

# The Calling

*The Good Shepherd's Loving Invitation*

**My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me...**

Steven K. Scott

**And I have sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to *My* voice; and they will become *one* flock, with *one* Shepherd.**



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# Introduction

## ***Better Than a Personal Invitation from the President of the United States.***

Jesus said, “**And *this* is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.**” (John 17:3). In a single statement, Jesus gives us a clear, precise, and perfect definition of eternal life. It’s the greatest equation of all time. Simply stated, Eternal Life = Knowing God and Jesus Christ. This is the only place in the entire Bible where eternal life is defined.

The bad news is, a few months earlier Jesus told His disciples, “**No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.**” (Matthew 11:27). This is bad news because eternal life is entirely dependent on *knowing* God and His Son, and the *only* people who will truly know God are the people to whom Jesus *reveals* Him. And when Jesus talks about *knowing* Himself and the Father, He’s not talking about knowing *about* Him, He’s talking about personally *knowing* the Father and Himself; knowing in a way that brings a person into a close personal fellowship and even spiritual *union* with God and Himself.

And now comes the *great* news. Immediately after Jesus tells us that He’s the only one who knows the Father, He gives us the greatest personal invitation ever given to men and women, boys, and girls. In the very next verse in this passage, Jesus invites you and me to come into an infinite, eternal relationship with Himself and God the Father; a relationship that will relieve us of our stresses, worries, and fears and will literally guide us into a life of joy and peace that will never end. He said: “**Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and LEARN FROM ME, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light.**” In this invitation, Jesus invites you and me to come to Him and *learn* from Him. In context, Jesus is implying that He will reveal Himself and the Father to us. He will also bring peace and joy into our lives that no one else can bring.

Jesus made over 100 statements about God the Father that are recorded in the four Gospels. In these statements He *reveals* the Father in glorious “high definition” clarity. If

you don't know what Jesus said about the Father, your concept of God is incomplete at best, or totally false at worst.

Jesus *is* the Eternal Son of God, and everything He said is absolute truth! His 1,900 statements recorded in the Gospels reveal the absolute truth about every subject and issue He addressed. He has addressed every issue you have ever faced and every situation you ever will face. He has the answers to all your greatest questions and the provision for all your greatest needs. He doesn't come to you as a threatening dictator or a dispassionate judge. He comes to you in true humility and gentleness. He comes as a compassionate counsellor who listens to your every prayer. He's the only counsellor who can give you the perfect answers and the timely help you need. Unlike all other counsellors, He can see what lies around the corner. He's not bound by time and knows every future circumstance you'll ever face.

He is the good shepherd who loves, nourishes and protects His Sheep. He didn't come to earth to start a new religion—He came to earth to call His sheep and lead them wonderfully through this life into life that will not end with death. This is the *real* Jesus—the one whose glorious words have been overlooked by generations, especially our current generation. His calling is real. If you'll hear His voice and follow His leading you will experience an intimate union with Him and the Father that goes beyond anything you've ever imagined. That's what this book is all about.

In His words I've found critical teachings that have been underemphasized or even overlooked by many. One thing that becomes blatantly obvious as you focus on Jesus' teachings, is that He *didn't* come to earth to start a new religion. Put simply, He came to earth to *call* His sheep and *lead* them through this life and into eternal life. He came to reveal the truth about everything important, including the Father and eternal life. In this book, you will hear His amazing callings to you and all His sheep. And no matter where you are in your relationship with Him, you will see Him and the Father more clearly. You will not only become their friend, but you will also experience a love relationship with the Father and the Son beyond anything you've ever imagined.

# Chapter One

## *Who Changed the Playbook*

Imagine for a minute that you are a second-string quarterback for the New England Patriots. Your team had a dismal season which ended before the playoffs began. It's now three days before Superbowl Sunday and your phone rings. It's your coach. He tells you that you've been traded to the Philadelphia Eagles, and you're to report tonight to Brian Johnson, their offensive coordinator. They've just finished their last practice before Sunday's game. A few hours later you're face-to-face with Johnson. He shocks you when he tells you Jalen Hurts and the team's other two quarterbacks are down with Covid and can't play Sunday! He hands you a playbook and tells you that you've got 48 hours to memorize the team's nearly 120 plays—100 pass plays and 20 rushing plays. Everyone in the league has heard about your near-perfect photographic memory. That, along with your great arm and the ability to scramble, should give the team a chance to stay in the game. Your photographic memory has never failed you, so you assure him that you'll have all of the plays memorized by gametime.

Sunday arrives and it's time to take the field. In addition to your family and every friend you've ever known, there are nearly 150 million people around the world watching *you* as you huddle to call your first play. You tell the team "lu-lu 8" ...a short pass to your right tight end. The team breaks and lines up. The ball is snapped. To your dismay, the right tight end blocks and doesn't open his arms for the pass. Instead, your left tight end opens his arms, but it's too late you've already thrown right.

You come back to the huddle and yell at your right tight end—"What were you doing!" He tells you a lu-lu 8 is a play to the left and his job was to block. You call another play, and once again, it's just the opposite of what the play calls for. In the huddle, one of your frustrated receiver asks, "what color was the cover of your playbook?" When you tell him "Green," the whole team panics. They instantly realize you had *last year's* playbook. You've memorized the wrong playbook! So, no matter what play you call, the team executes

a different play. In fact, after the first few plays, it's total chaos. Instead of one person calling the plays, everyone on the team is screaming the plays *they* think will work the best. Chaos reigns, and by the end of the game, you've suffered the biggest loss in Superbowl History.

### Who Changed Jesus's Playbook?

Now of course, this could never happen. And yet, it illustrates exactly what happened in Christianity during the past 1,700 years. In the Gospels, Jesus revealed the missions that God the Father sent Him to earth to accomplish. The Father had the perfect plan, and Jesus implemented that plan perfectly. Then, right before His ascension, Jesus told His disciples precisely what He and the Father wanted *them* to do and they did everything Jesus told them. He summed it up in the "Great Commission" when He said, **"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."** (Matthew 28:19-20). Pretty simple, not complicated. Make disciples (Committed followers of Jesus) by (1) baptizing them and (2) *teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded the disciples to do*. As simple and glorious as His instructions were, it took less than three hundred years for mankind in general and religious men in particular to completely mess it up.

By the end of the Third Century, Christianity had been institutionalized into an organized religion, full of man-made rituals and doctrines that had little to do with the recorded teachings of Jesus. The glorious transformational teachings and callings of the Good Shepherd were set aside, ignored or replaced by complex arrangements of religious teachings and philosophies. Efforts to organize and harmonize the teachings of the Old and New Testaments seemed to replace Jesus' simple instructions to "make disciples," with man's goals of "making Bible students." At the same time, religious intellectuals made a somewhat sloppy attempt to logically "connect the dots" and "fill in the blanks"—trying to replace the *mysteries* of an infinite God with finite, logical concepts that people could wrap their minds around. According to the Gospel records, in His day, Jesus completely rejected all such attempts. He exposed and rejected the foolish attempts of the religious leaders to

pollute the Father's commands and dilute Jesus' teachings with their own doctrines and teachings. Jesus said, **"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'" He said, "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions...You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!"** (Mark 7:6-9)

But Jesus didn't stop there. In John 5:39, He told the religious leaders in Jerusalem, **"You study the scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very scriptures that testify of me, yet you refuse to come to me for life."** They were literally studying the scriptures every day—scriptures that were filled with descriptions and prophecies of the Messiah that God promised to send. Yet, when He arrived, they were more driven to embrace and proclaim the scriptures than they were to embrace Jesus and proclaim that the Messiah was in their midst. Sadly, as you will see, this simple reproof of Jesus seems to be just as applicable today with many evangelicals as it was with the religious folks of Jesus' day. It's easy to find believers who study their Bibles diligently. And yet, finding believers whose lives demonstrate and even prove that they intimately know the Lord Jesus is a completely different matter. Sadly, this has been just as true of me as it has been for so many American Evangelicals. Since leaving atheism over sixty years ago, being a diligent Bible student has been relatively easy. But until a few years ago, moving into intimacy with the Father and Son had been a far more illusive pursuit.

### **The Lesson of the New Car**

Pastor Charles Pryce of Toronto's *People's Church*, told a story that gives a good picture that illustrates the Christian experience of so many evangelicals today. Here's his story as best as I can remember it. Pastor Pryce told his congregation:

About six months ago, my wife and I bought a brand-new car, a Toyota Camry. We drove it home, and once we parked it in our garage, I made an *incredible* discovery! I opened up the glove compartment and I found a glorious treasure...a 428 page Toyota Camry Operator's Manual! I instantly took it into the kitchen and began to

read it. WOW, it was FILLED with pictures, illustrations, explanations and wonderful directions. I read it for two hours, and that was only the tip of the iceberg. You can't believe all of the features it talked about and illustrated. It's truly the most incredible book I've ever looked at.

After a couple of hours, I was so excited I told my wife to come to the kitchen and see. What a car! You can't believe all the things it can do and all of its amazing features. We spent the rest of the evening pouring through the manual. The next day, she couldn't wait for me to get home from work so we could get back into it. Do you know, the more we read it the more we loved it! At the same time, we are falling in love with that Camry. We haven't driven it yet, because we've realized, we're just barely scraping the surface in that manual. In fact, we were so excited about the manual, I called the dealer and got the names and numbers of other people who have bought new Camry's. We reached out to ten of them and of course they were just as excited about their manuals as we were. So we formed a home study group, and for the past six months we've been meeting once a week to share our individual experiences with the manual. Every week we talk about our new insights from the manual and share our personal testimonies of what these insights mean to us. We all agreed that none of us want to drive our Camrys until we really know everything the manual says. And here's the amazing part. We know that the Camry was made in Japan and of course the manual was originally written in Japanese. So we all purchased Japanese manuals and we recruited a Japanese student from the University to join us each week. His name is Akihero and he's amazing. What a teacher. He teaches us right out of the manual in the original language. And of course, that's where we find the most wonderful meanings of the words and gain a better understanding of the true intentions of the Japanese engineers and the writers of the manual. Of course, none of us are driving our Camry's yet, and we don't know if we ever will. But the truth is, we are so excited about the manual, we realize if we *never* drive our Camrys, who cares? We don't need to drive them... we have the manual!

As ridiculous as this story sounds, it provides a great picture of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century experience of many Christians. Their focus is on "Bible study" and learning all about the Bible, its stories and characters, and of course its wonderful teachings. As wonderful as this

is, they may be getting to know all *about* Jesus, but they may *not* be getting to *know* Him. They've accepted Bible knowledge as a *substitute* for intimacy with God. They are making the same mistake the religious leaders in Jerusalem were making—studying the scriptures diligently, but not coming into an intimate union with Jesus. In today's terms, it's like finding the girl or man of your dreams, but limiting your relationship with them to what you could read about them on social media. You could learn all about them, but you would *never* get to know them intimately! You would have *knowledge* about them, and yet, you would have failed to get to know them in the *most important* ways.

### **Does *God* Really Want an Intimate Relationship with *Us*?**

The answer is a resounding, "ABSOLUTELY YES"! How do we know? Because God Himself told us so. In Jeremiah 9:24, the Lord said, "Let him who glories, glory in this; that he understands and knows me, the Lord God, who exercises lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness on the earth, for I delight in these things, declares the Lord." And Jesus said, **"Behold, I stand at the door knock. If any man hears My voice and opens the door, I will come into him and fellowship with him and he with Me."**(Rev. 3:20). Jesus even goes one giant step further. In John 17:3 He gave the *only* definition of eternal life found in the Bible. In his glorious intercessory prayer, he prayed, **"And this is eternal life, that they might know You, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."**

Fortunately for us, Jesus not only declared that He and the Father want such a relationship with us, He told us precisely how we could experience this kind of daily intimate relationship with Him and the Father! We will look at that more closely in chapters seven and eight. As you will discover, Jesus has clearly revealed the glorious plan He and the Father have designed for you and me. In fact, it's available to *anyone* who hears His calling and follows Him.

### **1 Voice—1 Flock—1 Shepherd**

Jesus said, **"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know Me—just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also. They too**

**will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”** Focus on this last statement. **“They too will listen to MY voice and there shall be ONE flock and ONE shepherd!”**(John 10:16). Jesus could not have made it more clear or simpler. He wasn’t organizing an institution. He was *calling* His *sheep* into one flock. There would be one voice—His voice! There would be one shepherd—the Good Shepherd!

The Father’s plan was to have His Son

- Preach the Gospel.
- Call people to repent and believe on Him.
- Reveal critical truths about Himself, the Father, and truths about our present life and our eternal life.
- Lay down His life as the atoning sacrifice for all who would believe Him.
- Call His sheep to come and follow Him.
- Bring them into a saving and intimate relationship with the Father and Himself.
- They would experience the new birth, a birth of the Spirit that Jesus revealed to Nicodemus.
- Jesus would make disciples by teaching them to obey His commands. They in turn would make disciples who would make disciples and so on.
  - They would proclaim the words and teachings of Jesus.
  - The Holy Spirit would attend the very words of Jesus and drive them into the hearts and minds of those who would hear.
- Jesus’ sheep would *indeed* hear His voice (His words) and follow Him, by hearing and doing what He said.
- He would be *their* shepherd and they would be His sheep.

Really not complicated. The Shepherd speaks the truth. The sheep follow the shepherd by hearing and doing what He speaks.

### **So What Happened?**



Man's ego is a powerful thing. We want to be admired and respected. We want to be perceived as intelligent, and even brilliant. If we are not transformed by God's grace and a spiritual birth, we become hungry for self-gratification which can become greed-driven and power hungry. We want to control our destiny and the environment that supports our drive to achieve our desired destiny. Ultimately, we want power—power over our own lives, then the lives of our family members and then the lives of those we influence. Sadly, nothing brings faster or greater control over the minds of others than religion and politics. Put them together, and they can control and determine the destinies of anyone and any group, even entire nations. By the end of the fourth century, religion and politics were fused together by the Roman emperor, Constantine. Christianity became an institutionalized religion and was no longer simply the Good Shepherd calling, leading and feeding His sheep.

### **How Do We Return to Jesus' Calling?**

In the gospels we discover that God the Father commissioned Jesus to undertake and complete a number of missions while He was on earth. Jesus never changed God's playbook—He perfectly implemented *everything* the Father commanded Him to do.

At the same time, Jesus created His “playbook” for His followers. He gave us play-by-play instructions in His teachings. He gave us His priorities so we could make them *our* priorities. He told us and He showed us how we could love Him and the Father in the very way that They want to be loved! He literally revealed His and the Father's love language. Jesus' playbook is all about empowering us to love and please God in a manner and to a degree that no one else could have ever revealed to us—NO ONE. This is what the writer of Hebrews wrote in that glorious epistle. He emphatically stated:

“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”  
(Hebrews 1:1-3).

The writer is saying that Jesus' words are the ultimate and absolute words of truth. Jesus said the same thing, repeatedly. In fact, He made 22 promises about *His* words that He didn't make about any other statements in the Bible. Jesus' playbook is made up of His teachings, His promises and His commands to those who would follow Him. All other purported truths must be measured against the bar of His words.

Jesus didn't give *anyone* permission to change *His* playbook for His followers, not even His disciples. He told them, **"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 14:6). Even the Holy Spirit doesn't change Jesus' playbook. According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit takes what Jesus says and delivers it to us. Jesus said: **"He will glorify Me, for He will take from that which is Mine and will disclose it to you."** (John 16:14).

### **The Question We *Must* Answer**

So once again, the question we must answer is, "How do we return to the calling of Jesus?" How do we come into a truly intimate union with Jesus and the Father? Like the sheep of any shepherd—we listen for His voice. When we hear it, we stop what we're doing, and we follow Him. How? *That's* what this book is all about!

# Chapter Two

## *The Shepherd*

*...He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.* (John 10:3-4)

### **A Few Things You Should Know About Your Shepherd**

Jesus is alive and wants to be interactive with His sheep. He is *not* a casual observer. He is not like any other person in the history of mankind. He is not like anyone you have ever known. He loves you infinitely more than anyone who has ever loved you...anyone! He is infinitely wiser than Solomon and yet more humble than Mother Teresa. He is more gentle than a little girl lifting a bird with a broken wing, yet more protective of His sheep than a mother bear watching her cubs. Unlike any other shepherd, He knows what lies ahead on the *other* side of the mountain. He knows where all of the enemies of your soul lie in wait. He knows their evil plans against you and He knows the Father's plan *for* you. He knows the future in crystal clear detail. He knows everything each one of us needs and knows precisely what to give us and the perfect time to give it. He is in perfect unity with God the Father and through the active ministry of the Holy Spirit He's available to interact with His sheep in the present moment, 24/7!

### **A Shepherd, not a Dictator!**

But Jesus is a shepherd, not a dictator. He's not a general, a policeman or a judge. He doesn't gather or lead His sheep through force or coercion of any kind! He simply speaks. He does not scream or yell. He doesn't try to argue, convince or persuade other sheep to join His flock. He doesn't plead with sheep, begging them to join Him or to follow Him. He simply enters each pen and speaks. His sheep hear His voice and they follow Him. He opens the gate of their minds and souls and leads them out of the pens of their circumstances that confine them. They follow Him out of those pens and onto His path as He leads the way.

Jesus' sheep recognize His voice—not just speaking to their minds, but to their spirits. His spirit beckons them in their spirit—at a different level than anyone else has ever spoken to them. They find themselves drawn in a way they can't explain. When He speaks, they listen and when He stops speaking, they want to hear more. He creates a yearning in their soul that wants more and more of Him. If this describes you, you know what I'm talking about. If it doesn't describe you, don't panic! If you can't identify with the yearnings I'm talking about, it simply means you haven't been eating His food. You have been eating food that doesn't nourish and fill your spirit. You may have filled your life with religion and all of its accoutrements, its doctrines and practices—but you haven't been feeding on the true food Jesus offers. In a moment, we'll look at this food that He alone can give.. But first, let's take a closer look at our Good Shepherd.

Toward the end of his life, Napoleon gave an articulate assessment of Jesus. Napoleon said this about Jesus:

I know men; and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires, and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist....Everything in Christ astonishes me. His spirit confounds me. Between Him and whoever else in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. He is truly a being by Himself. His ideas and sentiments, the truth which He announces, His manner of convincing, are not explained either by human organization or by the nature of things. The nearer I approach, the more carefully I examine, everything is above me—everything remains grand, of a grandeur which overpowers...One can absolutely find nowhere, but in Him alone, the imitation or the example of His life...I search in vain in history to find the similar to Jesus Christ...Neither history, nor humanity, nor the ages, nor nature, offer me anything with which I am able to compare it or explain it. Here everything is extraordinary.

Napoleon was absolutely correct—Jesus *is* a being by Himself, and between Him and all others, there really *is* no possible term of comparison. Looking at His life in detail and examining His words, we get a mere glimpse of all that He is—and that glimpse is truly astonishing. Our imagination cannot conceive of all that Jesus is. And here is what is most

amazing—in spite of all that He is—the capstone of God’s work on earth; sinless and perfectly righteous, He loves you and me with a love that goes beyond any love we have ever known or experienced.

While Napoleon could give an accurate assessment of Jesus from afar, as Jesus’ sheep, we can draw ever so near to Him and experience a truly intimate relationship with Him. Jesus is truly our Good Shepherd who knows us by name; knows us more intimately than we know ourselves, and yet, rather than being put-off by all of our failings, He comforts us and fills us with His inestimable peace and Joy. In a dark world that lives in defiance of God, Jesus offers us His light, so we never have to walk in darkness. Through His analogy in John 10, Jesus reveals a great deal about Himself and His sheep. Some of His revelations are so monumental that some of the lesser revelations in this passage may go unnoticed.

### **The Good Shepherd Calls His Sheep—including You and Me**

*My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.* (John 10:27-29)

In Jesus’ day, when shepherds came into a town, it was normal practice for them to herd their sheep into a common pen that also contained other flocks of sheep that belonged to other shepherds. When it was time to gather his sheep from the pen, a shepherd would sing a song to the sheep, or call them out with his voice. The sheep recognized their shepherd’s voice and would quickly follow him out of the pen. On the other hand, the sheep of other shepherds would not respond to the same voice because they were not His sheep.

As our Good Shepherd, Jesus doesn’t sing us a song. He is far more personal than that—He calls out to each one of us by name. This is no small detail. Remember who He is and all that He is—He’s everything Napoleon said He was, and a whole lot more. And yet, He calls *you* by name. Imagine if you were in an arena with 20,000 people. Your favorite President is announced and comes to the center of the floor. They hand Him the

microphone and He calls your name and asks you to come stand next to Him. That would be amazing, glorious and humbling, all at the same time. Now, multiply that feeling by ten thousand times and you'll have an idea of what it will be like when Jesus calls you out by name.

In John chapter ten, Jesus reveals incredible truths that are so simple they can be understood by a child, and yet, they are immutable and transformational. They are stated as absolute facts so they are not subject to change or manipulation by even the most brilliant theologians. They give us a picture of God's love, His plan, His tenderness and His firmness. They also reveal the radical departure of the Christian religion from Jesus' original playbook.

First, Jesus does *not* portray Himself as a religious leader or the founder of a religion. Instead, he portrays Himself as a shepherd—but not just any shepherd, He calls Himself, the good shepherd. Invoking this analogy and calling Himself *the good shepherd* made the obvious claim that He was the Lord/Shepherd David was speaking of in Psalm 23. But Jesus provides revelations here that were *not* included in David's glorious Psalm. First He lets us know that He is more intimately involved with us when He says He calls us by name. Second, He reveals that He is the *Only* shepherd of His sheep and that we will know Him intimately, just as He knows us intimately—that we will enter into a *union* with Him that *mirrors* His intimate union with the Father! (v 14-15). In this passage He doesn't tell us how that kind of intimate union will take place, but later, at the *last supper* Jesus tells us precisely how we will enter into that kind of intimacy with Him *and* with the Father.

In verse nine, He tells us that He's going to give us a new life and a full life here. He then tells us that He has another flock that He must merge with us and that they too will hear *His* voice, and together we will become unified and will comprise *one* flock with *one* Shepherd. (v. 16). He then makes a remarkable claim—He's going to voluntarily die for His sheep and then bring Himself back to life. (v. 17-18). He's going to give us *eternal* life, and we will never die. (v. 28). He then says that we are a gift that the Father gave to Him, and that we are safe in His hand and the Father's hand. (v.29). He then makes the claim that He and the Father are one—perfectly united in their love and protection of us, His sheep.

Here's how this glorious passage can be diagramed, showing what He does and How we are to respond.

### **The Good Shepherd**

- Calls His own sheep by name.
- Leads them out of the pen.
- [When all are out, He] leads them.
- Came that they might have Life, and have it abundantly.
- Lays down His life for the sheep.
- Knows His sheep.
- Has sheep in other folds.
- Will bring His sheep from the other folds, which sheep will hear His voice and become one fold with one Shepherd.
- Gives us Eternal Life.
- Holds us safely in His hands, as does His Father who gave us to Him as a gift.

### **The Sheep**

- Listen to *His* voice.
- Recognize His voice.
- Follow Him (by doing as He says).
- Experience true Life, and experience it abundantly.
- Experience Life by His death for us.
- Intimately know Him.
- Are in various folds, and are ready.
- Will hear His voice, listen to Him and follow Him, joining with the other folds to become one fold with one Shepherd.
- Receive Eternal Life from Him.
- Are held safely in His and His Father's hands, and cannot be stolen from them.

As you look at Jesus' sheep analogy and His glorious revelations, you see the breadth of His message. He's talking about Himself, The Father and His sheep. *He* is the shepherd. We hear *His* voice (His calling and His words and teachings). He lays down His life for us. He gives us eternal life. He keeps us protected, secure and safe. He and the Father are in perfect union when it comes to saving and protecting us. He leads us with His voice, (His words and teachings.)

Noticeably missing—He doesn't teach His sheep deep truths from the Old Testament. That doesn't in any way diminish the Old Testament or God's promised blessings that come from reading and meditating in the writings of the Old Testament. At the same time, His arrival here on earth supersedes all of the prophets and voices that came before Him. He is the perfect fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, and instead of relying upon the teachings of the prophets for spiritual food and guidance, we now have the Living Word of God, your personal Good Shepherd to follow. And as promised in Psalm 23, *He* will personally lead us, guide us, provide for us, protect us and take us where He wants us to go. He is God's ultimate word. This is reinforced by God the Father Himself in His emphatic, forceful message and *command* given at the *Transfiguration*.

### **A Truth So Critical, the Father Himself Intervenes and Gives a Command!**

Jesus took Peter, James and John up onto a high mountain. There Jesus was transfigured, His face glowing as bright as the sun and his clothes became as white as light. Then Jesus was joined by Moses and Elijah, Israel's two most revered prophets and began talking with them. Peter then decided to put in his two cents and said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah."

While Peter was still speaking a bright cloud enveloped him and the other two apostles. Then, the *angry* voice of God said, "**This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased. LISTEN to HIM!**" (Matthew 17:5).

How do we know it was the *angry* voice of God? Because the next verse tells us that Peter, James and John "fell facedown to the ground, *terrified*." At Jesus' baptism, witnesses heard God lovingly say, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," and no one was terrified. This time, God was expressing that Peter was horribly wrong to offer to build *three* shelters that would serve as monuments to Jesus and the two prophets. God was differentiating Jesus from all others who went before Him and all others who would follow Him. Moses and the other prophets were mere men and God was making the point that Jesus was not merely a man, He was HIS beloved SON! In fact Jesus would soon be going to the cross to *save* Moses, Elijah and all of the other prophets from *their* sins. Peter's



statement was unimaginably demeaning to God and to His one and only Son. I would imagine that God was really expressing, “How dare you compare these or any other man to My Son!” God then ends His exclamation, not with a suggestion, but with a non-optional command—Hear Him! And because it’s in the imperative (a command) the intention is not that you simply hear Jesus’ words and teaching with your ears and *consider* how to respond; but rather, that you listen to what He says with the *intention* and *commitment* to *do* what He says!

God was announcing loud and clear, that Jesus was far more than a prophet, and His words and teachings would supersede the words and teachings of all the prophets that went before Him. Jesus was truly God’s ultimate word! As John wrote, God’s word had become a person who would perfectly state all that God wanted Him to say, and do everything that God intended that He do. Once again, this is what the writer of Hebrews so perfectly wrote. Let’s take one more look at it:

“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”  
(Hebrews 1:1-3)

## **Jesus’ Calling**

### **Who Does He Call?**

As we have seen, Jesus’ calling is to His sheep. He defines *His Sheep* as those whom the Father has given to Him. How can we identify His Sheep? How can we know if we are truly one of His Sheep? We identify His sheep the same way He does. He doesn’t identify them by their physical, emotional, or intellectual characteristics. He doesn’t identify them by their health or lack of it. He doesn’t choose them based on their abilities, their perfections or imperfections. He doesn’t choose them based upon their goodness or their lack of it. He doesn’t call them based upon their religious or spiritual backgrounds or

qualifications. He does not choose them based upon their worthiness. He doesn't choose them based upon what they can give Him or what they can contribute to His kingdom.

Jesus identifies His sheep by one and only one characteristic. His sheep *hear* His voice. They *listen* to His voice. When they hear it, they come to Him. They *gather* around Him, and they follow Him. First, they follow Him out of the pen that confines them and then they follow Him along the paths He forges. They long to hear His words and they want to closely follow Him. They look to Him for their guidance, security, and protection. He gives them the only water that can satisfy their thirst. He feeds them the only food that can satisfy their hunger. His sheep desire to trust Him, not only with the direction of their lives, but with the direction of their daily travel, one day and even one decision at a time. They realize that their journey is *not* about them, it's about Him. He is their shepherd. They recognize His great love for them. They realize that He sacrificed His life for them. He died for them. But He didn't leave them alone as orphans. He came back from the dead, just as He promised He would.

### **The Good News—He Calls Sinners**

Have you ever been really sick? I have, a number of times. When you're really sick or in pain, you can't *wait* to see a doctor. Even though I was hospitalized with Covid, the worst for me have been the times I've been rushed to the hospital with kidney stones. Each time the pain has been excruciating and I couldn't wait to see the doctor. When he or she would walk into the room I knew relief was near. They were never panicked by my condition. They knew what I was going through and they knew exactly what I needed. They wasted no time, and quickly began their treatment. Not once did they treat my wife who brought me to the hospital. They only treated me. Why? Because I was the one who was sick.

Jesus said **"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."** (Luke 5:31-32). While other religions demand their followers become more righteous and holy before their god or gods can accept them, our God makes no such demand. Instead of condemning sinners, He sent His

Son to call and save sinners. He takes us as we are. Paul wrote, “But God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8 BSB).

### **“You Have No Idea of all the Bad Things I Have Done”**

After losing my fourth job since graduating from college (three years earlier) I was starting my first day on job number five. I had been hired as the Marketing Research Director of a very large financial institution in Phoenix. My boss (the vice president of marketing) called me into his office. He opened the conversation with, “I hear you’re religious.” I replied, “Not at all! I do have a personal relationship with Jesus—in fact He’s my best friend. But that’s a relationship, not a religion.” He replied, “Well I call that religion. I don’t want you talking religion in our department.” I said, “That’s no problem. You’re not paying me to be an evangelist, you’re paying me to do marketing research. If I spend my time doing anything other than what you’re paying me for, that would be stealing, and that’s the last thing I’d want to do, especially at a bank.” He smiled, and said, “Let me tell you why. I’m an atheist, Ted the Advertising Director is an agnostic, Kathie, the receptionist is a nudist, Mary is a Jew and Marsha is a Black Muslim. So I just don’t want you to start anything.” I nodded and said, “I get it. How about at lunch? Am I allowed to talk about Jesus at lunch?” He said, “Sure. That’s your time.” I then said, “I’m joining a car pool to and from work...can I talk about Jesus in the car?” He said, “Yes, that’s your time. I’m just talking about when you’re here in the office.”

That afternoon, Ted, the advertising director, invited me to lunch. Ted opened our conversation with, “I heard you’re religious.” Once again, I said I wasn’t and told him about my relationship with the Lord. He replied, “My wife and I were once youth pastors at a Methodist church, but ultimately realized that it was nothing more than superstition, so we stopped going. I then shared more of my personal testimony about leaving atheism when I became fully persuaded that Jesus was the person He claimed to be, the Eternal Son of the Eternal God. Ted basically said, that’s good for you, but I’m just in a different place.

The next morning was my first day in a carpool with two young women from my neighborhood—Jan, the 19-year-old bank receptionist, and Kathy, our department’s 25 year old secretary (the nudist). During our twenty-five-minute ride to the office, we talked

about a few things and I talked a little about my relationship with Jesus. When we arrived at the parking garage, Jan got out of the car, but Kathy didn't move. She told Jan, "I want to talk to Steve for a minute." When Jan closed the door, Kathy looked at me and said, "You talk about Jesus like He's your best friend." I said, "He *is* my best friend." She said, "I'm Catholic, and that's not how it is with us." I said, "Kathy, that's too bad, because I know that Jesus would love to be your best friend too." Her eyes instantly filled with tears. "Oh no, He would *never* want to be *my* best friend. You have no idea all of the bad things I've done."

I instantly replied, "Kathy, you're wrong! You are exactly the kind of friend Jesus wants! Jesus said He didn't come to call the righteous or religious people, but instead, He came to call "sinners" like you and me. We are exactly the people Jesus came to save—we are exactly the ones He wants to be His best friends."

Kathy started crying. "Could He *really* forgive me? Could He *really* become my best friend?" I reassured her and then shared a number of statements of Jesus, and she asked Jesus to come into her life and be her Lord and Savior, and of course, "become her best friend." She wept as she prayed. When she finished praying, she was overwhelmed with joy.

What I haven't mentioned about Kathy was that her face was beautiful and her figure was perfection. She was the company's "eye candy." Her blouses were very low cut and her skirts barely covered her bottom. She also wore a lot of makeup. But everything changed, almost in the blink of an eye. Jan and I picked her up the next morning, and both of us were in shock as she climbed into the car. Her face was only lightly made up, and yet there was almost a glow as she smiled. Her blouse went right to her neck and she had let down the hem of her skirt. Jan instantly said, "Kathy...what's happened? You're so beautiful!" Kathy replied, "Yesterday, Steve told me that Jesus could be my best friend. I asked Him to come into my heart, and He did. When I started getting dressed this morning, I looked in the mirror and *knew* He was in my heart. I thought, "Now that Jesus is in my heart, I don't want to embarrass Him. So I didn't use much makeup and I felt more comfortable dressing like this." Jan instantly replied, "I want Jesus to be *my* best friend too." Then she looked at me and said, "Could He come into my heart and be *my* best friend." I said, "Jan, He loves you so very much. Of course He can be your best friend too." Before we even started the car, Jan

prayed and asked Jesus into her heart. She began a whole new life, just as Kathy had the day before. But the story didn't end there. It was just getting started.

That morning, when Kathy and I walked into the marketing department, everyone stared at Kathy. They couldn't believe the difference. Ted (the advertising director) instantly called me into his office. "What the heck has happened with Kathy?" I told him, "Let's go to lunch today and I'll tell you." That afternoon, we went to lunch at *Woody's*, our favorite Mexican restaurant. Within a moment of sitting down Ted asked, "So what has happened to Kathy?" I told him that she had asked Jesus into her heart. He asked, "Did you tell her she had to change her face and her clothes?" I said, "No, I didn't say a thing. She said, since Jesus had come into her heart, she didn't want to embarrass Him." Ted said, "Steve, this is something very different than what my wife and I had." I said, "Ted, you and Cari had religion. I told you, I'm not religious. For me, Jesus isn't about religion, He is about life! He is as alive and tangible as you are. He *is* my best friend." We talked for a while, and then, right at the table, Ted prayed and asked Jesus to come into his life and become his Lord and Savior, and his best friend! And of course, the story didn't end there. Ted's wife and sister also became best friends with Jesus. So did Kathy's nudist husband. So did a number of Ted's friends, and their wives. Before we knew it, about 35 new believers were meeting in my little living room every Tuesday night to strengthen their relationships with their new best friend. Jesus was calling His sheep out of their pens and bringing us into His flock.

Jesus calls all of us to do an about face—turning from our self-centered ways, to begin to follow Him. He calls us right where we are but loves us too much to leave us in the condition in which He found us. He calls us out of spiritual poverty, heals our broken hearts, liberates us from our enslavements, removes us from our oppression and replaces our spiritually blind eyes with eyes that can see and comprehend Him. He changes our future from one in which we would receive God's condemning judgement to one filled with God's acceptance and favor. Jesus said, **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to *the* poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to *the* captives And recovery of sight**

**to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”** (Luke 4:18 NKJV). Is it any wonder why we call Him Savior?

It’s critical that we remember that He alone is our Good Shepherd. It’s Him we must hear--His voice, His call and His words. Second, it’s critical that we *listen* to Him by hearing what He says with His words, and by faith, empowered by grace, we begin *doing* what He says. We continue to hear His words and do what He says throughout our life’s journey. His shepherding of us was referred to in the Old Testament. As you read the Psalm below, *personalize* it. Jesus is your shepherd and you are His lamb. You were a gift to Him from the Father, and as John 3:16 states, He was the Father’s gift to you!

### **Psalm 23**

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures,

He leads me beside quiet waters,

He refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths for His name’s sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil,

for You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

# Chapter Three

## *The Callings*

***And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice; and they will become one flock, with one shepherd.*** (John 10:16)

When I speak of “*The Calling*,” I’m speaking of Jesus’ primary calling to His sheep. He speaks and His sheep recognize His voice. They gather around Him to listen to His words, and they unite as one flock around Him. He’s their one shepherd. They listen to His words and follow Him by doing what He says. Speaking of them, Jesus said, **“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”** (John 6:37). The first thing we should notice is that His calling is to each of us individually. He doesn’t call us as a group—as a denomination or even as a family. He speaks, and each one of His sheep turns and faces Him. He calls us individually and personally. He literally calls us by our name. (John 10:3).

To drive this point home, I’d like you to join me in a brief exercise. I’d like you to imagine Jesus calling you by your name and insert your name on the blank lines in the paragraph below. If you’re thinking “This sounds a little childish,” let me remind you that Jesus said, **“Truly I say to you, unless you change and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”** (Matthew 18:3 NASB) So be like a child and join me for a moment.

\_\_\_\_\_, I am *your* Shepherd. I love you so much that I hung on the cross for *you*. I took all of your sins, all of them, upon Myself. I was condemned to die so you could live. Before I was crucified, I prayed for you. I asked my Father to protect you while you were in the world. \_\_\_\_\_, I asked Him to sanctify you, to set you apart, to be glorified with Me. \_\_\_\_\_, My Father has sent the Holy Spirit in My name to teach you all things and bring to your memory everything I have said to you. I want you to hear My words throughout your days and into your nights. Read My words, hear My words, even meditate on My words. \_\_\_\_\_ If you will just do that, the Holy Spirit will remind you of My words at the moment you need them.

There are nearly 2,000 statements of Jesus recorded in the New Testament. All but a handful are recorded in the four Gospels. They address every important issue, every important choice, every important problem, every important situation you will ever face. I believe they have the answers to every important question you'll ever ask. He gives us more than eighty rock-solid promises. Most are conditional. If we will simply meet the condition attached to the promise, He, the Father or the Holy Spirit will fulfill the promise. He's given us more than 150 commands. Unlike the commands of the Mosaic Law, His commands don't weigh us down or burden us. In fact, the opposite is true—they empower us. They lift us like helium lifts a balloon—to an altitude to where we can see God's perspective and act wisely rather than foolishly. An argument could easily be made that many of Jesus' commands or conditional promises contain "callings." That would be true; but that's not what I'm addressing now. I want to take a quick look at seven of Jesus' callings. Seven amazing callings that each contain promises directly from Jesus' Heart.

## **7 Callings to His Sheep**

### **Calling #1: Listen**

***"My sheep listen to My voice..."***

As we saw in the previous chapter, God the Father commanded Jesus' disciples to *Listen to Him*. God wasn't telling them to merely *listen* to Him. He wasn't saying listen to Him so you can understand His perspective and *consider* it. He was telling them (and us) to listen to Jesus to *do* whatever He tells us to do. Throughout Israel's history, God would send prophets to convey His words and commands. But Israel didn't listen. They disputed and debated the prophets. They ignored them and often did just the opposite of what they were told to do. At times they even killed them in defiance of God. At the transfiguration, God was telling Jesus' disciples that Jesus was our final chance to Hear directly from God. We were to excitedly listen to everything Jesus said, receive His words into our hearts and minds and then, in faith and love, *do* what Jesus said.

Jesus revealed that listening to Him was the first identifying evidence that a person was one of *His* sheep. Those who don't listen to His words are not believers—they are not



His Sheep. Jesus revealed this distinction to the religious leaders who were asking Him to plainly tell them whether He was the Messiah. Jesus replied to them saying, **“I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe, because you are *not* of My sheep. My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;”** (John 10:25-27). WOW! Do you see that! Jesus told them that even though they had seen His miraculous works they did *not* believe because His works weren’t convincing, but BECAUSE they were *not* HIS SHEEP. Then He gives three amazing identifiers of sheep that are truly *His* sheep. First, they listen to *His* voice, with the anticipation and intention of doing what He says. Second, they are moving into an intimate relationship with Him (they are unifying with Him and His intentions). Third, they *follow* Him the only way it’s possible to follow anyone, they stay close enough to hear Him and they *do whatever He says*.

Jesus also tells us, **“What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.”** (Matthew 10:27) He wants us to listen to His words, day, and night, so that we can proclaim them to others—loving and ministering to our neighbors as ourselves—to be His voice on earth, telling others what He tells us.

## Reality Check

1. Do you want to *Listen* to the Good Shepherd?
  - If you are not reading and prayerfully considering Jesus’ words contained in the Gospels, you probably *aren’t* listening and you probably *won’t* hear Him when you need to hear Him.
  - Do you want to Listen to His words:
    - To consider them, or to do them?
2. Would you like to *hear* Jesus speak to you each night, or when you’re “in the dark,” not knowing what to think or do?
3. Would you like to *hear* Jesus’ whispers throughout your day?

If your answers to questions 1, 2 and 3 are Yes, Yes and Yes, there's only one way to accomplish your desired answers—spend time, more time meditating in His words. There is no short cut. One aid that can help you discover and meditate on His teachings is: *The Greatest Words Ever Spoken; Everything Jesus said about you, your life and everything else*. It divides Jesus' 1,900 statements into 225 topics. It enables you to quickly read everything He said on each topic. I would recommend you get the "red-letter" edition from, Christian books.com. Whether you use this aid or meditate on His life and teachings in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, you can *expect* that He will reveal Himself, His Father and His will. When possible, have pen and paper handy (or smart device) so you can write down what He shows you! I would urge you to do this.

## Calling #2: Repent and Believe

***"Repent and believe the gospel."***

Uh Oh...these sound like religious words. Don't panic. They are more pragmatic or practical than religious. In fact, the secular history of these words precedes Jesus' first coming! The word *repent* comes from the Greek word, *metanoeho*. It was used as a military command two-hundred years before the birth of Christ. It meant to do an "about face;" turning 180 degrees to march in the direction opposite from the direction you were previously marching.

The Greek word translated *believe* is the word *pisteuō*. It means to confidently entrust to the point of total reliance upon. If you are currently sitting on a chair, you could use *pisteuo* to describe your entrusting reliance upon the chair and its ability to support your weight. When you step into an airliner, you are expressing your faith or belief in the airline company, the pilots, the mechanics and the air traffic controllers to name a few. When you step into the passenger seat of someone's car, you are expressing *pisteuo* in the driver's ability to take you safely to your destination. This second calling we are looking at is Jesus' calling found in Mark 1:15. He said, **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."** (Mark 1:15). Since He grabbed His sheep's attention with the first calling (to listen and obey), He now calls them (and us) to change the direction they are facing and follow Him out of their pens that confine them,

their minds and their souls. They are turning 180 degrees away from their self-centered life to becoming Jesus centered—to change from following their self-centered paths to following Him on His paths.

With the second half of this calling, Jesus commands us to *believe the gospel*. The word *gospel* is translated from the Greek word *euangelion*. It means *glad tidings* or *good news*. Here Jesus is telling His disciples and us to confidently trust and act upon His statement that the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. In other words, we are now living at a time when God's atonement for our sin and His gift of salvation is complete and His kingdom is available to us, right now! It's as close as our hand, through Jesus Christ. To call that *good news* is one of the greatest understatements in the history of the universe.

With this calling, we don't have to live in sadness; we don't have to live in darkness. We don't have to live in fear or timidity. We don't have to fear death, because with the completed atonement, Jesus' sheep don't die—they just walk through death's doorway into their new residence with God in heaven. To obey our Shepherd's call and command to *believe* the time is fulfilled, His work is completed and that we may now experience God's kingdom on earth and in heaven is to live our lives in a very different way than we would if we didn't believe this incredibly wonderful news. To believe Jesus' good news, is to act upon that belief by *following* Him—hearing and doing what He says.

Here, Jesus' calling to *repent and believe* is focused specifically upon turning from our self-centered, sinful ways to a life of believing *His good news of the completion of His work and that the Kingdom of God at hand*. And yet, this calling is to extend beyond our initial repentance and belief, to a *lifetime* of believing. And when we fail to believe Jesus' teaching and act in an interest contrary to His words, He calls us to make 180-degree changes in our attitude or behavior to face and follow Him. That is repentance. It's important to note that repentance is *not* "penance" which is the act of self-abasement. Repentance is simply changing our direction, turning around, when the Holy Spirit convicts us of a wrong attitude, behavior or a pattern of attitudes and behavior. It's turning *from* our self-serving way and turning *toward* our Shepherd to hear His voice and follow Him in a

situation. Each time we obey Him, acting upon His words, we are acting in faith, and our faith in Him and His words grows and strengthens.

### Calling #3: Come unto Me

***“Come unto Me all you who are weary and heavily burdened”***

In this calling, we see the compassion, the kindness, the counselling and the problem- solving sides of our Good Shepherd. First, note that He is *not* asking or demanding that we make ourselves whole or acceptable or presentable in any way prior to our audience with Him. He’s telling us to come as we are, without any preparation or cleaning ourselves up or doing what we can to take care of our hurts and those things which terribly burden us. He’s telling us to bring our burdens to Him. This calling is found in its context in Matthew 11:28-30. Jesus said, ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*** Although Jesus is extending this calling as an invitation, it is in the form of the imperative as well! In fact, He gives us three commands. Now realize, He's giving us these commands, not as a ruthless or uncaring dictator, but rather as a loving counsellor, doctor and burden-bearer. He’s giving us these commands because He *knows* what we need—what will truly lift the burden, and solve the problems, even the pains we are bearing.

First, He commands us to come to *Him*. We cannot find true and lasting solutions to our burdens *apart* from Him. In Him and only Him will we find peace, resolution, rest and refreshing. Our *nature* is to run to someone else *first*. And if we do go to Him at all, we usually go to Him last. Oh, we may pray to Him as soon as we experience the pain or burdens, but we *don’t* look to Him or listen to Him for His comfort and His solutions. Jesus doesn’t forbid us from going to others, but He does tell us to come to Him *first* and foremost.

He commands us to take His yoke upon ourselves and *learn* from *Him*. Here, he’s not telling us to take on an oxen’s yoke. He’s telling us to take on His *rabbinical* yoke, which is

the yoke of His teachings. A rabbinical yoke refers to a rabbi's unique teachings or interpretations of the Law and how to apply the Law to one's life. While the rabbinical yokes of most rabbis added tremendous man-made burdens to the "spiritual" shoulders of their disciples, Jesus is telling His disciples (and us) that *His* yoke is just the opposite. Jesus promises that His yoke is truly *easy* and the burden it creates is truly light. He's commanding us to *trade* our heavy burden for His lighter ones. He tells us this so that we will not even hesitate to leave our burdens with Him.

Please note that He is also commanding us to *learn* from Him. This begs the question, where do you currently draw your knowledge from that guides your attitudes and behaviors? TV and Movies? The internet? Friends and relatives? Educators, therapists, books or magazines, pastors, counsellors or other religious authorities? No matter how good any of these may be, Jesus is saying that first and foremost, you should learn from *Him!* Learn from His teachings in the Gospels, and learn from the shining examples of His life, His attitudes, and His behavior. Then you will have His ULTIMATE truths by which you can measure all the *purported* truths and values of others. You can literally view all of life through the lenses of His teachings and His life.

In this compassionate calling, we not only are given Jesus' enlightening and empowering commands, but we are also given four amazing promises. First, He promises that He will counsel, guide, and teach us with gentleness and humility that flow from His heart. Think about how many teachers and counselors teach us from heads filled with pride and harshness. Not so with Jesus. Although He has all the knowledge and authority of God, He chooses to teach us humbly and gently—like a shepherd caring for a wounded lamb. Oh, what a Savior!

Gently leading and teaching us from a heart of humility are not His only promises when we bring our heartaches and burdens to Him. He also promises to give us rest and refreshing. The Greek word translated *rest* is the word *anapausis*. It means the stopping of all labor and receiving rest and *refreshing*. The labor in this case is all the mental, emotional and physical stress we are expending in our effort to carry our burden. But the rest and refreshing He promises is not merely a mental and emotional rest and refreshing,

it reaches to the very depths of our soul—the core of who we are—where all true restoration and transformation takes place.

And here's a source and type of burden that *only* Jesus can relieve. The burden of our sins, and all the guilt, shame, fear and condemnation they have created within our souls.

In college, I had a two-week stint working with General Food's number one salesman in the world. He was also their highest paid. We were working at the candy counter at the opening of a new Sears store. Working with him, we set a world-record for the sales of fresh cashews. In two weeks, we sold 7,200 pounds of cashews. During one of our lunches, he was telling me that there was nothing he couldn't do with his mind. He punctured a hole in his arm with the point of a sharp knife and immediately started bleeding. He looked at it, and with great concentration, stopped the bleeding. It was amazing. Once again, he boasted, "There's *nothing* I can't do with my mind." I then replied, "Oh, I know *one* thing you can't do with your mind." He gave me a very puzzled, even disbelieving look! I said, "When you do something that you *know* is wrong, *really* wrong, you can't get rid of the guilt you feel. And if it's really, really wrong, you can't get rid of the shame you feel!" He instantly replied, "How did you know?" I said, because *I* know there's only one person who can free us from our guilt and shame—and that's Jesus. And after working with you, I can tell that you have never come to know Him personally." I couldn't believe his response. He instantly teared up and with a desperation I have rarely seen, he wanted to enter into a relationship with Jesus. We prayed together and He asked Jesus to be His Lord and Savior, come into his heart, forgive his sin and arrogance, and take control of His life. In the blink of an eye, he became a brand new person. He had experienced the new birth that Jesus referred to in His conversation with Nicodemus (John 3).

My friend, Jesus is the *only* counsellor that can take away all your sin and all of the guilt and shame that your sin produces. The apostle Paul wrote, "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." (II Corinthians 5:21 BSB). When we put our trust in Jesus and His atoning work on the cross, God places all our sins on Jesus, and places all of Jesus' righteousness on us! Feeling all the

burden of his sins and the shame they produced, Paul previously wrote, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” He then answered this gut-wrenching question with, “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” And he followed that statement with “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 7:25; 8:1). Oh, what a Savior! There is none like Him!

### **Calling #4: Follow Me**

*He said to him, “**Follow Me.**”*

As we saw earlier, the third identifier of Jesus’ sheep is that they *follow* Him. Unbelievers do not follow Him. Religious people who follow other shepherds do not follow Him. Even many who believe they are Christians do not follow Him. But His sheep *do* follow Him. They hear His voice, turn to Him (away from themselves) and follow Him.

In Luke 5:27, Jesus walks up to a man whose profession is viewed as the most corrupt and hated of all professions. The man is Matthew, and his profession is that of a tax collector. Tax collectors were hated because in addition to the taxes they collected from the Israelites to send off to the government of Rome, they were known to collect more money than was due, stealing it from the taxpayers to put into their own pockets. They were thieves of the worst order. To the disdain of everyone around Him, Jesus goes right up to Matthew, looks him in the eye and says, “Follow me.”

Such a command to such a person was truly unimaginable, even disgusting to many. First, Matthew was terribly corrupt and sinful. He was viewed as a traitor to His own nation for serving the government of Rome to the detriment of his own people—the citizens of Jerusalem. Citizens of any nation typically hate traitors more than they hate criminals. Through the ages, known traitors were usually executed. Second, Matthew *was* a criminal in the eyes of the Israelites. He was literally stealing their money and keeping it. Third, to the crowd surrounding Him, Jesus was a rabbi—a holy man, a teacher or even a prophet representing the holiest being in all creation, the very God of Israel. Why on earth would a holy man partner up with a traitor and a criminal? Finally, in the eyes of all of those

who witnessed Jesus' calling of Matthew, they would have believed there was no chance that such a selfish, sinful man would walk away from his lucrative business and his license to steal, to follow a holy man and become one of His disciples? As you can see, in the eyes of everyone, the whole episode made no sense whatsoever. And yet, to everyone's amazement, Jesus not only gave this traitorous criminal the command to follow Him, but Matthew also shocked everyone by instantly obeying Jesus' command. We are told that the moment Jesus said, "Follow Me," Matthew instantly stood up at his tax table, left everything, and followed Jesus. We know that Matthew never went back to His occupation. He was with Jesus nearly every waking hour for the next three and a half years of Jesus' earthly ministry. He remained a passionate evangelist of the risen Christ until His martyrdom, nearly thirty years after that first moment he left everything to follow Jesus.

You may be thinking, "That scares the crud out of me. What if Jesus' call to me is to follow Him and He wants *me* to leave everything and follow Him all the way to being martyred?" Jesus has a wonderful answer for such a question. First, He tells us, "**In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.**" (John 16:33) Our Good Shepherd doesn't stop being our Shepherd. He continues to lead us, protect us and provide for us. And He's not just another shepherd. He has already overcome the world and everything the world can throw at us. Second, He doesn't lead us one year at a time, or even a month at a time. He doesn't even lead us a week or a day at a time. He said, "**Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.**" (John 6:34). He leads us through our day, one *moment* at a time. He teaches us how to truly live in the present moment. As you'll see in Chapter Eleven, when you are living in the moment with Him there is no fear, no anxiety, no stress. Third, most of His sheep throughout the ages have *not* left their families or their careers. Even the Apostle Paul continued to support himself with his tent-making business.

Finally, in His call to follow, Jesus says, "**If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross every day, and let him follow Me.**" (Luke 9:23 BSB). While this statement seems like a terrifying command filled with *loss*, it's really the opposite. It's a statement that when understood and embraced, becomes a



source of tremendous power, total liberation and freedom, and incomparable and irrepressible joy! Let's break it down.

- **Deny Yourself**

Simply stated this is making the choice to do *God's* will when you make a decision rather than *your* will *when* the two are in conflict. However, the more intimate your relationship becomes with Jesus, the more you will desire His will rather than yours—so this changes from being a “sacrifice,” to becoming a true delight and joy. Imagine a close, daily intimate relationship with the Savior who loves you so much He died for you and the Father who loves you so much He sacrificed His one and only Son for you. The more you get to know Him, the more you will love Him, and the more you love Him the more you will delight in His moment-by-moment presence with you. You will love *loving* Him by discovering and doing His will.

- **Take up Your Cross Daily**

This sounds terrifying, but it isn't. This actually liberates us from our enslavement to an “entitlement mentality.” A person who carries a cross has no rights. And a person who sees themselves as having no rights realizes that they are not entitled to anything and therefore they are releasing all of their expectations of others and even of God. Consequently, they immediately begin to see everything they value in their life as gifts! They see every good thing that comes their way as an unexpected gift, either from God or others. How do you feel when you receive an unexpected gift? Of course, you feel grateful and happy. On the other hand, the person who *doesn't* take up their cross daily, not only carries around a feeling of entitlement, they expect to receive from others their perceived rights and needs. And when those rights and needs aren't met to their expectations, feelings of sadness, disappointment, discouragement, frustration, anger, bitterness, or resentment can enter their minds and hearts. They can quickly become a slave to those negative emotions. Jesus wants to replace all of that with His joy that fills a heart with gratitude, which in turn produces happiness. Isn't that amazing. The very thing that looks like an

instrument of suffering and death becomes the very instrument that God uses to produce liberation from selfishness, joy, peace and ultimately, heavenly treasures.

- **Follow Him**

We follow Him by hearing His voice (His teachings) and believing Him and His teachings to the point of *doing* them. Please do *not* confuse this with religious activity. While religious activity may be wonderful and good, it is *not* what Jesus means when He tells us to follow Him. We follow Him in our attitudes and actions.

### **Calling #5: Be My Friend**

I was in the Civil Air Patrol (C.A.P.), an auxiliary of the Air Force during my four years of High School and then in Air Force ROTC in college. I loved my time in C.A.P. I became one of the top cadets in the U.S.; got my private pilot's license (for gliders) at no cost and participated in military activities on Air Force Bases. I took part in search and rescue missions and even received an Air Force scholarship for college. I also worked under military protocol and learned a great deal of leadership principles. And yet, the single greatest life-changing aspect of my four years in CAP was unexpected and unintended. As I rose through the ranks, I gained tremendous admiration and respect for the top cadet officers in the state. I not only learned a great deal from them, but I also actually *loved* following their leadership. And then it happened. They befriended me. The two top leaders (sophomores in college) took me in as a friend and I had the joy of becoming "best friends" with them even though I was only a senior in high school. Their friendship meant everything to me. I even saw both become followers of Jesus and transformed by His amazing love. But my point here is, when the people you most admire bring you into a close personal friendship, the impact is truly life changing.

Jesus does this very thing with His sheep. He invites us to become His close, personal friend. Do you have any idea what a privilege that is—how glorious and how miraculous that is? To be friends with the King of kings, the creator of the Universe! Oh, what a Savior! Fortunately, He tells us precisely *how* we can express our friendship with Him. As is the case with any friendship, friendship with Jesus is a "two-way street." It

provides Him with the opportunity to love us in the way we want and need to be loved, and it gives us the opportunity to love Him the way *He* wants to be loved.

He has loved us in so many ways that not only impact our lives on earth, and even more importantly, provide us with *eternal* life. He has demonstrated His and the Father's love for us in a manner and to a degree that no one else ever could or ever would. He died for our sins on the cross so we wouldn't have to pay the inconceivable debt our sins created. (Romans 5:8) He took on our sins while transferring His righteousness to us. (II Corinthians 5:21). Second, He called us by name into His flock—to receive all His provision and protection, both now and for eternity. Third, He provided the one and only way we could come into an eternal relationship with God the Father. (John 14:6). Finally, as you begin to meditate in the Gospels, you will see countless ways He loves you now. You will learn truths you could never know apart from His life and teachings. You will become connected to Him in a way that gives you spiritual life and health. You will be able to bear fruit that has eternal value. As you hear His daily whispers more and more, your relationship with Him will become the most treasured relationship in your life.

So far, it sounds like a one-way street. He does the leading, we do the following. He provides and protects, and we receive His provisions and His protection. So, what's the way we give back to Him? He makes it simple. We simply love Him by using His "love language." When we do this, we will not only be loving Him, but He also reveals we'll be loving the Father with that same love language at the same time you're loving Jesus. Jesus begins this revelation by reminding us of His immeasurable love for us by telling us, "**Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.**" He then tells us the response that His *friends* will give. He said, "**You are my friends if you *do whatever I command you.***"

"Wait a minute," you say, I thought His love was unconditional." It is! He gave His life to save us while we were still estranged from God with our sin-plagued nature. (Romans 5:8) The Apostle John explains, "We love Him *because* He first loved us." (I John 4:19). We love Him the way He defines *loving Him*, not to earn or gain His love, but to *express* our love for Him. We don't obey His commands to *gain* His friendship, we express our friendship

with Him by obeying His commands. He first loved us. (I John 4:19). He first called us to be His flock. He first died for us. He first became the *Way* for us to enter an intimate union with God. He answers our prayers. He connects with us to provide an on-going spiritual life through the Holy Spirit. He does *all* of that and infinitely more *before* we obey even one of His commands. We hear His words and obey them because we *want* to love Him and the Father with *their* love language. I will show you His explanation of this in the next chapter. As I mentioned earlier, the Apostle John tells us that His commands do not create a burden—they provide us with the incredible, supernatural power to love God back. (I John 5:3)

### Calling #6: Be My Disciple

Jesus calls us to become His disciples. A disciple is simply a committed follower. And Jesus tells us how we can become His disciples immediately—with no training, no special education, no ministerial training or qualifications. He gives us a very simple formula that applies to every man, woman, boy and girl that *wants* to be His disciple. It applies to a seven-year-old, and even to a 90-year-old in a nursing home. In John, chapter eight, Jesus was speaking to a group of unbelieving Jews. At first, they were arguing with Him. Then, in verse 30 we are told, “As Jesus spoke these things, many believed in Him.” This is a very important statement. As Jesus was speaking, many of the Jewish listeners “believed in Him.” They were brand new believers, only minutes old in their belief in Jesus. John then tells us, “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, **“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”** (John 8:31). Do you see this? Jesus gives a simple formula for being His disciple, and He gives it to brand new baby believers. This makes this formula a *universal* truth that applies to any and all believers! My sister gave her life to Jesus when she was seven years old; and in that moment, had she been told this truth by the pastor that led her to Jesus, she could have immediately become a disciple of Jesus by applying this simple formula—namely, abiding in Jesus’ words! Following a stroke, my mother was bed-ridden for the last 20 months of her life. And yet, she was a disciple of Jesus, even in bed, because she was abiding in His words!

Tragically, (and it is a *true* tragedy), this vital message and focus of Jesus is *not* taught in most circles today. We don't teach people the critical importance of reading, knowing, and abiding in Jesus' words. As I mentioned earlier, there are nearly 2,000 statements of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, and most professing believers don't know more than a handful. As a result, many lack the "spirit and life" of Jesus that He infuses into the hearts and spirits of believers through His words. They don't know but a handful of His miracle-producing commands and promises. They've literally missed the forest for the trees. They may diligently study the Bible, but they *don't* intimately know Jesus because they neither know nor abide in His words. My dear reader, you can change all of this today—in your life and the lives of those whom you influence. You can become His disciple right NOW by beginning to *abide* in His words.

Amazingly, discipleship is not the *only* promise He makes to you if you'll abide in His words. He goes on to say, "**And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.**" (John 8:32 NKJV). You will literally discover His eternal truths—truths by which all other statements of anyone and everyone can be measured as true or not true. And because He later revealed that *He* is *the* Truth, you are promised that you will come to intimately know Him. And as *The Truth*, He will set you free—He will cut the chains that bind you and liberate you from all restraints to freely know and follow Him.

So this of course begs the question, "What does it mean to 'abide' in His words?" The word "abide" is from the Greek word, *meno*. It means to continually remain or reside in. So, we abide in Jesus' words, by daily reading them, thoughtfully and prayerfully thinking on them. And *then* as we move through our day, when the Holy Spirit whispers Jesus' words into our minds, we choose to *do* what His words say. We apply them to our attitudes and our behavior in the present moment as we live in that moment. *That* is abiding in His words. So simple a child or even a bed-ridden senior can do it. As we abide in His words, the Holy Spirit will empower us with the grace and faith we need to *do* His words.

### **Calling #7: Make Disciples**

Last, but not least, He calls us to *make* disciples. It may sound ominous, but it's not. Simply stated, we make disciples by teaching those who desire to become His disciples, to

*abide* in His words. He said it like this, right before He ascended. He said, “**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.**” (Matthew 28:19-20). Making disciples isn’t complicated. It doesn’t require special training or leadership skills. It doesn’t require ordination, or seminary. It *does* require that we focus on Jesus’ teachings, that we discover His commands and that we teach others how to obey His commands without complexity—in a way that they can apply those commands and teachings to their lives, attitudes and activities daily.

In the next chapter, we look at one of the most *eye-opening* parables Jesus gave. It’s startling, it’s glorious, and it’s truly lifesaving!

# Chapter Four

## *Old Wine—Old Life. New Wine—ETERNAL Life.*

### **Drinking the Old Wine *Prevents* us from Drinking the New Wine**

Jesus and His disciples were feasting at a banquet at the home of His newest disciple, Levi (Matthew). Several Pharisees and other religious leaders complained to Jesus that His disciples were not following the religious traditions followed by the disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of other rabbis. After answering two of their questions, Jesus told them, “**And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine *must* be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, ‘The old is good enough.’**” (Luke 5:37-39 NASB). In the NIV and other translations, the Greek word that the NASB translates, “good enough,” is translated “better,” but this is the only place that this word *chrēstos* is translated into the word better. It literally means: nice; easy; *fit* for use; mild; and so on. It does *not* mean or connote “superior” but rather “adequate or good enough”.

In these statements, Jesus is revealing a number of *radical* changes in God’s *model* and *plan* for His people. Jesus’ model is represented by a new wine that is *superior*. It is literally the *best* possible wine. But like any new wine, it will require a new wineskin that won’t leak or burst. In this parable, Jesus is telling us:

- 1. There is a *new* model.**
- 2. God’s new model *cannot* be adapted, fused, or blended into the *older* model and older plan.**  
Trying to adapt or blend the old with the new would completely destroy the incredible worth and value of the new.
- 3. Most people when offered this new and better model will *choose* the older model and older plan, because in their opinions, “the old is good enough.”**  
Jesus revealed that despite its incredible superiority over the older model and plan, *most* people will choose the old, because they’re used to it and it fits into their

comfort zones. They think the *old* is nice, easy, and adequate. But the truth is, the older plan is *not* adequate. It's *not* good enough—not even close! In fact, what His new model offers is so amazingly superior, the old model is obsolete and *must* be replaced by the new!

**4. The new model requires a whole, brand-new container.**

As Jesus had told Nicodemus in the third chapter of John, such a brand-new container requires a new birth...a *spiritual* birth! (John 3:3-6). A new birth so amazing, that even Israel's most knowledgeable religious leaders and teachers couldn't explain it or understand it!

**Relationship *versus* Religion...*not* Relationship *plus* Religion!**

The religious practices that were established under the Mosaic law, were not mistakes. God had perfect purposes for each aspect of the law. He wanted to preserve the life, the health, and most importantly the spiritual and theological truths, through the calling of Abraham and his descendants. He wanted them to transcribe and preserve His Word. He wanted to preserve the integrity of their race through which the Messiah would come forth. He wanted their minds and hearts prepared for the coming Messiah, His message and His atonement. The over-riding purpose was to show the absolute holiness of God and the hopeless sinfulness of man. This would reveal mankind's desperate need for a Savior and for the saving grace and mercy of a loving God.

**A Brand New Wine *Requires* a Brand New Wineskin!**

The time had finally arrived for the Messiah to make His entrance into the world. But instead of descending from Heaven in glorious chariots of fire, He entered the world through the womb of a humble virgin. Instead of occupying a throne in the King's palace, He was birthed in a cave and laid into a manger. Instead of being dressed in a robe of royalty, He was wrapped in cloths.

Even though the Messiah's humble arrival was clearly prophesied, it was completely overlooked by Israel's religious leaders. They expected the Messiah to come in all of God's power to deliver them from their bondage to Rome. They expected Him to provide political deliverance because they saw no need for a spiritual deliverance. Jesus was nothing they expected, and yet He was everything God wanted Him to be. He was replacing a powerless



religion with the kingdom of God. God Himself would fulfill all of the requirements of the law with the perfectly-lived life of His Son. He would replace religion and all the commandments and doctrines of men, with an invitation extended to all to come into an intimate relationship with Himself and His Son—something the religious leaders had never experienced or imagined. A whole new wine!

### **Old Wine**

Religion and the Letter of the Law.  
Physically born into Abraham's Lineage.

### **New Wine**

Intimate Union with the Father and the Son.  
Spiritually born into God's Family.

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#### **Old Wineskins**

Voice of prophets, poets and priests  
Adherence to the law  
Restrictions of the letter of the law  
Priests have access to God  
Rely on priest's intercession  
Warring against sin-nature  
Follow traditions  
Obey burdensome commands of men  
Governance from outside  
Learn teachings of men  
Connection to religion  
Pressured by leaders  
Condemnation  
Hopelessly dead in sin  
On your own  
Salvation by obedience to the law  
No justification  
Law of Moses  
Wages of sin (which is Death)  
False hope in self  
Never-ending work and strife  
Faith that God would provide an atonement.

#### **New Wineskins**

Voice of the Good Shepherd  
Reliance upon Christ  
Freedom in the Spirit  
God's children, have direct access to Him  
Rely on Spirit's intercession  
Born of the Spirit / A new nature  
Follow Jesus  
Obey uplifting commands of Christ  
Guidance from the Holy Spirit in you  
Learn teachings of the Good Shepherd  
Connection to the Vine  
Comforted by Jesus and the Holy Spirit  
Liberation from condemnation of sin  
Made alive in Christ  
Protection & Provision of the Good Shepherd  
Salvation by Grace – Work of Christ, Gift of God  
Justified by faith  
Grace and Truth came through Christ  
Gift of God is Eternal Life through Christ  
Safe hope in Christ  
Rest and Refreshing of Soul  
Faith in Jesus and His atoning sacrifice

Looking at the comparison on the previous page, it becomes blatantly obvious why Jesus said the new wine could *not* be poured into old wineskins! And yet, even before the Apostle Paul wrote his last letter, his converts in Galatia were trying to do just that. He wrote:

“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?” (Galatians 3:1-3)

Paul was asking how they could have so quickly turned from following Jesus by faith through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, back to the customs of religion, trying to fulfill the demands of the law through those religious customs and observances. They were trying to commingle the old wine with the new, which would do nothing less than dilute and spoil the new wine and the glorious grace and intimacy the new wine produces with the Son and the Father. Sadly, this comingling continued throughout the second and third centuries. Tragically, Christianity was transformed from a calling and gathering of sheep to follow the Good Shepherd, into a brand-new *religion* with many of the remnants of the old wineskins and the old wine.

Of course, many will say, “Wait a minute. Jesus talked about building His church on the rock of Peter’s revelation that Jesus was the Messiah. Wasn’t that referring to a religious ‘organization’?” The Greek word that was translated into the English word, “church,” was the word *ekklesia*, which means “*a gathering of people called together into an assembly.*” It does *not* mean or refer to a religious organization. And that is exactly what Jesus was referring to in John 10:16 when He said, “**I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd.**” The Greek word translated “bring” is the word *ago*. It means “to lead, guide and direct.” As the Good Shepherd, Jesus would gather His sheep together—they would hear His voice, His words, and follow Him. He would lead them together from many pens into one flock that would hear His voice and follow Him.

## Praise God for The Churches and Organizations that Proclaim Jesus' Gospel

Please do not think that I am in any way trying to demean or minimize the role of any churches or organizations that have brought the gospel to us throughout the ages. God has used churches, institutions, and parachurch organizations to perform the miraculous calling, gathering and leading of Jesus' sheep. I came to Christ through the lay ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ sixty years ago. Nearly all of my growth in my walk with Christ has come through the ministry of many people in many churches. I currently attend a non-denominational church, where I am deeply moved to want to be more like Jesus every time I attend. I hope to attend churches with great Bible teaching, worship and fellowship for the rest of my life, and will never try to minimize or demean the work and callings of any of God's people or organizations.

### Good, Better or Best

Whenever there are choices of alternatives, there is usually a basic *continuum of choice*. It looks like this.

#### Continuum Of Alternative Choices

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|       |          |     |    |      |        |      |
|-------|----------|-----|----|------|--------|------|
| Worst | Very Bad | Bad | OK | Good | Better | Best |
|-------|----------|-----|----|------|--------|------|

For most followers of Christ, the *worst* alternative is rarely chosen. Most of the time, we choose between *good*, *better*, or *best* alternatives. In terms of hearing Jesus' voice and experiencing intimacy with Him and the Father, I believe most believers choose *good* rather than *best*. We often make that choice, not because that's what we really want; but rather, we simply don't know that there is a *better* choice or a *best* choice available to us. And this describes what has happened in modern Christianity. We have accepted *good* alternatives and sometimes *better* alternatives. Tragically, because we have limited resources, even choosing *better* alternatives prevents us from choosing and experiencing the *best* alternatives. This is *precisely* what Jesus was referring to in His parable of the wineskins. Look at it again.

**“And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, ‘The old is good enough.’”** (Luke 5:37-39 NASB)

In the Greek there are two words that are usually translated into the English word, *better*. Most often the word *kalos* is used which means *excellent*, *genuine*, or *precious*. This is *not* the word Jesus used in this parable. As we just saw, here He chose the word *chrestos*. *Chrestos* means, *fitting* or *good enough* or *pleasant*. So in this parable, Jesus is telling us that people who drink the old wine reject drinking the new wine because they think the old wine is “good enough.” Truly, the old wine may seem fitting, it may be pleasant or even good. *But*, it’s *not* the new wine. And choosing the old wine *prevents* a person from drinking the new wine.

So people choose the old wine of religion with all of its teachings, activities and benefits, in *place of* the new wine of an intimate relationship with Jesus and the Father and all the miraculous benefits that that relationship offers. They choose becoming a Bible Student (very good, even better) in place of discipleship (best). As we saw earlier, the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day made the same choice. As we saw in Chapter One, Jesus sternly told them, **“You study the scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very scriptures that testify of Me, yet you refuse to come to Me for life.”** (John 5:39-40). They studied their sacred scriptures diligently, and yet their choice diverted their attention from the most important benefit of the scriptures, namely preparing their hearts and minds for the coming Messiah. They accepted the old wine which was good, even seemed good enough—and yet it wasn’t good enough at all. Drinking the old wine kept them from the eternal-life-giving new wine that *only* Jesus could give them. They not only *missed* their Messiah, they hated Him and crucified Him.

### **We’ve Been Fooled by the Adversary’s “Misdirects.”**

On numerous occasions I’ve had the joy of watching one of the world’s great magicians. He was a fellow Arizonian named Bob Gertler. His stage name was Andre Kole.

He was not only one of the world's greatest illusionists, but he had also created many of the greatest "tricks" or illusions used by the most celebrated magicians in the entertainment industry, including David Copperfield. Many years ago, Bob, a skeptic, was asked by a Christian friend to investigate all the miracles Jesus had performed and see if he could figure-out (debunk) Jesus' "tricks." Bob said that he had never seen any trick performed by *any* magician that he couldn't quickly figure out. After a thorough two-year investigation of all of Jesus' miracles, Bob became convinced that they weren't tricks at all. He couldn't debunk any of them. However, as he carefully examined the person of Jesus, He became entirely convinced that Jesus was indeed, the Son of God. Bob became a passionate disciple of Jesus. He joined the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru) and performed all over the world, giving his testimony and inviting millions of others to become followers of Jesus Christ.

### **The Art of the *Misdirect***

Bob would be the first to tell you that all "magic tricks" are merely clever illusions. He would also tell you that one of the critical "tricks-of-the-trade," used by every magician is what they call "the misdirect." Simply stated, the "misdirect" shifts the visual focus of the audience to something intended to draw their attention away from what the magician is doing. He then performs the trick while their attention is intently focused on *the misdirect*. The misdirect may be as short as a fraction of a second that only draws a quick glance, or it may be longer. Regardless, the misdirect hijacks the audience's visual focus away from the very thing the magician wants to accomplish.

The *misdirect* is one of Satan's greatest tools. He often succeeds with those of us *who believe in Christ* when he uses misdirects to keep our focus away from that which is *best!* He can use a misdirect that is evil in its nature, or one that is morally neutral. But for dedicated Christians, he's more likely to use a misdirect that offers an alternative that is seen as truly or morally *good*, to prevent us from seeing and doing that which is *best!* And any misdirect that keeps a believer from seeing, hearing, and doing the *best*, accomplishes Satan's goal. We see his use of this strategy throughout the Bible, beginning with Adam and Eve, then Cain, and then in nearly every story and in every character's life—except the life of Jesus!

Satan tried to use “misdirects” with Jesus in the wilderness after Jesus had fasted for forty days. He even quoted sacred scriptures to Jesus; but Jesus was never fooled or distracted by Satan’s most clever misdirects.

### **Because We Are Creatures of Limited Time, We *Must* Avoid Satan’s Misdirects**

Because we are people with limited time, letting Satan’s misdirects fool us into accepting *good* in place of *the best* can be tragic. We often accept *a* way instead of *the* way; *a* truth instead of *the* truth, and *a* good life instead of *the* life. We accept good ways, instead of Jesus’ way, “good truths,” instead of Jesus’ truths, and good life, instead of Jesus’ life. When we do, the ways, truths and lives we’ve accepted may *not* bring us into intimacy with the Father. Jesus warned His disciples about accepting such substitutions when He said, “**I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me.**” (John 14:6).

Tragically, many professing Christians have been distracted, diverted or even detoured to a wrong path by the adversary’s incredibly brilliant and even godly-appearing misdirects. We have focused on becoming good Bible students instead of getting to know Jesus. We focus on any of many issues taught in the Bible that all too easily can become distractions that keep us from entering an intimate union with Him. We focus on truly glorious subjects like Bible prophecy, spiritual gifts, Old Testament symbolism, New Testament directives and organizational structures and on and on. While all of these are truly good, even great, gaining and mastering knowledge of such things and even practicing such things are *not* the focus or the intent of the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus was revealing to His disciples at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. He said:

**“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never *knew* you; leave Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”** (Matthew 5:21-23)

Notice that Jesus didn't debate the truthfulness of their claims. He didn't say, "You never prophesied in My name," or "You never cast out demons in My name" or "You never performed many miracles in my name." He simply declared to them, "I never *knew* you..." And because He *didn't* challenge the truthfulness of their statements, it's very possible that they really *did* do all these glorious things. Even if they didn't perform these miraculous works, they truly *believed* they did.

As good as all these miracle-working gifts were, they were *not* what the Father and the Son intended to become the focus of Jesus' sheep. For the group Jesus was describing, they were simply following the *misdirects* in place of God's ultimate gift, the offering of His Son and the gift of an intimate union with He and His Son. The miraculous gifts that these people set their focus upon were only temporary in nature. You see, the recipients of all their miracles ultimately died. And if they died not knowing Jesus the way He wants to be known, their miracles and healings were of no *eternal* worth.

### **I'm Incredibly Grateful for all of God's Miraculous Works**

I am *not* saying that the charismatic gifts of the Spirit aren't operational today or that they are not wonderful. I'm just reporting what Jesus said. They are *not* the intended *focus* of Jesus' gospel or His teachings. I have a son who was miraculously healed from a life-threatening cancer the night a wonderful Pastor exercised his gift of faith. But the pastor ended his prayer with the words, "Then we will *know* that You are the one who performed the miracle, and You ALONE will receive the glory!" Do I believe in the gifts of the Spirit? Of course, I do. But I KNOW that they were never intended to become the *focus* of Jesus' glorious Gospel.

### **Jesus Shines His Spotlight on His and the Father's Greatest Miracle**

Jesus affirmed this when He sent seventy-two of His disciples to various towns and villages to proclaim the Gospel and perform miracles. They did just that. They came back filled with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." Jesus replied "**I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits**



**submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.**” You see, as wonderful and glorious as these miracles were, they were *not* intended to be the source of the disciple’s joy. Jesus wanted them to know that HE was to be their focus, and the eternal life that they would receive from Him and the Father, was the greatest miracle and the greatest gift they would ever experience. It would be the *one* gift no one could ever take away from them! Unlike other miracles that are temporary in nature, their eternal life (and yours and mine) are truly eternal!

I love the Bible and believe everything it teaches. I am truly grateful to God for giving us His word and preserving it for us through the ages. I marvel at all its glorious teachings and revelations. And yet, as glorious as the written word of God is, it was *never* intended to be a substitute for that which was *intended* to be our focus and our glory—namely intimacy with the Father and His dear Son. As we saw in Chapter One, God clearly and precisely revealed in Jeremiah 9:23-24, what He wanted to be our intended focus. He said:

“Thus says the Lord: **“Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty *man* glory in his might, Nor let the rich *man* glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I *am* the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,”** says the Lord.”

God Himself said our “glory,” (the focus of our heart and soul) should be gaining an understanding of who He is and knowing Him intimately. We also saw that Jesus went one GIANT step further. He gave us the only definition of *eternal life* found in the Bible. He said, **“And *this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*”** (John 17:3 NASB).

God gave us end-time prophecies so that we would *repent* and so we wouldn’t be taken by surprise. But here again, Satan has used the glorious prophecies relating to the second coming as a *misdirect* to divert our attention away from coming into a spiritual intimacy with the Father and the Son. Yes, Jesus wants us to be aware of what’s going to happen, but He never intended that prophesy itself would become our ginormous, climactic

focus. In fact, look at what the angel told the Apostle John in Revelation 19:10. He said, “I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who rely on the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For ***the testimony of Jesus*** is the spirit of prophecy.” The purpose of prophesy is *not* prophesy. The spirit and purpose of prophesy is to turn our minds and hearts toward Jesus, to hear *His* testimony (the words that He spoke) and by faith, rely on His testimony—His life and His words!

The Father wants us to use our limited time to focus on Him and Jesus. Our adversary does *not* want us to use our limited time to focus on Jesus. Anything the adversary can use to steal our attention and intentions away from coming into an intimate union with the Father and Son brings him success at diverting us away from God’s great intentions for us. At the transfiguration, God commanded Jesus’ three most intimate followers (and us) to “Hear Him”! So, if God wants us to focus on the words and teachings of Jesus in the present moment, and Satan can misdirect our focus to *anything other* than Jesus’ words and teachings, his misdirects have been successful.

### **I LOVE Reading and Studying the Bible... But...**

I would never want to say anything that would in any way discourage Bible study. I have been studying the Bible for sixty years and it has been the number one tool of the Holy Spirit in my life. We all know that the Bible is the literal word of God and everything of eternal worth comes from the truths it reveals. But unfortunately, for most believers, Jesus’ words in the Gospels have been minimized. They have been given the same weight as any other words found in the Bible. In fact, most believers I have known can quote more of Paul’s words from his epistles or David’s words found in the Psalms or Solomon’s words in Proverbs, than they can quote the words of Jesus. Jesus’ words are treated as if they are no different than all the other words recorded in the Old and New Testaments. But the fact is, they *are* different! Radically and stratospherically different. As you will see in the remaining chapters of this book, Jesus’ words are the very tool the Holy Spirit uses to bring us into an intimate union with the Father and the Son. They are the foundation upon which we can *love* the Father and the Son the way *They* want to be loved.

As you discover the amazing role and power of Jesus' words in the next chapter, you will be able to move into a level of intimacy with God that is likely beyond anything you have ever imagined. Get ready for the most glorious feast of your life and the *new* wine found only in the Lord Jesus Christ!

# Chapter Five

## ***The Unique Roles and Miraculous Power of Jesus' Words***

### **We Must Stop Making *Peter's* Mistake**

If I were to ask you, what was the biggest mistake the Apostle Peter ever made, what would you say? If you say, “His three denials of Jesus,” you would be wrong. His denials of Jesus weren’t mistakes, they were *failings*—failings caused by unbelief. He simply did *not* have the faith that God would take care of him if he told the truth, so he lied. Don’t be judgmental though, because except for the grace of God, most of us would have experienced that same failing. But I didn’t ask what Peter’s biggest failure was. I asked what his biggest *mistake* was.

Prior to Jesus’ resurrection, Peter had some successes, lots of failings, but only *one* terrible mistake that we know about—and that was a *big* one. It was *so* big that it made God the Father angry—terrifyingly angry. Think about it—our God is a God of mercy and lovingkindness. He is a God of grace. He *delights* in showing mercy. He is incomparably kind and patient. And yet, this mistake made Him so angry, His response *terrified* Peter, James and John! That’s the bad news. The good news is, Peter only made *this* mistake once! Unfortunately, in the past I have made this same mistake many times, and so have most of the evangelicals I know. The *great* news is, God has forgiven us, and if we will heed Jesus’ calling and follow Him, we don’t *have* to keep making this same mistake.

### **Jesus Gives His Inner Circle a *Glimpse* of His Glory**

During His second year of public ministry, Jesus decided to let Peter, James and John witness an event that was so extraordinary, He commanded them *not* to tell anyone of it until *after* His death and resurrection. He took them high up on a mountain. It was late, and the three were tired. Jesus walked a short distance away from them and began to pray. As He prayed, His face became almost blindingly bright, and His garments became as white as a flash of light. Then, Moses and Elijah appeared, and were overheard talking with Jesus.

Peter decided to speak up and make what seemed to be a nice offer. He said, “Lord, it is good that we are here. If You want, I will make three tabernacles here: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” As Peter was speaking a bright cloud enveloped him and the other two apostles. Then the *angry* voice of the Father said, “**This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; LISTEN TO HIM!**” (Matthew 17:5)

How do we know that it was the *angry* voice of God? Simple. As soon as the voice began to speak, we are told that the disciples fell facedown to the ground and that they were *terrified*! At Jesus’ baptism, no one was terrified when the Father spoke and said something similar. But here, three grown men fell face down in absolute terror! They stayed face down in terror until Jesus walked over to them, touched them and said, “**Get up, don’t be afraid.**” They then looked up, and Moses and Elijah were gone. (Matthew 17:7-8)

So the natural question is, “Why was God so angry?” God was angry because Peter’s suggestion of making three tabernacles was horribly demeaning and dishonoring to God and His one and only Son. In essence, God was saying, “HOW DARE YOU DEMEAN MY SON—EQUATING HIM, HIS MESSAGE AND MINISTRY TO THAT OF THESE MEN.” Even though Moses and Elijah were the most revered prophets in the history of Israel, they were still merely men!

Like all of us, they too were sinners in desperate need of a Savior. Jesus on the other hand was God’s Son. He would soon suffer the humiliation of having most of the skin on his back ripped off by Roman whips filled with stones and lead hooks. His face would be beaten beyond recognition. He would be ridiculed, spit upon and hung naked on a cross! Jesus was going to be executed as an atonement for the sins of these two mortal men, along with the sins of you and me. How dare Peter exalt mere men (even recognized prophets) to that place of honor that belongs ONLY to God’s dear Son. How dare he lower Jesus from His exalted position as the Messiah, the God of all creation to that of a mere man!

God then finishes His statement with a command that Peter and the others would *never* forget. God commanded, “**LISTEN TO HIM!**” God was telling them (and us) that Jesus’ voice, (His message and His words) was the ONE voice that was to be heard and acted

upon—above all other voices, words and messages of any other human who had ever spoken or who would ever speak! Jesus was the embodied Word of God, and His words would be the ultimate standards of truth by which all other words and truths would be measured. Jesus said of His words, “**I have not spoken on My own, but the Father who sent Me has commanded Me what to say and how to say it.**” (John 12:49). No one else in history could make that amazing claim. Everything Jesus said, the Father had commanded Him to say and even *how* to say it!

### How Are *We* Making Peter’s Mistake?

Just as Peter made the terrible mistake of *equalizing* Jesus with Moses and Elijah, we in practice, equalize Jesus with the Old Testament Poets and Prophets and the New Testament Apostles. We do this by treating His words as if they were equal in value and purpose to everyone else’s words that are recorded in the Bible. That is not only a faulty equation, but also a totally *false* equation. And it’s terribly offensive to God. Peter made that equation, and God got mad—very, very mad!

People are quick to quote Paul’s statement to his protege Timothy, “All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness.” (II Timothy 3:16). Paul is right, all scripture *is* inspired, (God breathed) and does have valuable purposes when it comes to teaching, training in righteousness, and for reproof and correction as well. But Paul is *not* saying that all scripture is equal in its purpose or power! While all scripture is good for training and teaching in the areas Paul mentioned, all scripture is *not* equal in terms of God’s purposes, and their intended uses.

Jesus made 21 life-transforming, eternity-changing promises about *His* words that He did *not* make about any other words found in the Bible. The purposes and power of His words do *not* in any way minimize or diminish the role and power of other words found in the scriptures. But Jesus’ words are *exalted* to purposes, power, and roles that no other words ascend to.

For example, Jesus said, “**My words are Spirit and they are life!**” (John 6:63 ). They can literally penetrate our spirit and infuse His spirit and life into our spirit and life!” Countless professing Christians are lacking spiritual power today *because* they are not focusing on the words and teachings of Jesus. Consequently, their spirit and life are not being infused with Jesus’ spirit and life. He also tells us that if we abide in *His* words, we will be His true disciples; we will *know* the truth, and the truth will set us free from our enslavement to sin. He also tells us that *if* we abide in Him and His words abide in us, our prayers will be answered, we’ll bear a lot of eternal fruit, and we will glorify God! (I John 15:7-9). These are just a few of the incomparable promises Jesus makes about His words—promises that make his words as different from all other words, as nuclear power is different from conventional power.

The founder of Salem Broadcasting, America’s largest group of Christian radio stations. asked me to share this message with his executive team. Within a few minutes of starting my talk, their chief operations officer objected. He stated that *all* of the words in the Bible are Jesus’ words because they were all inspired by God. Of course, he quoted II Timothy 3:16. I reminded Him that the “Scripture,” Paul was talking about were the writings of the Old Testament. The New Testament had not yet been written or circulated. I also pointed out that Paul was simply referring to the teaching and correction roles of the words of the Old Testament.

I then asked him if he had memorized John 3:16. He instantly replied, “Of course.” I then asked, “How about, 1 Chronicles 26:18?” He answered, “No I haven’t.” I said, “So you are telling me that John 3:16 is so inspired, so important that you memorized it. But your actions are also telling me that 1 Chronicles 26:18, though inspired by God, isn’t so important—at least it’s not important enough for you to memorize it.” I asked, “Would you agree that if it *were* as important and powerful as John 3:16 that you *would* have memorized it?” He answered, “maybe.” I then said, “So according to your words and actions, you *don’t* believe that 1 Chronicles 26:18 is as important and beneficial as John 3:16!” He said, “I guess so.” I said, “You’re right, it’s not as important to *us*, and may not be

worth spending our time to memorize it. But it's still the inspired word of God and it was very important to the specific people He was speaking to. But its role or purpose and its inherent power for *our* lives *cannot* compare to Jesus' words in John 3:16." I then said, "By the way, I *have* memorized it. It says, "At Parbar westward, four at the causeway, and two at Parbar.'" The argument was over.

### **"LISTEN TO HIM!"**

This is the *only* command that God the Father personally gave us in the entire New Testament. It is *critically* important. It is critically important to our eternal life as well as our daily life here on earth. Without hearing and doing the words of Jesus:

- We cannot *know* the Father.
- We cannot love the Father and Son the way *They* want to be loved!
- We cannot have *intimacy* and *union* with the Father and Son.
- Jesus will *not* reveal Himself to us.
- We will not be counted among Jesus' friends.
- The Father and Son will *not* come to us and make their dwelling place with us.
- Our perception of God will be incomplete at best and totally wrong at worst
- We will not have Jesus' eighty-plus promises to daily walk upon by faith.
- We will not know or experience the supernatural empowerment of Jesus' commands.
- We will not have an ongoing infusion of His spirit and life.
- We will *not* be Jesus' true disciple.
- We will *not* know the truth.
- We will *not* experience His liberation from enslavement to our sins.
- We will not be able to bear an abundance of eternal fruit.
- Jesus' joy will not remain in us.
- We will not have the security for our life and future He makes available to us.



## On the Other Hand...

### Jesus Promises *Miraculous Outcomes* to Those Who Will Hear His Words and Do Them:

#### Jesus' Promises About *Doing His Words*.

1. You will receive an ongoing infusion of His Spirit and life into their spirit and life. John 6:63
2. You will become Jesus' true disciple. John 8:
3. You will know truth and *intimately* know *the* TRUTH. John 8:32
4. You will be liberated from enslavement to sin. John 8:32-38
5. You will gain intimacy with Jesus and the Father. John 14:21-23
6. You will be loved in a special way by the Son and the Father. John 14:21-23
7. Jesus will reveal Himself, His heart and His mind to you. John 14:21-23
8. The Father and the Son will come to you. John 14:23
9. The Father and the Son will make their continual dwelling place with you. John 14:23
10. You will be cleansed from your sin. John 15:3
11. Your prayer requests will be answered. John 15:7
12. You will bear much eternal fruit. John 15:8
13. You will glorify the Father. John 15:8
14. You will REMAIN in the center of Jesus' love. John 15:10
15. Jesus' joy will be in you. John 15:11
16. Your joy will be full. John 15:11
17. You will be counted as one of Jesus' friends. John 15:14
18. The "house" of your life will never be destroyed. Matt 7:24-25
19. Your life will be built on the perfect foundation. Matt 7:24-25
20. You will be intimately known by Jesus. Matt 7:21-25

- |   |              |
|---|--------------|
| 21. You will have assurance of your eternal life. | Matt 7:24-25 |
| 22. Your life and faith will never be shaken.     | Matt 7:24-25 |
| 23. His words will cleanse your mind and heart.   | John 15:3    |

Despite the Father's command to listen to His Son and do what He says, despite all of Jesus' promises and loving warnings, *most* Christians seem to know very little of what Jesus has said. They may have made their lives about the teachings of *Christianity* and the teachings of their denominations and local churches, but they may *not* have made their lives about Jesus' teachings and callings. To prove my point, I'll ask you the same questions I ask church pastors. Usually, it only takes the first five to show them how little they know of Jesus' teachings.

1. What is the love language of Jesus and the Father? (It's not worship or praise)
2. What is the only way you can *know* the Father?
3. According to Jesus, by what characteristic does He identify people who love Him?
4. How many commands did Jesus give to His followers?
5. When was the last time you preached a sermon or heard a sermon on the commands of Christ?
6. Can you recite (in your own words) 15 of Jesus' Commands?
7. Can you recite 10 of His 80-plus conditional promises?
8. What evidence did Jesus say *proves* to God the Father that you are one of Jesus' disciples?
9. To whom does Jesus promise to reveal Himself (His mind and heart-His likes and dislikes)?
10. Why are we told not to focus on the past? Where did Jesus say that?
11. Why should we be rejoicing every day, regardless of our circumstances?

### **Jesus Reveals the Solution to His Most Grave Warning**

As we saw in the last chapter, Jesus ended His *Sermon on the Mount* with a truthful, yet terrifying glimpse of the judgment of professing believers. Again, He said:

**“Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never *knew* you; leave Me, you who practice lawlessness.’”**

For forty years this passage really worried me. I would think, “What if I am one of these people? Will I say, “Lord, Lord, I led many people to you and even disciplined them.” Will I point out that I taught Bible studies, wrote Christian books and testified of Jesus on television to millions of people? And despite this, will I hear those terrifying words, “Steve, I never knew you. Depart from me!”

Then, one day in 2006, I didn’t stop at the end of the paragraph. The very next verse (24) begins the next paragraph with the word, “*Therefore.*” That means the whole reason Jesus gave this terrifying glimpse of the rejection of professing believers is the truth He was about to reveal. He said:

**“*Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts on them, will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.*”**

So Jesus’ answer to me and to everyone who has stressed over the terrifying prospect of being told, “I never knew you,” is to build our lives on the *rock* of hearing and doing what Jesus said. And to drive home that fact even more, he went on to say in the next verse: **“*And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and its collapse was great.*”**

So, there you have it—the rock that we’re to build our lives on is *hearing Jesus’ words and doing them*, and the sand that we cannot build a secure life or eternity upon is that of *hearing Jesus’ words and not doing them*.

**Eternal Life is God’s Gift; Salvation is *by* Grace, Through Faith!**

When I share this message with people, usually their first response is to say, “This sounds like *works*.” What they mean is, they see this passage as implying that you must “do good works” to be saved. That’s *not* what Jesus is saying. He’s saying that His followers, who have been born of the Spirit (born again) and have been saved by God’s gift of salvation, express their salvation with a gratefulness that *wants* to hear Jesus’ words and teachings and *wants* to do them. *That is how* they follow their Good Shepherd. That’s how they express their love and gratefulness to Him and the Father. Paul summed it up perfectly in Ephesians 2:8-10. He wrote:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus *to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*”

The good works God has prepared in advance for us to do, are to hear and do the teachings of His one and only Son!

In Jesus’ vernacular, God, through the Holy Spirit is the one who gives the gift of spiritual birth to Jesus’ sheep. (John 3:16). When Jesus’ sheep have been born *of the Spirit*, they hear Jesus’ voice (His words and teachings) and they follow Him by listening to His words and teachings and putting them into practice in their daily lives, in their attitudes and actions. (John 10:16;27)

The rest of the world sees us doing what Jesus teaches, and they call those attitudes and actions, “good works” or “works of righteousness.” This is a mirror-like reflection of the Father and the Son, so the Father is *glorified* by our “good works” that flow out of a grateful heart that’s been redeemed by the Good Shepherd. Such works aren’t performed to *earn* salvation, but rather, they are performed in *gratitude* as a loving expression of those who have received God’s *gift* of salvation. That’s what Jesus meant when He said, **“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”** (Matthew 5:18)

Do you *want* a moment-by-moment, day-by-day infusion of Jesus’ Spirit and life? Do you want His Joy that is not deterred or diminished by circumstances? Do you want true

intimacy with the Father and the Son? God wants all of that and *more* for you. According to Jesus, *abiding* in His words is the key to receiving all that He and the Father have promised.

In the next chapter, we'll look at the *source* of all of God's love, power, joy and righteousness. Once again, you'll directly hear from Jesus the critical nature of His words, and the joyful life they produce.

# Chapter Six

## *The Line in the Sand—Will You Cross it?*

### **Don't Let Fear Keep You from Doing What's Right**

My father was a bomber pilot in World War Two. He flew 42 harrowing missions in the South Pacific. Those missions were terrifying. I am awestruck by his courage and the courage of that “greatest generation.” Courageous men and women are *not* free of fear. When they face daunting, even life-threatening events, their courage isn't demonstrated by their lack of fear, but rather by the actions they take *despite* their fear.

There was one aviator that my dad couldn't stop talking about—his hero—Colonel Jimmy Doolittle. Dad had spent time with him and could tell me everything about him. Dad considered Doolittle, the greatest aviator and the most courageous military pilot he had ever known. He is best known for the *Doolittle Raid*, when he led 16 bomber crews on what seemed to be a “suicide mission.” You get a glimpse of it in the movie, *Pearl Harbor*. There's a scene where Doolittle tells all eighty volunteers how dangerous and deadly the mission will be. He tells them there is no shame in changing their minds and backing out. He then tells them if they *still* want to remain in the mission, “Step forward.” All eighty men stepped forward. No one backed out. In essence, he had drawn a line in the sand, and everyone courageously stepped across that line.

### **Jesus Draws His Line in the Sand**

Early in Jesus' ministry, like Colonel Doolittle, He too drew the proverbial *line in the sand*. There was a large crowd of followers who considered themselves to be among His disciples. Jesus told them that if they would eat His flesh and drink His blood, they would have eternal life. When He explained that He wasn't referring to His physical flesh, but rather, was talking about *His words* which were spirit and life, they complained among themselves. “This is too hard,” and turned and walked away. Crossing Jesus' line in the sand would require them to regularly consume Jesus' words and teachings, and they were too

self-absorbed to do that. Only Jesus' twelve disciples remained. They *did* cross His line. He then asked them, "**Do you also want to go away?**" (John 6:67). In the last chapter, we saw Peter's big mistake. Now, we see his shining moment—his glorious revelation and his life-changing decision. He said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68-69).

### **In Spite of Jesus' Miracles, Most "Would Be Followers" Walked Away!**

In John chapter six we see Jesus perform amazing miracles, one of which was witnessed by thousands. We also see a number of His glorious revelations. The disciples who crossed the line in the sand and chose to stay with Jesus, saw them all. Those who chose to walk away may have only seen one, but that one was unimaginable. By itself it gave them and any *reasonable* person all the evidence needed to make an affirmative decision to remain with Jesus. And yet, they walked away. They had seen Jesus take five small loaves of bread and two small fish from a young boy, and feed 5,000 people, then filling twelve large baskets with the *leftovers*. They were blown away by what they witnessed. They said, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."

### **Peter's Shining Moments**

That evening, Jesus went off by himself into the wilderness. His disciples got into one of their boats and began rowing across the lake. In the darkness they rowed three or four miles. The wind picked up and the water was rough. Then they saw Jesus, walking on the water. They were terrified, thinking a ghost was coming toward them. Then Jesus called out to them, "**Have courage, it is I, Don't be afraid.**" (Matthew 14:27). Peter called out to Jesus and said, "Lord, if it's you, *command* me to come to you."

Note that Peter would not step out of the boat unless Jesus *commanded* him to do so. He knew that if Jesus commanded him to come, Jesus would provide the power and grace that would be needed for him to walk on the water. This is an absolute truth that we should write into the concrete of our mind—*To His followers, Jesus will always provide the power and grace to obey whatever He commands them.* All they need to do is to take a *step of faith* and *obey* His command. So, Jesus then gave Peter a one-word command. "**Come.**" In faith,

Peter obeyed Jesus' command and stepped out of the boat. Miraculously, he became the *second* man in history to walk on the water. But the truth is, he wasn't walking on the water...he was walking (by faith) on Jesus' *command*. Unfortunately, when he turned his attention away from Jesus' command, onto the changing circumstances (the wind kicked up), he immediately sunk. The next miracle of the night is seen in John's rendition of the story. When Jesus stepped into the boat, the boat was immediately (in an instant) transported to the shore. (John 6:21). The next day, many from the previous day's 5,000 people crossed the lake to hear Jesus once again.

### **The Sheep the Father Gives to Jesus are the Only Ones Who Stay with Him.**

What we then see, hear, and learn, is truly amazing. First, we see incontrovertible *proof* that Jesus wasn't a promoter. He draws the line in the sand, and when nearly everyone rejects His words and starts to walk away, Jesus doesn't pursue them or modify His message to persuade them. A promoter would do everything he could to talk them out of leaving. A promoter would come up with a different analogy, or a more palatable argument to persuade them to stay. Not Jesus. He doesn't chase after them! Instead of trying to convince everyone to remain and become His true disciples, He simply reminds the remaining twelve, that the *only* ones who can follow Him are those whom the Father has given to Him. This is one more instance where we see that Jesus was *not* trying to create a big organization. He was simply announcing the eternal truths with His voice, *knowing* that His sheep would hear His voice, and unlike everyone else, they would follow Him.

However, the truths He reveals in this passage in John 6, are critically important. They show us what we *must* do to follow Him and to experience His abiding and eternal presence. They show us *how* to experience our goal of intimately knowing Him and becoming one with Him!

### **Jesus' Critical Revelations in John Chapter Six**

When the crowd catches up with Jesus on the other side of the lake, we see an amazing dialogue take place between Him and those in the crowd. They had seen Him feed five thousand and they enjoyed their meal so much that when they came to Him, it wasn't so



much to hear His truths, rather, it was to satisfy their physical appetite. (John 6:26). When He wouldn't do that, they wanted Him to give them a "sign," to prove He was the Messiah. They boasted that Moses gave their ancestors manna from heaven. He corrected them and said that *He* was the bread that came down from heaven. He said *He* was the bread of life, and that He came down to give life to the world. He reminded them that everyone who ate the manna Moses gave, ultimately died, but the people who would eat the bread He would give would *never* die but would have eternal life. He tells them that instead of working for bread that spoils they should work for the bread that provides *eternal* life. Then they asked, what should they do to be able to do the works of God. He told them that the only work of God they needed to experience was *to believe on the one God sent*—Himself. (John 6:28-29)

Jesus then shocks them when He flatly states: ***"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*** He then reminds them that despite the fact that they have *seen* Him, they still don't believe. He explains that they don't believe because they do not belong to the Father and that everyone who belongs to the Father, *will* come to Jesus. He then says, ***"Whoever comes to me, I will not cast away!"*** (That's you and me).

Jesus then gives another revelation that only He could give. Because He is the only one who has seen the Father and came from the Father, He is the *only* who could perfectly reveal the *will* of the Father. He said, ***"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life..."*** (John 6:40). "Looking to the Son," means turning to Him to put your trust in Him, hearing what He says and believing in Him to the point of *doing* what He says. They have a really hard time with this because they knew He was Joseph and Mary's son, and they just couldn't believe he was anything more than that. (John 6:42).

### **The Line in the Sand That They Just Couldn't Cross**

Here Jesus does something that is *so* contrary to what most of us would do, it seems crazy. But as you'll see, it's not crazy at all. When people argue with us and flat out reject our beliefs or opinions, we normally come up with additional arguments, proofs and other perspectives to try to persuade them and win them over to our side. Not Jesus! He does

just the opposite. Instead of making it *easier* for them to believe with a miraculous sign or an easier parable, He tells them a truth that they just couldn't handle. For them, it was the final straw, a barrier they could not overcome. On the other hand, for the ones who were given to Him by the Father, they patiently waited for Him to give further explanation. After His further explanation, the crowd still couldn't get it, and they left. But His twelve disciples did not leave. Although the truth He revealed caused the vast majority to cut and run, for you and me, it is one of the most powerful truths that Jesus revealed in His life on earth. It was repugnant to the unbelievers, yet, for believers it can become a source of tremendous power and joy that is truly unimaginable!

### **Jesus' Powerful Revelation**

Jesus said, **"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."** (John 6:53-56 NKJV)

When the crowd heard this, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can understand it?" Jesus gave a few remarks about their unbelief and then gave another revelation that gives us two life-transforming insights. He said, **"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh provides no benefit; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit, and are life."** (John 6:63 NKJV).

So let's look at what Jesus is really saying.

- If you *don't* eat His flesh and drink His blood you have no *real* life in you. In Paul's vernacular, you are *spiritually dead*. In modern vernacular, you are a *dead man walking*.
- If you *do* eat His flesh and drink His blood you **HAVE** eternal life.
- His flesh is real food, and His blood is real drink.

- **If You eat His flesh and drink His blood will experience Jesus in the *most intimate and miraculous way*.**—You will abide (live within) in Jesus, and He will abide (live within) in you.
- **Jesus is not talking about eating Him physically, but rather, coming into a spiritual union with Him.** A union where you will dwell within Him and He will dwell within you.
- **You eat His flesh and drink His blood *Spiritually*** —by consuming, feasting upon, and devouring *His words!*—They *infuse* His life and spirit into your life and spirit!

### **No Wonder So Many Believers *Aren't* Experiencing Intimacy with Jesus**

At the last Supper, Jesus refers to the bread as a symbol of His body which was broken for us and the wine as a symbol of His blood that would be shed as a *New Covenant* for the remission of our sins. This is *not* the symbolism He is using here.

In verse 63, Jesus tells us that He was *not* referring to His physical flesh, saying that, **“the flesh profits nothing.”** He then links what He said about eating His flesh and drinking His blood to *His words*. He said, **“the words that I have spoken to you are spirit, and are life.”** This is a statement that reflects what Jesus implies is a *critical* issue for His sheep. We look at this verse and we first put the focus and emphasis on “spirit and life.” But the emphasis should also focus on **“the words I have spoken.”** This statement unlocks His analogy. It also reflects a much broader truth. Jesus’ words, sayings and teachings are not meant to be merely acknowledged, or casually heard or read. They are meant to be *consumed*—even *feasted* upon! Staying true to the point of Jesus’ analogy, when we consume His words, we are consuming *Him*. His words infuse His spirit and life into our spirit and life—To drive this revelation home with all the power He knows, Jesus emphatically states, even promises, that the person who will consume His flesh (His words and teachings) will experience Jesus’ continually residing in them, and they will continually reside or dwell in Him. (John 6:56).

Can you imagine a life where Jesus is infusing *His* life and spirit into you throughout your day? That can create a level of intimacy with Him and the Father that will produce joy,

power, peace (freedom from worry and stress) and of course, miraculous living, that is *not* experienced through any other means.

I founded a company with an extremely advanced technology that allows us to *nano-size* critical peptides, amino acids, and nutrients that increase the cellular utilization of these molecules that are critical to all aspects of life, health, and mental and physical performance. I can tell you that when you put the right nutrients into your body that are effectively delivered to your cells and efficiently utilized by your cells, it's a gamechanger of monumental proportions. It literally changes every aspect of how you and your body function through the day. Jesus' words provide the critical spiritual nutrients that will be metabolized into our spirit and every aspect of our life with Him.

### **Eight Grains of Rice a Day is a Starvation Diet**

John H. Nobel and his father were slaves in a Russian prison camp for eight years after World War II. His particular camp decided to put the prisoners on a starvation diet to cut their expenses. John and his dad were given a single cup of rice to share that would need to last them for three months. Most of the prisoners died of starvation. John and his dad counted the grains of rice in the cup and figured out that if it was going to last them for the full ninety days, they could each only consume 8 grains of rice per day. John went from a weight of 150 lbs. to 95 lbs. He and his dad barely survived. But they *did* survive, while no one else did.

### **Chances Are, When it Comes to Jesus' Words, You've Been on a Starvation Diet!**

Many believers I have known in my lifetime have been on a starvation diet when it comes to Jesus' words. They may be filling-up on other teachings from the Bible that fill their head with knowledge and even give them what they need to make decisions that are wise and righteous. But what Jesus revealed in His analogy of *consuming* His words, is as lifechanging as going from a diet of 8 grains of rice a day, to a healthy daily diet that incorporates all of the aspects of a fully balanced diet. THAT is what Jesus is offering to you, your soul and your spirit. But unlike the food that goes into your stomach and only meets your physical needs, Jesus' words fill your *soul* and meet your *spiritual* needs. They literally

infuse Jesus' *eternal life* into your life—increasing your faith and your intimacy and your oneness with Him.

### **Another Shining Moment for Peter**

After Jesus explained all of this, nearly all of his would-be followers and disciples turned and walked away from Him. Jesus then looked at His twelve disciples and asked, **“You do not want to leave also, do you?”** Peter instantly answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:67-69 NASB) Hooray! Peter hits the home run on this one! No one else could provide words of eternal life! And Peter truly understood that in the analogy of consuming Jesus' flesh, Jesus wasn't speaking of His physical flesh, but rather His spiritual flesh—and His spiritual flesh was, in reality, His words! Peter also understood Jesus' promise that those who would eat His flesh would have eternal life were in fact talking about the eating of Jesus' words and teachings. That's why Peter jumped on that part of the analogy of Jesus' words, that they were, *“words of eternal life!”* He got it, and He repeated it back to Jesus to show that he got it!

### **Metabolizing Jesus' Words**

We've all heard the saying, “you are what you eat.” Your food is digested, and its nutrients ultimately become part of every cell, tissue, muscle, bone and organ in your body. We call that process metabolism. Your body is made up of the foods you have ingested over the previous seven to ten years. In this passage Jesus is telling us the same thing about our consumption of His words—they are truly *metabolized* into our spirit and our soul. They are used by the Holy Spirit to produce the miraculous transformation of our heart from which all our attitudes and behaviors flow. Just as the metabolism of your food begins the moment it enters your mouth, so spiritual metabolism begins the moment Jesus' words enter your mind and you begin to meditate or prayerfully ponder them.

### **The Takeaway**

Hopefully, you're starting to grasp the unique role and power of Jesus' words. They truly are spirit and life. They truly do transport His spirit and His life into our spirit and life. In Chapter Five we saw all the miraculous blessings you *miss* when you *don't* consume a daily diet of His words contrasted against the miraculous blessings you *receive* when you do consume His words daily (pages 61-62). According to Jesus, without consuming His words, it's nearly impossible to become *His* friend or His disciple. (John 15:14; 8:31-32). It's nearly impossible to become intimate with Him and the Father. (John 14:21-24). It's impossible to intimately know *The Truth*. (John 8:32). It's impossible to understand who the Father really is. (Matthew 11:27). It's nearly impossible to know Jesus' heart and mind. To not consume His words is to disobey the Father's command at the *Transfiguration*, making it far more difficult to gain supernatural peace, unshakable joy and true security. (Matthew 7:24-27). Jesus intended that *His* words become the very core or essence of who you are in Him!

So, the question is *How?* How can we truly consume Jesus' words instead of just casually reading them? The good news is, because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, you don't *have* to memorize them. Memorizing them is certainly beneficial, but not necessary. (Pretty hard to memorize 1,900 statements.). At the Last Supper Jesus told the disciples and us, **"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). Jesus identified twelve ministries of the Holy Spirit, and as we can see in this verse, one of those ministries is to *remind* us of everything Jesus said. But for Him to actively perform that ministry in our lives, we should read or hear Jesus' teachings on a regular basis. He can't remind us of something we've never heard or read.

There are several things you can do that will enable you to feast upon Jesus' words and receive all the benefits He promises. The most important of these would be reading daily from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. I would strongly encourage that you spend at least five minutes in the morning and five minutes before you go to sleep. The Apostle John seems to have had the most intimate relationship with Jesus, so I would recommend that you begin with the Gospel of John for your first several months. PLEASE have a spiral notebook at hand. As you see the life experiences of Jesus and His teachings and dialogues, the Holy Spirit *will* give you insights, inspiration and even revelation, all of

which are worth writing down. Since our goal is to focus specifically on the life and words of Jesus, I would recommend that you begin in John 3 and move through the book. Do NOT view this as mere reading or Bible study. View it more as settling into a brief, relaxing time of watching and listening to your Good Shepherd—one-on-one, just you and Him. *Appendix I* will give you some very helpful tools.

If you get the red-lettered edition of *Greatest Words Ever Spoken* (available at [Christianbooks.com](http://Christianbooks.com)), you can pick a topic each morning or evening and read everything Jesus said on that topic. There are 225 topics, so there's literally a lifetime of buffet tables to choose from for your daily consumption of His words.

In Appendix II, you'll see an amazing tool called SPECK that I learned from disciple-maker, David Watson. You can use it for your individual eating of Jesus' words, or for small group meetings. This tool allows you to take a teaching of Jesus, digest it and immediately incorporate it into your attitudes and activities. It instantly begins a transformational process.

In the next chapter, we're going to look at some amazing revelations from Jesus that He gives His disciples at *The Last Supper* that are recorded in John 14 - 16. They are wonderfully empowering and even explosive in terms of their power for your daily walk with the Lord Jesus.

# Chapter Seven

## ***In His Darkest Hour, Jesus Provides Solutions to Your Greatest Problems.***

When Jesus said that He was our *Good Shepherd* in John 10, He revealed attributes that not only demonstrated that He was a *good* shepherd, but they also showed that He was the greatest shepherd of all time. He knows us by name and leads us personally; (v.3) He wants to give us life, and a full one at that. (v.10) When a predator comes to attack or kill us, He protects us even if it costs Him his life. (v.15) He dies for His sheep. (v.15). He gives them eternal life. (v.28).

In John chapters fourteen through sixteen, we see Jesus in His Good Shepherd role with His twelve disciples at their Passover Supper. He knows it's only a couple of hours before His arrest, beatings, humiliations, and His torturous crucifixion! He knows that He is going to experience all of God's judgement and wrath, *not* against Him, but against our sins. If you or I *knew* that we were only a few hours away from torture and hours of agonizing pain, we would surely sink into panic and desperation. It would be impossible to direct our focus away from our impending anguish to focus on others. Jesus knows everything He's about to go through, and yet, none of this was His focus. Instead of drowning in dread, fear, or depression, we see Him focus *entirely* on the current and future needs of His disciples. We see Him demonstrating love, compassion and encouragement to a degree that the world Has never known. But His exhortations and revelations at the last supper were not *just* for His disciples. They were intended for our instruction and blessing as well.

## **Jesus Reveals the Answers to Life's Greatest Questions to His Discouraged, Despairing Disciples**



For more than three years the disciples had been totally dependent upon Jesus, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. He was their entire world. He has answered every question, solved every problem and provided a degree of peace, comfort, security and wisdom that they had never known prior to their calling. He had just told them that He's going away and that they cannot go with Him. They are panicked! Suddenly, their present life and future had plummeted off a cliff. They were confused, bewildered, and even terrified. This is their condition as Jesus is about to begin His "end-of-game" huddle. He's going to give them everything they need to know to accomplish their lifetime mission that He will be preparing them for as He maps out the life that is ahead of them. He knows that they are so discouraged and filled with such despair that they probably won't remember anything He's about to say, but He's going to say it anyway. Why? Because He knows that the Father will be sending the Holy Spirit in fifty days, and that when the Holy Spirit comes, *HE* will bring everything Jesus said back into their memories. (John 14:26). So, let's go back in time and join Jesus' final huddle with His eleven remaining disciples.

### **Stepping into Jesus' End of Game Huddle.**

Jesus begins the huddle by addressing His disciples' panicked state of mind. He gives them what seems to be an impossible command, followed by another command that is the solution to their anxiety and fears. First, He commands them, "**Let not your hearts be troubled;**" Said another way, "Take control of your emotions and thinking, and don't remain in your faithless state of panic, fear, and discouragement." I can imagine the disciples thinking, "Yeah right," or "Are you kidding me," or "How are we supposed to do that when you're telling us that you're leaving?" But Jesus doesn't just give them an empty command to do the impossible. He gives them the precise *way* to do it. In a second command, He tells them *how* to do it. He said, "**you believe in God, believe also in Me.**" Remember, the Greek word for *believe* is the verb *pisteo*. It means to actively trust and *express* that trust with the appropriate action. Believing in God is truly the foundation of their faith—it was never disputed. Now Jesus is telling them to place that same faith in Him. The action that such a faith calls for is to *take control* of their spirit and emotions by

placing their hope and confidence in Him. They were to do that by *doing* whatever He told them to do.

### **Jesus' Answer to *Our* Worries, Fears, Stresses and Insecurity**

Jesus then tells them that even though this looks like the *end* of their relationship with Him, it's *not!* He shows them what's to come of their lives, both their ultimate eternal destiny as well as *how* they're going to become wonderfully productive with the *rest* of their earthly lives. In other words, Jesus' departure was *not* the beginning of *the end*; rather, it was the end of *the beginning*! The instructions He gives them in the remainder of their supper will truly give them everything they will need to know to lay up treasures in heaven. He said:

**“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there you may be also.*”** (John 14:1-3)

In this brief statement to His disciples, Jesus gives you and me the same commands and solutions He gave to His disciples. They are His answers for dealing with *our* worries, fears, panic, stress and insecurity.

- First, He commands us to take control of our heart. This is contrary to our nature and our natural inclinations. Usually, we let our heart and the emotions it produces *take control* of us. Jesus tells us to stop it!
- Second, He tells us *how* we can take control of our heart. We are commanded to believe *in* the Father and the Son, and believe what Jesus says to the point of *acting* on it! Letting His words determine our attitudes and how we behave.

Like me, you're probably thinking, “I *do* believe in the Father and Son and I *do* believe what Jesus says, and I *still* worry, stress, and panic. The fact is, you can't fear and

believe in the same moment. When you are stressing or worrying, you are *not* believing what Jesus says. That may be because, like so many Christians you simply have *not* focused on Jesus' sayings and teachings. If that's the case, there's a high likelihood that you *don't* know what He said about the situation that is causing your worry or stress. If you don't know what He said about the problem or issue you're facing, of course you can't believe it. You can't believe what you don't know. That's why it's critical that you begin to daily meditate in the Gospels. This is another reason to use the topical book, *The Greatest Words Ever Spoken*, because it can aid you in learning what Jesus said and taught on whatever issue is causing you stress. It enables you to instantly find the subject and see what Jesus said about it. Then you can take the steps you need to take. Taking the appropriate actions His words call for will both express your faith in Him and build and strengthen that faith. When you do, you will also be set free from your stress that issue was producing. Because all fear, anxiety and stress enter our lives when our mind dwells on the future, discovering and acting upon His teachings takes our focus out of the future and sets it into the present moment—the present moment is where God dwells and His peace flows into our hearts.

In this same passage, Jesus states as a matter of fact, that our life doesn't end when we die! He has a place that He has prepared for us, and it's waiting for us. He also tells us that He will come again and receive us unto Himself and that we can be with Him.

Next, Jesus makes four claims that no sane person has ever made—neither before Him nor after Him. He said, **"I am *the way, the truth, and the life*. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** (John 14:6)

- First, He claims to be *the way*. Not just *a way*, not just a better way, not just the best way. He claims to be *the way*, clearly inferring that there is *no other* way to experience what He offers!
- Second, He claims to be *the truth*. He's saying that He is the embodiment of truth. Everything He said is the absolute truth, the very standard of truth by which all other purported truths must be measured! Every action He took, every attitude and behavior that we see in Him was a perfect reflection of His perfect and eternal truth.

- Third, He claims to be *the* life. He is saying that He is the embodiment of life as we know it, and eternal life! He's implying that apart from Him, those who live are merely existing. In John 10:10, He said that He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. That again implies that there is no true life, and no abundant life *apart* from Him. John 1:4 tells us that Jesus' life was *the* light of mankind. He told us in John 5:26 that He has life in Himself, just as the Father has life within Himself. He also said in John 6: 53, that unless we enter into a union with Him, we have no life within us.
- Fourth, He comes right out and states as fact, that *no one* comes to the Father apart from Him. He *is* the only way a person can enter into a spiritual union with God—an intimate union that begins in this life and lasts throughout eternity. This in itself is such a radical statement, that had it been heard by the religious leaders of Jesus day, they would have demanded His death for this very statement! Prior to Jesus, the main way to approach God was through the Levite priests. You could connect or link with them, but you were *not* invited into intimacy with God. At least that was the belief held and taught by the Levites.

### **Even After Three Years Together, Jesus Disciples' *Still* Didn't *Know* Him**

After telling His disciples that He was the *only* way to the Father, Jesus gives His disciples an amazing revelation. It was a revelation that they had not yet understood and one that showed that even though they had been with Jesus for more than three years, they *still* didn't intimately know Him. Jesus said to them, **"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."** (John 14:7). Here Jesus is telling His disciples that He and His Father are in such perfect union, that when they saw Jesus act or heard Him speak, it was identical to seeing the Father act and speak! Jesus had previously told them that He did *only* what He had seen His Father do (John 5:19-20), and that He only *said* what His Father commanded Him to say. (John 12:49). But now, He was going even further and saying that He's a *perfect* reflection and expression of the Father.

But even though Jesus had been as clear as possible, Philip spoke up for himself and the others. He said, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” (John 14:7). I do believe that this statement and what it revealed was truly heartbreaking for Jesus. With sadness, Jesus replied, **“Have I been with you for so long a time, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip?”** (John 14:9 NASB)

Philip was the fifth disciple called during the first few days of Jesus’ public ministry. He had been with Jesus for more than three years, witnessing nearly every miracle and hearing every word that Jesus spoke to the disciples and to the crowds He spoke to. Certainly, Phillip knew everything *about* Jesus, but had *not* come to intimately know Him. I fear this may be the state of millions of professing Christians. They have spent countless hours studying the Bible, attending church, even participating in glorious worship. But, like Philip and the disciples he was speaking for, they may have *not* come to know Jesus intimately. Remember, Jesus’ definition of eternal life is intimately knowing Him and the Father. (John 17:3). And His terrible “declaration” telling professing believers to “depart” from Him, focused on Jesus *not* intimately knowing those who were calling Him “Lord,” and even performing miracles in His name.

### **What Does it Mean to *Intimately Know Him*?**

This of course begs the question, what do we mean when we say, “Knowing intimately?” The Greek word that is translated *know* is the word *ginosko*. It has a variety of meanings, depending upon the context in which it is used. It can mean to know about, or learn about; but, it also is a word used to describe when a man and woman experience physical intimacy. It can signify two people coming together to form a union. This is what Jesus is expressing when He said, **“No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”** (Matthew 11:27). Of course, Philip knew everything a person could know *about* Jesus after spending more than three years with Him. But Phillip’s statement shows that he had not yet entered into a spiritual union or oneness with Jesus. And, it’s *this* type of knowing that Jesus is calling His sheep into—a spiritual unity and oneness with Him. And when we do that, we will have the kind of oneness with one another that Jesus prayed we would

experience in John 17:21-23. Praying to the Father Jesus said, "...**that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one.**"

Philip had not come into that kind of *knowing* of Jesus nor the oneness that kind of knowing produces. Disappointed, and most likely frustrated, Jesus told Philip and His other disciples, "**He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.**" Here Jesus is revealing His perfect, unimaginable oneness with the Father. He is also revealing that He and the Father are *in* each other in a spiritual way. He concludes with the command, "**Believe Me, that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.**" (John 14:10-11)

### A Miraculous Promise to You and Me

Good news—Only a minute after He reveals that Philip and other disciples *don't* know Him *intimately*, He shows them (and us) precisely *how* we can come into true intimacy with Him and the Father! But before He shows us that, He makes two almost unbelievable conditional promises to His disciples and to us. First, He said, "**Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.**" Here His condition is simple: "**believe in Me.**" When Jesus talks about "believing in" Him, He's *not* talking about merely embracing Him intellectually as our Lord and Savior. To *believe in* Him, is to hear what He says and trust what He says to the point of acting upon it. He then promises that those who will believe in Him, will do the very works He did, and they would do even greater things.

When Jesus talks about *greater things*, He's not talking about greater in quality or significance, but rather, greater in number. We know this because His reason for this

statement was because *He was* leaving the earth. And while there was “one of Him” to do what He did while He was on earth, there would be countless numbers of us to do His works after He left. He can turn His cheek when assaulted, but He’s only got one cheek to turn. His believers on the other hand, have millions of cheeks available to turn. Also, we cannot atone for other people’s sins; we can’t raise ourselves from the dead; we can’t cleanse hearts from sin, and on and on. While Jesus does *not* exclude the performing of miracles from His announcement of “*greater things*,” He doesn’t limit His statement to miracles. When the Holy Spirit enters our life, we have access to the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and the gifts of the Spirit (I Corinthians 12:8-10). Because the fruit and gifts of the Spirit are not natural workings of our human nature, they are truly supernatural fruits and gifts. Since the advent of the Holy Spirit, the community of believers as a whole have exercised the fruits of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, millions and millions of times—spreading Jesus’ agape love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control all over the face of the earth.

Next, Jesus gives us another conditional promise that is so mind-boggling to His disciples, He has to say it *twice*! He said, “**And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.**” He promises affirmative answers to their prayers and to ours when we ask *in His name*. But the condition, “*asking in His name*,” does *not* mean simply saying the words, “In Jesus’ name, amen,” or “Father, I ask this ‘In Jesus Name’.” In Roman times and in Jesus’ day, doing something in the name of someone else meant you were saying or doing *exactly* what they would say or do if they were physically present. You are literally acting or asking in their place.

Hopefully you’re asking, “How am I supposed to know what Jesus would pray or ask for in a situation?” In many cases you *can’t* know what Jesus would ask for. This would be a mute-point prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit. As you will see, the Holy Spirit has a ministry with Jesus’ followers that makes this process possible. He can prompt us to pray for something in Jesus name that *He* knows Jesus would ask for if He were in our situation. Secondly, we have Jesus’ teachings in the Gospels that can reveal His will for a particular situation. For example, He commanded us to, “**bless those who curse you, pray for those**

**who mistreat you.**" (Luke 6:28). Because He commanded us to do this, when we have been mistreated by someone, we can confidently ask Jesus or the Father to give us the grace and the opportunity to bless the person who mistreated us or cursed us. And we can ask that *in the name of Jesus*. The fact is, we know this is His will because He commanded us to do it. We can confidently know that He wants us to obey His command, so we can ask for *this* in His name.

Your first reaction might be, "well I don't know enough of Jesus' teachings and commands to base such an action on." That, my friend, is why you should read His words and teachings every day, even if only for a few minutes. Jesus said, **"What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs."** (Matthew 10:27). The more you read the words of Jesus, the more whisperings you will likely hear from the Holy Spirit—and those whisperings can guide you into praying for requests *in Jesus Name*. At this same Last Supper, Jesus told the Disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the ministries He would perform in their lives and in ours. As we have seen, Jesus revealed two of those ministries when He said, **"He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."** (John 14:26). Jesus said the Holy Spirit would be our *teacher* and *reminder*! But, like I mentioned earlier, He can't remind you of something you haven't heard or read. That's another reason that it's critical that we read Jesus' teachings in the Gospels—to provide the channel through which the Holy Spirit can perform this vital ministry. The more of His words you read and meditate in, the more whispers of the Holy Spirit you likely will begin to hear.

By the way, moments earlier, Jesus told His disciples that He would be asking the Father to send the Holy Spirit to live with us *permanently*. He said, **"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."** (John 14:16-17).

The disciples had no idea what Jesus was talking about at the time, but when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost and went from dwelling *with* them to dwelling *in*



them, everything Jesus had said came into focus. They would not have to be their own source of power, nor would they have to rely on their own brilliance or on their “will power.” With the Holy Spirit living within them they would have a new source of teaching, one who would help them to understand *everything*. More importantly, the Holy Spirit would empower them to bear eternal fruit. He would be their enabler. And Jesus wants the Holy Spirit to do the same with you and me.

### **God’s Love Language—the Key to *Intimately* Knowing the Father and The Son.**

Even though the supper was only half over, Jesus then gave His disciples one of the greatest revelations of their lifetimes. Even though He had clearly told them that He was leaving them, He now reveals *How* they can move into *intimately knowing* Him and the Father...even though He will not be physically present with them. The great news for us, it’s just as applicable to us today as it was to them. He told them and us how we can love Him and the Father, the way He and the Father *want* to be loved. And when we love Them *that way*, Jesus promises that He and the Father will love us back in a way that creates the intimate union or oneness with us that They desire. In Gary Chapman’s vernacular, Jesus reveals *God’s* love language. And when we love God using *His* love language, Jesus reveals Himself and the Father to us. In other words, Jesus reveals His heart and mind to us and will also reveal the Father’s heart and will.

Jesus tells His disciples, **“Whoever has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me. The one who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and reveal Myself to him.”** Now if Jesus’ phrase, “My commandments,” worries you, don’t let it. Remember, His commands are *not* burdensome (I John 5:3). They *don’t* weigh you down, they lift you *up*. They empower you with grace and provide the concrete foundation upon which you can walk by faith and grow your faith! So, unlike the commands of the Law, Jesus commands, (1) lift you up; (2) empower you with God’s supernatural grace to know and do His will; (3) plant seeds of faith that grow into miracle producing faith; and (4) provide the concrete path upon which you can *walk* by faith.

In verse 23, Jesus uses a different word than “commandment.” He said, “**ANYONE who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.**” *Anyone* includes you and me. Any man, woman, boy or girl can experience Jesus’ promise of He and the Father loving them and taking up residency with them, simply by hearing His “teachings” and obeying them. It’s that simple. It’s not that we obey 100% of His teachings 100% of the time. That is impossible. We will always struggle with our old nature and the sin and selfishness that nature produces. My pastor in college taught, “The only people who don’t struggle with sin, are the people who have surrendered to it.” We will always have the struggle of the Spirit versus the flesh; the “His will,” versus “my will.” But here in John 14:21-24 Jesus was talking about the *direction* of our life. Is our life pointed toward Him, getting to know Him, hearing His voice and trying to follow Him, or is our life merely focused on our own needs and desires and simply pursuing self-gratification?

Simply stated, Jesus is saying that we love Him and the Father by hearing His teachings and practicing them. He then makes three promises to those who will listen to His words and do them. He says that they will be loved (in a special or intimate way) by the Father and by Himself, and that He will show (reveal) Himself to that person—revealing His heart, His intentions and His will. He then says that He and the Father will come to that person and make Their continual dwelling place with them. Then Jesus finishes this statement with verse 24. He said, “**Anyone who does *not* love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.**”

So, Jesus Himself clearly states that our *love* for Him and the Father is not demonstrated by mere emotions or feelings, or merely by worship and praise. Rather, we love Him and the Father by *hearing and doing* what He said. He more succinctly stated this in John 14:15 when He said, “**If you love Me, keep My commandments.**” And in verse 24 He said, if we *don’t* obey His teachings, we *don’t* love Him (John 14:24).

Don't get me wrong, He's not saying that we shouldn't worship Him. We know that God, "inhabits the praises of His people" (Psalm 22:3) and that Jesus Himself said that the Father wants to be worshiped, "in spirit and in truth" (John 4: 24). But to *love* God, we must hear the teachings of Jesus, and by faith, empowered by grace, apply His teachings to our daily life, our attitudes and behavior.

The word that is translated *love* here in John 14:21-24, is the verb *agapao*, and it is an *active* love, not a passive emotion. So, we take the "love action" of hearing and doing what Jesus says, and the Father and Son in turn take the love actions to express their love for us. They express their love in many ways, *including* making their continual dwelling place with us. As He said, Jesus also *reveals* or *manifests* Himself to us. He also reveals the Father to us (Matthew 11:27). *This* is intimacy with God the way *Jesus* defines it.

If your response to all of this is, "But I don't know the commands and teachings of Jesus," don't panic. Discovering His teachings and commands is as easy as reading the four Gospels and meditating on His words. In the next chapter we're going to look at the rest of Jesus' end-of-game huddle where He shows us clearly how we can maintain a constant connection with Him that produces a continual flow of His life into us, producing eternal fruit that will glorify Him and the Father and store up treasures in Heaven for us.

For your convenience, In Appendix III, I have pulled out more than 150 of His glorious, empowering commands. I share them with you *without* any commentary so you can read them, meditate on them and even pray to the Father and Son about them. In Appendix IV, I've pulled out more than 80 promises that Jesus made to His followers.

# Chapter Eight

## *You Can't Run on Empty*

Every spring Chuck Norris and his wife Gena host an event to raise money for their amazing Kick Start charity that provides a life-changing mentoring program for thousands of inner-city students in Texas schools. And every year the event has an awesome grand prize that they raffle off. In 1998, my wife won the raffle (a brand-new Harley Davidson motorcycle). Well, suppose you decide to go this year and you find out that this year's raffle prize is a Bugatti Chiron Super Sport. Even though you've never heard of it, your son tells you it's a really cool car. So, you buy one ticket. Against all odds, you win! At the end of the event Chuck hands you the keys. He tells you the dealer delivered the car to the event with almost no gasoline in the tank, "So be sure to fill the tank at the nearest gas station." Chuck gives you a big Texas hug and you jump into the car. Chuck says, "By the way, the car has a top speed of 304 miles per hour, so drive with a light foot on the gas pedal.

You look at the fuel gauge and think, "Wow, he wasn't kidding," the digital gauge says, "Low fuel—refuel immediately." You drive out of the parking lot, onto the highway. You're excited so you slam your foot, *pedal to the metal*, and sure enough, it takes off like a rocket. You can't believe it! You quickly cut back the speed, but you've already covered two miles. Then it happens, you run out of gas. Of course, you're really frustrated. You've got a brand-new car, and you're stuck on the side of the road. It doesn't matter that you own the fastest production car in the world. Like any other car, it won't move when you're out of gas. It's a truly worthless means of transportation, until you refuel. You walk to the nearest gas station and buy a 2-gallon gas can. You fill the can with "regular unleaded," and walk back to the car.

When you open the fuel door to pour the gas into the tank, you see a warning sign. "Use Premium Fuel Only." You remember that your dad always said, "Premium gas is for suckers! Any engine will run on regular." So, you put the two gallons in and drive to the gas

station where you fill the tank with regular. You drive back onto the freeway, and the car begins to run very rough. Lots of “pings and knocks.” You’re four hundred miles away from home, so you think, “no big deal,” I’ll fill it with premium in a couple hundred miles. The further you drive, the worse the car runs. In fact, it runs worse than any car you’ve ever owned. Finally, it stalls, and you pull off the road. A tow truck comes and drives you to the only Bugatti dealer within 500 miles.

When you tell the service man what happened, he looks at you in shock. He asks you, “Didn’t you read the warning, ‘Use premium fuel only?’” He tries to start the car, but no luck. He says, “That’s what I was afraid of!” “What?” you ask. “You’ve destroyed your engine...you’re going to need a new one.” “You’re kidding, right?” “Nope, you’ve *damaged* it so badly, it will need to be replaced.” You reply, “Surely it’s under warranty, right?” “Nope, you ignored the warning, and your failure to follow the warning voids the warranty on the engine. You’re going to have to pay for it.” “How much?” you ask. “\$1.2 million,” he replies. You’re now in shock, “How can that be?” He tells you that it’s the most powerful automobile engine in the world, which is one reason the car sells for \$3.9 million. Now, you’re deeper in shock than ever—you had no idea the car was that expensive. Great car, but it won’t run on the wrong fuel!

### **Have You Been Running on The Wrong Fuel?**

Can you remember how excited you were when you were first, “born again”? Whether you felt like it or not, you had just been given the greatest gift that has ever been given; a gift infinitely more valuable than that Bugatti. The gift was given to you absolutely free, even though it was the most expensive possession ever purchased by anyone. It cost the Father and Son, everything! The Father had to watch His only Son humiliated, tortured and murdered, to pay the debt of your sins. The Son, who had never even *tasted* sin of any kind, had to bear the weight and consequences of your sins and endure God’s full wrath and judgment against your sins and the sins of all mankind! For the first time in eternity, Jesus had to experience the withdrawal of His Father. (Matthew 27:46) Their intimacy was suspended. But Jesus and the Father willingly paid that terrible price to redeem their sheep.

And if you had been Jesus' only sheep, He would have still made that sacrifice for *you!* *That* is how much Jesus and the Father love you!

And yet, over time, things may not have turned out like you thought they would. If you've lost your initial feelings, or you've been discouraged or disappointed in your journey with Christ, don't despair. You may have simply been trying to run your spiritual life on the wrong kind of fuel. You're not alone! Most of the American Evangelicals I have known have had a lifetime of running on a lower octane fuel. Not getting the fuel *Jesus says we need*, has caused many to stall out. Some have crashed and burned. And many have never been able to experience the personal intimacy with Jesus that they had hoped for. As we saw in earlier chapters, they fell victim to the adversary's "misdirects," accepting religious activities and even Bible study, *in place of* intimacy with Jesus. While they may have gained lots of knowledge (which is good), they have not received a consistent daily fueling with Jesus' spirit and life. While the words of all others can inform, motivate, and inspire, only His words can infuse His Spirit and His life into our spirit and life. We've been running on "regular," while our spirit is engineered to run on *premium* fuel only—The intimacy Jesus promised to those who will hear His teachings and do them.

### **Jesus Introduces a More Intimate Connection**

The life-transforming teachings that Jesus gave His disciples at the *Last Supper*, didn't end with John, chapter 14. His teachings continued and are recorded by John in chapters 15 and 16. In chapter 15, Jesus uses a *new* analogy to portray what He wants us to know to have the intimate relationship with Him that He desires. No, he doesn't use the analogy of the Bugatti. He starts out in verse one, calling Himself, "the true vine" and His Father, "the vinedresser." In verse five, He calls His disciples (and us), "branches" of the vine. Let's look at the passage and then break it down.

**I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.**

**Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.**

**I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned.**

**If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:1-8)**

Wow! Can you believe all the amazing revelations Jesus gives us in these first eight verses of John 15? Let's break it down.

#### **A More Intimate Connection with Jesus.**

The first thing we see is that we are offered the opportunity to be connected to Jesus *intimately*. A connection so intimate that the fibers of our soul are outgrowths of Him. Because our connection is interwoven into Him, we can receive a continuous flow of His life-giving Spirit. As His Spirit, (The Holy Spirit) flows into us, the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit in us which then blesses the lives of anyone who receives that fruit from us. As we bear His fruit, we bring glory to God the Father.

While there is always a little distance separating a shepherd from his sheep, there is *no* distance between the vine and its branches. The *vine and branch connection* represents an intermingling and a oneness that is truly unique, glorious, and full of wonder. As it turns out, the connecting fibers that make us one with Him, are the spiritual fibers of His spoken words! His amazing promises contained in verses seven and eight are contingent upon us abiding in Him and His words abiding in us. The more you hear His words and live according to the attitudes and behaviors that His words teach, the stronger the connecting fibers between the vine and the branch will grow! Wow!

#### **Special Care from the Father.**

As we bear fruit, the Father Himself “prunes us,” removing any spiritually dead or diseased areas in our heart and soul, so we can produce even *more* spiritual fruit. (v2.) This enables us to bear more fruit and become more “Christ-like” in our attitudes and behaviors. This fruit is not only sharing the Gospel with others and discipling believers, but it also refers to the fruit of the Spirit that transforms our heart and gives life to those whom God brings into our paths and into our moments. As we see in Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of the Spirit is: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

(Galatians 5:22-23).

### **Greater Purpose for Our Lives —Bearing Fruit.**

Jesus and the Father’s number one purpose for us is that we come into intimacy with them. (Jeremiah 9:23-24; John 17:3). We enter that intimate union when we are “born of the spirit” (John 3:3-5) and the ‘fibers’ that proceed out of the vine that intimately connect us to Jesus and bring spiritual nutrition *into* us, are Jesus’ words. As we can see here in verses 2-8, the natural and intended result of this intimacy is the bearing of fruit. This passage demonstrates that one of the primary and critical purposes of those who are born of the Spirit, *is* to produce spiritual fruit—both our ministry in the lives of others, as well as the Holy Spirit producing His fruit in us.

### **Bear *Much* Fruit.**

IF we abide in Jesus and His *words* abide in us, we *will* bear *much* fruit. (v. 7-8). If we continue to abide in Jesus and let His words abide in us, we *will* bear much fruit. God wants you and me to bear a LOT of fruit, and abiding in Jesus’ words keeps His Spirit and life continuously *flowing* from the vine into us (the branches). And the natural outcome in us is the growing of the fruit!

### **Can’t Bear Fruit Without Vinelike Connection to Jesus.**



Without Jesus, we cannot bear fruit. We can't do anything of eternal worth or benefit unless we are connected to Him. Think about it. Early in this last supper, Jesus proclaimed to His disciples that HE is *the* way, *the* truth and *the* life. (John 14:6). So all spiritual life, both temporal and eternal only *flows* from Him (the vine) into us (the branches). Without that life flowing into us, we are dead—no life, no fruit! (v.4-6)

### **No Fruit-No Life.**

Those who do not produce spiritual fruit are spiritually dead. As dead branches, they are removed from the vine, so the life and the Spirit which flow out of the vine can flow only to those branches that are living, giving *them* all the nourishment they need. When I share this, people always panic—"I don't know if I'm bearing fruit?" Once again, the fruit is *not* exclusively ministries of evangelism or discipleship, it also refers to the glorious fruit of the Spirit. Read and re-read Galatians 5:22-23 and ask yourself, "Do I see any of these fruits that were *not* a part of my past life but are in my life now?" *That* is the fruit of the Spirit. Do you have a hunger to know Jesus more intimately? That too is a fruit of the Spirit. Do you have a hunger for more righteousness in your life? That is a fruit of the Spirit. Do you want God in your moments, and do you want to hear more whispers from the Holy Spirit? Those desires in themselves are fruits of the Spirit. Are you now gaining a hunger for Jesus' words? That too is a fruit of the Spirit. Remember, every branch on the vine begins as a tiny nodule. That's true in our case as well. But as we abide in the vine and His words begin to live within us, we grow into a strong and healthy branch, and the fruit naturally comes.

### **Jesus Uses His Word to Clean Your Heart and Mind.**

Jesus' words are a spiritual detergent to clean our heart and mind. (v.3). I don't know about you, but I want my heart and mind washed every day, and that's one more duty Jesus' words perform in our life. How many times a day do you wash your hands? Why not wash your heart and mind just as often as we wash our hands, or shower, or wash our teeth, and so on. We can meditate on Jesus' words, anytime, night or day, whether for a few seconds at a time or for minutes or hours. With all the spiritual pollution that we walk through in this dark world, we desperately need this glorious bar of spiritual soap.

## More “Yes Answers” to Your Prayers.

In verses seven and eight, Jesus makes an incredible conditional promise. He said, **“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit.”** We can ask what *we* desire, and it will be done for us. However, there *is* a condition—and it’s a big one. The condition He gives us is, we must, “abide in Him,” and His *words* must “abide in us!”

### Abiding in Him and His Words Abiding in Us

So the two questions that these conditions create are, “What does He mean when He says we must ‘abide in Him,’” and, “What does He mean when He says His words must ‘abide in us?’” First, the word “abide,” is the Greek verb *meno*. It means: *to come to a stop and continually remain in the particular place that you’ve stopped*. Picture that you were walking from your house to a place ten miles away. But after walking five miles you decide to stop, sit down for twenty minutes, and remain there to rest and have a drink of water. For that twenty-minute period, you would be “abiding” in that place.

As we saw in chapter six, Jesus told His followers that if they would “eat His flesh and drink His blood,” they would be abiding in Him and He would be abiding in them. (John 6:56). A few minutes later, He explained that “eating His flesh and drinking His blood,” was an *analogy* that represented consuming and applying His words. (John 6:63). So, when we consume and abide in His words, we will be *abiding in Him* and He will be *abiding in us*. That *meets* the condition He gives us here in verse seven.

Now, as we have seen, the promise He makes when we meet this condition of abiding in Him and His words abiding in us, is that we can ask what we desire, and it will be given to us. But then, He immediately qualifies that promise with a *clarification*. He immediately states (and concludes his “vine/branch” analogy) saying, **“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”** (John 15:8). So, this is the critical implication: As you abide in Jesus and His words abide in you, YOUR desires

will *morph* into new desires that reflect Jesus' heart, mind and will; and God, granting those desires will inherently produce "much fruit." And, that fruit will glorify God and demonstrate that you are Jesus' disciple.

### **How to Reside in Jesus' Love and be Filled with His Joy**

Jesus' analogy of us being intimately connected to Him like the branch is connected to the vine pictures a degree of intimate connection with Him that had never been experienced or even imagined by His disciples. It's the perfect picture of a promise Jesus had made to His disciples, minutes earlier in during the last supper. Jesus had told them, **"On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you."** (John 14:20). The day Jesus was speaking of was the day when the Father would send the Holy Spirit to come into their lives. When we are born again, or born of the Spirit, I personally believe that the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our soul and enters into a union with us. The evidence of that union is, "the fruit of the Spirit."

After giving us His incredible analogy of the vine and the branches, Jesus now ceases to use analogies and gives His disciples (and us) very specific and concrete revelations and instructions. All of these are 100% applicable to us, as He is telling His disciples what's going to happen *after* He leaves them to return to the Father. First, even though He will no longer be *physically* in their presence, He tells them *how* they can remain or dwell in His love. How they can *continue* to grow in their intimate relationship with Him. Second, He tells them and us that when we are in this kind of love relationship with Him and the Father, we will be *filled up* with *His* joy. He then gives us a command and tells us *how* to be His friend. Let's look at the text.

**As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; Now abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's**

**life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.** (John 15:9-14)

Let's break it down.

1. **Jesus tells us that He loves us in the very same way and to the same *degree* that the Father loves Him.** That is amazing, even incomprehensible! Jesus is sinlessly perfect and has obeyed the Father's will *perfectly*! He has been the Father's Son for eternity. It's easy to understand how the Father could love such a righteous, perfect, and glorious Son as Jesus. However, I will *never* understand how Jesus can love me, in all my failings and sin, in the same manner and to the same degree that the Father loves Him—but He does—that's a fact! It's a fact because that's what He said, and Jesus cannot lie! He not only said it, He *proved* His sacrificial love for us by laying down His life on Calvary's cross! He did that for you and me.
2. **He commands us to abide, reside or dwell in the center of His love.** He then tells us precisely how to do it—by obeying His commands and teachings. Remember, Jesus' commands do not create a burden, but rather, they empower us to rise above all circumstances and obstacles to do the Father's will. Jesus never commands us to do anything that He will not provide the grace and power and faith to do what He tells us. With that empowerment, any perceived burden quickly diminishes in the presence of His provision. (I Corinthians 10:13).
3. **He tells us that He continually abides, resides and dwells in the center of His Father's love the same way—by obeying *His* commands!** I know you probably think, "That's not fair—He's God, so it's easy for Him to obey the Father's commands." Not really. When He left heaven's glory to come to earth, He let go of His divine rights and powers to perfectly obey the Law. He had to live on earth as a man, subject to temptations and trials. But He overcame all temptations and perfectly obeyed the Father in every sense. (Hebrews 4:15) (Philippians 2:6-8). Can we obey His commands as perfectly as He obeyed the Fathers? Of course not. But we can

keep our hearts turned toward Him and listen to His voice with the intent to obey His commands and teachings.

4. **He tells us *how to be His friend*.** We make His commands and teachings our focus and our way of life by simply hearing and doing what He teaches us to do, and we will indeed be His friend. He's not implying that we will do it continually and perfectly, but rather, it will be the growing goal of our intentions.
5. **He wants to fill us with *His Joy*.** In verse eleven, He says that He's telling us these things, so that His Joy will be in us, and our joy will be full! This is truly amazing. Here, He is only a few hours away from being tortured and then crucified, and yet His joy is so deep and so pervasive, that it overcomes His circumstances and fills His heart. Instead of worrying about Himself and what He's about to suffer, He's telling the disciples and us how we can be *filled up* with *His Joy*! How can Jesus be filled with joy, knowing that He is about to experience the most terrible suffering anyone has ever experienced? The answer is that His joy is *not* connected to circumstances. Instead, His Joy is rooted in His never-changing intimacy with the Father. *That* is the "circumstance free" joy that flows into Him from the Father. And *that* is the joy He wants to pour into us. Because He is the vine and we are the branches, that joy *can* flow right into us, straight from His heart, *regardless* of our circumstances. Imagine, having a joy that isn't dependent on your circumstances. *That* is Jesus' joy, and He wants to fill our heart and soul with it!

### **Chosen, Not Frozen**

God is a God of *purpose*. He didn't just spin the world in motion and say, "Good luck." We see purpose in everything He did in the Old Testament, and we see His purposes in everything Jesus did in the New Testament. Jesus revealed more than twenty missions that the Father sent Him to earth to accomplish. I've listed those in Appendix IV. All of them would have been impossible for you or me to accomplish, and yet Jesus, miraculously accomplished every one of them. In the remainder of His time at the last Passover supper, He revealed His purposes that He wants us to pursue, and He also revealed that He will be

sending the Holy Spirit who will come to minister to us and through us. As you will see in Chapter Ten, Jesus reveals twelve specific ministries of the Holy Spirit. But first, He repeats and reinforces the *critical* purpose for us that He revealed minutes earlier. He said, **“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.”** (v.15-16) Here He gives us four revelations:

**1. Jesus *chose* us to be His followers.**

We didn’t just *happen* to be born of the Spirit. Our desire to follow Him didn’t originate in our old nature. Any desire that we gained that made us want to hear His voice and follow Him out of the sheep pen, was the result of His grace and the saving ministry of the Holy Spirit. Going from our condition of being *dead in sin*, to becoming *alive in Christ* was the result of God’s amazing grace and mercy. (Ephesians 2:1-5). Though we thought we were choosing Him, it was really Him choosing us and the Holy Spirit giving us a living desire to hear and follow our good shepherd.

**2. He appointed or commissioned us for the purpose of bearing fruit that would remain.**

Jesus chose us, not just for our sake, but for the sake of others and for the purpose of *bearing much fruit*. And His intention is that we produce fruit that continues to live and remain alive over time. Once again, this is both the fruit of our testimony of Jesus, His life and His words, and the fruit that the Holy Spirit would produce in our lives and through our lives.

**3. Whatever we ask the Father in Jesus’ name, He will give it.**

Our first response to this promise may well be, “Hey, I’ve asked for things in Jesus’ name, and never received what I asked for!” The truth is that is *not* what Jesus is saying! As we saw earlier, asking for something in Jesus’ name is *not* simply saying at

the end of a prayer, “In Jesus’ name, amen,” Nor is it merely saying, “Father, I ask you for this *in Jesus’ name*.” Asking for something “in Jesus’ name,” means that you are asking for something that you know or believe that Jesus would ask for if He was physically in that situation that you are praying about. If you pray for something in His name and it *doesn’t* come to pass, then you can rightly deduce that had Jesus been in that exact situation, He would *not* have asked for what you asked at that time. Jesus said, **“And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.”** (John 8:29). Jesus came to do and speak exactly what the Father wanted Him to do and speak, so He was literally acting and speaking in place of the Father. If the Father had been physically present, He would have said and done exactly what Jesus said and did.

You may be asking, “Well, how on earth am I supposed to know what *Jesus* would pray for if He were in the situation I’m praying about?” The answer is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Remember, Jesus said, **“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”** (John 14:26 NKJV). If you will meditate in Jesus’ words, in any situation that you are praying about, the Holy Spirit will remind you of what Jesus said. You may hear His “whisper.” (Matthew 10:27). When that happens, you can confidently pray “in Jesus’ name.” Otherwise, you do *not* have the authority to ask for something in Jesus’ name that He would not ask for. Asking and acting in Jesus’ name is asking and acting in His place.

#### **4. We are commanded to love (*agapao*) one another.**

Jesus closes this short passage with a command for His disciples and us to love one another. At first glance, this sounds easy. After all, the disciples had been together 24/7, for more than three years. Surely, they already loved one another. Right? Wrong! It seems that they were not the best of friends. As Jesus was nearing the worst 24 hours of suffering in History, they selfishly argued about which of them would be “the greatest” and who would get to sit next to Jesus in His kingdom. Also,

remember when Jesus told them that they must forgive each other seven times, they knew that *He* knew that they really struggled to forgive each other even once—so instead of agreeing to obey His command, they pleaded for “more faith.” Now Jesus is telling them that they are to love each other with “selfless” agape love. He commanded them to love in this way, and they had *no* idea how they were going to obey this command. The truth is, once the Holy Spirit came and indwelt them, they *were* able to obey this command because *agape* is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit was then living in their hearts. Agape love isn’t based upon feelings or driven by feelings. It’s available to us through the Holy Spirit, and like forgiveness, we can either obey Jesus’ command and walk in the Spirit, or we can disobey it and surrender to the fruit of our old nature.

### **Agape Love Defined by its Traits.**

If we want to see Agape love in action, all we have to do is look at Jesus’ life and we quickly see His agape expressed for the Father and His agape expressed for His sheep. Look at His encounters with people in the Gospels and you’ll see agape in action. The woman at the well, the woman washing His feet with her tears, the woman caught in adultery, Zacheus, and on and on. Over and over again He reaches out with truth and kindness. When the truth is a hard truth that causes people like the rich young ruler to walk away, we are told that He grieved with sorrow. Look at His invitation to us in Matthew 11:28-30. I’m currently writing a book called *And Then They Met Jesus*, about His encounters with nearly 40 individuals, and each encounter overwhelms me with His love and ministry—knowing that’s how He loves me as well. In John 13:34, Jesus tells us exactly how to agape one another—the same way He loved the disciples and the same way He loves you and me. He said, “**A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**” The fact that Jesus commands us to agape one another in this manner, leaves us with no excuse for *not* expressing agape for anyone. This does *not* mean that you emotionally connect to people who have abused you or have evil intentions toward you or others in your care. In such instances, just *praying* for them is in fact one of the highest forms of agape love that you can express.



Paul gives us a great description of the traits of agape love that we can use as a template to help us see the choices we can make in the way we love people with this glorious fruit of the Spirit. I'm putting them in a list, rather than in verse.

### **Traits of Agape Love (I Corinthians 13:4-8)**

- Agape is patient,
- Agape is kind.
- Agape does not envy,
- Agape does not boast,
- Agape is not proud.
- Agape does not dishonor others,
- Agape is not self-seeking,
- Agape is not easily angered,
- Agape keeps no record of wrongs.
- Agape does not delight in evil
- Agape rejoices with the truth.
- Agape always protects,
- Agape always trusts,
- Agape always hopes,
- Agape always perseveres.
- Agape never fails

### **Who Will You Begin to Express More Agape to?**

Who will you have the opportunity to express agape love to today—not because you feel it, not because they deserve it, but because your Good Shepherd has commanded it! Who will you choose to express agape to in the coming week? Make a list! Pray for His grace to empower you with the faith you need to obey His glorious command! He will always supply you with the grace you need to take the step of faith He commands you to take. In Chapter Ten, we are going to zero-in on the twelve ministries of the Holy Spirit that Jesus identified before He said goodbye to His disciples.

# Chapter Nine

## ***“What Must We Do to Perform the Works of God?”***

In John chapter six, we read about Jesus performing an unimaginable miracle. A crowd of more than 5,000 people had followed Him onto a grassy field. He told His disciples to have everyone sit down. He then took five small loaves of bread and two small fish, and miraculously transformed them into so much food that the entire crowd was served an abundance of bread and fish. They ate until their appetite was completely satisfied. Then His disciples collected the uneaten bread and fish—enough to fill twelve large baskets.

The next day, a great number of these people followed Him to a place called Capernaum with the hope of seeing more miracles and hearing Him speak. But instead of showing them more signs and miracles, He offered them a key—a key that would empower them to do the same kind of miraculous works they had seen Him do. First, Jesus told them, **“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on Him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”** But instead of taking what He offered them, they instead asked, *“What must we do to perform the works of God?”*

Jesus was telling them to shift their focus from their physical appetites to appetites of eternal worth and to the spiritual food that He wanted to give them. But instead, they wanted to perform miracles, not for God’s purposes, but for their own. (John 6:27). Jesus answered them saying, **“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He (God) has sent.”** (John 6:27-29). Surely, this answer was so simple that everyone in the crowd instantly believed in Jesus and started performing miracles like He did. Right? Wrong! They paid no attention to His words at all! Instead, they met His simple answer with deep skepticism and unbelief. Even though they had just experienced His miraculous “feeding of 5,000” twenty-four hours earlier, they chose *not* to believe in Him. Instead of answering His statement with the simple faith He was calling for, they challenged Him to *prove* Himself

*again! They asked, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do?”*

You see, no matter how many miracles Jesus performed, His miracles *didn't* change their *unbelieving* hearts. No matter what He said, no matter what He did, their *unbelieving* hearts would not be changed into *believing* hearts. Why? Simply stated, they were *not* His sheep and they had *not* been born of the Spirit. When people are born of the Spirit, they miraculously become His sheep. They hear His voice, and they begin to follow Him by doing what He says. They gain a new hunger—a hunger for their Shepherd, a hunger for His words, and a hunger for His guidance and His leading. On the other hand, here in John 6, the people simply wanted more proof—more miracles—more gifts! They did not recognize the Good Shepherd's voice. They did not know Him. They did not want Him. They simply wanted more—more proof for themselves, more gratification for their appetites and desires.

Doesn't that sound a little like us? How many times have you and I asked God for just one more sign or gift—one more miracle—one more blessing? “*God, PLEAZZZZZZZZZ—just this one time, give me\_\_\_\_\_! If you do, I promise I will.....*” Sound familiar? I'm sure I've done this hundreds of times in my 60 years of following Christ. Thankfully, God knows my heart and doesn't regard my foolishness. By the way, Jesus doesn't bargain! You and I cannot manipulate Him or twist His arm. I'm not saying that we can't ask of Him. Of course, we can—we can ask Him and the Father for anything and everything. In fact, Jesus commands us to ask—not just for what *God* wants, but as God's children, for what *we* want. Jesus said, “**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; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!**” (Matthew 7:7-11). But we don't *bargain* with Him. Trying to bargain with Him is akin to making quid-pro-quo vows to Him or the Father, and Jesus commanded us *not* to make

such vows! He said, **“Say only ‘yes’ if you mean ‘yes,’ and say only ‘no’ if you mean ‘no.’ If you say more than that, it is from the Evil One.”** (Matthew 5:37).

Jesus gives us lots of glorious and miracle-working instructions when it comes to praying. But when we try bargaining with Him, we show that we *don’t* have the one thing He asks—Belief in Him. “Wait a minute!” you say. “I *do* believe in Him!” Funny, that’s just what the disciples said, right before they *proved* they *didn’t* believe.

Shortly before Jesus’ arrest, His disciples emphatically said, *“Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.”* Jesus replied, **“Do you now believe? A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone.”** (John 16:30-32). Jesus’ disciples *thought* they believed in Him, but the moment their circumstances changed, their *circumstantial belief* instantly vaporized, just as Jesus said it would. Peter had declared that even if everyone else abandoned Jesus, he would not—in fact he said he would follow Him right into death. (Matthew 26:33; John 13:37). But Peter did not! Along with the other disciples (except John) Peter abandoned Jesus and even went so far as to deny Him three times, just as Jesus said he would.

### **Circumstantial Belief Versus In-Heart Belief**

As we saw earlier, when these folks asked, “What must we do to perform the works of God,” Jesus’ answer was wonderfully simple. He said, **“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”** To have the kind of faith required to perform the works of God, they needed to *first* experience a work of God in their hearts. That work of God is the *spiritual-birth* Jesus described to Nicodemus in John chapter three. When that spiritual birth takes place, one of its natural outcomes is the planting of a new seed in our heart—the seed of “faith in Christ.” Once that new birth takes place and that seed is planted by the Holy Spirit into our hearts, it literally begins to transform our heart (the very core of who we are). As this transformation is taking place, we begin to see the supernatural “fruit” of the Holy Spirit grow in our heart. As that fruit grows within us, it then begins to naturally *flow out* of us into the circumstances and to the people that surround us. The fruit

of the Spirit is: love (agape), joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22) These fruits do not have their source in us or in our circumstances—their source is the Holy Spirit. So, when circumstances change (either for the better or for the worse) the fruits of the Spirit do *not* change. They continue to flow into us from the Holy Spirit and they continue to flow out of us, like streams of living water. And those who are in our presence are blessed by those streams. (John 7:38).

On the other hand, attributes that change when our circumstances change, have their source in our circumstances rather than the Holy Spirit. When our love for somebody lessens when they then fail to meet our hopes and expectations, our love is “circumstantial love,” not the *agape* love that is a fruit of the Spirit. When bad things happen to us and our “joy” seems to vaporize or turn into unhappiness, discouragement, depression or despair, the joy we were experiencing was *not* the fruit of the Spirit. It was the fruit of good or adequate circumstances, meaning it was “circumstantial joy.” When our peace turns to fear or stress, it was not the fruit of the Spirit peace, it was circumstantial peace. When our kindness vaporizes in the presence of someone else’s meanness, it is “circumstantial kindness,” not “fruit of the Spirit kindness.” When our patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness or self-control fails in the presence of adversity, unrealized expectations, or self-centeredness, they too are circumstance-based rather than fruit of the Spirit based.

### **Can a Person Have the Fruit of the Spirit *and* Circumstantial Attributes?**

I’ve been asked, “When we are born of the Spirit, can a person have *both* the fruit of the Spirit and circumstantial attributes?” The answer is absolutely YES! Not only can we, I’ve never met a believer who *didn’t* have both. There is nothing wrong with circumstantial attributes! The only problem is that they are difficult, or even impossible to sustain. As soon as the “source” circumstance changes, the circumstantial attributes it produces change as well. Circumstantial attributes and the fruit of the Spirit can be in complete harmony, or they can be out of sync or even diametrically opposed. Attributes that are sourced in an intimate relationship with Jesus and are the *fruit* of the Spirit, are stable and are not diminished or lost when our circumstances turn negative.

## **Circumstantial Faith versus Word-Based Faith**

In the Gospels, we see two types of faith—circumstantial faith and Word-based faith. Whenever Jesus performed a miracle, most of those who witnessed it instantly gained a belief in Jesus as a teacher or prophet from God. The miraculous change in a circumstance they viewed created a “wow” experience, an impact on their opinions about Jesus, and a circumstance-based belief in their minds. However, almost as soon as the circumstance passed, the belief that was produced by that circumstance passed as well. These opinions and beliefs were quickly replaced by doubts, rationalizations and an even greater demand for more evidence—more proof. People literally wanted to see more and more miracles; and no matter what they saw-- they never experienced an in-heart belief, faith or trust in Jesus and His words. Even when they embraced a strong opinion in their minds about His deity, their circumstantial faith did not produce faith in their heart.

### **Circumstantial Faith is Weak at Best, and Powerless at Worst**

Circumstantial faith is weak at best and powerless at worst. It’s like a house on the beach made of straw. You can live in it until the tide changes or the winds kick up and the house disappears. As we saw earlier, even the people who experienced the feeding of 5,000 wanted to see *more* miracles before they would believe in their hearts that Jesus was the Son of God. And when He told them that the work of God was that they needed to believe in Him—and to consume His words to receive His Spirit and life, they deserted Him. Circumstantial faith can bring about a general change in one’s life—but it tends to produce little to no lasting spiritual power—no lasting intimacy with Jesus.

### **Circumstantial Faith—Comfortable But Impotent!**

For people who settle for this kind of faith, Jesus remains little more than a historical figure they mentally assert to be divine. Sadly, they fail to experience His sustaining power or a lasting trust in Him. They do not experience life-transforming intimacy with Him. They’re treading water and merely surviving in the sea of life’s circumstances. They’re not making progress toward the *beach* of faith in Christ and the miraculous fruit-producing vine

of intimacy with Jesus—an intimacy through which the fruit of the Spirit can freely flow into their heart and produce the eternal fruit that glorifies the Father.

### **The Holy Spirit to the Rescue**

This circumstantial faith is the *kind* of faith that *typified* most of Jesus' disciples throughout His earthly ministry. Of course, everything changed with the arrival of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, (a few weeks after Jesus' resurrection). On that day, they miraculously transitioned from a circumstance-based faith to a *Word-based* faith that was produced in their hearts by the Holy Spirit Himself. Their new-found faith empowered them to experience an intimate relationship with Jesus. And with that intimacy, they went forth and changed the world.

“Wait a minute,” you say, “how could they experience ‘Word-based faith’ when Jesus was no longer physically present with them to speak His words, and His words hadn’t yet been written down in the Gospels?” ANSWER: As we have seen earlier, one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit was to *remind* them of everything Jesus had said to them. (John 14:26). And that’s exactly what the Holy Spirit did. In the various situations the disciples encountered throughout their lives, the Holy Spirit would remind them of what Jesus had said. Jesus had also told them, “**What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.**” (Matthew 10:27). Speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, “**For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak what He hears, and He will declare to you what is to come. He will glorify Me by taking from what is Mine and disclosing it to you.**” (John 16:13-14)

### **Exactly *What* is Word-based Faith?**

Word-based faith is an action-taking, step-of-faith that is based on a specific command, promise or teaching of Jesus. It occurs when you take a step of faith to obey a command of Jesus or act upon one of His many teachings or conditional promises. It’s really simple—obey His words, fulfill the condition He requests, and then you’ll experience the amazing benefits He promises. For example, He said, “**If you abide in My word, you will be My disciples indeed. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you**

**free.”** (John 8:31-32). So here, the condition He calls for is that we *abide* in His words. When we fulfill that condition, His promises are that we will be His true disciples, we will know the truth and the truth will liberate us from the taskmaster of sin that enslaves us. Abiding in His words means that I read or hear Jesus’ words and let those words guide my attitude and behavioral choices. When I do that, I will become His disciple and know and experience the truth, and He and His truth will liberate me. When you take steps of faith, acting upon His words, don’t be surprised when you start seeing miracles.

### **Peter Learns the Lesson of Word-Based Faith**

In Luke chapter five, we see Jesus step into Peter’s fishing boat. After speaking to a crowd gathered on the shore, Jesus told Peter to take the boat out further into deeper water and let down his nets. Peter replied, *“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”* Peter was exhausted and just wanted to get out of the boat and go to bed. Anyone who has ever performed manual labor all night *knows* how Peter felt. But after voicing his objection, Peter took a step of faith on Jesus’ command and rowed the boat much further out and cast his heavy nets into the water. The result? Miraculous! Peter and his crew caught so many fish that his net began to break, and he had to call His partners (James and John) to come help with their nets and boat. It was so amazing to Peter that he instantly fell on his knees at Jesus’ feet and cried out, *“Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man!”* We need to realize, before this miracle could happen, Peter *had* to take a step of faith and *obey* Jesus’ command to row out into the deeper water and cast his net.

Peter learned His lesson! In fact, later, when Peter saw Jesus walking on water, he wanted to experience the same kind of miracle. But he would *not* even try to step onto the water unless Jesus would first give him a command to do so. Peter knew that if Jesus commanded him to do something, Jesus would perform the necessary miracle that would give him the grace and power to fulfill that command. Peter said, “Lord, if it is You, *command* me to come to You on the water.” Jesus then gave him a one-word command—He said, **“Come.”** (Matthew 14:28). Peter then took the step of faith to obey Jesus’ command,



and became the only other man in history to walk on water. Below are a few other examples of word-based faith.

### **Examples of Word-Based Faith**

- Jesus told the young man who was born blind, to go wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam.
  - He expressed his faith in Jesus' command by doing what Jesus said, and he received his sight.
- Jesus told his disciples to throw their nets to the other side of the boat.
  - They expressed their faith in Jesus' command by doing what Jesus said, and they caught so many fish that their boat almost sank.
- Jesus told the man whose daughter had just died, to "fear not, just believe"
  - The father chose to ignore his friends' statements of her death and instead believed Jesus' command, and His daughter came back to life.
- Jesus told Lazarus' sisters to remove the stone blocking Lazarus' tomb
  - She expressed her faith in Jesus and obeyed His command to order the stone to be removed, and Lazarus came back to life.
- Jesus told the servants at a wedding to fill the empty water jars with water.
  - They expressed their faith in Him, did what He said, and more than 120 gallons of water were turned into wine.
- Jesus told the man who had been sick for 38 years to get up and walk.
  - He expressed his faith in Jesus' command, stood up and walked, and after 38 years of an incapacitating illness, he was healed.
- Jesus told the paralyzed man, "Get-up, take your mat and go home" (Matthew 9:6)
  - He expressed his faith in Jesus by making an effort to get up, and strength came back to his body and his paralysis disappeared.

### **What Word-Based Faith is *Not***

Word-based faith is *not* simply taking a verse in the Bible out of context and trying to bend it into an applicable promise for you or your circumstances. For example, the apostle John began his third epistle with the words, “Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” I have heard so many people take this out of context telling others, “See, God wants you to prosper... you just need to ‘name it and claim it.’” No, this was a gracious *salutation* at the beginning of a letter to the people whom John was writing. It was no more than that—it was *not* a spiritual law; and it certainly didn’t reflect Jesus’ commands or promises. On the other hand, Jesus *did* say, “**If anyone has my teachings and keeps them, My Father will love him and We will come to him and make our continual dwelling place with him.**” (John 14:23). That is a group of promises to *anyone* who will hear Jesus’ teachings and do them.

Jesus made more than eighty such promises to His followers, most of them conditional. Empowered by grace, we take the conditional step of faith that He asks us to take, and the corresponding promise He made will then be fulfilled. For example, in John 6:37, Jesus promises that He will never drive away or turn away *anyone* who comes to Him! Our step of faith is *coming* to Him. When we do that, He promises He won’t reject us. Instead, He will receive us—He will bring us right up to His chest. And no matter what we’ve done, He will *not* turn us away. Wow!

### **Eternally Safe and Secure**

In John 10:27-28, Jesus gives two amazing promises to those who will express their faith in Him by *hearing* His words and *following* Him. We follow Him by taking steps of faith to *do* what He says. He promises we will experience eternal life and He will hold us so securely in His hands that *no one* will be able to steal us away from His grasp. He said, “**My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.**” Jesus gives more than eighty conditional promises to His followers. He gives us a condition—then, as we take the step of faith called for, He fulfills His corresponding promise. Unfortunately, if you don’t know His promises and their conditions, you can’t take the steps of faith He calls for. That’s just one of the tragedies of not knowing Jesus’ words and teachings. So many “believers” have diligently studied the

Bible but have *not* focused on Jesus' incomparable words! Consequently, they know little of what He taught, little of what He commanded and little of what He has promised. They may be sincerely religious, but they miss out on so very much because they haven't come to know Jesus intimately—they simply don't know many of His more than 1,900 statements that are recorded in the New Testament.

### **Moving into Friendship with Jesus.**

Another life-changing command and promise is found in John 15:14. Jesus said, **"You are My friends, if you do what I command you."** So simple, so powerful, yet so under-valued and underutilized. Listen to Jesus' commands, do them—and you'll be His close friend. The Greek word is *phillos* and implies a friendship with deep fondness—a friend that is certainly in one's inner circle of *dear* friends. So being counted and treated as a dear friend by the Lord Jesus is as simple as hearing His commands and teachings and doing them. This should have come as no surprise considering Jesus' *"guide to intimacy"* with the Father and Himself that He had revealed only minutes earlier in John 14:21.

### **Bad News—GREAT News**

If you are currently pointed in the wrong direction, that of simply wanting to acquire those things that bring temporary fulfillment and gratification, don't panic! You're simply doing the "normal human experience" of being self-directed. The GREAT news is that it doesn't have to be that way. As you point your mind and heart toward Jesus; as you get to see His day-by-day life on earth, as you begin to *hear* His words and follow Him by doing His words, everything will change. As you get to know Him, you will fall more and more in love with Him. And as you fall in love with Him, you'll also be falling in love with the Father. As you do this, your self-directed pursuits become less satisfying and even less attractive. Instead, your direction will become more and more focused on following Jesus and His words. You will find yourself hungering and even craving more and more of Him. But this will *not* happen without focusing, reading, and pursuing His words and His life that are gloriously recorded in the four Gospel. Try anything else, and you will always come up short.

## Circumstantial Life versus Eternal Life

As we saw in Chapter six, Jesus gave us analogies that separate Him, His life and His teachings from the lives and teachings of all others—even the lives and teachings of the Old-testament prophets and even His disciples. Consider these declarations:

- **I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.**
- **For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.**
- **I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.**
- **Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.**
- **Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.**
- **For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.**
- **Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.**
- **The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.**

Jesus confounds his listeners when He tells them that they *don't* have life in themselves and that He *does*. He tells them that the life He can give them will provide eternal life as well. But He also tells them that to *get* that life they must *eat* His flesh and drink His blood. (Don't panic, He's not talking about becoming a cannibal) nor is He talking about the bread and wine or grape juice we partake of "in remembrance of Him." As He says at the end of this passage, the flesh itself counts for nothing, but the *Spirit* gives life. He then says, "**The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life.**" In other words, HIS WORDS are His metaphorical flesh and blood" that we must consume. As we consume His words, His Spirit and His life are infused into our spirit and lives. As we do

or *apply* His teachings to our behavioral choices and attitudes, we experience HIS life in us. That's what Jesus alluded to when He said, "**On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.**" (John 14:20). This kind of intimate union takes place as we hear His commands and teachings, and by faith (empowered by grace), we do what He tells us to do. He explains this in the very next statement (John 14:21-23).

### **Jesus' Life and His Words are the Very *Source* of Life and Intimacy We Need!**

So, as it turns out, everything of eternal worth and intimacy with the Father and Son all revolve around JESUS and HIS TEACHINGS.

He declares:

- We are His Friends if we obey His commands
- We *Love* Him and the Father by hearing and practicing His teachings and commands.
- We become His disciples, know and experience the truth and are set free from the mastery of sin, by abiding (continually dwelling) in His words.
- We make disciples by teaching them to hear and obey His commands
- He infuses His life and Spirit into us through His words or teaching.

### **Jesus Gives Us His Google Map**

When I've shared this with other believers and asked if they know Jesus' commands or teachings, they usually reply, "Of course, 'love one another' and 'love God'". They are usually shocked when I reply, "While those are *two* of His commands, do you know the other '150 plus'?" Before you panic, let me tell you that all of His commands are recorded in the Gospels of John, Matthew, Mark and Luke. And once again, His commands do *not* create a heavy burden, but rather they provide the incredible, miraculous power to know and do what He and the Father desire.

Jesus doesn't give us His commands with the expectation that we will master and perfectly implement each of them. They are provided as "Google Map" for following Him, so that we might experience all that He and the Father have for us each day. They literally show us what direction we should go and they give us the critically important guidance we need for our daily choices and decisions.

### **Jesus' Simple Recipe for Increasing Your Faith**

*Lord, Increase Our Faith*

When Jesus told His disciples they must forgive a brother for his sin against them, even if that brother commits the same sin against them seven times in the same day, they instantly cried out, "Lord, increase our faith." He instantly gave them an analogy that revealed that they didn't have *any* faith when it came to *obeying* His commands. So the truth was, they didn't need *more* faith, they simply needed faith—any faith—even the slightest amount of faith would do. He said, "**If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you.**" (Luke 17:6). So, they didn't even need that much faith to obey His command to forgive, they just needed faith—much *less* than a mustard seed. So this kind of faith only needs two ingredients: (1) an applicable command or teaching from Jesus, and (2) a willingness on your part to *obey* that command or teaching in the moment you are in.

# Chapter Ten

## *Jesus Offers You and Me the Ultimate Helper*

**And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.**

Does anyone know more about the Holy Spirit than Jesus? Of course not! The disciples knew a little—Jesus knows *everything*. Paul knew a little, Jesus knows *everything*. Preachers, teachers and writers know a little, *Jesus* knows *Everything!* Like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit is God.

Jesus told us, “**No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.**” (Matthew 11:27) As we’ve seen, Jesus revealed the Father with His life, and His words. He gave us more than 100 statements that reveal the Father and teach us truths about the Father. Jesus has known the Father and the Holy Spirit for eternity. Jesus came to earth to glorify the Father and petitioned the Father to send the Holy Spirit to earth who would glorify Jesus. Jesus revealed this in John 14:16 and 16:13-15. The Father did indeed send the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection. (Acts 2:1-11). Just as Jesus came to earth to say exactly what the Father wanted Him to say and *do* exactly what the Father wanted Him to do, the Holy Spirit would come to earth to declare to the disciples (and us) *exactly* what the Son wants Him to declare and *do* exactly what the Son wants Him to do. And the Holy Spirit wants to do it with us, for us and through us! Jesus said, “...**He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you.**” John 16:13-14 (NKJV). Just as Jesus was intent on glorifying the Father by acting and speaking on His behalf, so the Holy Spirit is intent on glorifying Jesus by acting and speaking on Jesus’ behalf.

While most believers are familiar with the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit that the Apostle Paul revealed, I have found that many are *not* familiar with the *ministries* of the Holy Spirit that *Jesus* revealed.

### **Jesus Reveals Twelve Ministries of the Holy Spirit.**

There are Biblical references that suggest the Holy Spirit has *always* had a ministry on earth with certain individuals such as David. But Jesus is talking about the Holy Spirit coming to earth in a new and unique way, to perform specific ministries with the disciples and with us. The first ministry of the Holy Spirit that Jesus revealed was recorded in John chapter three. I believe the Holy Spirit was performing *this* ministry throughout Jesus' ministry on earth and there is evidence He was performing this ministry in the lives of many throughout the entirety of the Old Testament. We know that the Holy Spirit was in union with Jesus while Jesus was on earth and in that, He was *with* the disciples but not *in* them (John 14:17). Jesus said, **"the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."** The transition from being *with* them to being *in* them took place on the day of Pentecost (fifty days after Jesus' crucifixion). Jesus revealed twelve ministries of the Holy Spirit who would be with us and *in* us.

#### **1: Spiritual Birth.**

Jesus told Nicodemus, **"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."**

In the second chapter of Ephesians, The Apostle Paul revealed that sin has killed all of us spiritually. He teaches that when Adam sinned, a nature of sin and spiritual death was passed on to all mankind. (Romans 5:12). This created the need for man to have a second birth—a *spiritual* birth. (John 3:5-8). Paul stated, "But because of his great love for us, God,



who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” (Ephesians 2:4-5). A common misconception is that *we* do something that initiates our spiritual birth. Not so! The truth is, the Holy Spirit births a new spirit within us, making us who are spiritually dead come to life, a new child of God. This is what John is saying in the first chapter of his gospel, when he wrote, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12-13).

The evidence of that new birth is a new desire within us that wants to know and follow Jesus Christ; we want to hear His teachings and do what He teaches; we want the fruit of the Spirit and we begin to see that fruit expressed in our lives—agape love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The fact that we even *want* to receive Christ and do indeed receive Him and believe on Him is evidence that the Holy Spirit has “birthed” us. In Paul’s terminology, He has “quickened us” or “made us alive.”

## **2 and 3: Comforter/Counsellor; Advocate/Intercessor.**

In John 14:16, Jesus tells us, “**And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you forever.**” (BSB). The Greek word translated “Advocate” is the word *parakletos*. It literally means *one who comes alongside*. It was most often used to describe a legal advocate who would plead one’s case before a judge; but it could just as easily be used to describe a person that comes alongside to provide counsel, comfort, or help in ways that the person himself isn’t able to do. For Jesus to use this multi-faceted word to describe the Person He would be petitioning the Father to send is a perfect descriptor of the Holy Spirit. He will perform all of these ministries with us, just as Jesus provided all of these ministries with His beloved disciples when He was physically present with them. Jesus was telling them that the Holy Spirit would be everything to them in their future that Jesus had been when He was physically present with them. Amazingly, Jesus promised that once the Holy Spirit was sent, He would be with them (and us) forever! In

Him we would have an advocate, a counsellor and a comforter present with us twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

#### **4 and 5: Teach Us All Things, and Remind Us of Everything Jesus Said.**

Jesus said, “**But the Advocate, 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).

These two ministries are truly miraculous *when* we avail ourselves to them. They enabled the Apostles to remember everything Jesus taught and to proclaim His teachings to the world. This ministry also provided the accounts of Jesus’ life and His words that were recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

For the Holy Spirit to perform these two ministries in our lives, we *must* engage in the practice of residing within the Gospels—reading them and thoughtfully pondering their stories and words. When you do this, you will visualize Jesus’ behaviors, attitudes, and words. As you consider His words, consume them. Think about how they apply *your* attitudes and behaviors that you experienced in the previous 24 hours. Think about how you did or didn’t apply them. Think about the circumstances and events you’re likely to encounter in the next 24 hours and how you can apply Jesus’ words to those events as well. You’ll be amazed at the actions and words of Jesus that the Holy Spirit will bring into your mind as you go through your day.

Now the Holy Spirit cannot remind us of that which we have not heard or read. Jesus made over 1,900 statements recorded in the Gospels, and sadly, most believers that I have known have difficulty recalling even 50 of them. During the past seventeen years I have discovered that by meditating *daily* in Jesus’ life and words, even if it’s only a few minutes a day, the Holy Spirit has what He needs to actively and miraculously perform these ministries in my life. Even though I read and studied the Bible for forty-three years, I did *not* consistently experience these ministries until I began meditating specifically on Jesus’ words. The more I meditated in His words, the more I experienced these miraculous ministries in my daily life. Even though I have *not* memorized Jesus’ statements, usually

when anyone asks what Jesus would say about an important issue in their life, the Holy Spirit whispers a statement of Jesus into my mind that applies directly to their question or need. It's as if I've memorized hundreds of Jesus' statements, yet I haven't memorized more than a few. Jesus said, **"What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs."** (Matthew 10:27). These two ministries of the Holy Spirit enable us to hear and proclaim the whispers of Jesus!

## **6 and 7: Testify of Christ (To Us and Through Us). Enable Us to be Powerful Witnesses for Him.**

Speaking of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, **"he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning."** (John 15:26-27)

When was the first time you experienced or felt a positive feeling or impression about Jesus? Think about it. Was it at Christmas time when you were a young child? Was it in a Sunday School class or a Vacation Bible School? Was it a church service? Or was it when a family member, relative or friend first mentioned His name. Was it when you were going through a difficult period in your life, and you asked or even pleaded with God for answers or help? For the first time you thought about the name or person of Jesus and you felt something—something different than you had ever felt about any other name or any other person—you sensed there was something special about Him? For me, it was when I was five years old and walking through the entrance of my parent's church. I saw the famous painting of Jesus' face (Warner Salmon's 1940 portrait of Christ). I stopped and stared at it and instantly felt, He was unlike anyone else I had ever known. I felt something in my heart that I couldn't describe. Looking back, I think that was the first ministry of the Holy Spirit speaking to my heart, sensing that Jesus was better than anyone else on earth.

During the next few years, I attended Sunday School and church and heard more and more about Him. I wanted to believe that He was truly the Son of God. But when I was ten years old and learned the truth about Santa, I quickly deduced that Jesus and God were also just stories adults told kids to help us not be afraid of dying. And yet, I felt that Jesus really lived, and I probably should not deny Him or say anything bad about Him. By the time I

was fourteen, I seemed to have lost my belief that God existed—because nobody could answer my questions about God.

When I was 16, everything changed. I went to a meeting and heard a brilliant scientist, who had been an atheist his entire life. He told how he had become fully persuaded that God existed and that Jesus Christ was God's eternal son. After the meeting I went up and talked with him. After a few minutes, he ran to his car and brought me back a book entitled *Mere Christianity* by CS Lewis. I started reading it that night. Three nights later I read the eighth chapter entitled, "The Shocking Alternative." By the time I finished that chapter, I was fully persuaded that Jesus was indeed, the person he had claimed to be—the eternal Son of the eternal God! I rolled off my bed, got on my knees, and asked Jesus to forgive me for my sins and to come into my life as my Lord and Savior.

That night, Jesus answered my prayer. He came into my heart through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I immediately experienced the new birth, *the birth of the spirit* that Jesus had told Nicodemus about in the third chapter of the Gospel of John. I had been *born again*. The next morning, I went to my classes, a brand-new person! My foul mouth had been cleansed. The Holy Spirit had powerfully testified to my mind and my heart, the very core of who I was, through the personal ministry of another believer—C.S. Lewis. The Holy Spirit had performed this ministry to me, through the scientist and through C.S. Lewis's writing.

From that point on, everything began to change. What had happened to me was so wonderful, I couldn't wait to tell all my friends about it. A few were genuinely happy for me; but most of them quickly discarded my words and thought I was merely going through a temporary phase of life. And yet, during the next three years, every one of these friends (18 in all) gave their lives to Christ as well. Like me, they were dramatically changed. We all gained new desires to know Christ intimately and to follow him with our hearts and our lives. The Holy Spirit had performed these two ministries to us and through us—testifying of Christ to us and then testifying to others *through* us. These two promised ministries of the Holy Spirit had begun to be experienced in our lives. That was more than 60 years ago, and to my knowledge all these people except one, went on to serve Christ the remainder of

their lives! They not only lived the Christian life, but they had also become powerful witnesses and testifiers of the life and gospel of Jesus Christ.

How about you? Whether you have experienced these two ministries or not, I can promise you that God wants you to experience them to the fullest. He wants you to experience the powerful testimony of Jesus Christ and he wants you to powerfully communicate your testimony of Christ and His teachings to others, both verbally as well as in the attitudes and actions of your daily life. If you will only begin to focus your attention on the four gospels of the New Testament, meditating on the life and teachings of the lord jesus, I promise you that you will begin to hear his whispers and you too will powerfully testify of Him and His gospel.

#### **8: Convict Unbelievers of Their Sin.**

Jesus said, “**And He, (the Holy Spirit) when He comes, will convict the world regarding sin, and righteousness, and judgment: regarding sin, because they do not believe in Me;**” (John 16:8-9).

Here Jesus reveals that this ministry of the Holy Spirit is to convict the world regarding *sin*, because those who do not believe in Him and do not embrace the truths He taught, do *not* experience His payment for their sins. Because they become a god unto themselves. They become callous to God’s standards of right and wrong. Thus, the Holy Spirit must enlighten them about the truth of their sins and their need to repent (change the direction of their lives) so they can clearly understand the two divergent paths that lie ahead of them. If you choose to follow Christ, His atonement on the cross will pay the full debt and consequences of your sins. God has already accepted Jesus’ death as full payment of the “sin debt” of Jesus’ followers. But if you choose to follow your own path of self-centeredness, then you will have to pay your own sin debt with your own spiritual death. Paul tells, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23). Until you are born of the Spirit and become a follower of Jesus, you are dead in sin. (Ephesians 2). Unbelievers not only experience spiritual death in this life, but they will also experience eternal separation from God, His light, His love, His mercy, His forgiveness and His grace as their *eternal* destiny. That’s why Jesus’ teaching is

called “the gospel.” As we saw earlier, the word gospel simply means, “good news.” People can repent (change the direction of their life from one of following their own ways, to one of following Christ and His ways.) The good news is that those who are born of the Spirit and repent from their sins, have become spiritually alive and are given the desire and the power to believe in Jesus and follow Him. For this to happen, the Holy Spirit must perform this ministry of enlightening them and convicting them of their sins.

At the *Last Supper* Jesus told His disciples that He was “***The Way, The Truth, and the Life.***” (John 14:6). Earlier, Jesus had said, “***There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words: the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.***” (John 12:48). You see, when anyone rejects Jesus and does not believe Him or His words, they are *rejecting* the very truth of God—the ultimate standard of truth by which all other purported truths will be measured. Jesus revealed the true standards of morality, what is right and what is wrong, and the realities of life. And when they reject His standard, they lose the ability to correctly judge right from wrong, and good from evil. For example, in Jesus’ day, men knew adultery was wrong, but they believed it was okay to look at a woman and have lustful thoughts about her. Jesus revealed that the truth was that when they embraced lust in their hearts, they committed adultery in their hearts—and that was wrong.

Jesus had come to tell the truth about everything. However, He and His words that *reveal* the truth were rejected by many and are still rejected today. But after Jesus returned to heaven, the Holy Spirit would take over where Jesus left off. Jesus would not be physically present to *convict* people of their self-centeredness and sins. And because most people *reject* Jesus and His words, those same people become the god of their own lives. They fall prey to the false notion that they can set their *own* standards of morality. That might be true if God didn’t exist, but He does exist, and He is the only one who can accurately perceive and relay actual truth. He is the *only* moral authority! And He has expressed the ultimate truths of morality, righteousness and evil, sin and self-centeredness through the life and teachings of Jesus, His Son. When Jesus is rejected, self-centeredness and sin run rampant. Proverbs 21:2, states, “Every person’s way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD examines the hearts.” And Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right

to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Sin and self-centeredness offer a temporary gratification that can produce a circumstantial happiness that can be alluring and even intoxicating. But if Jesus is truly the Son of God, that which seems “right in a person’s eyes” but doesn’t meet God’s standards of truth, will result in a spiritual death.. “But it feels so good, and seems so right,” you may say. But God’s truth is not established by human feelings or human reasonings. Rather, His truth emanates from His very nature—and perfectly reflects His nature and His standards.

C.S. Lewis warned, “When the whole world is running towards a cliff, he who is running in the opposite direction appears to have lost his mind.” This ministry of the Holy Spirit shines the spotlight on evil and man’s sin, so that we can repent and embrace Christ and follow Him instead of our own feelings. One of my sons was a U.S. champion high jumper. He had no authority to pronounce the height of the bar he was facing. The height of the bar was measured against the perfect standard of a measuring tape. If the tape said the bar was seven feet and Ryan failed to clear that height, he couldn’t protest and say that the bar was eight feet—the only measurement that counted was the *true* measurement established by the authority of the measuring tape. You and I have no authority to declare what’s right and what’s wrong—that authority belongs to God alone, and Jesus declared it in His words and lived it in His life! The Holy Spirit wants to illuminate with this ministry. He wants to reveal where the catastrophic cliffs lie in one’s path, so he can change his direction and run *away* from it instead of running toward it.

## **9: Reveal the Righteousness of Christ.**

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would convict the world regarding righteousness, **“because I am going to the Father where you can no longer see Me.”** (John 16:10). In other words, when Jesus was physically present with the disciples they could see *perfect righteousness* just by seeing His living example and hearing His words. But when He ascended to be with the Father, they would no longer have the living standard of righteousness with them. Consequently, they would need the Holy Spirit to reveal the perfect standard of Jesus’ righteousness even though Jesus was physically absent.

When you ask anyone if they are a good person, nearly always they will answer “Yes.” They may answer, “I’m not as good as some people, but I’m certainly better than a lot of people.” Most people consider themselves, “good,” because they compare themselves to others that they know are worse. For example, they might say or think, “I’m not Billy Graham or Mother Teresa, but I’m a lot better than my friend who stole money from his employer.” On the other hand, ask nearly anyone, “Are you as good as Jesus,” they would certainly say, “No.” Jesus towers above all others when it comes to righteousness. In this ministry of the Holy Spirit, the righteousness, holiness, love and mercy of Christ are spotlighted. And when we see the incomparable magnitude and splendor of His righteousness, we instantly see in contrast, the dark depravity of our self-centeredness and the hopelessness of our broken condition. We see our desperate need for a Savior—our critical need for a miraculous work of grace.

Jesus said, “**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**” (Matthew 5: 3). The Greek word translated “poor” is *ptochos*, which means “destitute beggar”. So here Jesus is telling us that it is the person who is a spiritually destitute beggar, that is the one who is truly blessed. In fact, He says that this is the very person who will inherit heaven. Why is this true? Because this person has nothing of spiritual value in his own life—NOTHING! No spiritual resource whatsoever that he can draw upon to resolve his spiritual bankruptcy. No way to avoid God’s judgment and condemnation for his lifetime of sins. He has NO way, no resource, no understanding of how to make himself acceptable to God. He has no means to cleanse his sinful nature, to eliminate his massive, crushing debt created by a life of self-centeredness and sins. So why does Jesus say he is *blessed*? He discovers that there is ONE benefactor who CAN cleanse his heart, fully pay off his massive sin debt, make him acceptable to God and create in him a brand-new nature. And when he discovers that such a benefactor is alive, willing and fully able to pay his debt, cleanse his heart and give Him a brand-new nature—he runs to Him, falls to the ground and pleads for mercy and forgiveness. And when he receives Jesus and Jesus’ payment for his sin and experiences the cleansing power of Jesus’ death on the cross—he falls in love with his Savior like never before. His heart is filled with a joy that nothing in the world can take away. This man experiences the spiritual birth that Jesus told Nicodemus about in the third



chapter of the Gospel of John. Jesus gave a parable of just such a man and tells us that he went home forgiven and justified. He said:

**“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”** (Luke 18:10-16)

All of this is made possible when the Holy Spirit performs His ministry of revealing the righteousness of Christ.

#### **10: Reveal the Condemning Judgment of God**

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would convict the world, **“about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”** When Jesus was crucified, many of the people who were witnesses wrongly assumed that Jesus had been defeated. Even Satan likely deduced that his work of deceiving the religious rulers and provoking the crowds to execute Jesus had derailed God’s plan of redemption. And yet, what Satan meant for evil, God meant for good. To Satan’s horror and humiliation, God used his dastardly actions against Christ to provide the very means of performing His perfect work of forgiveness and redemption. Jesus’ death on the cross not only provided the means of our redemption, it created a “guilty conviction” of Satan. Jesus rose to become the victorious ruler of the Kingdom of Heaven, while Satan was irrevocably judged and condemned for eternity. His conviction would result in a sentence of eternal damnation that would be carried out at the end of the age. In this passage, Jesus was telling us and His disciples that when the Holy Spirit would come, He would not only spotlight Jesus’ life and victory—He would brightly illuminate Satan’s humiliating defeat. He would turn on the light for all mankind to clearly see the contrast between God’s eternal kingdom and Satan’s dark and deadly world order. People would have a clear choice to follow the Good Shepard, the light of the world, or the

prince of darkness and his ultimate demise. They could follow the victorious prince of peace into eternal joy, or the condemned ruler of this world into never-ending bondage to him. While many would see the light and run to Jesus, Jesus Himself tells us that many would love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil and they do *not* want to leave the self-gratification that their life in darkness affords them. Jesus has been crowned and Satan has been convicted and sentenced. Through this illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit people can see clearly who they want to follow.

### **11: Reveal Future Events to the Believers.**

Jesus said, **“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the 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). Jesus ends this statement with the revelation of another ministry of the Holy Spirit, His ministry of revealing future events. We see Him performing this ministry throughout the ministry of the Apostles, culminating with the Revelation of the Apostle John of the end times and the climactic return and rule of Jesus. We see this ministry continued in the early church through the gift of prophesy. There has been a long-standing debate as to whether this need and manifestation of this gift continued after the Bible was completed. Rather than entering the debate on this issue and the debate on the charismatic gifts, let me say that God is God and the Holy Spirit is certainly able to perform *any* ministry that He sees the need to perform. We error greatly when we try to create a manmade boundary or set human limitations upon the ministries of the Holy Spirit. I have certainly, undeniably seen the miracles of the Holy Spirit performed many times in my life experiences.

In 2008, one of my sons was diagnosed with cancer after a large tumor had appeared on six ultrasounds. I was in Frisco Texas, and my son was five thousand miles away. A pastor and five of the leaders in his church laid hands on me. The pastor prayed, “Father, we know that You are the Great Physician, and *nothing* is too hard for you. Right now, in the name of Jesus Christ, I pray that you would vaporize Devin’s tumor...just make it go away. And when the doctors open him up let them tell our brother, ‘I’m confused. I couldn’t find the cancer. I don’t understand this. I’ve never seen anything like this.’ Then we

will know that You are the One who performed the miracle, and You alone will receive the glory!" When he finished praying, he looked down at me and said, "I want you to know that God just told me that He answered my prayer; Devin is fine, and you have absolutely *nothing* to worry about!" One week later, Devin was operated on by a chief surgeon at our university hospital. The large tumor was gone! The doctor said all four phrases verbatim and in order. The statistical odds of all this happening exactly as the pastor had prayed, would certainly be *trillions* to one. In fact, they would be incalculable!

Like I said earlier we cannot put God into a box. We cannot in any way set limits or establish boundaries that will contain Him or determine His actions. He is not Santa Claus, and he is not a genie in a bottle required to grant our every wish. He is God, and the universe He created cannot contain him. Twelve years after Devin's miraculous healing, my younger son was diagnosed with the same cancerous tumor in the same location. We prayed and we fasted, and I was told that the same pastor in Texas had also prayed. But this time, God used the skilled hands of a surgeon to remove the tumor and spare my sweet son's life. He has been cancer free ever since that surgery.

## **12: Empower Believers with Spiritual Power.**

Forty days after Jesus' resurrection, and moments before His ascension, Jesus told His disciples, "**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth.**" (Acts 1:8). There are two Greek words in the New Testament that are translated into the English word, "power." The one most often used is the word, *exousia* which means the *authority or the right* to exercise authorized powers. For example, Pontius Pilate uses the word *exousia* when he said to Jesus, "Don't you realize that I have the *power* to release you or crucify you?" Jesus answered him using the same word saying, "**You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.**" (John 19:10-11). In other words, Pilate is telling Jesus that he has the *authority* to determine Jesus' fate, and Jesus is answering him saying that the authority he is claiming has been granted or authorized by God himself.

However, in Acts 1:8, the Greek word translated *power* is *dynamis*. It means *powerful force*. We get the English words, *dynamite*, and *dynamic* from this Greek word. Jesus is telling His disciples and us that when the Holy Spirit comes upon us, He provides the powerful force we need to perform the will and the works of God. He provides the power to experience the fruit of the Spirit and exercise the gifts of the Spirit that Paul tells us about in Galatians 5:22 and I Corinthians 12. This same power also enables us to *walk* in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). This is why in John 14:12, Jesus could make an incredible promise to His disciples and to *all* who truly *believe* in Him. He said, **“Truly, truly I say to you, the one who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I am going to the Father.”** After the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, the disciples began to personally experience many of the miraculous works they had seen the Savior do. When Jesus said *greater* works, He did not mean greater in degree, but rather, greater in quantity—because they would remain on earth and He would not. Obviously, *no one* could ever perform a greater miraculous work than that of securing the redemption and eternal life of Jesus’ sheep. He said, **“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.”** (John 10:27-28).

Jesus has called us to believe *in Him* and in His works. He has called us to *believe* Him and His words. He calls us to believe His words to the point of doing what they say. He calls us to be His disciples by *abiding* in His words and He calls us to make disciples by teaching them to obey His teachings and commands. But He not only gave us these teachings and commands, He sent the Holy Spirit to empower us with the grace and faith to follow Him by doing what He said. Oh, what a Savior! There is NONE like Him!

# Chapter Eleven

## *How on Earth Can I Do This for The Rest of My Life?*

### **Good News for All of Us.**

The mere thought of following Jesus for *life* can be daunting to say the least! In fact, it can seem downright impossible. The good news is He doesn't expect us to focus on what we need to do for the rest of our lives. In fact, He tells us *not* to focus on the future at all! He tells us, don't even worry about tomorrow! He said, "**So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**" (Matthew 6:34 NASB). And if you're thinking about your past and things in your past that are so terrible you think "God could never be intimate with me because of my former life and choices," Jesus has an answer for that as well. He said, "**No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.**" (Luke 9:62). So, Jesus doesn't want you to waste your time focusing on the future *or* on the past. He wants you to set your focus on the present moment. That's it! You don't have to think about what you did in the past or what you're going to do in the future...even an hour from now. Why? Because God doesn't dwell in the past or in the future—He's the God of the present. He told Moses, "I am that I am." He didn't say, I was or I will be. God lives in the present moment; all miracles take place in the present moment, and when your mind is in the past or the future, you may fail to experience God in the moment you are in. All miracles take place in the present moment. If your mind is in the past or the future, you may miss the opportunity to experience a miracle in the moment. BUT, if you bring your focus into the present moment, you will not only have the opportunity to experience amazing fellowship with the Father and Son, you may experience the miracle of the moment as well.

Remember, God's number one desire for you is for you to experience a miraculous, intimate union with Him, and that can only happen when you come into the present moment with Him.

**All of your worries, fears and stresses enter your mind when your focus is dwelling in the future.**

The future isn't just next year or even next week. It's also ten minutes from now. It's, "I wonder what my boss is going to say," or "I wonder what's for dinner tonight." Anytime you're worried, anxious, stressed, or fearful, realize, your mind is in the future. And when you're in the future, you are missing fellowship with God, ministry to others, or even potential miracles in the present. When you realize that your mind is dwelling on the future you can hit reset buttons that will instantly transport you into the present moment. Jesus gives us four such reset buttons, and they always work.

**All sorrows, regrets, disappointments, and even resentments come into your mind when your focus is on the past.**

The past isn't just last year. It might be this morning when a driver cut you off on the freeway, or when your spouse did something troubling or unkind. It may be something terrible that someone did to you or it might be nearly insignificant like thinking about something you ate that is now bringing regret into your thoughts. When you realize that your focus has fallen into the past, you can once again hit any of the four reset buttons that Jesus gives, and your focus will be instantly transported into the present moment.

**Red Flags That Signal You're in the Future**

Anxiety  
Fear  
Stress  
Dread

**Red Flags That Signal You're in the Past**

Sadness  
Regret  
Shame  
Resentment

**Reset Buttons That Instantly Transport You Back into the Present**

The disciples had a habit of living in the future—waiting for Jesus' next miracle or next big event. Consequently, they often missed the opportunities and miracles right in

front of them. In John 4:35, Jesus told them, **“Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest’? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest.”** Jesus gives them three amazing reset buttons. First He says, “behold.” In the original language this word is extremely forceful. It is in the imperative tense, so it is a command. It is the same as Jesus saying, “Come into the moment right now, and really pay attention to what I’m about to tell you.” It has the force of grabbing one’s shoulders and shaking them to grab their undivided attention. And then He gives them the commands to: (1) *lift up your eyes*; and (2) *look at the fields*. And because the fields are “white” or ripe for harvest, His implied command is that they should: (3) immediately *begin harvesting*. He tells them that the “reapers” are already working in the fields, so get busy and start *harvesting*! So here are the first three “reset” buttons that *we* can push that will *instantly* bring us into the present moment.

The first reset button is to “lift up your eyes.” Whatever the eyes of your mind are looking at, whether looking back at past situations, or looking forward at concerns of the future, you are to shift your focus immediately to the present moment. You can use little triggers like a quick blink, a nod of your head, taking an intentional deep breath, or even a pinch on your cheek. Regardless of how you do it, bring your physical eyes and your mental eyes into the present moment.

The second reset button is to *look* at what is right in front of you and *see* who is in that present moment with you. It might be a child or your spouse. It might be a co-worker or a receptionist behind a desk. It might be an Uber driver or a server in a restaurant. If no one is physically present with you, it might be someone who comes to mind that you need to call or text or even pray for. Whoever God directs your attention to, view *them* as a “white field” ready to harvest.

The third reset button is to take the action to begin *harvesting*. This doesn’t mean you start preaching the gospel to the person; it means that you become a representative of Jesus Christ to that person in that moment. They may need a smile, an appreciative look, a word of encouragement, a hug or a listening ear. They may need you to pray for them or with them. They may want to tell you something they’ve just gone through. Or, they may

need to hear about our wonderful Savior and his amazing love for them. You don't have to force a situation. You simply need to be *attentive* to them. Most of the time, a smile, a nod or even mere eye contact can convey that you appreciate and value them. If you're shy, don't panic. You don't even need to think about what you're going to say. You can ask them simple questions about themselves—as generic as “How are you this morning?” Or “Any plans for the weekend?” or “Anything new with your kids?” During the height of the Afghan war, I saw a uniformed serviceman walking toward me in the airport. I stopped him and thanked him for his service. He thanked me and I asked, “Where are you headed?” He replied, “I’m starting another tour in the Middle East.” I asked, “Could I just take a minute and pray for you?” He said, “Yes sir.” We bowed our heads, and I prayed a very short prayer for his safety and for his family and thanked God that He would be with this soldier throughout his tour. When I finished, he looked at me with tears in his eyes and said, “Sir, you have no idea how much this means to me. I’m leaving this airport and going to my deployment with a peace in my heart that I have never felt before.” He reached out his hand, and after a strong handshake, we gave each other a hug. The whole encounter took less than three minutes, and yet, God had met us both in that present moment.

Another reset button to bring us out of the future or the past and into the present moment is prayer—simple conversation with God. The moment we see any of the red flags that signal we are not in the present moment we can begin to pray. We can pray about the issue we are dwelling on, such as the cause of a worry or fear or a hurt, sorrow or regret. Or we can pray about *anything* that we are thinking about. In fact, God *commands* us to do just that in Philippians 4:6-7. He tells us, “*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, 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.*” It can be as quick as a couple of words or as long as we would like. Either way, it brings us instantly into the moment, and God is there!

### **Reset Buttons That Instantly Transport You Back into The Present**

- **Lift up your eyes.**
- **See the white fields in front of you**



- Harvest the field
- Pray

There's nothing wrong with visiting the future or the past but, you don't want to get stuck there, because when you do, you can miss the miracle of the moment. Throughout Jesus' life we can see Him consistently and constantly coming into the moment. And the results were nothing short of miraculous. One of my favorite illustrations of this is found in John, chapter four.

### **The Woman at the Well**

Jesus and His disciples had been walking in the hot desert sun for nearly six hours. Jesus was tired and decided to stop and take a rest in a small Samaritan village. His disciples decided to go to a nearby village to buy some food for lunch. While Jesus was seated, a Samaritan woman from another town came up to a well in front of Him to fill up a large pot with water. Jesus asked her to give him a drink. She was shocked. Jews *never* spoke to Samaritans. She asked Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" The conversation, and the events that followed were nothing short of miraculous. By the end of their conversation, He had told her things that He hadn't told anyone else. He even told her that He was indeed, the Messiah that she had been waiting for. She became a believer and was so excited about what she had heard, she forgot to take her waterpot when she left for home. Jesus' disciples returned right as He was finishing up his conversation with her. They were amazed that He was even talking to her, but they said nothing. They walked up to Him and urged Him to eat some of the food they had purchased. He turned them down saying, **"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work."** He then said, **"Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!"**

Meanwhile, when the Samaritan woman got back to her village, she told all of the men what had happened, and they believed her. They quickly traveled back to Sychar to hear Jesus in person. Then, they too became believers that He was indeed, the Messiah.

They were so transformed, they urged Him to remain with them and He spent the next two days, personally teaching and discipling them! We can't imagine the number of people who became believers, followers and disciples of Christ as a result of what happened in those three days.

### **What If Jesus Had *Not* Been “In the Moment”?**

Imagine for a moment what would have happened if Jesus' mind had not come into the moment when the woman walked toward Him and the well. Imagine if he had been focusing on the *past*. If He had been thinking, “I can't believe what Peter said this morning. He and James just couldn't stop bickering.” As He was reliving the past, (focusing on just a few minutes earlier) the woman would have come to the well, filled her water pot and left. She would not have been born again. The men in the city would not have been born again. And Jesus would have continued His journey with no new believers or disciples. An entire village would have continued living in darkness without His light!

Or, say He was living just a few minutes in the future, thinking, “I can't wait 'til they get back. I am so hungry! I hope they bring me some food that I like, and not something that I don't like.” Once again, the woman would have come, filled up her water pot and left. Or, say He was living just a few hours into the future, thinking, “I can't wait until tonight when I can spend a few hours in prayer. I can't wait for that time Father, when it's just you and Me.” Once again, the woman would have come and gone, and no eternal fruit would have been harvested by our Savior.

Thankfully, no matter where His mind was before she approached the well, Jesus brought His mind and heart into the moment as she approached Him. He instantly brought His mind into the present moment. He *did* “look up.” He *did* see the white field before Him; and He *did* reap the harvest! When the woman arrived, and He instantly drew her into His moment. Within minutes, the Holy Spirit birthed her—she was born again. And without even thinking about it, she became an unashamed witness and an evangelist for Jesus Christ. Maybe hundreds of Samaritans became followers of Christ as a direct or indirect result of her witness. And all of this took place because Jesus came into the moment.

If you begin to use these reset buttons when you find yourself dwelling in the future or the past, you too will likely find wonderful things happening as you come into the present moment with God and with whoever He puts in front of you. I have seen countless miracles take place as I've learned to follow Jesus' commands to live in the moment.

### **An Atheist Becomes a Follower of Jesus and Then Leads His Brother From Atheism to becoming a follower of Jesus.**

A few months ago, I was coming out of the parking lot at church when I saw a 26 year-old man walking with his two year old daughter. I was running late for a gathering at my home, when the Holy Spirit told me to come into the moment and start a conversation with that young man. His name was Jacob, and I could tell he was crazy in love with his daughter Ricki, so I asked him, "Did you ever know you could love this much?" He replied, "No, I *never had any idea* I could love *anyone* this much!" We started talking and within a few minutes he told me he was an atheist. He thought his statement would cause me to recoil, but instead I got very excited. I said, "That is so exciting, I was an atheist! So I know right where you're at." I went on to say, "I'm excited because I became a follower of Jesus, because *another* former atheist gave me a book written by *another* former atheist that persuaded me that Jesus was truly, the living Son of God. That was nearly 60 years ago. So when you discover the reality of Jesus, you will be the fourth atheist in this line of atheists to become a follower of Jesus." He was shocked by my answer and asked if we could get together in the coming week. We did, and he gave his life to my Best Friend, the Lord Jesus. A couple weeks later he was in Dallas visiting his brother who he had led into atheism. He shared how he had just left atheism to become a follower of Jesus. His brother was blown away, and after an hours-long conversation, he became the FIFTH atheist in our line of atheists to give his life to his new Lord and Savior. Here's the line—Former atheist C.S. Lewis brought Dr. George Byers out of atheism to Jesus. Dr. Byers then brought me to Jesus; I then brought Jacob to Jesus, who two weeks later, Jacob brought his brother to Jesus. Five former atheists turned followers of Jesus. I am so grateful I disregarded my plan to run home and came into the moment with Jacob and his daughter Ricki.

When you start "coming into the present moment" and seeing the white fields right

in front of you, don't be surprised when you start seeing miracles in your moments. I promise you, as you begin to do this you *will* see miracles right in front of your eyes. I discovered this amazing principle and Jesus' three little commands as I read about Jesus and His words in the fourth chapter of John. Imagine what awaits you as you begin to focus on Jesus' life and teachings and move into an ever-deepening friendship with Him!

# Chapter Twelve

## *Astonished!*

*When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at His teaching...*

What would you say if someone were to ask you, “What’s so *amazing* about Jesus?” Chances are your mind would instantly envision one or more of the miracles He performed. Maybe you would think of His crucifixion or His resurrection. Maybe you would think about His forgiveness and the eternal life He has provided for you. And yet, as amazing as all of these are, His words and teachings are *just* as amazing. The *first-time* the chief priests and Pharisees dispatched the temple guards to seize Jesus, the guards came back empty handed! They were asked, “Why didn’t you bring him in?” Their answer surprised everyone. They *didn’t* say, “You should have seen the miracles this guy was performing—Blind people receiving their sight, sick people being healed by His mere touch, and demons being cast out!” Truth is, the guards didn’t even mention the miracles they had likely witnessed. Instead, they simply replied, “*Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks.*” (John 7:46 NASB 1995). Their stone-cold hearts had been melted like butter in a microwave by Jesus’ *words*! And their cynical skepticisms had been vaporized by the authority and the spirit with which He spoke those words!

When Jesus finished teaching the Sermon on the mount, Matthew tells us, “The crowds were *astonished* at His teaching, because He taught as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.” The Greek word translated *astonished*, is the word *ekplesso*. It literally means: *to be struck with a blow*. Imagine someone hitting you in the chest with a baseball bat so hard that it knocks you down—*that’s* the image Matthew is trying to convey. The people were knocked down, their minds were “blown,” by Jesus’ teachings *and* by the authority with which He taught. These same people had become accustomed to religious teachers who taught with little to no authority. Jesus talked with all the authority of God—not as if He was merely reading or announcing His opinions, but as if God Himself was speaking through Jesus’ mouth. Jesus was truly speaking as a first-hand witness of

God—and had a full understanding of everything God knew. He was teaching *absolute* truths. In fact, when He went back to His hometown, we are told, He began teaching them in their synagogue, “with the result that they were *astonished*, and said, “Where *did* this man *acquire* this wisdom and *these* miraculous powers?” (Matthew 13:54). Later, we are told that the chief priests were *afraid* of Him and wanted to kill Him, “because all the crowd was *astonished* at His teaching.” (Mark 11:18). Even His disciples who had followed Him His entire ministry were continually amazed by His words. (Mark 10:24)

In the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke, we are told that Jesus was teaching in the temple every day and that the religious leaders could not figure out a way to kill Him because the crowd of people listening to Him, “*hung* on His words.” His teachings and words were so captivating, so mesmerizing, that the crowds were clutching onto His words with a vice-grip. The Greek word used here is the word here is *ekkremamai*, and it means to clutch on to something so tightly it was as if they were “hanging onto His words for dear life.” As the religious leaders watched this, they realized that if they tried to seize Jesus while He was speaking, the crowd would have likely stoned them to death.

### **Do Jesus’ Words Astonish *You*? Do *You* Hang onto Them for Dear Life?**

If Jesus’ words don’t astonish or amaze you, and you don’t find yourself *hanging* onto every word for dear life, don’t panic...it just means you are not that familiar with them. And the consequence of that, is that you are *not* consistently abiding in them. I’m *not* talking about Bible Study or reading or even memorizing Bible verses. I’m talking about intentionally and thoughtfully focusing on the words, sayings and teachings of Jesus that are recorded in the Gospels. Anytime a believer tells me that they’re discouraged or that they’re just not “feeling the Spirit lately,” the first question I ask is, “How much time this week have you spent focusing on Jesus’ words?” It’s not uncommon for them to instantly tell me how much they’ve studied the Bible during the week. Then I repeat to them, “I didn’t ask you how much time you spent in the Bible, I asked you how much time you spent in the words and teachings of Jesus?” You see, the 22 promises Jesus made about His words, He did *not* make about any other words in the Bible. They were promises specifically about His spoken words (see Chapter Five, pages \_\_ to \_\_).

For sixteen years, nearly every night as I'm drifting off to sleep, I have listened to the life and teachings of Jesus recorded in the four Gospels. And every morning I wake up amazed by His life and astonished by His words. In His words He gives His followers hundreds of teachings covering more than 200 topics. He gives His followers more than eighty promises that provide the concrete foundation they need to grow and strengthen their faith and to walk by faith. He gives them more than 150 empowering commands that reveal God's will for anything and everything they will encounter in their lifetime. They will empower His followers with the grace and faith to do God's will and experience the miraculous intimacy with Jesus and the Father that He promises in John 14:21-23.

### **To Know Him is to Love Him**

I joined the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ (Cru) in 1970. That summer, I attended their Institute of Biblical Studies, and one of my courses was *New Testament Survey*. It was taught by a 70-year-old Bible teacher, Dr. Manford Gutsky. Everyday Dr. Gutsky ended the class with the same statement. Speaking of Jesus, he would say, "Remember class... to *know* Him is to *love* Him!" After one week of him repeating this statement every day, I wondered, "Why does he do this every day?" It really bothered me that he kept telling us that, over and over again. It bothered me because I did not have the "ooey gooey feelings" for Jesus that I defined as "love." I was newly married, and my feelings for my bride dwarfed any feelings of love that I felt for Jesus. I thought, ugh, I don't have *feelings* for Jesus, so does that mean I don't really "know Him?"

Now that I've had a lifetime of getting to know Jesus, by studying His life in the Gospels and meditating daily in His words, I now understand what Dr. Gutski was saying. I did *not* know Jesus in the way, nor to the degree that Dr. Gutsky did! I had terrible misconceptions of what it meant to "know Jesus" and what it meant to "love Jesus." Even though I knew a lot *about* Jesus, I didn't *know* Him in the way that the Apostle Paul meant when he talked about, "knowing Him." And I also didn't understand what Jesus meant when He talked about *loving* Him. Now that I have a much fuller and more accurate understanding of what Jesus meant and what Paul meant when they talked about knowing Him and loving Him, I can tell you, that I too now know Him and love Him. I understand

what professor Gutski was saying, I realize that this truth is so important, it really did deserve to be repeated every day.

## KNOWING HIM

There is a huge difference between knowing about somebody and knowing them! Chuck Norris has been my dear friend for nearly 30 years. Anytime I am teaching on this subject I ask the audience, “How many of you know who Chuck Norris is?” Nearly every person in the room raises their hands. I just did this at a large church in Florida this past week, and sure enough every adult instantly raised their hand. But when I asked the next question, nobody raised their hand. I asked, “If you saw Chuck Norris walking in an airport and yelled out, ‘Hey Chuck,’ would he instantly set his bag down, come running over to you and give you a giant Texas hug?” No! He’d probably take a quick look at you, smile and nod and keep on walking. Why? Because even though you know *about* him, you don’t *know* him; and he probably doesn’t know you. On the other hand, if any one of my kids yelled his name, he would instantly put his bag down, run over to them, pick them up and give them a giant hug. Why? Because they know and love Chuck and he knows and loves my kids.

I knew all about Jesus from the time I attended Sunday school when I was a child. After I asked him to be my Lord and Savior when I was 16, I got to know more and more *about* him with each passing year. And yet, for the longest time, I did *not* come to truly *know* him. I did not come to know him the way *He* wants to be known. I did not come to know Him the way the apostle Paul came to know Him. Paul, looking back at all of his education and all of his amazing accomplishments, wrote, “More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them *mere* rubbish, so that I may gain Christ.” (Philippians 3:8 NASB).

For us as followers of Christ, coming to know Jesus and the Father in this very special way is critical to our life on earth as and to our eternal life. In this life, this kind of “knowing” brings us into a *union* with the Father and the Son—an intimate union that creates in us a new identity. Jesus said, “**On that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you.**” (John 14:20 BSB). Just as a man and woman



become “one flesh” when they marry, creating a *new* identity, so when we enter into a new oneness with Christ, we gain a new identity—one quite different than when we didn’t “know” Him. This is the kind of unity that Jesus prayed for us in His intercessory prayer in John 17. He prayed, **“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they may also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.”** (John 17:20-21 BSB).

Can you believe that? Jesus and the Father want to bring you and me into a unity and identity with themselves? How can that be? How can God love us so much that He would sacrifice His only Son to pay for our sins, forgive us all our sins and draw us into an intimate relationship with Himself. The only answer is: *that* is who He is! The truth is, when we truly believe in His Son, we are grafted into Christ the way a branch is grafted into a vine. And when we are *in Christ*, all of our sins placed upon Him and all of His righteousness is transferred to us. That’s why Paul could write, “He who knew no sin, became sin, that we might become the righteousness of God,” (II Corinthians 5:21) and “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are *in Christ Jesus*.” (Romans 8:1). If you don’t feel “worthy” to enter into this kind of intimacy with the Lord Jesus, don’t worry...none of us do! But it’s us who are unworthy that He calls unto Himself. He said, **“I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”** (Luke 5:32). It’s to you and me that He says, **“Come unto me all of you who are weary, and heavily burdened.”** (Matthew 11:28). In Revelation 3:20, He gives the ultimate invitation: **“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into His and fellowship with him and He with me.”** (Revelation 3:20). **“Anyone”** includes you and me! He promises you and me, **“If you continue in My word, you are my true disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”** (John 8:31-32).

# Conclusion

## *Seeing Jesus Every Day*

***Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.***

### **The Answer to Your Greatest Struggles and Heartaches**

In John chapter 15, Jesus told His disciples *how* to continuously abide (remain) in His love. He said, ***“If you keep My commands, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commands and abide in His love.”*** Jesus then said, ***“I tell you these things so that My joy will be in you, and your joy will be full (complete).”*** While joy from other sources rises and falls as circumstances change, joy from Jesus is always available to us, even when our circumstances change for the worst. His joy flows into us as we consume His words, hearing them and by faith empowered by grace, doing them. His words infuse His Spirit and life into our spirit and life (John 6:63). As we hear and obey His words, we abide in His love and His joy flows into the depths of our souls. The more we come to *know* Him, the more powerful and the more consistent His joy will flow into us and be metabolized into our life and spirit. Then, after Jesus told His disciples how they could experience joy by abiding in His love, He told them *how* they could experience His joy even during adversity and terrible trials. First, He told them they are going to be hated by religious people who will think killing them is a service to God. He then told them that the reason He was telling them about these terrible things they will experience in their future, is to warn and prepare them for what their future holds. He said, ***“All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or Me.”*** (John 16:1-3)

Do you see that? People do terrible things to Jesus' followers and others BECAUSE they do not *know* Jesus or the Father. When you think about it, this is an amazing revelation from Jesus. When we come to know the Father and Son, we not only move into a more intimate union with them, we stop doing terrible things to other people. On the other hand, when people *don't* know Jesus or the Father they can easily decline into darkness and the disregard of others. What a contrast. Of course, there are *levels* of good and levels of evil. But the deciding factor in both, is whether or not they know the Father and Son. Knowing Jesus takes people into light, (John 8:12) and not knowing the Father and the Son takes them into darkness (John 3:19-20). Knowing Jesus and the Father takes people into *eternal life* and not knowing Jesus and the Father takes us into death (John 17:3 and John 6:53). It becomes obvious that *all* of life revolves around knowing or not knowing Jesus and the Father.

When my daughter was in junior high school, some of her very close friends abandoned her and began doing terrible things to her. When she asked me, "Why are they doing these terrible things to me?" I told her, "Because, they do not know Jesus or the Father." She said, "But they're all in my Sunday school class." I told her that going to church and learning about Jesus and the Father, does *not* mean that they *know* Jesus and the Father. They may know all about Jesus, but they *don't* know Him. Those who *know* Him *don't* do terrible things to others.

### ***Seeing Jesus Produces Belief and Joy, and Changes Behavior.***

After Jesus finishes telling His disciples of the terrible things that will befall them in their future, He gives them one of His great word pictures. Speaking of His immanent crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus tells them, "**Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born, she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.**" (John 16:20-22).

Here, Jesus tells His disciples that “seeing” Him, will turn their grief into joy...a joy that is so powerful that *no one* will be able to take it away from them. And that's exactly what happened right after the resurrection. One by one, even though they were in the depths of hopelessness, grief, and despair, when Jesus’ followers *saw* Him, they were instantly filled with joy. We saw it with Mary at the empty tomb (John 20:16). When Peter and John first saw the empty tomb, we are told that they “*believed*.” But, when they *saw* Jesus in the upper room, they were filled with more joy than they had ever known. (John 20:20). We see it again with the two men walking on the road to Emmaus. They were in the depths of despair. But once they realized who they had just *seen*, they were filled with a joy so great that it caused their hearts to burn within them—a level of joy they had never before experienced. (Luke 24:32). And when Thomas saw Jesus for the first time after the resurrection, he was overcome with amazement and awe. In fact, he instantly proclaimed Jesus not only to be his Lord, but to be his God! (John 20:28).

Like me, you may be thinking, “That’s great for them, but I’ve never *seen* Jesus.” The good news is, Jesus *knew* you and I would think that. Amazingly, at that very moment, Jesus promised a very special blessing to you, me and everyone else who would believe in Him without seeing Him. This blessing, directly from Jesus’ lips would only be available to those of us who had not seen Him yet believed in Him. When Thomas finally saw the resurrected Jesus and cried out, “My Lord and my God,” Jesus told him, “**Because you have seen Me, you have believed;**” and then He proclaimed, “**Blessed are those who have *not* seen and yet have believed.**” (John 20:29). What a glorious proclamation to you and to me. And now comes a blessing and a wonderful reality that is available to you and to me. Although we haven’t seen Jesus physically, the Holy Spirit stands ready to enable us to spiritually see Jesus every day. Just as the two disciples on the road to Emmaus didn’t recognize Jesus during their walk with Him, when Jesus served them bread, their eyes were “opened,” and they saw that it was Jesus. Jesus is the bread of life. (John 6:35). The Holy Spirit offers to feed us that bread as we read the Gospels and thoughtfully reflect on Jesus’ life, His activities, His spirit, and His words. As we consume this bread of life, our eyes are spiritually opened to see Him in all of His reality. We witness the amazing truth of His life

and words in ways the disciples weren't able to experience until their eyes were fully opened *after* they had seen the resurrected Christ.

For 17 years, nearly every night I go to bed listening to the gospels. I clearly see Jesus as He journeys through His surroundings. I see Him interact with people; I hear his incomparable teachings and receive his clear instructions and desires for me. They come alive as I hear them. I wake up nearly every morning amazed by Him and astonished by His words. Every morning my spirit silently cries out, "What a Savior!" I praise Him. I praise the Father. I thank the Father for sending His dear Son and for opening my eyes to who He really is and His amazing life and words. I am filled with amazement. My heart cries out, "Lord Jesus, You alone are worthy to be praised." I am amazed by His love, His mercy and His grace. I tell Him that I love Him, and I ask Him to open my eyes to see Him throughout my day. I ask Him to help me live in the present moment with Him and with those whom He brings into my path. And here's the exciting part; that's exactly what happens! I see the miraculous fruit of the Holy Spirit daily—not because of me, but because of Him. He *is* the vine, and I am merely the branch.

As I tell you these things, I don't want to give you the false impression that "I've arrived—that I have more intimacy with God than other believers do. If anything, the closer I get to Him, the more flaws I see in myself. I see Him in all of His holiness, and me in all of my self-centeredness. I cry out with Paul, "Oh wretched man that I am." I cry out with the tax collector in Jesus' parable, "God be merciful to me, the sinner." Ahh, but then it happens. I hear and see Jesus calling me, **"Come unto me, Steve Scott. Take my yoke upon you and LEARN FROM ME! I am gentle...and humble of heart. My yoke is easy, and MY burden is light. Relax, and let Me refresh and rejuvenate your soul."** Then, I joyfully concur with Paul, that, I am a new creature in Christ, and old things are passing away, and all things are becoming new. (II Corinthians 5:17). And, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1). That's ME! And if your trust is in Jesus and His work on the cross, that's YOU!

My friend, if you will begin to daily meditate in the life and words of the Lord Jesus, meticulously recorded in John, Matthew, Mark and Luke, the Holy Spirit will remind you of

Jesus' words and actions each day and will whisper His words and His will to you as you go through your activities and encounters each day. I promise that you *will* begin to see Jesus more and more each day—each week and each month. And as you see Him throughout your day, your joy will overflow, not only blessing you, but blessing the lives of those around you.

God loves you more than you will ever know! He wants to bring you into an intimate relationship and daily fellowship with Himself—a relationship and fellowship that becomes more and more intimate and joyful every day for the rest of your life. He is not calling you to judge you. He's calling you to *follow* His Son. He's calling you to bear eternal fruit. Jesus is the vine, and you are His glorious branch. I pray that you will experience all that He has for you, both in this life and for all of eternity. God bless you, my dear reader.

**If you would like free online guidance in the teachings of the Lord Jesus, go to *KnowingHimToday.org*. You can access all of our discipleship materials, podcasts and videos for free. May God continue to bless you in your wonderful response to the calling of our Good Shepherd.**

## **Appendices to come**

**I. Helpful Tools**

**II. S.P.E.C.K. Model**

**III. Commands and Teachings of Jesus.**

**IV. Promises of Jesus to His Followers.**