation 11:15).

When you pray "Your Kingdom come," you are praying that God will be acknowledged as King and that life here on earth will be regulated by His commands.

When you say the words "Your Kingdom come" you are asking God to remove anything that is in rebellion against His Kingdom, including words, attitudes, desires, behavior, etc., in yourself and others for whom you are praying.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Greek there are two words used for the word "will" in reference to God. One word is "*boulema*". This word refers to God's sovereign will which is His predetermined plan for everything that happens in the universe. This type of "God's will" is fulfilled regardless of decisions made by man. It is God's master plan for the world and His work in the world to bring to pass all things on the basis of this sovereign will (Ephesians 1:11).

The "boulema" will of God does not require the cooperation of man. In the "boulema" will of God, the outcome is predetermined.

The other word for God's will is "*thelema*" and it refers to His individual plan or will for each man and woman. In order for God to fulfill His "thelema" will, it requires man's cooperation. People have the power to choose whether or not they will walk in the "thelema" will of God.

When you pray "Your will be done" for yourself or another person, you are interceding for the "thelema" will of God to be fulfilled.

Give us this day our daily bread. Asking God to "give us" acknowledges that He is your source, not a welfare agency or a company pay check. The Greek word translated "daily" in this model prayer means "necessary or essential, sufficient for your sustenance and support." Its use in this context confirms that the model prayer is to be prayed daily. The prayer for "bread" refers to both spiritual and

material sustenance. The word "us" denotes that we intercede for provision for others as well as ourselves.

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. The literal rendering of this verse in Greek is "as we forgave our debtors." Thus the verse could read, "Forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven others." The idea is that before you seek forgiveness for your sins, you are to have already forgiven those who have sinned against you. Jesus taught this principle in the parable of the unjust servant in Matthew 18:22-35. Forgiving others is a reflection of God's forgiveness, and His forgiveness is manifested in you and through you when you forgive others.

The Bible declares:

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
(1 John 1:8-9, KJV)*

When you confess your known sin, God forgives any unknown sins as well as what you have confessed, cleansing you from all unrighteousness. Then you are set free to forgive others.

Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Jesus taught us to pray, "Do not lead us into temptation," but James indicates God does not tempt man (James 1:13). So who is the tempter to whom Jesus is referring? The Bible clearly reveals that this is the role of our enemy, Satan (1 Thessalonians 3:5). The Scriptures repeatedly warn of temptations which come from the devil (1 Corinthians 7:5 and 1 Thessalonians 3:5). The Bible explains that...

...each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (James 1:14-15)

Satan is the tempter, but you are drawn into his snare when you allow your fleshly desires to entice you. Such desires birth sin, and sin results in death. Some of Satan's attacks arise from uncontrolled evil passions from within, while other temptations come from without through your senses of hearing, seeing, feeling, touching, and tasting. Whatever their source, the Apostle Paul assures that:

*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.
(1 Corinthians 10:13, NKJV)*

When you pray, "Do not lead us into temptation," you are asking God to preserve you from the enticement to sin.

In Ephesians 6:10-18, the Apostle Paul provides detailed information about the evil one and the spiritual armor which God provides for your defense. Paul emphatically declares you should be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might and stand boldly in the face of evil forces (Ephesians 6:10,11,13). He decrees that it is possible to stand against every wile (deceit, cunning, craftiness) of the devil. Paul admonishes that we should war a good warfare (1 Timothy 1:18), fight an effective fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12), and battle intelligently with purpose (1 Corinthians 9:26).

Paul emphasized that our warfare is not a natural battle and that natural weapons are ineffective. Spiritual battles must be fought with spiritual weapons:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.
(Ephesians 6:13-18, NIV)

The purpose of spiritual armor is to enable you to stand against the wiles of the enemy, Satan. Paul commands you to "put on" this spiritual armor which means it is your responsibility to appropriate the weapons God has provided in order to battle the enemy effectively.

For yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever. The word "for" indicates the authority by which the model prayer has been prayed. It means "because" the Kingdom, power, and glory belong to God, you can claim the provisions, promises, and protection of this prayer. It is His Kingdom, but as His heir, it is your Kingdom also. It is

a legacy conferred by your Father and it pleases Him to give it to you (Luke 12:32).

The word for power is "*dunamis*" from which comes the English words "dynamic" and "dynamite." When you conclude your prayer with the declaration "Yours is the power," you are acknowledging the dynamic power of God with its dynamite-like potential for fulfilling your petitions. When you state, "Yours is the power," God echoes back the words of Jesus, "I give you power over all the power of the enemy." This assures an answer to all for which you have prayed in the model prayer.

The next declaration is, "Yours is the glory!" The word "glory" is one of the richest words of the English language. No single word can serve as a good synonym, but here are some words that describe it: Honor, praise, splendor, radiance, power, exaltation, worthiness, likeness, beauty, renown, and rank. The same glory with which Jesus was glorified by the Father is His gift to you (John 17:22). God's glory guarantees:

-Provision: Philippians 4:19

-Strength: Colossians 1:11

-Joy: 1 Peter 1:8

-Liberty: Isaiah 60:1

-Rest: Isaiah 11:10

-Sanctification: Exodus 29:43

-Unity with other believers: John 17:22

"Forever" means that which is "eternal, having no end." As you conclude your prayer, you are ascribing the Kingdom, power, and glory to God forever. You are linking yourself in an eternal bond with your Father because you are acknowledging that you share in His Kingdom, power, and glory.

Amen. When you use the word "Amen," it seals your prayer with powerful authority because "Amen" is one of the names of Christ (Revelation 3:14). He is called the "Amen of God," because all of God's promises are fulfilled in Him. When you say "Amen" it means you have prayed your petitions in the name of Jesus. The meaning of this word is, "Even so, as I have prayed it, even so shall it be done." So when you say "Amen" you are actually making a declaration of faith.

Organizing for prayer

If you want to be an effective intercessor then you must make time to pray. One way to do this is to plan for regular prayer times individually and with other believers. Here is the plan followed by New Testament believers.

Personal prayer. Prayer is to be made individually in private:

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:6, NIV)

Set aside a special time each day for prayer, preferably in the morning before you begin your day. If you are not a "morning person", then select another time that is more suitable

Two praying together. Two people praying together is the smallest unit of corporate prayer. Its inherent power is revealed in the following Scripture:

Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. (Matthew 18:19, NIV)

Find a friend who wants to be an intercessor and pray regularly together. If you have someone praying with you, they can help you keep going if you get discouraged.

Small groups. Sometimes called "prayer cells", these are groups that come together to pray. There is great power when people join together for this purpose:

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. (Matthew 18:20, NIV)

Prayer
By Catherine Thompson
California Death Row For Women

Prayer can change you in profound ways that lead to a positive life. It is the most powerful medicine available. For me, conversing with God is like picking up the telephone or sitting across a table and talking to a close friend. God picks up every call--no call waiting or refused calls--and He answers every knock on His door.

Set a special time to pray to God each day. Open your heart to receive His guidance, let Him know that you want to change, and invite Him to guide you in living a Spirit-filled life and being a better person. Give thanks for the good and bad circumstances in your life, as both provide lessons to teach you the right and wrong ways to approach life.

Being in prison, you may question "What do I have to be grateful for?" Give thanks for what you have instead of dwelling on your losses. Use your prayer time to ask God for help and to give Him thanks, confess your sins, and seek comfort and guidance. Do not give up if at first you don't get an immediate response, because God answers in His time, not yours. Sometimes you won't like or understand His answers, but He knows what is best and always answers your prayers in His timing.

At times, when my mind wanders during prayer, I know that it is Satan trying to stop me from talking to God. This happens to everyone. When it happens to you, just refocus your heart and mind on the Lord and continue your prayer. Make prayer part of your entire day, not just the special time you have set aside for it. You can pray at all times--while you are making a sandwich, working, taking a shower--anywhere and everywhere. Just talk continuously to God.

APPENDIX THREE

Living In God's Kingdom

Guidelines for living in the Kingdom of God are given in the New Testament in the form of commands and parables.

Commands Of The King

The following are commands given by Jesus that will enable you to live successfully in the Kingdom of God.

Repenting of sin.

- Repent: Matthew 4:17
- Come unto Me: Matthew 11:28
- Seek God and His righteousness: Matthew 6:33
- Forgive: Mark 11:25
- Deny yourself: Matthew 16:24
- Ask, seek, knock in prayer: Matthew 7:7
- Strive to enter in at the straight gate: Luke 13:24
- Confess your sin: 1 John 1:8-9

Formulating your beliefs.

- Believe the Gospel: Mark 1:15
- Believe in God, believe also in Me: John 14:1
- Believe on Him God has sent: John 6:28-29
- Believe that I am in the Father, He in Me: John 14:11
- Believe the works I do: John 10:37-38
- Believe in the Light: John 12:36
- Believe so that you may receive: Mark 11:24

Living a new life.

- You must be born again: John 3:7
- Cleanse first that which is within: Matthew 23:26
- Make the tree and the fruit good: Matthew 12:33
- Abide in Me, and I in you: John 15:4

- Have salt in yourselves: Mark 9:50
- Labor for the meat which endures: John 6:27
- Rejoice--your name is in heaven: Luke 10:20

Receiving the Holy Ghost.

- Receive the Holy Ghost: John 20:22
- If any man thirst, come to Me: John 7:37-39
- Keep My Word/another comforter: John 14:15-17
- Ask with persistence: John 16:24
- Tarry until you receive power: Luke 24:49

Following Jesus.

- Follow Me: John 12:26
- Be baptized: Matthew 3:13-15
- This do in remembrance: Luke 22:17-19
- Take up your cross: Luke 9:23
- Learn of Me: Matthew 11:29
- Continue in My love: John 15:9

Learning to pray.

- Pray always: Luke 21:36
- Pray not to enter temptation: Luke 22:40-46
- Pray for laborers for harvest: Luke 10:2
- Pray for your enemies: Luke 6:28
- Pray in My name: Matthew 6:6
- Pray after this manner: Matthew 6:9-13
- Do not use vain repetitions: Matthew 6:7-8

Developing your faith.

- Have faith in God: Mark 11:22
- Do not be not faithless: John 20:27
- Do not doubt: Luke 12:29
- Take no thought for life: Matthew 6:25-34
- Don't let your heart be troubled: John 14:1-27
- Be of good cheer: Matthew 14:27
- Do not be afraid: Mark 5:36

Being faithful.

- Be faithful unto death: Revelation 2:10
- Hold fast what you have: Revelation 3:11
- Be glad when you are persecuted: Matthew 5:11-12
- Take no thought what you shall speak: Matthew 10:19
- Do not murmur among yourselves: John 6:43
- Look up and lift up your heads: Luke 21:28

Sharing the gospel.

- Preach the Gospel to every creature: Matthew 10:7
- Preach repentance in Christ's name: Luke 24:46-47
- Baptize in the name of the Trinity: Matthew 28:19
- Teach what I have taught you: Matthew 28:20
- Speak what I tell you: Matthew 10:27
- Feed My sheep: John 21:15-17
- Heal the sick: Matthew 10:8

Eliminating covetousness.

- Beware of covetousness: Luke 12:15
- Do not lay up treasures on earth: Matthew 6:19-20
- Give to him that asks of you: Matthew 5:42
- Give of such things as you have: Luke 11:41
- Share with the poor: Luke 14:12-13

Avoiding hypocrisy.

- Beware of leaven of the Pharisees: Luke 12:1
- Beware of the scribes: Luke 20:46-47
- Do not go after false leaders: Matthew 23:2-3
- Revere My Father's house: John 2:16
- Do not give to be seen by men: Matthew 6:1-4
- Pray in secret: Matthew 6:5-6
- Do not fast to be seen by men: Matthew 6:16-18

Developing meekness.

- Take My yoke upon you: Matthew 11:29
- Don't dominate others: Matthew 20:25-26
- To be chief, you must serve: Mark 10:43-44
- Do not take the place of honor: Luke 14:8-11
- Say "We are unprofitable servants": Luke 17:10

Loving others.

- Love as I have loved you: John 15:12
- Do not despise the little ones: Matthew 18:10-14
- Make peace one with another: Matthew 5:23-24
- Resolve offenses: Matthew 18:15-17
- Forgive others repeatedly: Matthew 18:21-22
- Do not judge by appearance: Matthew 7:1-5
- Do not condemn: Luke 6:37

Perfecting your love.

- Be perfect: Matthew 5:48
- Love your enemies: Matthew 5:44
- Do good to them which hate you: Luke 6:27-28
- Lend without expecting a return: Luke 6:35
- Possess your soul by patience: Luke 21:19

Loving God.

- Love the Lord your God: Mark 12:30
- Him only shall you serve: Matthew 4:10
- Worship in spirit and truth: John 4:23-24
- Do not tempt the Lord your God: Matthew 4:7
- Fear God: Luke 12:5
- Honor the Son, Jesus Christ: John 5:22-23

Relating to your neighbor.

- Love your neighbor: Matthew 19:19
- Do not murder: Matthew 19:18
- Do not commit adultery: Matthew 19:18
- Do not steal: Matthew 19:18

- Do not lie: Matthew 19:18
- Honor your father and mother: Matthew 19:19
- Do to others as you want them to do to you: Luke 6:31

Developing godly wisdom.

- Be wise as serpents, harmless as doves: Matthew 10:16
- Beware of evil men: Matthew 10:17
- Do not follow blind leaders: Matthew 15:12-14
- Do not give holy things to dogs/swine: Matthew 7:6
- Respond properly to rejection: Luke 10:10-11

Living by the scriptures.

- Search the scriptures: John 5:39
- Remember the Words that I said: John 15:20
- Let these sayings sink in: Luke 9:44
- Take heed how you hear: Luke 8:18
- Take heed what you hear: Mark 4:24
- Beware of false doctrine: Matthew 16:6-12
- Beware of false prophets: Matthew 7:15-17

Being a witness.

- Let your light shine: Matthew 5:16
- Make sure the light is not darkness: Luke 11:35
- Go and bring forth fruit: John 15:16
- Be merciful: Luke 6:36
- Tell the things the Lord has done: Mark 5:19
- Lift up your eyes, look on the fields: John 4:35

Preparing for the second coming of Christ.

- Hold fast until I come: Rev. 3:2-3
- Be ready: Jesus is coming: Luke 12:40
- Have loins girded, lights burning: Luke 12:35-36
- Don't let your heart be overcharged: Luke 21:34
- Remember Lot's wife: Luke 17:31-32

-Don't be deceived:
-Watch:

Mark 13:5-6
Mark 13:34-37

Kingdom Parables

A parable is a story which uses an example from the natural world to illustrate a spiritual truth. The actual meaning of the word "parable" is "to lay beside to compare." In parables, Jesus used natural examples that were easily understood to explain spiritual truths. Basically, a parable is an earthly story with a Heavenly meaning.

That which is natural is something you can observe with your senses. You can see, hear, taste, or touch it. That which is spiritual can only be observed with spiritual senses.

The main subject of the parables of Jesus was the Kingdom of God. Before telling many of these parables Jesus clearly stated this as the subject: *"Again he said, 'What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?'" (Mark 4:30, NIV)*. Even when the parable was not introduced by such a direct statement, the analogies illustrated principles of the Kingdom of God. Every parable told by Jesus related in some way to the Kingdom.

Why did Jesus choose this unique teaching method to reveal spiritual truths about the Kingdom of God? The disciples asked this same question: *"The disciples came to him and asked, 'Why do you speak to the people in parables?'" (Matthew 13:10, NIV)*. Jesus answered them: *"Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matthew 13:11, KJV)*.

Knowledge of spiritual truths was given to the disciples because they had spiritual minds. Those without spiritual minds heard the parables but failed to understand them because such truths can only be understood by a spiritual mind:

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.
(1 Corinthians 2:14, NIV)

Those with spiritual minds--meaning they have been born again through Jesus--understand spiritual things. Those with carnal, sinful minds cannot understand. Jesus used parables to conceal these great spiritual principles from unbelievers:

That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing, they may hear, and not understand...
(Mark 4:12, KJV)

The following is a compilation of the parables told by Jesus. The subject, references, and Kingdom principles taught by each are listed. Look up each reference in your Bible and study the parable in detail.

Parables extending the offer of the Kingdom.

The Patched Garment:

Matthew 9:16; Mark 2:21; Luke 5:36

The Wine Bottles: Matthew 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37

These two parables teach that the Kingdom of God was new and unique. It could not be confined to the old patterns of religious tradition. It is not possible to understand the

Kingdom of God by trying to fit it into old thought patterns and lifestyles.

The Good Shepherd: John 10:1-16

King Jesus is compared to a shepherd. He would lead His sheep out of religious bondage and bring them into the liberty of His Kingdom. His sheep would know His voice and respond to His offer of the Kingdom.

The Lost Sheep: Matthew 18:12-14; Luke 15:4-7

The Lost Coin: Luke 15:8-10

The Lost Son: Luke 15:11-32

These parables illustrate how the Father seeks the lost, how His followers should seek the lost, and how repentance is the key to becoming an heir to the Kingdom.

The Wedding Banquet: Matthew 22:1-14

The Great Banquet: Luke 14:16-24

Through these parables, Jesus invited people to enter the Kingdom of God. The original announcements of the wedding and banquet were sent to a special group of people, the nation of Israel. Those chosen did not respond, so an invitation was extended to the Gentile nations.

The Two Builders: Matthew 7:24-27

In this parable Jesus compared Himself to a rock on which a person may build their life. A house built on a secure foundation will stand through every storm. The same is true spiritually. Jesus offered men and women the opportunity to build their lives on the eternal foundation of the Kingdom of God.

The Two Gates: Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:24-28

Only one gate leads to the Kingdom. That gate is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Parables concerning the rejection of the King.

The Murderous Husbandmen:

Matthew 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 20:9-18

Jesus used parables to reveal that the nation of Israel would reject Him as their Messiah and King. In the parable of the murderous husbandmen, Jesus explains how God sent prophets to Israel with the offer of the Kingdom, but the people killed their own prophets. Then God sent His own Son and He, too, was rejected and killed.

The Barren Fig Tree: Luke 13:6-9

The fig tree is a natural symbol of the nation of Israel. God raised up Israel as the nation through which He would reveal His Kingdom to the world. Repeatedly, God tried to get the "tree" of Israel to bring forth "fruit" among heathen nations by sharing their knowledge of the true God, but Israel remained barren and unfruitful.

The Wedding: Matthew 22:2-14

Jesus also used a parable of a wedding to illustrate His rejection. Servants were sent to call people to the wedding, but the people killed the servants and rejected the Master's invitation. This revealed how the offer of God's Kingdom was rejected.

Parables concerning the future of the Kingdom.

The Talents: Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27

The Man On A Long Journey: Mark 13:34-37

The Servants: Matthew 24:43-51; Luke 12:39-46

The Watching Servants: Luke 12:36-38

The Kingdom would not come at that time because Israel rejected Jesus as their King. The parables revealed that Jesus would be absent for a time from earth, but that in the end-time His Kingdom would finally be instituted. Jesus

emphasized that His followers should be faithful over the tasks given them, using their talents and abilities to extend the Kingdom of God.

The Fig Tree:

Matthew 24:32-34; Mark 13:28-30; Luke 21:29-32

Jesus said that one can tell when summer is near because the fig tree develops leaves and blossoms. The fig tree is a natural example of the nation of Israel. In this parable Jesus was explaining that when Israel was restored again to her own land and began to blossom as a nation, the time for the return of the King was near. (This event has already happened. Israel has been restored to her own land as a nation!)

Parables concerning the growth of the Kingdom.

The Talents: Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27

This parable reveals that the Kingdom will spread by wise use of the spiritual talents and abilities God has given believers.

The Sower: Matthew 13:3-8; Mark 4:3-8; Luke 8:5-8

The Gospel of the Kingdom will be spread by the sowing of the seed of the Word of God. The fruit does not depend on the seed, but on the condition of the soil (man's heart).

The Tares And Wheat: Matthew 13:24-30

Satan will try to defeat the spread of the Kingdom by sowing people described as "weeds" among the good seed of God's Kingdom. These weeds resemble the good wheat, but are easily identified at harvest time because wheat produces grain, while weeds produce no useable product.

The Net: Matthew 13:47-50

The Kingdom is also compared to a great net thrown into the sea. All kinds of fish are caught, then when the net is drawn to shore the good fish are separated from the bad. The Kingdom will draw men and women from all nations. Prior to the final establishing of the Kingdom, there will be judgment and a separation of true believers from hypocrites and unbelievers.

The Mustard Seed:

Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:31-32; Luke 13:19

The Kingdom of God will grow like a mustard seed. The seed is small and has insignificant growth in the beginning, but in maturity it grows to great size.

The Leaven: Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:21

Like leaven in a lump of dough, the Kingdom of God will spread throughout the whole world. The power of the Kingdom is not external but internal.

Parables concerning Kingdom judgment.

The Ten Virgins: Matthew 25:1-12

The Sheep And The Goats: Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus told several parables concerning future judgment in the Kingdom. At the time of judgment, those who are sheep of the true shepherd, Jesus Christ, will be accepted into the Kingdom of God. All others will be denied entrance.

Parables concerning the value of the Kingdom.

The Pearl Of Great Price: Matthew 13:45-46

The Hidden Treasure: Matthew 13:44

These parables confirm that the Kingdom of God is of such great value that nothing else compares to it. It is more valuable than any possession. If you must give up

everything you possess in order to obtain the Kingdom, it is worth the sacrifice.

The Householder: Matthew 13:52

In this parable, Jesus compared Himself to the custodian of a storehouse who brings forth the items needed by the household. The custodian may bring out new grain or old grain, new wine or old wine, to meet the needs of the household. In some ways the Kingdom Jesus brought was like the previous form, but in other ways, it was entirely new. Both the old and new covenants, represented in the Old and New Testaments, have great value in the Kingdom of God and are needed by its residents.

Parables concerning life in the Kingdom.

The Two Sons: Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus taught that obedience is the test of sonship within the Kingdom family.

The Good Samaritan: Luke 10:30-37

The Kingdom principle of love for others is taught in this parable. Your neighbor is anyone in need, whose need you know and are able to meet, and directed by God to meet.

The Two Debtors: Luke 7:41-43

This parable teaches that love will be demonstrated by those who have experienced the love of God and His Kingdom.

The Pharisee And The Publican: Luke 18:10-14

The Pharisee approached God on the basis of his own righteousness. The tax collector recognized there was nothing in himself that made him worthy to stand before the Lord. In this parable Jesus taught how people should approach God to offer worship, praise, thanksgiving,

petition, and intercession in the Kingdom. It also taught humility in prayer and warned of self-righteousness.

The Persistent Widow: Luke 18:1-8

The Persistent Friend: Luke 11:5-10

These two parables illustrate the importance of persistence in prayer.

The Faithful Manager: Matthew 25:14-30

This parable emphasizes the importance of wise and righteous stewardship of Kingdom treasures which God entrusts to believers.

Seats At The Wedding Feast: Luke 14:7-11

This parable illustrates the importance of humility and how promotion in God's Kingdom comes from the Lord.

The Vine And The Branches: John 15:1-6

This parable describes the relationship of Jesus to residents of the Kingdom, using the analogy of how a vine is connected to the branches.

The Laborers In The Vineyard: Matthew 20:1-16

This parable teaches that eternal rewards are not bestowed on the basis of worldly standards.

The Servant's Office: Luke 17:7-10

This parable details your responsibility to fulfill the commands of the King.

The King Going To War: Luke 14:31-33

The Man Building A Tower: Luke 14:28-30

These parables emphasize the importance of proper understanding of your commitment to the Kingdom of God.

The Wedding Garment: Matthew 22:10-14

This parable emphasizes the necessity of being clothed in the righteousness of God in order to enter the Kingdom.

The Rich Man's Meditation: Luke 12:16-21

This story illustrates the folly of relying on temporal material wealth. The priority of your life should be the eternal Kingdom of God.

The Mote And The Beam: Matthew 7:1-5; Luke 6:41-42

This parable teaches that you should judge yourself rather than others.

The Harvest: Matthew 9:37-38; Luke 10:2

It was this story of a harvest, ripe and ready to gather, which Jesus used to focus the attention of His disciples on the need for extending the Kingdom.

APPENDIX FOUR

Sharing Your Testimony

It is important that you share your testimony of faith with others, as you are commissioned by Jesus to do so (Matthew 28:19-20). There are many people around you who are longing for the same forgiveness and freedom you have experienced through Jesus Christ.

In King David's model prayer for forgiveness of his sins of adultery and murder, he declared:

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. (Psalm 51:12-13, NIV)

David sought restoration for himself and then pledged to share the good news of redemption with others after he was forgiven and restored.

You may feel you are unworthy to share your testimony because of your past. The Apostle Paul--previously known as Saul--had a very sinful past. From his own confession he declared: *"I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison"* (Acts 22:4, NIV).

After his conversion experience on the Damascus Road recorded in Acts 9, Paul's life was so changed that the disciples realized that: *"The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy"* (Galatians 1:23, NIV).

A model testimony in the Bible is that given by the Apostle Paul when he appeared before King Agrippa (Acts 23).

Take time to study this chapter in detail. Paul spoke briefly of his early life, his conduct prior to conversion, his conversion experience, and the changes in his life evident after his coming to Christ. He explained that his purpose was to share the gospel with others, and then he extended an invitation to his audience to receive Christ.

The greatest testimony you can give is that of a changed life. You will also have opportunities--like Paul--to share a verbal testimony with others about what Jesus has done in your life. Be sure that your appearance, your attitude, and your actions are in harmony with what you have to say.

Preparing Your Testimony

Pray for guidance. Ask the Lord about what should be included in your testimony and pray that He will guide your preparation.

Write your testimony. Include the following points:

Your past. Share briefly regarding your past life and the realization of your need for a Savior that brought you to Christ. Do not go into detail regarding your sins. For example, you might say: "I was a mainlining heroin addict for 24 years, having started to use at age 12." You don't need to go into specific details. Or you might say, "I was a prostitute, having been drawn into that lifestyle after being molested as a teenager." You do not need to share how many times you were molested, by whom, or the details of your abuse. The focus of your testimony is not what you were in the past, but what Christ did to change your life. Do not sensationalize or lie about events in your past life. Focus on the basic truths: The problem was sin and the solution was Christ.

Answer questions such as these: How did your sinful behavior affect you spiritually, mentally, behaviorally, emotionally, physically, and financially? How did your sinful lifestyle affect your relationships? What was the focus of your life in the past? What consumed your time, passion, and finances?

Your conversion. Share specifically how you came to Christ. When did you first hear the Gospel? How did you receive Christ: In a church service? Through a friend? By a radio or TV broadcast or through a Christian movie? By reading the Word of God in the Bible, a book, or a tract? Share scriptures that support the fact that Jesus is the only answer for the sin of mankind.

Your present life. Explain how Jesus Christ has changed your life. How have you changed emotionally, physically, financially, mentally, and behaviorally? How have your relationships with others improved? Give specific examples of how your life has changed. For example, "I had a \$300 a day drug habit, now I am set free through Jesus!" Or, "I was a selfish, angry person who cared only about myself, but now I am a new creature in Christ. I am no longer angry and selfish."

Edit your testimony. Review what you have written and edit it. Decide what is important and what you can delete in order to make your presentation more succinct. Do not use religious jargon, prison slang, or ghetto talk that your audience might not understand.

Practice your testimony. Practice what you have written until it becomes natural and you can do it without your notes.

Present your testimony to others. If you have been given a specific amount of time to give your testimony in a church service, rehearse your testimony to be sure it fits the time frame. When your allotted time is up, stop!

You will probably present your testimony most frequently in an informal setting, sharing with another person one-on-one. Very often, giving your testimony will result in an opportunity for you to lead someone to Jesus Christ as Savior. Appendix Five explains how to do this.

Sharing Your Testimony In A Letter

You may want to share your testimony with friends and family--especially with those you have hurt or failed in times past--by writing a letter. Here is the basic format for a letter.

The addresses and date of the letter.

- Your name and address are put in the top right of the page (unless the institution requires otherwise).
- The date is put flush with the left margin.
- If the contact is formal one or your institution requires it, include the recipient's name and address slightly below the date on the left.

The salutation.

- The recipient of the letter should be addressed with the word 'dear' or a similar salutation without an indentation.

The body of the letter.

- The main content of the letter is written below the salutation with an indentation for each new paragraph.
- In this case, the main content is your testimony.

The conclusion.

The letter is concluded with "Sincerely yours" if the letter is formal. If it is a personal letter, you may conclude with "love and prayers" or "all my love."

Signature.

Sign your name below in the final paragraph. If it is a formal letter, print your name below your signature so that it is legible.

Some phrases you might use.

Gratitude phrases.

- I want to thank you for standing by me all of these years.
- Thank you for having faith in me, even though I did not deserve it.
- Thank you for never giving up on me.

Apology phrases.

- I am so sorry for the pain I put you through by my past behavior.
- I am so sorry for the pain I caused you.
- I am so sorry for not being the father/mother/spouse that I should have been to you.
- I am so sorry for the crime I committed and how it has affected you.
- I am so sorry for the pain I caused you and your family by my actions.

New life in Christ phrases.

- I want you to know that I am now a born-again Christian.
- I want you to know that I have received Jesus Christ as my personal Savior.
- My life has changed and is continuing to change since I gave control of it over to the Lord Jesus Christ.

-I want to share with you the tremendous changes that are occurring in my life.

-I am learning more about God every day as I study His Word.

...*Then share your testimony*, using the guidelines given in this appendix.

A Biblical Pattern **Acts 23**

In his testimony, Paul spoke briefly of his early life, his conduct prior to conversion, his conversion experience, and the changes in his life evident after coming to Christ.

He explained that his purpose was to share the gospel with others, and then he extended an invitation to his audience to receive Christ as Savior.

See also 1 Timothy 1:11-17.

APPENDIX FIVE

Leading Someone To Christ

You lead someone to Christ the same way you accepted the Lord--by sharing with them how to acknowledge their sin, confess to God, repent, ask forgiveness, and accept Jesus as Savior. They must:

Accept what God says about sin. *"... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, NIV).*

Understand that the penalty for sin is death. *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23, NIV).*

Believe that your sins can be covered. *"Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18, KJV).*

Accept God's plan for covering your sin. Jesus dealt with your sins at the cross: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:16-17, NIV).*

Repent of your sin. *"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out" (Acts 3:19, NIV).*

Believe in and confess the Lord Jesus as your Savior. *"...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9, NIV).*

Be assured that your sins are covered. When you have taken these steps, you can be assured that *"As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us"* (Psalm 103:12, NIV). God blots out your sins, and remembers them no more: *"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more"* (Isaiah 43:25, NIV).

APPENDIX SIX

Scriptural Index

This appendix will enable you to study references that are made to prisoners/prisons in the Bible.

Genesis 39:11-41:14: Joseph's imprisonment.

Genesis 42:15-20: Joseph imprisons his brothers.

Genesis 45:4-8: Joseph reveals himself to his brothers.

Numbers 21:1: The Israelites are imprisoned.

Judges 16:21-25: Samson is blinded and imprisoned.

1 Kings 22:27: Micaiah is imprisoned because of his prophetic ministry.

2 Kings 17:4: Hoshea, king of Israel, is imprisoned by the king of Assyria for being a traitor.

2 Kings 24:10-12: King Jehoiachin of Israel is taken prisoner by Nebuchadnezzar.

2 Kings 25:27-30: Jehoiachin is released from prison by the new king of Babylon.

2 Chronicles 16:7-10: Hanani is imprisoned by Asa, King of Judah, for giving a prophesy.

2 Chronicles 18:26: Micaiah is imprisoned by Ahab, king of Israel, because of his prophecy.

Psalms 69:33: The Lord does not despise prisoners.

Psalm 79:11 and 102:20: A request for the Lord to preserve those condemned to die.

Psalm 146:7: The Lord sets prisoners free.

Isaiah 14:17: Satan does not allow his captives to go home.

Isaiah 24:21-22: The kings of the earth are imprisoned.

Isaiah 42:7: The prophecy of Jesus coming to free the captives in prison.

Isaiah 49:9: In the day of salvation, the Lord will tell captives and those in darkness to be free.

Isaiah 53:8: Jesus' imprisonment foretold.

Isaiah 61:1: The proclamation of the Lord's anointed to announce freedom for prisoners.

Jeremiah 32:1-2: Jeremiah imprisoned in Judah.

Jeremiah 32:6-15: Jeremiah buys a field while in prison.

Jeremiah chapter 33: The Lord speaks to Jeremiah while he is in prison.

Jeremiah 36:5: Jeremiah dictates the Lord's Word to Baruch during his imprisonment.

Jeremiah 36:26: Jehoiakim tries to have Jeremiah arrested.

Jeremiah 37:4-38:13: Falsely accused of desertion, the prophet Jeremiah is beaten and imprisoned.

Jeremiah 38:28: Jeremiah continues his imprisonment until Jerusalem is captured.

Jeremiah 40:1-4: Jeremiah is freed by the imperial guard.

Jeremiah 52:11: Zedekiah, king of Jerusalem, is blinded and imprisoned for life by the king of Babylon.

Jeremiah 52:31-34: Jehoiachin, King of Judah, is released from prison by the king of Babylon.

Lamentations 3:34: God does not willingly afflict prisoners.

Lamentations 3:53-55: Jeremiah pleads with God during his imprisonment.

Daniel 3:1-28: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are thrown into a fiery furnace and rescued by God.

Daniel 6:16-24: Daniel is incarcerated in the lion's den and is rescued by the Lord.

Zechariah 9:11-12: God's promise to deliver prisoners.

Matthew 4:12;11:2;14:3,10; Mark 1:4,6:17,27; Luke 3:20: John the Baptist is imprisoned and executed.

Matthew 5:25-26: It is best to make peace with an adversary who is taking you to court. Otherwise, a prison term may be forthcoming.

Matthew 18:30: The unmerciful servant puts a man who owes him money into jail.

Matthew 25:35,39,44: Jesus states that people who minister to those in prison are ministering to Him and that people who neglect to do so have neglected to minister to Him.

Matthew 27:15-21; Mark 15:6; Luke 23:19,25: Barabbas is released from prison instead of Jesus.

Luke 4:18: Jesus states His calling, which is the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-3 and includes ministry to prisoners.

Luke 12:58-59: Be reconciled to your adversary so you can escape imprisonment.

Luke 21:12-13: Jesus tells His disciples that they will be imprisoned because of His name and that this will result in their being witnesses.

Luke 22:33: Peter declares he is ready to follow Jesus to prison and death.

Luke 23:19,25: The release of Barabbas at the request of the people.

Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19: Jesus is taken captive and dies for the sins of the world.

Acts 4:3: Peter and John are imprisoned.

Acts 5:18-23: The apostles are imprisoned and then freed by an angel of the Lord.

Acts 5:40: The apostles are punished for preaching in the name of Jesus.

Acts 7:54-60: Stephen, a believer, is executed for his faith.

Acts 8:3; 9:2,14,21: Saul is persecuting and incarcerating Christians prior to his conversion to Christ.

Acts 12:1-2: James, the brother of John, is put to death by Herod.

Acts 12:3-17: Peter is imprisoned and then freed by an angel of the Lord.

Acts 12:18-19: Herod puts to death those who had been guarding Peter.

Acts 14:19: Paul is stoned by the crowd and assumed dead.

Acts 16:25-39: Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned. An earthquake occurs, the prison doors open, and their chains are loosed. The jailer and his family are saved and Paul and Silas are freed by the magistrates.

Acts 20:22-24: Paul predicts his future imprisonment in Jerusalem.

Acts 21:11: Agabus, a prophet, confirms that Paul will be imprisoned in Jerusalem.

Acts 21:30-35: A crowd in Jerusalem seizes Paul with the intention to kill him. Paul is saved by Roman soldiers.

Acts 22:24-29: Paul testifies that he previously persecuted and imprisoned Christians.

Acts 23:1-35: Paul speaks before the Sanhedrin and is imprisoned.

Acts chapter 24: Paul's trial before Felix and his appeal to Ceasar.

Acts chapter 25: Paul's trial before Festus.

Acts chapter 26: Paul's trial before Agrippa.

Acts chapter 27:1-28:15: Paul's trip to Rome while in the custody of Roman soldiers.

Acts 28:17-20: Paul talks about his imprisonment.

Acts 28:16: Paul is allowed to live under house arrest with a guard to watch him.

2 Corinthians 11:23: Paul talks about his imprisonments and the hardships he has suffered for Christ.

Ephesians 3:1; 4:1: Paul states that he is a prisoner of Christ.

Ephesians 6:20: Paul states that he is an ambassador in chains.

Philippians 1:11-18: Paul states that his imprisonment has advanced the cause of Christ.

Colossians 4:10: Aristarchus is a fellow prisoner of Paul.

2 Timothy 1:8: Paul asks that people not be ashamed of his incarceration for the cause of Christ.

2 Timothy 1:16-17: Paul blesses Onesiphorus for his ministry to him in prison.

2 Timothy 2:9: Paul says that although he is bound, the Word of God is not bound.

2 Timothy 4:16-17: The Lord stood by Paul's side when everyone else deserted him because of his imprisonment.

Philemon 1:9-10: Paul requests mercy for Onesimus who was saved in prison.

Philemon 1:23: Epaphras is a fellow-prisoner of Paul.

Hebrews 13:3: Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow-prisoners.

1 Peter 3:19: Christ ministers to those in prison.

2 Peter 2:4: God imprisoned the angels who revolted against Him.

Jude 1:6: God imprisoned the angels who revolted against Him.

Revelation 2:10: The devil will imprison believers.

Revelation 2:13: Antipas, God's faithful witness, is put to death.

Revelation 20:7: Satan is released from prison for a short time before his final incarceration in the lake of fire.

If this book has been a blessing to you, please recommend it and give it to others. We would love to hear how this book has changed your life. You may contact us at:

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