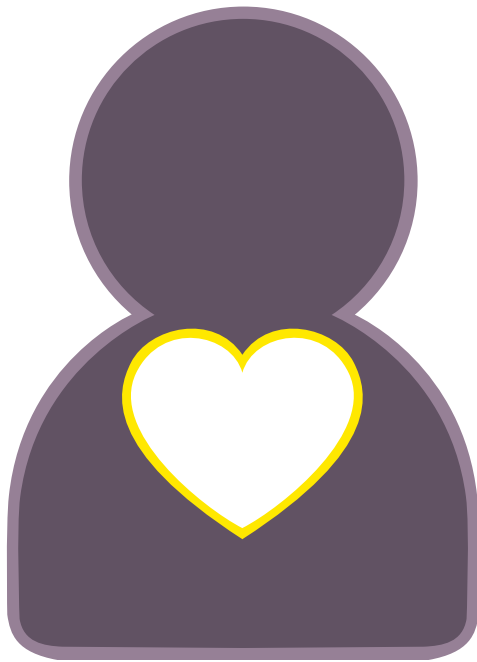


**I believe.  
What happened?**



**Laura Novey  
David Zimmermann**



# **I Believe. What happened?**

**Laura Novey  
David Zimmermann**

Cover and illustrations  
by Earl Martin

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**Whether you are a new believer in Jesus  
or you have believed for some time,  
this book is for you.**

- Understand your new life in Christ better.
- Find real peace and joy in the full assurance of salvation.
- Learn how to live the abundant life God offers to you in the here-and-now.

“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

-Colossians 2:6-7



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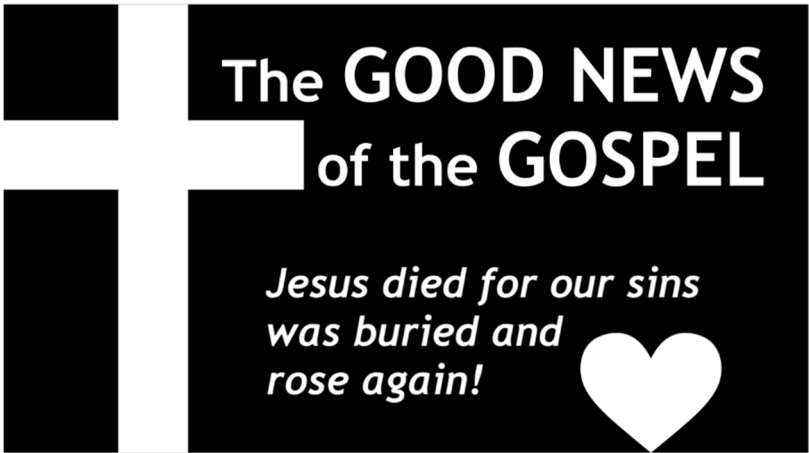


# 1

## A Breathtaking Rescue

Flames nearly engulfed the home. Frantic family members screamed in horror that a child was inside. They had heard her cries and knew where she was, but they couldn't get to her. An intense wall of fire advanced toward the little girl who now lay unconscious, overcome by thick, choking smoke. The man had come running. Without pause, he burst into the house, fought through the heat of the blaze, grabbed up the child, and handed her out the window just as the inferno closed in. The child lived. The man died.


That child was you. And the man who gave his life was Jesus.



You have heard **and believed** the good news that while you were helpless to save yourself from the eternal penalty of your sin, God initiated and carried out a colossal rescue plan. Out of His boundless love, He chose to empty Himself, put on human flesh, and step into humanity's mess to be the Savior of mankind. Having no sin of His own for which to die, Jesus Christ took your sins and mine on Himself and paid the penalty in full on our behalf. He died for our sins, was buried, and on the third day rose back to life, proving that

our sin debt really has been paid in full, once and for all. What you and I could not do for ourselves, God did *for us*. That's grace.

# GRACE

**GOD'S**  **Undeserved  
Unearned  
Love & Favor**

It is by **grace** – God's undeserved, unearned love and favor – that you have been saved. There was nothing meritorious about you, nothing that made God consider you deserving of salvation. Even the good things you did were tainted by your sin nature. The only ones who are worthy to be in the presence of the Most High God are those who have “clean hands and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:4). ...but all humans have dirty hands and sin-infested hearts.

The forgiveness of your sin debt and the crediting of Jesus' righteousness into your own spiritual bank account are components of the gracious gift purchased by Jesus' blood for you. You received this gift of eternal life by believing (relying upon, trusting) that what Christ accomplished on the cross was wholly sufficient for you. No strings attached. There is nothing you can add to, substitute for, or use as reimbursement toward what Jesus did. While the gift was costly for Him, it is free to you. Ephesians 2:4-9 puts it this way:

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. **For it is by**

**grace you have been saved**, through faith [belief, trust] – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”

**Works** is the word the Bible uses for those things we might do to try to please God or fix our sin problem. ...you know, things like baptism, prayer, religious activities, giving money to the poor, going to church, doing kind things for others. There is nothing wrong with these things. Good works are good! But according to the Bible, you and I can't do enough good things to bridge the gap between us and God. It is impossible. Even at our very best, we fall far, far short of God's standard: perfection.

“By the works of the law no one will be justified” (Galatians 2:16). **Justified** means to be in right standing with God. Our good works cannot justify us because they are like whipped cream and sprinkles on a mudpie. Or a cup that's scrubbed on the outside and filthy on the inside. Or a tomb that has been beautifully whitewashed but is full of death and decay.

You see, it's not even our good works that are the issue. It's the stain of our sin that separates us from a holy God. That's the problem. Good works can't wash away those stains. It is those sin stains that must be dealt with. You and I do not have any means by which to wash ourselves clean. We do not have the right detergent for the job.

That is why we need the Savior.

In Philippians 3, the apostle Paul said that those who believe in Jesus “put no confidence in the flesh” (3:3). We contribute nothing to our salvation. Paul continues even more emphatically, “If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more” (3:4). That is, if anyone could be saved by keeping the Law and following the religious rules, certainly Paul would have been eligible. He had the pedigree, the zeal, and a religious resumé far beyond what most could claim. And yet even someone like Paul could not earn his own salvation. Anything he had ever done in his religious fervor he counted as “loss.” The word *loss* in the original Greek is a term which refers to a bad business transaction that results in a penalty or forfeiture. If we try to purchase eternal life with our works, that deal goes south in a hurry. “What is more, I consider everything a loss...garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, **not having a righteousness of my own** that comes from the law [works], but that which is through faith in Christ – **the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith**” (3:8-9).

Our mutiny against our Creator demands the death penalty. We deserved to die in that house fire. Our eternal destiny should rightfully be in what the Bible calls the Lake of Fire. But God, in His infinite love and mercy, offers eternal life instead. We can't earn it. We don't deserve it. But God lavishes it on us anyway when we simply put our faith in Jesus. What mind-blowing grace!

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## Search the Scriptures

In Acts 17:11, the people of Berea were commended because as they listened to the message about Jesus, they "examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." It is essential for us to do the same. God's Word (the Bible, Scripture) is perfect, reliable truth (Psalm 119:160). If you do not have a Bible, there are various Bible apps available online. As you read the passages, take notes on what you discover. Record any questions you have, too, so you can get them answered.

What can you learn about God? About yourself?

- Isaiah 59:2
- Psalm 24:3-4
- Isaiah 64:6
- Matthew 23:25-28
- Romans 6:23

Who is Jesus? What did He do?

- Philippians 2:5-8
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-8
- John 3:16-18

- Romans 5:6-11

Compare grace and works.

- Romans 3:20-24
- Ephesians 2:4-9
- Romans 11:5-6
- Galatians 2:16
- Philippians 3:3-9

What else can you glean about eternal life?

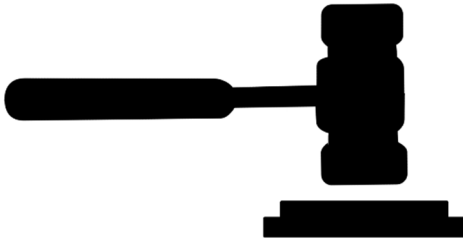
- John 14:6
- Ephesians 1:7
- Revelation 20:11-15
- John 11:25-26

## 2

# The Heavenly Courtroom

The evidence has been presented. The arguments have been made. The final summations have been given. The jury has deliberated. The accused knows he is guilty, so the verdict is no surprise: "Guilty as charged." But then the shock of a lifetime ensues. Gasps echo throughout the courtroom as the judge looks the defendant squarely in the eye, raises his gavel, and declares his final judgment: "Not guilty!"

The moment you placed your faith in Jesus as your own personal Savior, a legal proceeding took place. The gavel came down in the courts of heaven. The Judge's decision was final. Irrevocable. He "canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14). Your sins were officially forgiven. God declared you not guilty. For you, eternal life commenced the instant that irreversible judicial decree was pronounced.



Some can pinpoint the day and time they came to believe in Jesus. Others have a much more nebulous story. The experiences and emotional responses that accompany salvation are as unique and individual as our fingerprints. Some of us might have felt or expressed something intensely. Others might have felt nothing at all. Our testimonies may be filled with drama or blend right into the fabric of the everyday. Although our personal experiences set the scene for our salvation story, faith itself is not a feeling or sensory phenomenon. Faith is an act of the will brought about by the power

of the Holy Spirit. Regardless of how your story may have unfolded, it is your faith in Jesus—your decision to trust Jesus to handle your sin debt for you—that secured your acquittal in the heavenly courtroom.

But in order for that legal ruling to be effectual for you—in order to have your convictions legally expunged—the penalty first had to be paid. God could not just wink His eye at your sin and sweep it under the rug. No, your transgressions are acts of high treason against the Lord of Hosts. His vehement wrath against sin justly demands vengeance. His justice had to be fully satisfied. How did this happen?

Just before Jesus bowed His head and died on the cross, He said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). While at first glance it may seem like He was referring to His impending death, that phraseology actually refers to a mission being fully accomplished, an expectation being completely fulfilled, a debt being paid off. Jesus’ mission was to be the **propitiation**, the “atoning sacrifice,” for our sins (1 John 4:10). His death on the cross totally satisfied God’s requirements, thereby appeasing His wrath. Picture a lightning rod: a tall metal pole that attracts lightning and conducts the dangerous electricity down safely into the ground in order to protect a building. Just as metal attracts lightning, sin attracts God’s wrath. Jesus willingly took your sins on Himself in order to divert God’s fierce wrath away from you. He bore the whole horrific force of divine fury. He suffered and died so that you and I could go free. Jesus Christ satisfied the justice of God by presenting payment in full to the court on our behalf. His blood is the only currency God accepts. It is only upon the basis of Christ’s shed blood that God is able to overturn your death sentence and mine.

Legal acts also require signatures or seals to make them official. Government officials, notaries, engineers, architects, and others use seals of various sorts to certify documents. In ancient times, kings would seal documents and other items with their personal signet ring pressed into clay or wax. The seal signified authority, validated ownership, and guaranteed any promises related to the contents of whatever was sealed. Did you know that God has placed His own official seal on you?

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, **you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit** [about Whom we’ll learn more], who is a deposit

guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.”

– Ephesians 1:13-14

The Holy Spirit is God's seal of ownership, authority, and promise pressed permanently into the clay of your own being. You forever bear the signet mark of the King of kings.

And there's more! Other edicts also went into effect the moment that gavel struck the bench in the highest court of all heaven and earth. These promises, too, are covered by the Holy Spirit's seal. This is just a sampling of what is yours now and forever in Christ. You are...

**Adopted by God.** Almighty God is now your Father. You are His son or daughter. You are in His family, of His household, a bearer of His name, able to eat at His table and enjoy His love. He is now legally your *Abba* (daddy).

**Heir of a great inheritance.** You are a joint heir with Jesus Christ. The things of this life are perishable and fading away, but your inheritance from God is imperishable, indescribably glorious, and safeguarded in heaven for you.

**A citizen of the kingdom of heaven.** This world is not your home. Your passport, driver's license, voter registration, and other documents reflect an earthly affiliation which is only temporary while you sojourn here for a time. You are legally a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. You are an ambassador of the King in this foreign land as you journey home.

**A sheep in the fold of the Good Shepherd.** You are under the intimate and constant care of God Himself. He leads you, protects you, nourishes you, comforts you, stays close to you, defends you, helps you, rescues you, trains you, blesses you, attends to your wounds, and gives you rest.

**Granted direct access to God.** There is now no barrier between you and God. You may come boldly to His throne to receive His grace to help in any time of need. His ear is inclined to your voice. You are able to run into His arms and shelter under His wing at any time.

You are not in any way deserving of this “not guilty” verdict or the incredible privileges that accompany it, but they have been legally and eternally declared yours by the Lord of all creation. These blessings, and so many more, are poured out on you from the exceeding riches of His grace. Jesus is the One who made it all possible.



“Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together.”  
– Psalm 34:3

---

## Search the Scriptures

Describe the heavenly courtroom and what was decreed for you.

- Isaiah 33:22
- Colossians 2:14
- John 19:30
- 1 John 4:10
- 2 Corinthians 5:21
- 1 Timothy 6:15-16
- Ephesians 1:4-14
- 2 Corinthians 1:21-22
- Isaiah 64:8

Explore your position and possessions in Christ.

- John 1:12
- Romans 8:14-17
- 1 Peter 1:3-5
- Philippians 3:20-21
- Colossians 1:13

- Ephesians 2:18-19
- John 10:7-18
- Psalm 23
- Psalm 116:1-2
- Psalm 91:4
- Hebrews 4:14-16

Let's praise His name together!

- Psalm 34:1-3

### 3

## A Tale of Two Hearts

A “dead man walking” is a person who is doomed, like a prisoner on death row facing execution. While physically alive in body, they have in essence already died a death. They are condemned and without hope. There are millions of people alive today who are spiritually walking dead. But because you have placed your faith in Jesus, you are no longer spiritually dead. You are very much alive! How did that happen? To answer that, we need to go back in God’s story of redemption to learn something about your old self *in Adam*.

Not long after God created all things perfect, something happened that would profoundly change it all. God had placed the first man, Adam, in the garden of Eden and commanded, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die” (Genesis 2:16-17).

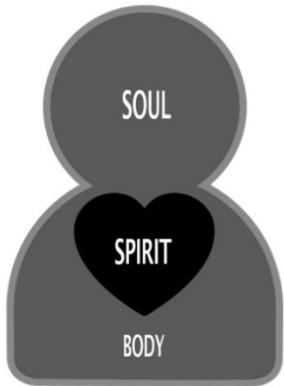
Now, fast forward to that day in Genesis chapter 3 when Adam and Eve defied God’s command. Immediately, something changed. They realized they were naked before God and each other, and at the sound of the Lord walking in the garden, they tried to hide from His presence. Something within them had died even before their bodies physically perished and returned to dust many loooong and heartbreaking years later. The first man and woman created by God were also the first to walk dead spiritually.

Death means separation. Adam and Eve had been in intimate fellowship with God prior to eating the forbidden fruit, but now there was a stark estrangement. Our grandparents in Eden had suffered spiritual death. Ephesians 4:18 describes it as being “separated from the life of God.” Adam and Eve were now “dead in...transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). The whole of creation even today suffers under a curse because of what happened that day in the garden.

The sin curse has done a number on us all. We are all born with dead spiritual hearts. Our connection with God is nonexistent when

we are first born. We've inherited this dead heart syndrome from Adam and Eve because they chose sin over God way back in the beginning. Because of Adam's choice, "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). All generations that have followed Adam—including you and me—are said to be born **in Adam**. What does that mean?

Being *in Adam* means that we not only trace our physical genetics back to Adam and Eve, but we also have their sin nature. We are cut off from God. "In Adam all die" because "we have borne the image of the earthly man" (1 Corinthians 15:22,49). The spiritual heart that we're born with is black and dead, severed from fellowship with God.



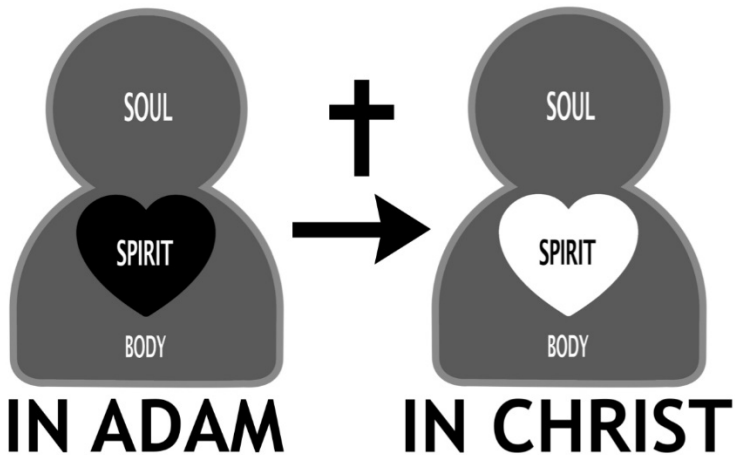
## IN ADAM

But when you responded in faith to the gospel, you became a **new creation**. To understand what that means, let's back up again to the very beginning. God's first act during creation week was to say, "Let there be light," and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). That light pierced the darkness and illuminated God's handiwork as He brought all created things into being. There was, in the same way, an appointed day on which God called you by name and commanded, "Let there be light," and the blinding darkness which held you captive was dispelled. You could now see the truth and believe.

“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of the darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.”

– 2 Corinthians 4:6

A dead spiritual heart is not a suitable place for a holy and perfect God to reside. But when you heard the gospel and put your faith in Jesus, something happened. A transformation! That old dead heart was removed by God <ffffff> and a new heart—a heart that is brand new and pure—was put in its place. The Holy Spirit moved in and sealed you as God’s forever. At that instant, you became a new creation.



“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you...”

– Ezekiel 36:26-27

You are no longer in Adam. You are **in Christ**. It is a permanent transaction. You have a completely new identity. The Bible describes this instantaneous old-heart-to-new-heart transaction in various ways. You were *made alive*. You were *made righteous*. Your body became a *temple* of the indwelling Holy Spirit. You were *baptized* by the Spirit. You have been *born again*!

In John chapter 3, Jesus told Nicodemus, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are **born again**” (3:3). It confused the daylight out of that man who had come in the night to speak with Jesus. “‘How can someone be born when they are old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!’” (3:4). Jesus explained that there is one birth of the flesh (in Adam) and another birth of the spirit (in Christ).

“Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, the **new creation** has come: the old has gone, the new is here!”

– 2 Corinthians 5:17

People can try so hard to purify their own hearts through following God’s law and doing good works, but they fail miserably. This is because they are attempting to walk in a God-pleasing manner while they’re still spiritually dead. What all of us need is a righteous status attained by faith in Jesus. Period. He made your scarlet sins as white as snow. He removed your dead spiritual heart and put a clean, pure heart in its place. He gave you a new birth. You are a new creation in Christ.

---

## Search the Scriptures

What does it mean to be *in Adam*?

- Genesis 2:16-17
- Genesis 3
- Ephesians 4:18
- Ephesians 2:1-5
- Romans 8:19-23
- Romans 5:12

- Psalm 53:2-3
- Psalm 51:5-10
- 1 Corinthians 15:21-22,42-49

How are you a new creation *in Christ*?

- Genesis 1:3
- 2 Corinthians 4:3-6
- Ezekiel 36:26-27
- 1 Corinthians 6:19
- 1 Corinthians 12:13
- John 3:1-16
- 1 Peter 1:3,23
- John 1:12-13
- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Matthew 5:8

Does righteousness come from ourselves or from God?

- Romans 10:2-4
- John 6:63
- Isaiah 1:18

## 4

# Stinkin' Thinkin'

Wouldn't it be great if the immediate result of receiving a new heart would be perfect living, and our days of participating in sin would be over? Unfortunately, it doesn't quite work that way. We still live in a fallen world, and sin remains available to us. Sin is still an option. We can still choose it. But what happens when we do?

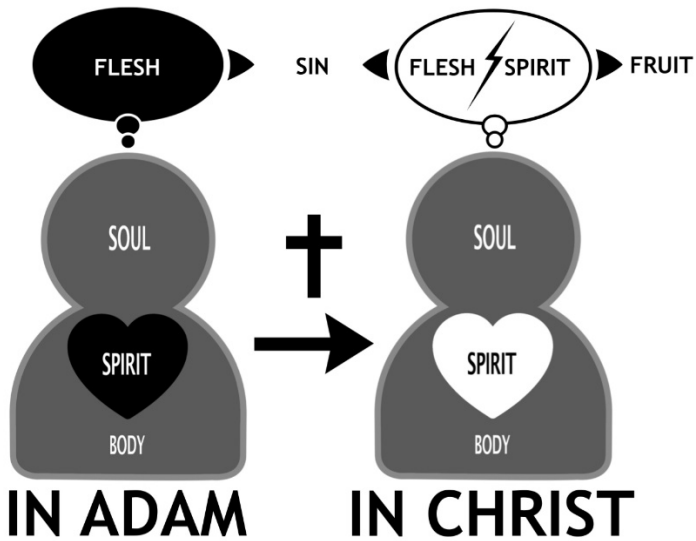
Our flesh, by its very nature, prefers to live according to the things that give us satisfaction. *Flesh* in this biblical context doesn't refer to the skin that covers our muscles, bones, and organs. Rather, it encompasses our natural way of doing things – the habits, patterns of thinking, and desires we're born with. Even as new creations, we still battle the flesh in this earthly life. "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh" (Galatians 5:17). Sin doesn't mesh with our new hearts. It's incompatible with the new nature by which we may now live. When we participate in sin, we're miserable. We know something is terribly wrong.

God is well aware of the struggle you face even now. Out of His great mercy, He did not leave you defenseless. Remember that Holy Spirit that sealed your salvation? That Holy Spirit is now living inside your new, clean heart providing powerful ammunition for the battle. You now have a very real, effectual source of strength upon which to draw that you did not have available to you before. You can now "walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16,25). In other words, the divine power that made you eternally alive is the same power that is accessible to you to help you live in a right and good way day-by-day.

When you get in step with the Spirit, you're not controlled by that old flesh. The Holy Spirit produces a whole different array of desires and loves and yearnings and longings and fruit into which you may freely tap. But you've got a choice. You can live by the



desires of the flesh, or you can live by the direction and power of the Holy Spirit.



Consider this: “When you were slaves to sin...what benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!”(Romans 6:20-21). At one time you “were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures,” but now Jesus has set you free “through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:3,5). He has supplied the power by which you are able to overcome the sway of sin. You are a new creation in Christ, and you have at your disposal the divine resources you need “to devote [yourself] to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone!” (Titus 3:8).

But where do you start? How do you get in step with the Spirit so you can reap the priceless benefits of living in a new way?

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

– Romans 12:2

The **world** represents the culture in which we live—the realm which Satan oversees and rules in this age. He is the “father of lies” who has “no truth in him” (John 8:44). The philosophies of the world are marked by the over-importance of things and power and money and sex. The world offers empty promises that play to our pride and fleshly desires.

Walking in the Spirit involves **mind renewal**. We have extensive baggage that we may not even realize we carry with us because we have spent our whole lives absorbing the propaganda of the culture. We have a whole lot of stinkin’ thinkin’ going on in our minds. There are worldly precepts and ideologies that have woven themselves into the warp and weft of our being. They influence the way in which we view and respond to the world, ourselves, others, and God.

It's not a matter of gathering up every ounce of our courage and strength and saying through gritted teeth, “*I will not allow the world to squeeze me into its mold!*” No. The key to a metamorphosis in the way we live, like a caterpillar being changed into a butterfly, is the renovation of our thinking. The Holy Spirit empowers the metamorphosis, but we are involved in the process.

When we put our faith in Jesus, our hearts become instantly transformed. Dead is alive. Ugly is made beautiful. Sin is washed away <prfff!>. It’s completely done. The heart, where the Holy Spirit lives, doesn’t need any further transformation. But the mind is an entirely different subject altogether. We must cooperate in allowing the Holy Spirit to flush out the garbage that is in there to bring our minds into sync with the mind of Christ. That’s how we throw off burdens, escape snares, and walk through this life in freedom and peace and joy. “The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace” (Romans 8:6). When we allow the Word of God to saturate our thinking and gradually change our modus operandi, the blessings are phenomenal!

“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”

– Psalm 119:103-105

Having a renewed mind is “life for you, an ornament to grace your neck” (Proverbs 3:22). You are blessed when you walk, not in the counsel of the world, but with your thinking re-shaped by God’s truth. “That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers” (Psalm 1:3).

We all have a lot to learn. Whether we’ve been a Christian for two minutes, two days, two months, two decades, or a whole lifetime, we’ve got a lot to learn. Mind renewal involves years of growing. It doesn’t happen overnight. It requires our cooperation with the Holy Spirit as we soak up the truth from His Word, displace the lies, and experience the blessings of living out our new lives in Christ.

We need to take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ. That’s work. That’s hard. It takes effort because the world and our flesh have been influencing us for so long. We can find ourselves entrenched in ruts that seem normal and acceptable and comfortable until God shines the light of truth on the subject. We can face serious struggles at those junctures.

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord’s unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!”

– Psalm 32:8-11

Mind renewal is a journey that isn’t always linear or smooth sailing. At times we slip back into old patterns of stinkin’ thinkin’, old habits, old ways. There can be fits and starts. But God’s Word is living and active. His Spirit is always working within us. And our Father is so very patient with us as He carries out His plan and purpose for our lives. He desires for us to experience the blessings that accompany a truth-actuated mind.

The world has built up lofty fortresses with strong foundations, but you can take heart because “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

– 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

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## Search the Scriptures

What is true about this world and our living in it?

- John 8:44
- Ephesians 2:1-2
- Proverbs 16:25
- Romans 8:6
- 1 Peter 5:8

Compare walking in the Spirit vs. walking in the flesh.

- Galatians 5:16-26
- 1 Corinthians 10:13
- Ephesians 6:10-18
- Romans 6:11-22
- Titus 3:3-8

How do you walk in the Spirit? What are the results?

- Romans 12:2
- Ephesians 4:22-24
- Psalm 119:103-105
- Proverbs 3:21-26
- Psalm 1:1-3
- Psalm 32:8-11
- 1 John 4:4
- 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

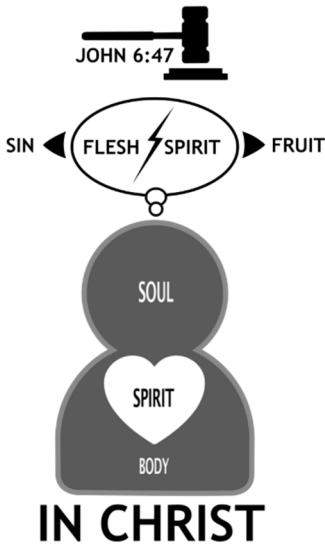
# 5

## Blessed Assurance

“Very truly I tell you, the one who believes **has** eternal life.”  
– Jesus in John 6:47

That is God’s clear and simple promise to you. If you have put your trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ, then you are saved. You belong to Him now and forever. It’s not a matter of you trying to hang onto Jesus for dear life. It’s a matter of Him holding onto you. Nothing can snatch you out of His hand. *Nothing*. Your eternal home is heaven. “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23). God—the One who made the promise—*will* carry it through to completion.

But the enemy still likes to whisper in our ears, as he did in Eden so long ago, “Did God *really* say...?” (Genesis 3:1) “Is that what God *really* means? Surely, that’s far too easy. There must be more to it than that.” ...and seeds of doubt are planted in our minds.



God warned us in advance of this tactic of the enemy so we would not be shaken by it. The enemy hisses, “Look at you. You don’t much *look* like a child of God. How can you really be sure that you are?” And then well-meaning but misguided Christians might take up the cause. They’ll tell you that how you look after placing your faith in Jesus proves whether or not you really and truly have saving faith. After all, they reason, if the Holy Spirit is inside of you renovating you, then everyone should be able to see the evidence of that. And if you mess up, boy, you’d better question your salvation. They proceed to set up checklists and arbitrary litmus tests to determine what you should look like before they—or you—can be convinced that you are saved.

Don’t go there, Christian friend. Don’t get sucked into that. Take a deep breath and rest easy in your salvation. *Nowhere* in Scripture does God lay out checklists and litmus tests by which we must prove our redemption. To be sure, His holy book shows us the good and right and true way to live. He lays out what is beneficial to us and others, as well as pleasing to Himself. And we know the kind of fruit the Holy Spirit produces within us and through us if we don’t set up roadblocks. But these things are neither prerequisites nor reliable confirmations of our salvation. God’s directives are meant to guide our Christian walk after we’ve placed our faith in Jesus. That is, they are all part of that life-long mind renewal and metamorphosis process which God uses to mold us and shape our character into the image of His Son. That doesn’t happen overnight.

If the directives in Scripture are a measure of anything at all for Christians, perhaps they might measure in some way our spiritual growth and maturity...or maybe they simply measure whether we’re having a good day or a bad day...or a good moment or bad moment. But how well we conform to God’s commands has nothing to do with proving our salvation status.

What we see on the outside does not always reflect the state of someone’s heart. A person can walk the walk, talk the talk, and look great on the outside while having no saving faith in Christ. Conversely, an individual can blend in with the rest of the world, even though God has given him a new heart sealed with His Spirit. “The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at

the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Judging eternal destinies is His business to attend to. Not ours.

God does not want His children to be fretting about checking off boxes and satisfying the squinted-eye scrutiny of self-appointed judges. Who do we think we are to stand in the place of God? "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?" (James 4:12). We do not have the right, the authority, or the capability.

**"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.** Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

– Galatians 5:1

If you get caught up in striving in the flesh to somehow *prove* to yourself and others that you are saved, how is that really much different than striving in the flesh in an effort to *earn* eternal life? The practical result is the same: living life under the crushing weight of legalism (strict compliance to rules and the Law).

"Who has bewitched you?...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

Under legalism, the Church becomes saturated with judgmentalism, arrogance, and fear. It's a slow fade into hypocrisy, despair, and hopelessness. That is not what God has for His children. He has given you rest from striving and lifted the burden of the Law. He desires for you to be flyin' free, enjoying your new life in Christ, and getting energized by the incredible discoveries you're making about the God who is walking right along with you. "From the Lord comes deliverance [salvation]" (Psalm 3:8). And thank God that it does! His mercy and grace are infinitely greater than ours. "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).



Perhaps legalism is a knee-jerk reaction to the culture infiltrating the Church. Maybe it's the modern-day equivalent of Pharisaic efforts to maintain the holiness of God's people, even if only externally. Holiness is important for God's people. Absolutely! It's God's will for us. We are called to reflect the light of Jesus to a lost and perishing world. But genuine metamorphosis happens from the inside out. Not from the outside in. Mind renewal and life change are empowered by the Holy Spirit. No one can do the job of the Holy Spirit. It's one thing to come alongside a brother or sister in Christ to teach, convince, rebuke, exhort, and encourage in all patience from a motive of love and humility. But it is a far different matter to coerce people into submission to our expectations by threatening them with the very assurance of their salvation. Our charge is to "continue to work out [grow in] *your own* salvation," not to manage or appraise someone else's (Philippians 2:12). God Himself is the author and perfecter of each one's faith.

God's grace—His undeserved, unearned love and favor—is an unconditional gift. There are no caveats, contingencies, or covert clauses attached to it. It is a gift of freedom given to you by the nail-pierced hands of the One who paid for it with His life.

Freedom is inherently risky. God is fully aware of that. Even though "the grace of God...teaches us to say 'no' to ungodliness and worldly passions," Christians can abuse their freedom and use it as an opportunity for fleshly living (Titus 2:12). But the paradox is that this kind of living isn't freedom at all! It is in effect a return to slavery. God's grace is a gift that liberates us so we "may take hold of the life that is truly life!" (1 Timothy 6:19).

The more we comprehend God's grace, the more we can exhale, and the less afraid we are to genuinely open up to Him and others. We can erase the worry lines, release our death grip, draw close to Him, learn from Him, lean on Him...and *love* Him. We need to remove the legalistic leaven from the Good News. Just as leaven (yeast) incorporates itself into a whole batch of dough, legalism's effects are pervasive. Whether subtle or overt in form, legalism is caustic to the gospel, corroding the meaning of grace.

Confidence in our salvation does not come from our performance as Christians, which is inconsistent at best. **Rather, our assurance is exclusively anchored in God's character.** Eternal life is assured to us solely on the basis of God's rock-solid faithfulness to carry out His promise to all who believe in Christ.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

- Romans 15:13

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## Search the Scriptures

What is God’s promise? How can you be assured of your salvation?

- John 6:47
- John 10:28-30
- Hebrews 10:23
- 1 John 2:25
- John 3:16
- John 3:36
- John 14:1-3
- Numbers 23:19
- 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Why are works not clear-cut proof of salvation?

- Genesis 3:1
- Luke 18:9-14
- 2 Corinthians 11:14-15
- Matthew 7:1-5,22-23

- 1 Corinthians 3:1-3
- Matthew 23:5-7,13,27-28
- Galatians 2:4
- 1 Samuel 16:7
- Hebrews 4:13
- Matthew 13:24-30,36-43  
(Note: The weeds in the parable are noxious darnel that looks exactly like wheat until harvest time.)

Who has authority over your salvation? Why?

- Romans 8:29-30
- James 4:12
- Galatians 5:1
- Galatians 3:1-3
- Galatians 5:7-9
- Galatians 2:19-21
- Colossians 2:20-23
- Psalm 3:8
- John 8:36
- 2 Timothy 4:2
- Philippians 2:12-13

- Hebrews 12:2
- Galatians 1:6-9

How do works figure into your walk *in Christ*?

- 1 Peter 1:15-16
- Titus 2:11-12
- Galatians 5:13
- 1 Corinthians 6:12
- 1 Corinthians 10:23-24
- Romans 6:1-4,15-22
- 1 Timothy 6:19

Be blessed!

- Romans 15:13

## 6

# In View of God's Mercy

"Therefore, there is now **no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus..."

– Romans 8:1

None. Yet you still think, say, and do things that are not pleasing to God. Of course you do. Even though you have been spiritually reborn in Christ, you are still navigating through life in mortal flesh with its stinkin' thinkin' and the option to walk by the flesh instead of by the Spirit. Judicially, you have been made perfect now and forever. You have the indwelling Holy Spirit who is at work within your new, clean heart empowering your metamorphosis into the image of Jesus. But in practice, you will not be made perfect this side of heaven.

Unless and until we fully understand that Jesus already suffered God's wrath for every last one of our sins—past, present, and future—we will never experience the peace, the shalom, the wholeness and completeness and wellbeing and inner quietude that God desires for us to have. We will instead experience guilt-driven anxiety and apprehension, disorientation, and exhaustion from bobbing and weaving before God.

Listen, have you ever considered the fact that because God is just, He *cannot* condemn you for any of your sins now? It's true. Because Jesus paid the price in full, once and for all, there is nothing left for which to condemn you! It would be unjust of God to do so because He has already hurled all your sins away "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). He promises, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25). Even when you behave waywardly, He remains faithful to you because He cannot act contrary to His own nature.

It is paramount to clearly know how God sees you now. The way in which you perceive God's view of you powerfully shapes not only your response to Him, but also the way in which you live. Think

about that. If you believe that God has you under His fierce scrutiny, just waiting for you to mess up so He can rain down fire and brimstone on your head, how do you respond to that in your heart? In your life? But what if, instead, you understand the truth that the God of heaven and earth is now your merciful and gracious Father who fully and unconditionally accepts you, warts and all; that He gladly “crowns you with love and compassion” (Psalm 103:4); and that He attentively guides, provides, protects, and cares for you as your Good Shepherd. What is your heart’s response to that? How does that play out in your life?

There is nothing you can do to make God love you any more than He already does because you didn’t merit His love in the first place. And there is nothing that can separate you from His love. That is critical to grasp. You were once a child of wrath, but you are now a child of God. When God looks at you, He sees Jesus’ righteousness covering you. “Your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3).

Zechariah chapter 3 is a striking depiction of what happened to you when you put your faith in Jesus. In this heavenly scene, a man named Joshua is standing before God. Satan is standing to his right ready to accuse him of his sins. But before his accuser can get anywhere, the Lord says, “The Lord rebuke you, Satan!...Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?” (3:2). Picture a little stick (you) still smoldering from being plucked by God out of the fires of hell. God then commanded that Joshua’s filthy clothes be removed, and to Joshua He said, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you” (3:4). Joshua received the robes and a clean turban on his head. On what grounds was God able to do this? By the work of Jesus Christ whose shed blood would remove iniquity “in a single day” (3:9) on the cross. The Lord then sent Joshua off to walk in the newness of life.

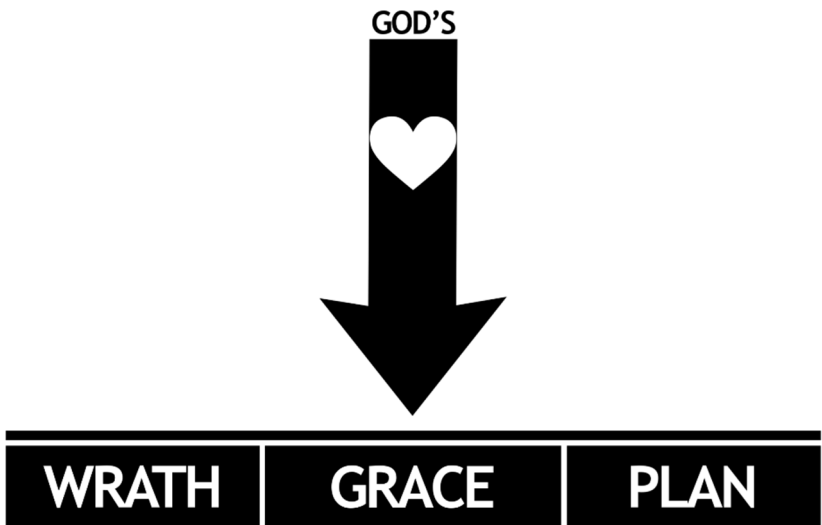
It is the very same scenario for you. Although you were once guilty before God, Christ redeemed you. He scrubbed you up and clothed you with His own perfect righteousness. You have been made new. And that is exactly how God regards you.

It is imperative to know the truth and build your new life in Christ on the proper footing. You will get caught up in Law-based living and rule-following if you don’t have the right foundation. You

will see the commands in Scripture as a list of shoulds and shouldn'ts rather than something the Holy Spirit empowers you to do in view of God's mercy.

**In view of God's mercy.** That is the key.

The Christian life is not about self-improvement or reforming ourselves. It's not about polishing up our exteriors so we look good. It is about living life in view of what God has done *to* us and *for* us. It is about living life in the context of that astonishing heavenly transaction and all that is ours to claim in Christ.



The foundation upon which our Christian walk is based has three components. First, it is important that we have a true picture of how sinful humans are before a holy God. We need to understand that God's **wrath** toward sin is completely warranted. Second, we need to have a thorough grasp of God's **grace**. Only God is able to take care of our sin problem. Jesus turned away God's wrath from us and onto Himself. In Christ, we have peace with God, and we no longer need to fear death.

The third stone in the foundation is also fundamental. It is God's **plan for this life**. It's something we don't have to wait for until we

take our final breath. This plan starts out with the proclamation that for all those who have put their faith in Jesus, there is now no condemnation. Right now, in this life, for those who are in Christ, there is no condemnation coming down at us from God, and we should not accept by any stretch of the imagination the condemnation of others on us. Jesus came so that we would not only have eternal life, but also abundant life in the here-and-now. We have the Holy Spirit indwelling us and empowering our new way of life.

And as the Holy Spirit works on renovating us from the inside out into the image of God's Son, it is vital to know where this entire foundation has come from. *It has come from God.* We must not mess with this foundation. We must not add to or take anything away. Otherwise, we're going to get confused. We're going to get confused by the Law. We're going to get confused by keeping rules. We're going to get confused by thinking we need to make ourselves look good so that God will give us His stamp of approval. *We've already got His stamp of approval! We have God's favor! We've been given new hearts.* We are new creations.

The foundation was laid by God Himself so that we can build our new lives in Christ on it. Christian living must be established on this foundation, vertically and horizontally, in view of God's mercy.

"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life...very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature..."

- 2 Peter 1:3-4

It all comes from God. He has done all the work to provide everything you and I need to enjoy abundant life in Him. He has "called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" and set you free so that you may proclaim His excellencies to the world (1 Peter 2:9).

"I will exalt you, my God the King;  
I will praise your name for ever and ever.  
Every day I will praise you  
and extol your name for ever and ever.  
Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;  
his greatness no one can fathom.



One generation commends your works to another;  
they tell of your mighty acts.  
They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty –  
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.  
They tell of the power of your awesome works –  
and I will proclaim your great deeds.  
They celebrate your abundant goodness  
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.  
The Lord is gracious and compassionate,  
slow to anger and rich in love.  
The Lord is good to all;  
he has compassion on all he has made.  
The Lord is righteous in all his ways  
and faithful in all he does.  
The Lord is near to all who call on him  
To all who call on him in truth.  
My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord.  
Let every creature praise his holy name  
for ever and ever.”

–Psalm 145:1-9,17-18,21

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## Search the Scriptures

Does God still condemn you for your sins? Why or why not?

- Romans 8:1
- Psalm 103
- Isaiah 38:17
- Isaiah 43:25
- John 14:27
- 2 Timothy 2:13

- 1 John 4:9-10
- Romans 8:31-39
- Colossians 3:3
- Galatians 2:20

What does your relationship with God look like now?

- Zechariah 3
- Isaiah 61:10
- Romans 6:4
- Romans 5:1-2
- Matthew 11:28-30
- 2 Peter 1:1-4
- 1 Peter 2:9

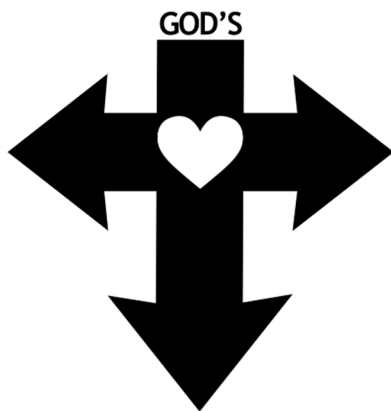
How awesome is our God?!

- Psalm 145

## 7

# Grace Walking

You have come into a relationship with God that you did not—and could not—have before. The foundation He has put in place for you in Christ provides everything you need. Until you take your final breath, “it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). It is the Holy Spirit who has made you spiritually alive and sealed you as His. It is the Holy Spirit who is empowering your mind renewal. It is the Holy Spirit upon whom you may draw for strength and peace. And it is the Holy Spirit who bears fruit through you as your life intersects with those around you. What a radical change from when you were in Adam! Once you were a “dead man walking.” Now you’re grace walking.



**WRATH**

**GRACE**

**PLAN**

Not only does God continually pour down His mercy, love, and grace on you, but you are now a living, breathing conduit of that mercy, love, and grace to the world. God’s presence and power has

converged with your life and is meant to flow out of you to touch the lives of those with whom you come into contact day by day. Having the right perspective in this process is important. You are not striving in your own power to accomplish the work of God. Your job is to be aware when God's work intersects your life and join Him in it.

"But we have this treasure [the Holy Spirit] in jars of clay [our bodies] to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."

- 2 Corinthians 4:7

As you join God in His work, you'll find that He intends for His children to do life together. All born-again believers in Jesus are a part of His family – part of the **body of Christ**. We are meant to share His truth with each other and offer support and encouragement to one another. God fits us all together in exactly the configuration He desires for us to function. When each person is fulfilling his or her unique, God-given role, the result is a beautiful, perfectly healthy, smooth-running body that functions optimally to proclaim Jesus Christ and build one another up toward a mature knowledge of the things of God.

God does not use a cookie cutter to make people. God has never created anyone like you before, and He will never create anyone like you in the future. Each of us is unique. No one in the body of Christ is exactly alike. The Holy Spirit also distributes to each of us a variety of spiritual gifts to exercise within the body of Christ just as He wills. Spiritual gifts are special empowerments of the Holy Spirit that help Him accomplish His work through us. Some may be gifted by God as preachers or teachers. Others are gifted in hospitality or encouragement. Still others might be gifted in discernment or evangelism. Some gifts are exercised very publicly, while others are meant to be implemented behind-the-scenes. Regardless of how God chooses to use any of us at any given time, *all* parts of the body of Christ are important. The eye is just as important as the hand, which is just as important as the gall bladder in God's plan. From the one who teaches Sunday school to the one who cleans the church's toilets, each is essential and valued in Christ's body.

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). God prepared in advance how He would weave each one into His tapestry so that the whole body of believers in Christ, “joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:16).

God also intends for His children to make connections, develop relationships, and have meaningful interactions with the community outside of the body of Christ. He has sent us forth to be His emissaries, bringing His truth, hope, healing, grace, love, light, and life to the world. “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (Romans 10:15)

Jesus promised, “‘Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.’ By this he meant the Spirit...” (John 7:38-39). You and I are channels for that powerful and revitalizing living water as it flows out from its Source, through our innermost being, and out to parched and despairing souls.

As we walk as His children, we must remember the foundation established by God. If we’re trying to do things by our own strength or in an effort to make ourselves look good, it’s not going to be pretty. Our new life in Christ has no checklists. It is when we live in view of God’s mercy toward us that we in turn can effectively love, serve, forgive, comfort, encourage, and edify others. That’s when life for us gets exciting! That’s when life is worthwhile! And that’s when the work of God gets accomplished.

What is grace walking, ultimately? It’s freedom, peace, purpose, and privilege under God’s favor. It’s listening and responding to our Lord. It’s being tuned in to God’s Word and letting His Spirit use it to shape our perspectives, our attitudes, our words, our decisions, our behaviors. It’s being imitators of God “as dearly loved children,” walking “in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Just as Jesus gave Himself as a sacrifice for you, He desires for you to present your own body as a “living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1).

To be a **living sacrifice** means to be fully at God's disposal. As we offer our whole living self to Him, our feet – what do they do? They walk in the paths that He would have us go. Our lips speak the truth and bring messages of hope in Jesus. Our hands lift the fallen. Our arms embrace the lonely and the unloved. Our ears listen to the cries of the mourning, the cries of the distressed. And our eyes look humbly and patiently to God. These things are not self-generated. They are not self-produced. They are brought forth by the living water that flows out from redeemed hearts. When we present ourselves as living sacrifices, not only do we enjoy great blessings ourselves, but this is also the highest form of worship!

Worship is way more than singing praises to God on Sunday morning. Worship is all-encompassing. Worship is wiping runny noses in the name of Jesus. It's fixing someone's air conditioning all to the glory of God. It's being kind to a stranger. It's waking up in the morning and asking God to use us how He best sees fit. We can even worship God in our resting and enjoyment of His creation.

Jesus said the key is loving God "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and loving "your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39). Grace walking is allowing God's love to so saturate your life that it overflows and floods your world.

"Now may the God of peace...equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

- Hebrews 13:20-21

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## Search the Scriptures

How does the Holy Spirit empower you in the body of Christ?

- Philippians 2:1-13
- 2 Corinthians 3:5-6

- Ephesians 1:22-23
- 1 Corinthians 12
- Ephesians 4:11-16
- 2 Corinthians 4:7
- Ephesians 2:8-10
- Romans 12:3-8
- Hebrews 10:24-25

What does the Holy Spirit empower you to do in the world?

- Mark 16:15
- Acts 1:8
- Matthew 28:18-20
- 2 Corinthians 5:20
- Romans 10:14-15
- John 7:38-39
- John 4:7-26
- Ephesians 5:1-2
- Romans 12:1
- Acts 20:35
- 2 Corinthians 9:7

- Matthew 22:37-40
- Philippians 2:1-11

Who equips you, and for what purpose?

- Hebrews 13:20-21



## 8

### Pass the Liquid-Plumr®

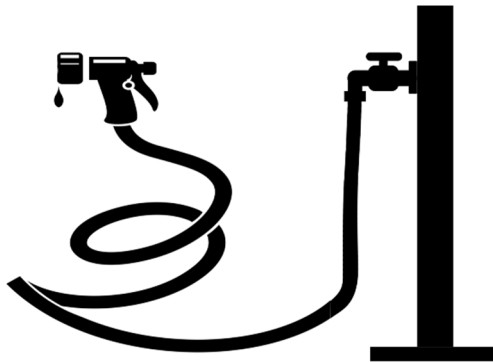
The reality is that sometimes God's children resemble stagnant cisterns more than channels of living water. Those harsh words we just growled at our spouse? The selfish things we did this morning? The bitterness that has crept into our attitude toward that person? Hmm... Instead of being free-flowing conduits of the Holy Spirit, we've got ourselves a clog.

But God, in His mercy, has even provided the remedy for this. 1 John 1:9 is our divinely supplied Liquid-Plumr®.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

- 1 John 1:9

But aren't our sins already forgiven forever? Yes! There is a difference, however, between our standing and our state. Positionally, we are completely clean forever before God. But in practice, we still sin. Our **relationship** with God does not change. We are forever His children, holy and beloved. But our day-to-day **fellowship** with Him can be affected when we *grieve* or *quench* the Holy Spirit with a besetting sin. It's like a kink in the hose.



It's analogous to the functioning of our own families. Our children are our children and will always be our children. We love them to pieces and want the very best for them. By grace, we overlook a whole lot of infractions. But at times, our fellowship with our children can be a little shaky. Think, for example, of the terrible twos. Or the teenage years. 'nuf said.

When sin creates some friction in your fellowship with God, the Holy Spirit goes into convicting mode. Convicting – *not* condemning. Our God no longer speaks the language of condemnation to those who are in Christ. Conviction involves convincing or persuading you to look at the issue that is causing problems in your life. He brings the matter at hand to your mind and keeps it there until you come to Him to deal with it. Sometimes you need some mind renewal first. You might even find yourself going back to Him many times for the same issue until you can fully work through it with Him over time. But when you confess to God that what you have thought, said, or done is indeed wrong, it is forgiven. It no longer stands as a hindrance in your daily-walk-fellowship with God.

Isn't that just so like our gracious God? ...going the extra mile or two – or million! You don't have to sit and fret, trying to put together lists of the sins you've committed all day in case you neglect to confess something. No. Relax, Beloved of God. If there's something Abba wants to work on with you, you will certainly know. He is faithful to bring issues to your mind and help you see them for what they are. God is the One directing and empowering your metamorphosis. Your job is to be sensitive to the nudging of His Spirit and respond. "So, as the Holy Spirit says: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...'" (Hebrews 3:7-8).

"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

- Psalm 139:23-24

When the Lord helps you clean out the clogs every now and again, you remain a vessel "useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work" (2 Timothy 2:21). That's what it means to abide in Christ and stay connected to the Vine.

What a relief that God doesn't tackle all our faults and foibles at once. He sands off a rough spot here, melts off a little dross there, chisels away at some things that don't belong over there. But not in one fell swoop. We'd be a mess! He is such a patient, kind, and compassionate Father. He knows your frame and loves you endlessly regardless. When you stumble, you "will not fall, for the Lord upholds [you] with his hand" (Psalm 37:24).

All sin is against God, but others often suffer in the wake of our transgressions. God desires for us to live peaceably with everyone to the extent that it depends on us. That means loving without hypocrisy. Blessing those who persecute us. Not repaying evil for evil or taking our own vengeance for offenses against us. As children of God, walking in humility is crucial. That's when we best reflect Jesus and most deeply experience the fullness of God's blessings which then emanate out to others. "I'm sorry" should be ready on our tongues when we hurt someone, and we should be willing to liberally apply forgiveness when someone hurts us, even when they don't ask for forgiveness. ...all in view of God's mercy toward us.

Now, sometimes it's necessary for God to chasten us if we're not getting the message – if we're being defiantly disobedient. He knows just how to turn up the heat in our lives to get our attention. Again, we come to a dichotomy that's important to understand. **Discipline** is *not* the same thing as punishment. Punishment is the imposition of a penalty for an offense. The underlying motive of punishment is wrath, and the goal is justice. God has zero wrath toward His children. Jesus already paid our penalty and satisfied His justice. We must disconnect the concept of punishment from the concept of discipline in our minds. While punishment springs from wrath toward sin, discipline comes from a motive of love. Discipline desires what is best for someone. Discipline involves teaching, reproof, correction, and training so that God's children "may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:17).

When we go wandering off God's path into the thorns and briars and brambles, He desires to protect us and steer us back. It's the same reason why parents put up baby gates and install outlet plugs with a toddler in the house. Little ones can otherwise put themselves in a lot of danger without even realizing it. It's why we consistently tell a child not to touch a hot burner when their little fingers are reaching

up to do just that, and it's why we grab them away when they don't heed our instruction. But there may come a day when, after repeated attempts to train the child not to touch the hot stove, we may need to allow them to feel the heat or even get burned. It's not an easy thing for a parent to do, but the long-term results of obedience are far more desirable than the short-term pain involved in those teachable moments. And when our child gets burned, we hold them close, put balm on their wounds, wipe their tears, and move forward together in a much better direction. "The Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in" (Proverbs 3:12).

Not surprisingly, the words *discipline* and *disciple* are closely related. **Discipline** is the training, instruction, and education that helps someone develop to maturity, while a **disciple** is a learner, a pupil, a student. While God's job is to discipline (teach and train) us, it is our job to submit to His discipline as disciples (learners, growers). A disciple is one who studies, listens, and responds to being taught, reproved, corrected, and trained. As disciples, we must put in the effort to become in practice what we already are in position. The Holy Spirit within us empowers the process. But we must cooperate in order to make gains.

It is critical to understand the difference between being a **born-again believer** and a **disciple**. Otherwise, there are a whole lot of passages in Scripture that will be perplexing and disturbing when taken out of context. Being a disciple takes energy and perseverance on our part. We're going to get out of it what we put into it. It takes time and dedication to study, learn, and grow in the knowledge of God and His ways. Not every child of God is necessarily walking as a disciple—a learner, a grower. Some trust Christ as their Savior and then put it on cruise control instead of rolling up their sleeves and taking advantage of the awesome privilege we have been given to learn and mature. Those brothers and sisters remain immature for a long time. They stagnate. At times, you and I might be intensively engaged as a disciple, and at other times not so much. Our *salvation*, however, *does not hinge* on our level of commitment as a disciple. While our walk as a disciple can wax and wane, being a believer sealed by the Holy Spirit is a once-and-done-forever deal.

But why would you want to continue on cruise control when you could be living so much more abundantly? God has given you the

tools to become deeply rooted and built up in the truth so that you may blossom and bear fruit. He has given you His Word, and He invites you to talk with Him at any and all times about any and all things. Did you know that the Holy Spirit even empowers your prayers? God's children may draw on the full resources available to them as they walk as disciples. That's powerful stuff!

In Acts chapter 4, the apostles Peter and John had been arrested for preaching about Jesus. They totally confounded the religious leaders with their testimony. "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Peter and John were fishermen with no formal education. But they had been walking day-by-day with Jesus. That's what made the difference for them. And that's what makes the difference for you and me.

"Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.'"

- 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

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## Search the Scriptures

What is the difference between relationship and fellowship?

- 1 John 1:9

- Ephesians 4:30
- 1 Thessalonians 5:19
- Hebrews 3:7-8
- Psalm 139:23-24
- 2 Timothy 2:20-21
- John 15:3-5,8
- Psalm 103:11-14
- Psalm 37:23-24
- Psalm 51:4
- Matthew 6:14-15
- Romans 12:9-21

What is the difference between punishment and discipline?

- Hebrews 12:4-13
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- Proverbs 3:11-12

What do you discern about discipleship?

- Luke 6:40
- John 8:31-32
- John 13:35

- 1 Corinthians 3:11-15
- Romans 8:26-27
- Proverbs 15:29
- Philippians 4:6-7
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
- Ephesians 4:25-32
- Acts 4:1-22
- Micah 6:8
- 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

## 9

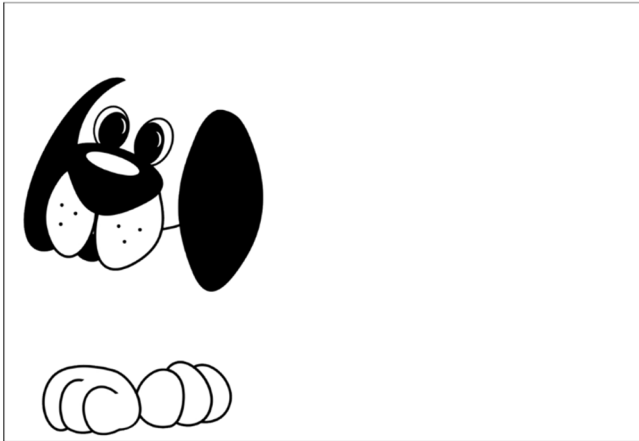
# Rock Solid

“Therefore, everyone who **hears** these words of mine and **puts them into practice** is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it **had its foundation on the rock**. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

- Matthew 7:24-27

Wisely building your new life on the rock has two components. The first part is **hearing**. You have a choice. You can listen to the voice of the culture, or you can listen to the voice of God. But when the storms of life blow, it is only God’s truth that provides a solid, reliable base. “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness,” but “every word of God is flawless” (1 Corinthians 3:19, Proverbs 30:5).

Take a moment to complete this picture mentally or with a pen:





Compare your rendition to the original at the end of this chapter. How did you do?

In the same way, we all have gaps in our understanding of the things of God. None of us has a fully complete knowledge of God and His Word. But we have a tendency as human beings to try to fill in those missing pieces. Sometimes we do that through our own reasoning. We fill in what makes sense to us. Sometimes we fill in the pieces with our own desires – that which we personally want to be true. Sometimes we plug in things that we’ve been told or taught without examining those things. But if we try to fill in the missing pieces in those ways, then our picture of who God is and what God says might not be accurate. ...and that makes our foundation a bit sandy.

*Hearing*, therefore, entails relying on the Bible for correct information and developing the ability to rightly handle the Word of God. Accurately grasping what God says is necessary for mind renewal. We can’t simply rely on our own ideas, and we can’t put God in a box by twisting His words so that they make sense to our finite, mortal minds. His thoughts and ways aren’t just a smidgeon different from our own; they are light years higher than ours! He has an all-encompassing vantagepoint, unlimited understanding, and matchless power – too lofty and incomprehensible for any human to attain. He is the mighty One “who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand” and “with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens” (Isaiah 40:12). “Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way?” (Isaiah 40:14). No one. He is the very source of wisdom. God sits enthroned over all creation. He speaks and acts without asking for our input, our judgment, or our permission.

If we knew what God knows, we would always conclude that His thoughts and ways are spot-on. But we don’t know all that He knows, so we must take Him at His word by faith. There are many times when we just have to shrug and say, “I have no idea how this works or why You’re doing it that way, but You are God and I am not. If You said it, I’m going to believe it’s true, even if I can’t wrap my brain around it...even if it doesn’t fit the paradigm I’ve constructed...even if it’s not what I desire...even if it’s uncomfortable...even if it hurts.”

The Bible *must* be the plumb line from which all things are measured because it is God's personal and perfect revelation of Himself, His will, His works, and His plan to us. It is authoritative. It tells us what is true. It shows us where we are wrong. It helps us get back on track. It guides and directs our lives. It is what the Holy Spirit uses to change our thinking, which in turn has the capacity to change our way of living.

Walking in the Spirit as a disciple of Jesus begins with hearing, but it doesn't end there. While it is necessary to hear and comprehend God's Word, there is another essential component of the unshakable house illustrated in the parable. Scripture provides the supporting bedrock, but the house must then be firmly anchored to it. How? By **putting God's words into practice**. Real-life application secures our lives firmly to the foundation. That is where the stability comes from, even when the winds howl and the waves crash. What good is a strong foundation if the house is merely floating on top of it?

Being founded on the rock involves spending time with Jesus, trusting what He says, and then putting what we've learned into practice. James 2:17 puts it this way: "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." This does not imply that works are required for saving faith. Rather, it's talking about our day-to-day walk as believers in Jesus. It means that if we believe what God says but don't put it into practice, then there are no tangible benefits. It's like having strep throat, picking up the prescribed antibiotic knowing it will treat the problem, and then putting it in a cabinet without taking it. The antibiotic is ineffective if it's not actually used. God's Word is meant to be used! It's meant to produce results!

Hebrews chapter 11 is filled with examples of men and women of God who believed what He said and then put their faith into action. The results were tremendous! But what if they hadn't lived out what they believed? What if, for example, Noah had trusted what God said about the impending worldwide flood and wholeheartedly believed that a boat built according to God's specifications would save his family from that flood, but then he didn't actually build the boat. His excuse could have been that he despised the relentless ridicule of the people. Or that he was too busy. Or that he didn't have the skill. Or that he would rather die in the flood than live in a floating zoo. Or he could have reasoned that since there were no clouds

gathering in the sky just yet, he could put it off for a while. (Aren't we good at justifying disobedience in our minds?) If Noah had not put his faith into action, you and I would not be here today. Noah's faith didn't just dead-end within his mind. It proceeded on into real-life application. His was a living faith. An effectual faith. A fruitful faith. His faith was a rubber-meets-the-road faith that produced the results God desired.

In the same way, we are exhorted, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22). It is those who believe what God says *and then apply it* who "will be blessed in what they do" (James 1:25). If we aren't actually living according to God's counsel, should we expect to reap its benefits in our lives? Should we expect results? But when we allow God's Word to permeate our thoughts, words, and actions, there are many wonderful promises we can claim and blessings we can enjoy.

Disciples of Jesus who are building their lives on the rock—listening, learning, and living it out by the power of the Holy Spirit—are able to remain steadfast and at peace in the eye of life's storms. Anchored to His truth, we are lights for Jesus in a dark world. We give off the fragrance of Christ. And we ultimately magnify and exalt the One who "gave himself for us to redeem us...and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:14).

"The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer;  
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,  
my shield and the horn of my salvation.  
He is my stronghold, my refuge, and my savior...  
The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock!  
Exalted be my God, the Rock, my Savior!"

- 2 Samuel 22:3,47

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## Search the Scriptures

What does it mean to be founded on the rock? How do you profit?

- Matthew 7:24-27

Investigate the first component of building your life on the rock.

- 1 Corinthians 3:19
- Proverbs 30:5
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- 2 Peter 1:19-21
- Hebrews 4:12
- Psalm 119:11
- Isaiah 55:8-11
- Romans 11:33-36
- Psalm 147:5
- Isaiah 40:12-31
- Psalm 115:3
- Job 40:2
- Psalm 19:7-14
- Matthew 4:4

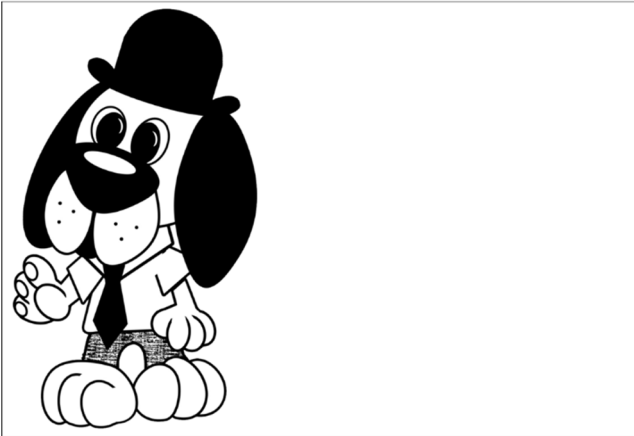
- John 14:26
- Proverbs 3:5-8
- 2 Timothy 2:15

Examine the second component of building your life on the rock.

- James 2:17
- Hebrews 11
- James 1:22-25
- Matthew 5:14-16
- 2 Corinthians 2:14-17
- John 15:18-20
- Titus 2:14

May God be exalted!

- 2 Samuel 22:3,47

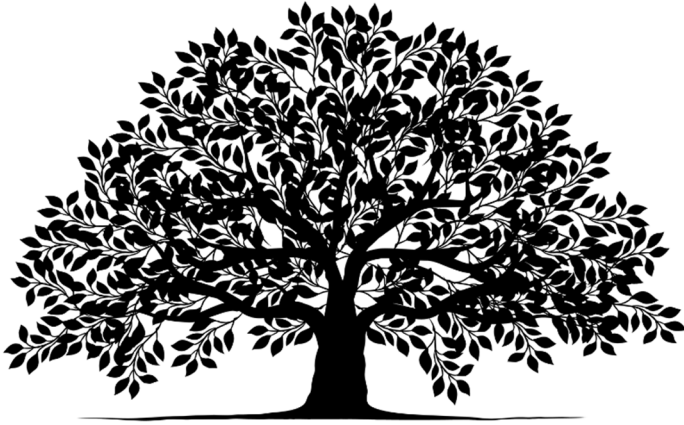


# 10

## Oaks of Righteousness

“They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.”

- Isaiah 61:3



Jesus painted a beautiful picture in Matthew 13:31-32:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches.”

As individual citizens of the kingdom of heaven, we may seem insignificant, but together, we are meant to be like a majestic tree planted by the Lord with deep, well-watered roots and succulent fruit—a tree that provides a place of safety and rest to those seeking refuge from the world’s tempests. ...a tree that lifts its branches heavenward in worship.

It is God who rescued you and me from the fires of hell. It is God who transforms and empowers us. It is God who has chosen to use us as instruments of His grace. It is God who tenderly looks after us as a Shepherd. And it is God who will one day take us home to be with Him forever.

“Every good and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”

– James 1:17-18

Although you and I reap exceedingly glorious benefits in the midst of it all, it’s not about you and me. **IT IS ALL ABOUT GOD.** The purpose of *all* that God says and *all* that God does is to bring glory to Himself. He, alone, is worthy of praise and honor.

“Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;  
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.  
Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
and extol him with music and song.  
For the Lord is the great God,  
the great King above all...  
In his hand are the depths of the earth,  
and the mountain peaks belong to him.  
The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.  
Come, let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;  
For he is our God  
and we the people of his pasture,  
the flock under his care...”

– Psalm 95:1-7

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## Search the Scriptures

Describe the big picture.

- Isaiah 61:3
- Matthew 13:31-32
- Jeremiah 17:7-8
- Colossians 2:6-7
- Psalm 92:12-15
- James 1:17-18
- Isaiah 48:11
- Romans 9:15-24
- Jude 1:24-25

Look up!

- 2 Thessalonians 3:16
- Psalm 95:1-7

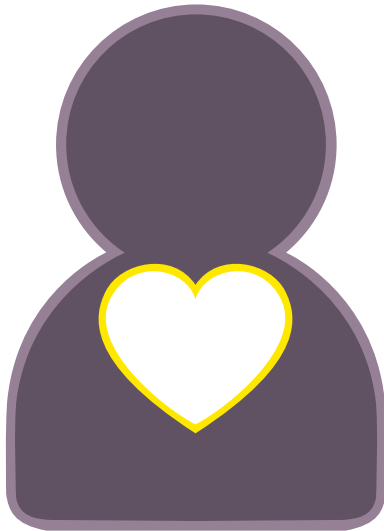


“Not to us, O Lord, not to us,  
But to Your name give glory  
Because of Your lovingkindness,  
Because of Your truth.”

- Psalm 115:1

Whether you are a new believer in Jesus or you have believed for some time, this book is for you.

- Understand your new life in Christ better.
- Find real peace and joy in the full assurance of salvation.
- Learn how to live the abundant life God offers you in the here and now.



**I believe.  
What happened?**