

By Way of Reminder

Lee Giles

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World English Bible (WEB)

Lee Giles

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By Way of Reminder ~ Introduction.....	9
Lesson 1 ~ Romans 5:8-10	10
Lesson 2 ~ Isaiah 43:2	12
Lesson 3 ~ Psalm 18:19b.....	13
Lesson 4 ~ Matthew 14:19-20.....	14
Lesson 5 ~ Isaiah 30:15, 32:17	16
Lesson 6 ~ Colossians 4:7-8.....	18
Lesson 7 ~ Genesis 9:13-15	19
Lesson 8 ~ Isaiah 37:14-21	19
Lesson 9 ~ Isaiah 43:19	21
Lesson 10 ~ Ephesians 5:29-30	22
A Note About Divine Health.....	23
Lesson 11 ~ Galatians 2:20.....	24
Lesson 12 ~ 1 John 4:16	26
Lesson 13 ~ Psalm 23:1	27
Lesson 14 ~ 2 Corinthians 1:3-4	28
Lesson 15 ~ 1 Peter 5:6-10.....	29
Lesson 16 ~ Isaiah 30:18	30
A Note About Sin	31
Lesson 17 ~ Good News for the Christian.....	32
Lesson 18 ~ 2 Chronicles 5:10	33
Lesson 19 ~ 1 John 5:18	34
Lesson 20 ~ God is Able	35
Lesson 21 ~ Philippians 2:13	37
Lesson 22 ~ John 11:5-7.....	39
Lesson 23 ~ John 5:8.....	40
Lesson 24 ~ Romans 5:5	41
Lesson 25 ~ Deuteronomy 6:5	42
Lesson 26 ~ Ephesians 5:1-2	43
Lesson 27 ~ Romans 8:5-8	44
Lesson 28 ~ John 6:18-21.....	45
Lesson 29 ~ Isaiah 3:10	46
Lesson 30 ~ Luke 10:42	47
Lesson 31 ~ Jeremiah 29:13	48
Lesson 32 ~ Deuteronomy 17:19	49

By Way of Reminder

Lesson 33 ~ 2 Samuel 6:14.....	50
Lesson 34 ~ John 14:15.....	51
Lesson 35 ~ Hosea 6:6.....	52
Lesson 36 ~ John 7:23.....	53
Lesson 37 ~ John 8:31-32.....	54
Lesson 38 ~ Philippians 1:15-18.....	55
Lesson 39 ~ Romans 7:22-23.....	56
A Note About Lesson 39.....	57
Lesson 40 ~ John 3:27.....	58
Lesson 41 ~ John 3:34b.....	59
Lesson 42 ~ Lamentations 2:8.....	60
Lesson 43 ~ Lamentations 2:9.....	61
Lesson 44 ~ John 9:22.....	62
Lesson 45 ~ 1 John 5:4-5.....	63
Lesson 46 ~ Psalm 92:4.....	64
Lesson 47 ~ Ecclesiastes 12:1.....	65
Lesson 48 ~ Hebrews 4:15.....	66
Lesson 49 ~ Ezekiel 43:12.....	67
Lesson 50 ~ Luke 1:79b.....	68
Lesson 51 ~ Psalm 56:3-4.....	69
Lesson 52 ~ Psalm 23:5a.....	70
Lesson 53 ~ Jeremiah 26:3.....	70
Lesson 54 ~ Daniel 6:10-11.....	71
Lesson 55 ~ Daniel 4:27.....	72
Lesson 56 ~ Ezekiel 11:8.....	73
Lesson 57 ~ Isaiah 14:27.....	74
Lesson 58 ~ Lamentations 3:33.....	75
Lesson 59 ~ Exodus 32:9-14.....	76
Lesson 60 ~ John 17:3.....	77
Lesson 61 ~ John 10:3-5.....	78
Lesson 62 ~ Hebrews 4:2.....	79
Lesson 63 ~ John 3:23.....	80
Lesson 64 ~ John 1-5.....	81
Lesson 65 ~ Acts 14:17.....	82
Lesson 66 ~ Isaiah 14:2.....	83

Lesson 67 ~ Isaiah 42:15-16	84
Lesson 68 ~ John 10:29	85
Lesson 69 ~ Luke 18:19	86
Lesson 70 ~ John 21:3	87
Lesson 71 ~ Psalm 103:7	88
Lesson 72 ~ Haggai 2:23	89
Lesson 73 ~ Matthew 5:3	90
Lesson 74 ~ Luke 10:38-42, John 12:1-3a	91
Lesson 75 ~ John 12:3b	92
Lesson 76 ~ John 12:35	93
Lesson 77 ~ Luke 2:48b-50	94
Lesson 78 ~ Luke 8:37	95
Lesson 79 ~ Malachi 3:6	96
Lesson 80 ~ Malachi 3:16a	97
Lesson 81 ~ Joel 2:13a	98
Lesson 82 ~ Joel 2:13b	99
Lesson 83 ~ 1 Corinthians 6:12	100
Lesson 84 ~ Nehemiah 8:5-6	101
Lesson 85 ~ Amos 7:1-2	102
Lesson 86 ~ Jonah 4:2b	103
Lesson 87 ~ Psalm 44:3	104
Lesson 88 ~ Micah 3:11	105
Lesson 89 ~ John 13:3-4	106
Lesson 90 ~ 2 Corinthians 5:14	107
Lesson 91 ~ Amos 3:2	108
Lesson 92 ~ John 17:6	109
Lesson 93 ~ Micah 6:8	110
Lesson 94 ~ Jonah 2:4	111
Lesson 95 ~ Hebrews 13:19	112
Lesson 96 ~ Luke 1:75	113
Lesson 97 ~ Nehemiah 8:2	114
Lesson 98 ~ Lamentations 3:28	115
Lesson 99 ~ John 13:23	116
Lesson 100 ~ 1 Corinthians 15:58	117
Lesson 101 ~ Luke 10:25-28	118

By Way of Reminder

Lesson 102 ~ John 6:29	119
Lesson 103 ~ Psalm 144:15b	120
Lesson 104 ~ Malachi 2:5	121
Lesson 105 ~ Hebrews 4:11a	122
Lesson 106 ~ Hebrews 4:11b	123
Lesson 107 ~ Genesis 1:17-18	124
Lesson 108 ~ Mark 12:10-11	125
Lesson 109 ~ John 12:40	126
Lesson 110 ~ John 13:34-35	127
Lesson 111 ~ Luke 12:25	128
Lesson 112 ~ Luke 22:25	129
Lesson 113 ~ Matthew 1:19	130
Lesson 114 ~ Matthew 21:12	131
Lesson 115 ~ Matthew 26:34-35	132
Lesson 116 ~ Acts 9:31	133
Lesson 117 ~ Acts 17:26-27	134
Lesson 118 ~ Genesis 26:3	135
Lesson 119 ~ Luke 24:16	136
Lesson 120 ~ Matthew 21:26	137
Lesson 121 ~ Acts 27:22-25	138
Lesson 122 ~ Psalm 37:8	139
Lesson 123 ~ Genesis 3:10	140
Lesson 124 ~ Romans 4:25b	141
Lesson 125 ~ Psalm 18:6-24	142
Lesson 126 ~ Psalm 30:5	143
Lesson 127 ~ John 16:22	144
Lesson 128 ~ Isaiah 55:8	145
Lesson 129 ~ Genesis 2:25	146
Lesson 130 ~ Hebrews 13:2	147
Lesson 131 ~ John 8:7-11	148
Lesson 132 ~ John 8:35	149
Lesson 133 ~ John 6:12	150
Lesson 134 ~ Daniel 6:20	151
Lesson 135 ~ Luke 24:46-47	152
Lesson 136 ~ Nehemiah 9:12	153

Lesson 137 ~ Psalm 46:9c	154
Lesson 138 ~ Exodus 29:46	155
Lesson 139 ~ Genesis 4:7	156
Lesson 140 ~ Proverbs 1:28	157
Lesson 141 ~ Proverbs 1:33	158
Lesson 142 ~ Proverbs 2:1-5	159
Lesson 143 ~ Nehemiah 9:17-21	160
Lesson 144 ~ Proverbs 3:3-4	161
Lesson 145 ~ Proverbs 3:5-6	162
Lesson 146 ~ Proverbs 3:7-8	163
Lesson 147 ~ Proverbs 3:9-10	164
Lesson 148 ~ Proverbs 3:11-12	165
Lesson 149 ~ Proverbs 3:21-24	166
Lesson 150 ~ Genesis 13:8-11	167
Lesson 151 ~ Genesis 25:34	168
Lesson 152 ~ Hebrews 13:6	169
Lesson 153 ~ Leviticus 1:13	170
Lesson 154 ~ Mark 10:21	171
Lesson 155 ~ Matthew 3:2-3	172
Lesson 156 ~ Psalm 16:6	173
Lesson 157 ~ Psalm 20:7	174
Lesson 158 ~ Psalm 139:12	175
Lesson 159 ~ Romans 14:17	176
Lesson 160 ~ Romans 4:20	177
Lesson 161 ~ Luke 1:35	178
Lesson 162 ~ Colossians 2:17b	179
Lesson 163 ~ Isaiah 40:30-31	180
Lesson 164 ~ Philippians 3:18	181
Lesson 165 ~ Luke 10:41	182
Lesson 166 ~ Luke 19:1-10	183
Lesson 167 ~ Mark 15:21	184
Lesson 168 ~ Psalm 16:8	185
Lesson 169 ~ Hebrews 7:25	186
Lesson 170 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Romans 8:1	187
Lesson 171 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ 1 John 1:9	188

By Way of Reminder

Lesson 172 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Romans 10:9.....190
Lesson 173 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Matthew 6:24.....191
Lesson 174 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Matthew 19:16-29192
Lesson 175 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ John 9:41193
Lesson 176 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ 1 John 1:7-10, 2:1194
Lesson 177 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Romans 14:23195
Lesson 178 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Never Again!.....196
Lesson 179 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Matthew 28:20b197
Lesson 180 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ God Loved Pharaoh199

By Way of Reminder ~ Introduction

2 Peter 3:1-2: "...I am writing to you [to stir] up your sincere mind **by way of reminder**, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand...and the commandment of the Lord and Savior..." (NASB).

Hi, this is Lee Giles from Easy Peasy All-in-One Homeschool. I recorded video teachings over 2022-2023 because I just wanted to talk more about our good Father. It's such an encouragement to me, and I think all of us could probably use the reminders of His goodness. I want us all on solid ground. I don't want to be moved by anything other than the compelling love of Christ! These lessons are edited transcripts of those videos, so if it sounds like I'm speaking, not writing, that's why. Some of the talks I did extemporaneously and others I had written out, though these are still the transcript versions. You can probably "hear" the difference between them.

Lesson 1 ~ Romans 5:8-10

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:8-10, NKJV).

God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. The Bible says there is no greater love than laying down your life for your friend. So, the greatest love was shown to us while we were sinners.

One, His love is steadfast, unending, unchanging. So why do we ever act like we can't trust Him to love us? *I can't trust Him to answer my prayers. I'm not sure that this is going to happen. I'm not sure I'm going to be provided for. I'm not sure I'm going to have what I need. I'm not sure I'm going to be protected.* Acting in fear about these things, when we were complete sinners apart from Him, He showed us the greatest love. His love for you isn't going to shrink at any time. He's unchanging and His love is steadfast and sure; it never fails—love never fails. And He is love; He can't fail you. So, that's how we get our confidence. We're not going to lose His love. He's never going to stop loving us.

Next, “much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” We're saved from wrath. What's wrath? Wrath's the flood. Noah is in the ark; wrath is the bowls being poured out on the population: destruction of a third of the earth kind of thing. Wrath is the earth opening up and swallowing Achan whole. It's the end. Wrath is no more chances—done. That's not for us, it's not for believers; it's never going to be for the believer. Wrath is not for us. We are saved from wrath.

This is different from trials and tribulations. Trials and tribulations are a blessing to the believer. They are a gift to us. Everything that happens to the believer is a blessing. The only thing Satan can do to you is bless you. What?! Because all things work together for good. God is working all things together for those who love Him and have been called according to His purposes, which is you if you are a believer, and you have the spirit of God in you, which makes you a believer. Because we can't believe without Him. It's all a gift from Him, from our good God.

Last verse: “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.” Let me just stop there at the first half of the verse. While we were enemies. Jesus said love your enemies. He doesn't ask us to do something He didn't do first. When He died for us, we were enemies.

We're either a friend to the world and an enemy of God, or a friend to God and an enemy of the world. There is no middle ground. There's a line drawn in the sand. He is so patient and puts up with a lot, waiting for us. He wants us—He wants everyone to be saved—but it's black and white. You are in the kingdom of Satan or you're in the kingdom of God. You're an enemy of God or an enemy of the world. You're a friend of God or a friend of the world. You don't get it both ways and you shouldn't want it both ways. But He said love your enemies; He did it first, He loved us. We were enemies of God and He loved us, and He died for us. He showed us that greatest love: love your enemies.

“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled,” (we’re at peace with God now), “we shall be saved by His life.” That’s how we’re saved. We’re saved, not by reading our Bible a lot, or getting ourselves “good.” (Works are dead works. It will kill you. Don’t do it.) We’re saved by His life. We’re transferred out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God. We’ve crucified ourselves and His life is resurrected in us. It’s not our best life now. It’s not Him making our lives better. Our lives are to be dead and gone. The old creation has passed away. That’s dead, dead, you pass away, you’re dead, crucified. I’m crucified with Christ—self, old-self is nailed to the cross. We’re crucified. We’re dead and it is His life that is resurrected in us. It’s His life that comes through us; it’s His words in our mouths; it’s His thoughts in our minds; it’s His feelings in our hearts; it’s His power in our bodies—it’s His life. The life we live in the flesh we live by faith in the son of God—it’s His life. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me—it’s His life. It’s His life that saves us. He is eternal life. Flesh is going to fail and pass away like the flowers just fade away; His life is the eternal life. It’s His life in us that gives us eternal life, starting now that will continue on forever. You have eternal life if you have the Holy Spirit in you.

Living His life is abiding in Christ. In the vine, we’re connected to Him. His life flows through us—His peace, His joy, His righteousness. You cannot sin because it’s His life in you and He is free from sin, which means the life in you is free from sin. You have the power in you to live righteously because it’s His work, not yours. You can’t do it. You can’t do it, but He can. He can live through you. He can live all those good things through you.

Jesus was the visible image of the invisible God. The disciples said, “Show us the father,” and Jesus said, “You’ve seen Him. You’ve seen me; you’ve seen the Father.” Who’s the visible image now? We’re the visible image of Christ on the earth. People are supposed to look at us and see Christ. It’s a high calling, except it’s not our work, it’s all His work. There is no good in us. Even Jesus said, “Why are you calling me good? No one is good but God.” There’s no good in us, so you don’t have to try to be good. It’s His goodness in us. We just have to love Him and get to know Him. Know Him. Love Him. Totally simple—not always easy—but totally simple, because it’s not our work, it’s His.

Lesson 2 ~ Isaiah 43:2

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you” (Isaiah 43:2, NASB).

Water and fire. Those are God's baptism tools. What is baptism? Baptism is death. In baptism, you are buried with Christ. That's putting to death the old self. And then we are resurrected to new life, with the life of Christ in us—His Holy Spirit life. The water and the fire are tools of death to self, so all those things in our lives (we mentioned this in the previous lesson), trials and tribulations, are for our blessing.

Those trials and tribulations are part of that fire that God sends to cleanse us. And there's the washing of the word, one of the things we're doing right now. We're renewing our minds by thinking about His Word. We read His Word, and we think about His Word. We meditate on His Word, we get His Word in our hearts, and we talk about Him day and night. We share about Him, always talking about Him. But the fire—the fiery trials—those things that come after us, they are for our good. They are for our cleansing. They are not going to harm us. No evil thing can harm you. No evil thing can touch you. No evil will befall you. Whatever translation you want to use; that's what God says to us. The fire is not going to harm you.

What happened to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fire? How did God save them? He didn't put out the fire. The fire was still going on around them. But they were unbound and unharmed in the fire. That's the scripture quote: they were unbound and unharmed. They were all tied up; they were bound up. Something was binding them up. They were entangled in something; some sort of death, sin, entanglement got them. They went into the fire and they were unbound. That's *where* they became unbound. Because they went into the fire with Jesus.

When we have these trials, troubles... What do people tend to do? They tend to *not* turn to Jesus. They tend to turn to methods of man to try to end the problem as fast as possible. And they're missing the blessing of the trial and tribulation. You are missing the blessing if you are just trying to get out of it.

Why are we running away from God's blessing? We run *to* Jesus. Anything should cause you to run *to* God. If anything's causing you to run away from God, something's wrong. Something's wrong with your thinking. Everything should cause us to run *to* Him. But Jesus is with you in the fire if you're walking with Him. Go to Jesus. That's how you get unbound and free.

Lesson 3 ~ Psalm 18:19b

Our scripture today is Psalm 18:19; it's the second part of that verse. "He rescued me because He delighted in me" (NASB). "He delivered me because He delighted in me" (NKJV).

God is our salvation because He loves us. Why does He love us? He loved us when we were enemies. He doesn't love us because of how good we are. He doesn't love us because of what we've done for Him. He loves us. Jesus died for us. He showed us the greatest love because He loved us.

It's not about us. It's about Him and who He is. He is love. It is unending, steadfast, and a forever love, and He will always love you with that love. All God asks of us is to know He is love. All He asks of us is to know Him. To get to know Him is to know He is love and His love for you. All we're asked to do is know Him and His love.

In Ephesians 3, Paul's prayer for the church is to know the height or the length of the love of Christ: to know the love of Christ, which is beyond knowledge, passes understanding, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. We have to know His love to receive His love. It's all a gift from Him. It's not because of our fasting, prayer, and good works that we get to know Him and get to know His love, and receive His love in our hearts poured out by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). It's because He loved us. All we have to do is just *want* to know Him. We have to desire Him and want to know Him. We have to know that: *I am nothing; I have no good thing in me; I have nothing to offer, this wretched self that I am; I just want to get away from me, and I want to know You.* If you don't see yourself as a wretch, you haven't seen yourself yet. Ask God to show you who you are; it's not pretty.

Instead, get to know Him. He's beautiful. King David said, "There's one thing I want, just to be in your house, to gaze upon your beauty and inquire in your tabernacle." He just wanted to be with Him. That's all you need. Just *want* to be with Him. *Lord, I want to get to know You. I want to know how much You love me. I want to know Your love, so I can receive and give Your love.*

That's how we walk in peace and joy—rest. All those things we're supposed to have all the time. It's just by knowing His love, just by knowing who He is, just by knowing Him. It's all a gift from Him. Just ask Him to show Himself. *Teach me who You are.* He'll use prayer. He'll use scripture; that's His word to us. Read it, but ask Him to teach you from it. Ask Him to show Himself from the Word. He'll use fasting. He'll use trials and tribulations. It's all His good work working in you to know Him and His love for you so you can be saved. God loves us, so He rescued us. He rescues us because He delights in us.

Jesus died because He loved us. That doesn't change. We're the ones who can change. He doesn't change. We want His life in us so we can be steadfast like that, so we're not going to be moved. We'll never move away from Him because He keeps us. We've asked Him to keep us. *I want to be Yours. Keep me close.*

Know how much He loves you.

Lesson 4 ~ Matthew 14:19-20

“Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained” (Matthew 14:19-20, NKJV).

I want to talk about serving the Lord. The disciples brought what they had. It wasn't even from them; they got it from someone else. They took what they had (the five loaves, the two fish) and they give it to Jesus. Jesus gives thanks to the Father for it, blesses it, gives it back to the disciples and the disciples serve the people.

Everything that we have, we are to offer it to God, to consecrate: to consecrate, to make Holy, to set it apart for His purposes. We're to offer ourselves, our bodies, as living sacrifices. We offer ourselves up to God. He doesn't just take our life and kill us and take us to heaven when we come to faith. He makes us holy, sets us apart for His purposes. He gives us our life to serve Him, to work according to His purposes, to fulfill His purposes. Our time, our money, our energy, our talents, everything—every little thing—all your possessions, your house, your car. If you have it, you should offer it all to the Lord to bless, to consecrate, to set it apart for His purposes. And then all of it becomes His, for His work to serve others. None of it's for you. Your life is not for yourself. You're dead. Hopefully. That's the goal. We're dead. We don't live for ourselves. We live as Christ. We live for others. Love is selfless. Love is other-focused.

We are the branches producing fruit because we have the life of Christ in us. Christ is the vine. If we're attached to the vine, then we produce fruit because the vine produces the fruits. The Spirit flowing through the vine, who by the way is Jesus and is rooted and grounded in love—He's not going anywhere. The life flows through Him into us; the Holy Spirit is producing the fruit. He prayed for us to produce much fruit. It is His will for us to produce much fruit, so we will if we're just connected to the vine, because it's His will and His work. He's providing everything for it.

But what is fruit? If you're the branch and you're producing fruit, the fruit's not for yourself. It's for others to come and take. The fruit is for others. What we're given is for others. It's not for ourselves. And we never have to think, *well, you know I don't have the energy for that; I don't have the time for that; if we give that money, we're not going to have enough for....* You can't think that way. One, it's not ours. It's all His. He gave it for His purposes, not for ourselves. It's not for us to hoard and keep onto.

What happens if the fruit just falls off? It rots! It's going to amount to nothing if we try to keep it for ourselves. We need to give it away. You can't outgive God. They gave five loaves, two fish in one basket. They come back with twelve baskets! It was enough for all of them to give all that again to others and have a super abundance for themselves.

It's not about you being continually poor and bankrupt. That is not God's will. You may come into a season of testing where you have to trust Him day by day, moment to moment—for that time—and the energy and the money, and the provision, the protection, whatever, but you're not going to constantly live in that place. That's not where He wants you. That might be for a season, for your

blessing, but He will bring you out of that. And you will live. Even during that time, it's a super abundance because He always provides, He always comes through, He never fails. Love never fails.

I don't want to just say these things. We've lived it. So, I feel like I have a little authority to say, "You can trust Him to do it. That you'll have enough." People think I'm hopped up on caffeine all the time because I get up very early in the morning, and they think I accomplish so much. I don't use any caffeine. I don't want to need anything but Jesus. It's His energy; it's His strength; it's His work. He accomplishes it, and so much is accomplished because He does the work. I just offer myself to Him. It's His work. He does it. We've given all our money away, we've given away our possessions, we've given away almost down to the last drop—more than once. But we don't live in poverty, we live in super abundance because you can't outgive God. He will always out-bless you.

Lesson 5 ~ Isaiah 30:15, 32:17

“In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30:15b, NKJV).

How are we saved? In returning and rest. That returning, that's repentance, coming back to God. We were away from God—we come to God. Or we turned away from God; we turn back to God. It's the changing of our mind, changing of our hearts, which is in part our decision and in part the Holy Spirit working in us. It's that returning to God, calling to Him, running to Him, asking to pray for forgiveness and asking for His help to carry on in righteousness and rest. We're saved by rest. We're not saved by works. We're saved by grace through faith which is a gift, not of works. Our job is to rest. We are saved by resting, the Believer's Rest, that's in Hebrews 4.

(By the way, when I mention something—Believer's Rest—you can Google search: “Bible verse believer's rest” and it'll come up. In another lesson I mentioned the washing by the word, you can Google: “Bible verse washing by the word.” I was thinking of Ephesians 5 when I said that. Or “Christ is the vine,” you can search: “Bible verse Christ vine.” John 15 will come up. You can search these things out for yourself, make sure I'm not just saying something. Search it out for yourself in the scriptures.)

Alright, Believer's Rest, that's Hebrews 4. It's the place we're all supposed to come into. That's our salvation: resting in his finished work. Jesus said, “It is finished.” It's a finished work. Our salvation is accomplished and we're to rest in it. We're not to try to add to it. We work out our salvation. That's already been accomplished. That's not working for our salvation. I know people who get tripped up in that. Maybe we don't think of it as earning our salvation. Sometimes we do. Maybe we're trying to fast and pray enough to get healing or whatever it is we think we need. Our salvation is all part of that. It's not just heaven at the end. It's walking in God's presence now. It's our healing, and our protection, and our provision, all those things in the psalms, all those things we see in the Old Testament that God does for His people. That's part of our salvation, our life in Christ. And so sometimes we do try to be good enough, do the right things so that we can get the thing that we think we need. But if we really needed it right then, we'd have it, because He meets all of our needs.

We also, try to work for our salvation because we're not at rest. We're not trusting Him to bring it about. We're not trusting Him for healing, so we run to the doctors. We're not trusting Him to provide, so we take out a loan. We don't trust Him to... whatever it is. You can watch our miracle stories to see some of the ways we have waited on Him and trusted Him to provide. And He always protected, even when we didn't realize that we needed it, He did it anyway. Because He's a good God.

Our goal is rest and that is our salvation. Our strength is in resting: quietness and confidence. Quietness, that makes me think of the verses: “Be still, and know that I *am* God” (Psalm 46:10, NKJV); be still, or be silent, and see My salvation, that's all you need to do (Exodus 14:13-14). Our job is to know He is God, to see His salvation—just to look to Him, know who He is. *I see You. I know You've got this. I know You're working it out, and You hold me in Your hand. I know Your will can't be thwarted. I know Your will is only good and perfect for my life. I know that You are only loving towards me. I know that You are in control and able, so there's nothing to fear. I will wait on You, and You will strengthen my heart as I wait for You.*

There's another similar verse in Isaiah. Isaiah 32:17: "The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever" (WEB). Where does that quiet confidence come from? It's the effect of righteousness, but again righteousness is a gift from God. We're clothed in the righteousness of Christ. We make the choice to obey the Holy Spirit, obey the Scriptures, but He does the working; He does the doing. He puts the will in and the want in, into us to obey. He puts His love in His heart so that we want to please Him, and He puts the ability in us to walk in obedience. We do fumble around in this flesh. It's not that we never fumble in any way, but we're not choosing sin. We're choosing Him. We choose love; we choose Him.

Lesson 6 ~ Colossians 4:7-8

“Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts...” (Colossians 4:7-8, NKJV).

I looked Tychicus up this morning because I saw that he was at the end of Colossians, and I knew that he was mentioned at the end of Ephesians. I did a little research on him. He was a faithful, fellow servant. He accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey. He visited with him in prison in Rome. He obviously was sent to the churches. He carried some of the epistles to the churches. We have Ephesians because Tychicus was faithful. He carried the epistle to the Ephesians. He had his own ministry of comforting the saints, encouraging them, but he also had a ministry to Paul, serving him.

I have a “bloom where you are planted” message from this. We all have a different purpose, and a different ministry. We don’t always know how we’re serving, and what impact we’re having. He was a messenger. He knew he wasn’t Paul. He was happy to serve Paul, to be considered a fellow servant of Paul, ministering to his needs, helping deliver the gift of money to the believers in Jerusalem who needed it, being Paul’s messenger to take his important letter to the Ephesians. He didn’t know that he wasn’t just delivering this teaching to the Ephesians to encourage them and help them. He didn’t know that he was—loving, helping, blessing—a billion other people by doing that. He didn’t know the impact that he had.

He just knew that in loving God, he was going to be this faithful helper and servant to Paul and do what he needed to help Paul be a minister of the gospel that he was called to be. That was how Tychicus was fulfilling his calling in Christ. He didn’t know what greater ministry he had, but we have Ephesians (maybe another one too) because of it. So be thankful for your role, whatever it is. You could be changing diapers, but you don’t know the impact of your ministry.

Lesson 7 ~ Genesis 9:13-15

“I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth...the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh” (Gen. 9:13-15, NKJV).

The rainbow is a promise that the flood is not going to happen again. But in a way, it's a reminder that next time He's going to destroy the world by fire. The world is going to be destroyed again.

What do we do about that? Warn people that the world is going to burn. Do we care enough to share? Even if they're not here when the world burns up, hell is a place of fire. Do we have the love of God in our hearts compelling us to share the gospel? Why do we share the gospel? Is it because we love all these people so much? We may not feel love for them all equally, but God loves them all. He calls them all his children. They're all created in His image.

Beyond that, how do you feel when you think about Jesus dying on the cross? Did you ever go to a Good Friday service? Jesus did that for you. We think about that: how Jesus sacrificed His life, died for us, was beaten for us. But He did that for everyone else too. Jesus died so that every person you see today could be saved, could go to heaven, could have a relationship with the Father, could live in fellowship with Him, and could experience the love, joy, and peace that you have in Christ.

Jesus deserves what He paid for. We should tell people about Him because He's worthy for them to know Him and honor Him. He's the great God. He deserves worship. He deserves for everyone to honor and worship Him. He did all this so we could be with Him, so that all those people could have the chance to know and love Him. May the lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering.

Lesson 8 ~ Isaiah 37:14-21

I'm going to be reading from Isaiah 37, within verses 14 to 21. What's going on is, Hezekiah is king of Judah, and the Assyrian army is coming. The Assyrian king is just saying, “Turn yourselves in. Don't try to fight us. We destroy everyone.” Messengers bring the Assyrian king's threats to Hezekiah, so verse 14: ...Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers, read it, and went up to the house of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. Hezekiah prayed to the Lord. Then it says the prophet Isaiah comes to him: This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says, “Because you have prayed to Me...” (verse 21).

This is one of the great battles in history in Israel. They don't fight. The Lord just sends angels and they destroy the other army. But why did He do it? The Lord says, “Because you have prayed to Me.” The very first thing Hezekiah did when there's this big problem was spread it out before the Lord and pray to Him. Because he prayed and went to God saying, “Glorify Yourself in this situation. Let them know you are God.” Instead of, “Help me!” weeping, crying, “What am I going to do?” he says, “God be glorified. These people don't follow you. They follow these gods of wood and stone. They're nothing. You are the Great I Am, the Almighty God.”

We need to remember. We need it be our reaction to pray first, to go to God first. We need to train ourselves to turn to Him whenever there's a problem. He should be on our thoughts all the time so when there's a problem, it's never, “What am I going to do?” it's, “Hey Lord, I have this problem. Thank

you that You can take care of this. We will walk through it together. You do the work. I'll join You however You want me to."

We need to abide with Christ, walking and talking with Him all the time, so that it's completely natural, and a reaction for us to talk to Him first. Not try to solve our problems, get in a jam and then ask for help. Or make our own plans and then ask Him to bless them.

Now, there is one more prayer. In the next chapter, 38, Hezekiah is told by Isaiah that he's going to die, and Hezekiah cries. He doesn't pray a good prayer. He prays, "Lord, remember how good I've been." We can't earn our salvation, can't earn it by being good. But what it says after that is, "I've seen your tears." God says, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears..." (Isaiah 38:5b, NKJV). He didn't say, "I heard your prayer, and you're right. You are so good. You deserve this." God's moved with compassion by Hezekiah's tears.

So, just a little lesson on prayer today. Go to Him. He cares. We don't earn it; we don't prove to Him that He should help us. He's the great God. He can. He cares. He saves.

Lesson 9 ~ Isaiah 43:19

“Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness *And* rivers in the desert” (Isaiah 43:19, NKJV).

His plan isn't to take them out of the desert or take them out of the wilderness, but to smooth their paths: to provide for them rivers, water, and life. He makes a way through the trial, not necessarily taking it away. Let's stop asking Him, begging Him, to take things away. But instead, know that He makes a way through. How do we know? Because Jesus is the Way. We cling to Him, and He takes us through. We just need to be with Jesus. He is the Way through anything.

Lesson 10 ~ Ephesians 5:29-30

“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Ephesians 5:29-30, NKJV).

You're in Christ's body. You are His flesh and bones. Do you ever hear anyone talk about divine health? Here are verses for it. We are His body; we are His flesh, His bones. You're in Christ's body. Think about it: you have His immune system. And what about it? He nourishes it. People are healed of diseases just by eating well. People change their diet and they're healed of autoimmune diseases, cancer, just by changing their eating. He nourishes His body. We have His perfect food.

Now, this isn't, of course, just about health. That's just one little part of salvation. Healing is something He offers. But what does He nourish us with? He feeds us his Word, His life. We do not live by bread alone but on every word from God. He nourishes us by teaching us His Word, by revealing His Word to us, by revealing Himself to us in His Word. We consume His Word each day to give us life. It renews us, renews our body, mind, soul, spirit. We get renewed by reading His Word with our drink of water, our living water, that's also renewing us day by day. And with the water, with the Word, we're nourished to life. We are part of Christ's body.

A Note About Divine Health

I mention Divine Health because, while I definitely see in the Bible that God's general will is our health and healing, I didn't have a firm footing on living in health. I was able to trust God through 2020-2021 without any work on my part to protect myself or my family, and we didn't get sick. That was based more on just knowing God is good and loving and able and sovereign, just knowing and trusting Him with our lives.

I was excited to see something that stuck out new to me as a way to think of being kept in health by Christ since we are flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone. He nourishes and cares for His body of flesh and bone—that's us!

Of course, I believe in His sovereign goodness He can allow sickness, and my response is, "Thank You."

Lesson 11 ~ Galatians 2:20

When people ask me my favorite verse, I usually say it's Exodus 14:14, "The Lord will fight for you, you need only to be still" (NIV). But my most quoted verse, is Galatians 2:20 (ESV): "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Now, I've been learning about abiding in Christ. If you have followed to my teachings, you know I've been talking about that for more than a couple of years. In the beginning, I was talking about abiding in Christ: being with Him, being one with Him, being in the vine, being in Christ, being hidden in Christ. It's His righteousness. It's His work. These are the things I talk about. But this verse always bothered me. I would say, *I no longer live but Christ lives in me*. I no longer live. You're dead. You're supposed to die. I'm supposed to be dead. You hear me talk like that a lot because I think that's the key to the Christian life. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. I think that's the sum of it.

But this verse always bothered me because the life I live in the flesh—I'm living out—I live by faith in Christ. Why did that bother me? Because I could fail. Because any time I wasn't seeing Christ-likeness come out, it was my failure of faith. Any time I wasn't seeing His power, I wasn't seeing His love, I wasn't seeing His patience, which is love... whatever it was, I would be defeated. I didn't have faith. I lacked faith. God help my unbelief. I lacked faith in the Son of God.

Well, not too long ago, I heard this verse in the King James, which I don't read. On any given day, I might read the New King James Version, the English Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, the Hebrew Christian Heritage Bible, the Berean Study Bible, or the New Living Translation and others. I read lots of different translations after spending 20 years of my life reading only the New American Standard Bible.

Most translations say, "I live by faith," even the New King James, but the King James version was an epiphany. It's not the only one that translates it this way but all of those other main ones just say, "by faith in the Son of God." King James says, "...the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith *of* the Son of God," instead of, "...by faith *in* the Son." "By the faith *of* the Son of God" was an epiphany to me. I'm clinging to that translation because it's the truth of what God has been showing me in the whole rest of scripture: it's His work. It's *His* work. We receive the free gift. It's not by work. It's a gift. Our faith is a gift; we're told faith is a gift. He gives us our faith. He is the author of our faith. He's the perfecter of our faith. It's all His work and we say those things, but then why are we trying to live by faith and have faith?

It's a working kind of attitude, which I'm trying to get away from. I just want to abide, just be His. Let Him keep me. Let Him do the work. Let Him be my righteousness because that's the only way. We can't do it any other way. It was very freeing to me to read this in the King James Bible. So, I hope it helps some of you to live by the faith of the Son of God. It's His faith, just like everything else. It's His. He gave it to me; it's His.

I don't even like to think of it like He gave it to me and then I get to use it. It's not that it's unbiblical. I don't like thinking of it this way, like, *I'm weak so He gives me strength and now I'm strong*. I don't like thinking of it like that. I like to think of it as it's His strength. It's not that *I'm strengthened now, so I can*

go do whatever it is because now I'm strong because that leaves Him behind. Like, here, just give me what I need and then I can go take care of it.

That's not how I want to live. I want Him to live. I want to be dead. I want Him to live. I need Him to put His strength *in* me, Him to work his strength *through* me, all *His* strength. Never like *now it's mine*. It's just His. It's His strength. It's His faith, the faith of the Son of God. My faith can't fail because it's the faith of the Son of God. Jesus Christ has perfect faith in the Father because He knows the Father fully. If you know the Father fully, if you know God fully, you have full faith. The more we know, the more faith we have because He can't fail. He is love. He's everything. He's all perfection. I won't start listing all His attributes, but He can't fail. There's no reason not to have fullness of faith. Jesus Christ has perfect faith, and the life I live in the flesh I live by *His* perfect faith. It's His perfect faith in me. It's His perfect faith working through me and I cannot fail.

Lesson 12 ~ 1 John 4:16

“So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16, ESV).

God is love. Why did God send His son to die? God is love. Why did God send the flood? God is love. Why did God bring His children out of Egypt? God is love. Why did He deport His children to Babylon? God is love. Why is the great tribulation coming on the whole earth? God is love. Why is He coming to rescue His church out of the world? God is love.

There's never a time that God isn't love. There's never a time that God doesn't love. There's never a time when He doesn't love His children or love everyone in the world. God wouldn't be angry at our sins, and how we hurt ourselves and hurt each other, if He didn't care. He cares more than you can possibly imagine. He loves you more than you can understand. By His grace, He can give us some understanding of His love, but He is infinite and He is love. His love is infinite. It's beyond our comprehension. Never think that God doesn't love you, or that you lost His love somehow. His perfect love is loving you right now. If you are suffering, know God loves you. He is perfectly loving you. What's your response to His perfect love?

Lesson 13 ~ Psalm 23:1

Our verse today is from Psalm 23, just: "I shall not want" (NKJV). I shall not want. I have no desire for anything. My desires have been satisfied. I want for nothing. It's not just a provision of need, but a restful contentedness in my loving Father's perfect care of me.

It may be a long craggy walk to the higher ground, but lush green pastures and still clear waters wait for me, those same hills providing shelter and safety. God only takes good care of me. He only loves. I never need to worry about finding the green grass and still waters. He leads me there. I never have to worry about how long it will take, or losing my way, because He is my Shepherd. He tenderly and expertly cares for His sheep and causes them to know His voice and follow Him. I have surrendered myself to His care; I have chosen to be one of His flock. I don't have to see above the crowd to know which way we're going. I just have to follow His voice, which He makes me to know, and follow because I am His. He's marked me as one of his own. He defends me from the one who might try to steal me away because I am marked for Him; He knows me as His own.

I have no need to desire long after what I do not have, because it's my Shepherd's good pleasure to give me all I desire. He taught me what to desire. He put His desire in me, so He's always pleased to fulfill my desires and always keen to meet my needs, without me even making them known. I don't have to ask my Shepherd for the green grass and still waters. He chooses them for me, and He takes me there without me asking or planning. I just walk with Him. It's my joy to walk with Him because He knows my name and calls to me, so that I am listening to His voice and keeping close to Him. I like to stay close so that when He reaches out a hand, I get a warm pat or embrace from Him. The Shepherd loves me. For what shall I want? Nothing.

Lesson 14 ~ 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

“Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4, NKJV).

How does God comfort us in suffering? How is the Holy Spirit our Comforter? We know God does deliver us from every trouble, but we still go *through* troubles. We know that God comforting us doesn't mean all the troubles just go away when we want them to, and we certainly know it doesn't mean that troubles never come. How are we comforted?

We are comforted by knowing who God is, by being reminded of His character and promises. The Holy Spirit fills our heart with God's love, and we know that we are loved even when we are suffering. We are reminded that God is working out His good purposes, and we can, and should, trust Him and submit ourselves to what He's doing in our lives.

There's another kind of comfort from Psalm 23, "Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (verse 4, NKJV). You are protected with the rod—beating away the wolves. You are guided by the staff—kept to the Way.

One of the jobs of our friend, the Holy Spirit, is to remind us of what Jesus taught, so that we might stay on the straight and narrow path. We may be suffering because we've forgotten something or have not rightly understood and applied one of Christ's teachings. The Holy Spirit may use discomfort to redirect our thoughts and actions, but it's a comfort. It's a comfort to know you can't stray too far. You are kept by God in Christ. When we submit our lives to God's control—His keeping—then we can take comfort in the Holy Spirit's perfect work of keeping us with Him.

If you have asked God to take control of your life, then believe that He is doing it. See His comforting at work in all the discomforts of the day. What is He showing you? Are you being thankful? Are you trusting that He's directing your thoughts and actions? It is a comfort to know that you can entrust your keeping to God. He is the Good Shepherd. We can choose to let Him keep us and let Him guide our paths. It's a comfort to know we aren't in control, but we are in the best hands.

Lesson 15 ~ 1 Peter 5:6-10

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you” (1 Peter 5:6-10, NASB 1995).

Peter is writing to Christians who are suffering specifically. They are being persecuted. Peter tells them how to face their suffering with humility. They aren't to fight what's happening to them. They're to trust in the mighty hand of God. Is God not powerful enough to stop what was happening? Of course, He is. Does God not know what's happening to them? Of course, He does. Does God not care? Of course, He cares. Does God not have the authority to intervene? Of course, He does. God rules supreme and is all-knowing and all-powerful, not to mention is love itself. They're to trust the God of grace. When we are suffering, we are under the mighty hand of God. We're not to wrestle out from under it. The command to be alert and resist the devil does not mean that we're to fight in order to get out of our suffering.

James 4:7 compliments these verses in affirming the message: we resist the devil by submitting to God. The devil isn't after us so much as he's after our faith. When we fight against our suffering, we're working with the devil, not resisting him. Submitting to, and trusting the God of grace, is how we resist the devil's attempts to knock us off our firm foundation of faith in the Word, and the goodness and love and perfection of Christ. We're told in God's Word, which is good as any unbreakable promise, that our deliverance date is marked on the calendar. It will come at the proper time. God won't leave us in our suffering a moment longer than needed. He will, Himself, perfect us, confirm us as His own, strengthen us for His work, establish us as saints in His kingdom. A temporary time of suffering in exchange for God himself perfecting us? How could we not see *that* as worth it?

Lesson 16 ~ Isaiah 30:18

The verse for this one is Isaiah 30:18. Now the first sentence of the verse is, "...therefore will the LORD *wait*, that he may be gracious unto you" (KJV; emphasis added).

Do you get it? Are you getting this? God's goodness means He waits to bless you. God's love means He waits to deliver you out of your situation. God's care means He waits to bring healing and restoration. God's compassion means He waits to end the suffering.

Why is there suffering? It's not because God wants us to suffer. He wants to bless us! It's His love that withholds the blessing. Life is marked with suffering because it's a tool of God's grace to draw us to Himself, so that we can live in safety and security, and peace and joy and in the fullness of love, all of which can only come from Him.

If you are thinking He chose a poor way to show His love, you aren't getting it. A life of ease and pleasure is a selfish life. A selfish life leads to death. A life of only ease and comfort and pleasure would kill us all. His will is life. Without evil, we wouldn't recognize His good. Without pain and sickness, we wouldn't recognize His healing. Without troubles, we wouldn't see His deliverance. We would miss most of who He is, if we only saw the one side. You don't appreciate light until you know what dark is. How many people have realized they didn't appreciate something until it was gone?

God is always good. He never stops being Himself. Your financial bind isn't because God stopped loving and caring. He is always love. He is always good. He is always just. He is always holy.

I read you the first sentence of the verse. Here's the last: "...blessed *are* all they that wait for him" (KJV).

A Note About Sin

At the end of this book is a group of lessons I labeled as Sin and Salvation Lessons. If you were to sum up my teaching, the message the Lord has given me to proclaim, it's this: God is good; sin is bad. I wanted to just talk about His goodness, but I keep ending up talking about sin. Of course, our God's goodness is there too. He has set us free from sin! And I want you to know it. He wants you to know it too!

You can jump to those lessons if you know you are stuck in some sin and have been wondering if it's okay or not. God wants to set you free! I was separating out those lessons, but I know some of these regular lessons will be on the same type of things because it's what the Lord and I are talking about now.

Lesson 17 ~ Good News for the Christian

So, what is the good news for the Christian? We can't save ourselves! Solomon was the wisest man on earth and he acted the fool and worshipped idols. Samson was the strongest man on earth; he was made weak by a nag. Moses was the humblest man on earth but he lost it and didn't honor God and struck the rock. We can't do it. We can't do it on our own. We will fail. That's the good news. It's the first part of the good news.

The good news isn't that *we get to be failures like everybody else but thankfully we got a ticket to heaven because we happen to be in a place where they told us to raise our hands if we wanted to be safe from hell*. That's not the good news. The good news is that we can be saved from ourselves. We can be saved from sin. Self and sin are all wrapped up in each other, just like love and obedience are intertwined. We need saving from self and sin, not just forgiveness of our sins. We need freedom from ourselves. We naturally choose sin. It comes easily to us. It does not come easily, naturally, to want to submit and obey. It comes naturally to want our own way and *unnaturally* to submit our desires to the will of God. We want to demand our own way. We need to surrender all control. If there's a strongman that needs to be bound in our lives, it's Self. We crucify the flesh. We are crucified with Christ. In baptism, we are buried with Christ (Col. 2:12, Romans 6:4). We need to be able to say with Paul, "I no longer live."

How? How is that possible? None of it is possible! Good news! When people argue that it's not possible, they're right, except they're leaving out the God of the impossible. How can people argue that God is not big enough, good enough, or powerful enough, loving enough, sovereign enough, wise enough, kind enough, smart enough to be able to free us from our sin? God is great! He is big enough to be able to figure out how to bring you safely home to Him along the paths of righteousness. They are the only paths to eternal dwellings. Just give Him your life, let Him take it from there.

Lesson 18 ~ 2 Chronicles 5:10

“There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets which Moses put *there* at Horeb, where the LORD made *a covenant* with the sons of Israel, when they came out of Egypt” (2 Chronicles 5:10, NASB).

The ark was God’s dwelling place among the Israelites. It was God’s presence. And what was in the ark? God’s ten commandments. God’s presence is with His commandments, or the commandments are with His presence. When the Lord writes His law upon our hearts, I’m wondering if it’s akin to Jesus pouring His love out into our hearts.

1 John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome" (NASB). The love of God, as in God’s love. God’s love is that we keep His commandments. What if we interpret that to mean our keeping the commandments is God’s love toward us? Love always goes toward something. What if we saw the law as God’s love gift to us? God wants us to be with Him. He wants to be with us, and we can only be with God in righteousness. We can’t be with Him without it. It’s the law that draws us to Christ. We need Christ because we need to fulfill the law and He’s the only One Who can do it. When we obey, we love. When we love, we obey. The law and God’s love are written on our hearts. What if we loved the law that Jesus fulfills to bring peace and justice to the earth through the glory of His name? As long as we are trying to argue that the law is done and gone, we’re missing God. We’re missing His presence. We’re missing His love.

Lesson 19 ~ 1 John 5:18

“We know that God's children do not make a practice of sinning, for God's Son holds them securely, and the evil one cannot touch them” (1 John 5:18, NLT).

Why is sinning not the habit of the Christian? What does the verse say? It's because Jesus, Himself, holds us securely and our enemy can't touch us. If we have been born into God's kingdom, we have been set free from Satan's kingdom. We are no longer slaves to sin but are now slaves to righteousness.

When we are in God's kingdom, Jesus is our King, our Lord. He's a good king. He shares all the wealth of His kingdom with us. We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. He pours out the very love of God into our hearts and He, Himself, is our Light.

When we abide in Christ, living by faith as one with Him, then we are walking in the Light. We talk with Him. We live our lives together. We are one. Being with Him, acknowledging Him in everything that is happening to us and around us. He shines His light on it all. He shows us what to pray about. He shows us our wrong thinking and actions, and we get rid of them. We want them away because we love Jesus. We want to remain close to Him. We want to stay in the Light, abiding. To choose not to get rid of the harmful ways in us, would be wanting to hide from the Light, and we'd be walking in darkness, and have no fellowship with Him.

We confess. We repent. He cleanses. He keeps. He keeps us. That's a way of saying, “God's Son holds them securely.” To keep, means to guard. He'll guard us from evil. There's no fear of falling away if we are in Christ and have given ourselves over to His keeping.

Lesson 20 ~ God is Able

I wanted to share with you my little poster I have hanging up on our Miracle Wall. If you've listened to our miracle stories, all those stories have a little mini displayed index card with some description and the year and the place on it, lots of little tokens hanging up with the cards, a little picture demonstrating what it is. And some are just small index cards with a word, answers to prayer. We have four corkboards that go across the wall of our dining room.

Anyway, on the last corkboard I have this hanging up. This is what I would tell people when I got the chance, when someone was willing to hear such things. Let's just say 2020-2021, you know what I'm talking about. This is what I would tell them to show them there's no need to worry. When I would think about the stuff going on, I couldn't find a reason for concern; I wish that was always the case. I did not hang this up in 2020-2021 because I didn't need it. I knew this and it was easy for me. When I hung this up was when my oldest son started adventuring.

He's 20 and he started going out on adventures on his own. He's never even spent the night at someone's house; he's never been away to school or had a job outside the home. Then all of a sudden, he spent a week in Costa Rica and didn't have cell phone access, and went on another trip and lost his passport, and went on another trip and was in negative fifteen-degree weather. He's adventurous, I'm-going-to-climb-a-volcano-today kind of kid. "I'm going to be out in the middle of nowhere, and I won't have cell service for a few days; you won't hear from me."

He travelled recently for 25 days, drove all the way across the country, made it to California from Philadelphia (where we are), and went to all sorts of places, which is amazing. He saw the Grand Canyon; I've never seen it. And it's awesome, and I trust the Lord is training him up for his exciting, daring mission work to come. But yes, he is the reason I hung this up, so that I could just remind myself.

So here we go. God is powerful, so He is able. I would ask people, "Well, do you believe God's powerful? Do you believe He's *all* powerful?" Of course! Well then, He's able to act. He's able to do something about it. God is love, so I would ask people, "Do you believe God is loving?" You know, of course! Of course, people say yes. Alright, so He cares. He cares about what's going on and He's able to do something about it. God is sovereign. So, you ask, "Is God sovereign? Do you believe He's in control? Or does He have to bow to someone else's wishes, someone else putting demands on Him—what He can and can't do?" So, yes, of course, God's in control. He's sovereign over all. What He says has to happen. It's in your Bible. He puts out His hand, who can turn it back? He's able and He cares about what's going on and He's able to do something about it. He has the authority to do something about it. No one can tell Him, "You can't do it." He has the authority to make the decision to act on what He's caring about. And then God is Good. So, then I say, "Do you believe God is good?" Of course. People know this. God is good all the time. Well, if He's good, then we can trust His will. We can trust what He is sovereignly going to do because of how He cares for us. So where is the place for worry?

We never did get sick, and we never did do anything at all to protect ourselves. Sometimes I would purposely do the opposite. I would purposely *not* wash my hands if I had a thought like I should, because I wouldn't let fear control me. Fear doesn't get to make the decisions. I'm controlled by the Holy Spirit. I would let my kids go play and touch everything and then not wash our hands, just to stick it to fear of germs. That's how I treated it, and we never did get sick. And I was sort of believing that

we weren't going to get sick because He's our protection. We weren't trying to protect ourselves. We didn't wipe anything down. We were relying on Him for protection. He's the stronghold. He's the shield. He's the fortress. He's our strong deliverer. He is able. He cares. He's sovereign. He can do something about it. And I can trust His will. But I can trust His will, so I knew if we did get sick, He allowed it because He cares. Because He loves me and there was some good purpose in it that He chose that for us.

I want His good purposes working out in my life. His good purpose isn't ease and comfort. His good purpose is the life of Christ manifest in us, His life alive in us so we can live forever. He wants eternal life in us, now and forever. That's what I want working in my life. That's what He wants to work in my life. He wants to bless me so I can be a blessing to others. The life of Christ, the Spirit, flowing rivers. Not just coming into us, but coming out of us. That's what He's working out. What He's choosing, that's what I want. So, let it be to me according to Your will.

Anyway, I do have a general belief that God's will, in general, is health, healing, wholeness, having what you need, all the stuff God provides. Not that we never get colds or anything ever, but I trust Him. He takes care of us. At the bottom of my little sign, I wrote my response (just to help my brain for those times when too many thoughts are coming and you just need help getting your brain thinking the right way): Our job is to trust, give thanks, humble ourselves, wait with rejoicing. It's a big thing that I talk about in the new September study, coming out September 2022 called The Suffering Servant, on the All-In-One Homeschool site, so maybe that will help you.

There you go. God is able. God cares. He has the authority, and we can trust His will. What's there to be concerned about?

Lesson 21 ~ Philippians 2:13

The verse is Philippians 2:13; let me read the Berean Literal Bible translation, “For God is the *One* working in you both to will and to work according to *His* good pleasure.” And here's the same thing in the New Living Translation, “For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”

I want to think about this. Let's put this together with David wanting to build God a temple. And the prophet says, “The Lord is with you, do whatever is in your heart.” And then the prophet comes back and says, “You know, it's a good idea but it's not for you. Your son's going to do it.”

God puts His will in us. We have a transformation of will. This is one of the things we can believe. He gives us the desire to do His will, His life, His choice for us. He gives us the power to do it. So, when we're saved we live in a broad place of freedom. Before we're saved, it can feel like a list of dos and don'ts, constraining us, and we're fighting against it because it's not what we want to do. Romans 7. This is law making us... *we should do this but we don't want to do this and we keep not doing it*. But Romans 8 is walking in the Spirit. We can walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh because it's God who works in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure.

In David's will he had this desire to build a temple, and it was okay for him to have that desire and he started working on it. He gathered up all the materials and stuff, but God intervened and showed him His better plan for how that was going to be accomplished. It was God's will to build the temple. God showed him the better way, to wait. David just prepared and he wasn't going to finish it off. He works in us His will, so how do we know His will?

One, we believe that He's in us, working this in us. It's not something we have to seek like, “God, what is Your will?” and then we know it. Because why do we want to know it? Because then we can go do it. It's not for us to go do. It's Him doing it through us. So, it's not necessarily just going to be—*boom, now you do it*. He doesn't want to send us off. Hopefully you don't want to just go off and do His work. You want Him to do the work; you do it together.

When we know God's will, it's something in our spirit. The Holy Spirit in us is what knows God's will. He's not putting it in our flesh so we can work it out in our flesh. God works through our spirit. You know you exist. You're not having this thought, *I am*. You know you're alive. It's not this thought in your head. You just know it. When you know His will, it's just something in you that knows it. It's our thoughts that we take captive, every thought. Taking every thought captive. That's not where you're going to know. Your thoughts are where you say—*this sounds like a good idea*—pros and cons, and you're working it out in your own understanding. This isn't going to necessarily go well when you go that way. That's working it out in our own understanding.

Lean not on your own understanding but acknowledge Him. *Lord, I acknowledge that You are working in me to will and do according to Your good pleasure, so let's go together. This is what I know and I don't know how to carry it out. I don't know how it's going to go, but You're going to go with me, so it's going to work out because You're going to do the work*. And that's how we follow God's will. I hope that makes sense to you. It can be a hard lesson.

Take those thoughts captive. That's not how we get to know God's will. We seek Him, not His will. We seek Him, not His direction for us. Seek Him. Seek Him. Acknowledge Him in all your ways. *Thank you that You're with me. Thank you that You're walking with me. I surrender my life to you. My day is Yours. Order my steps. It's all Your work to do today, Lord. Give me the privilege of going with You while You're doing it.*

Lesson 22 ~ John 11:5-7

“Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, ‘Let us go back to Judea’” (John 11:5-7, NIV).

Why did Jesus wait two days before going to see them? Because He loved them. That's God's motivation. Love. Jesus is not in a hurry. God is never in a hurry, because He's never late. God is always on time. Psalm 102:13: “You will arise and have pity on Zion; it is the time to favor her; the appointed time has come” (ESV). There are appointed times. Jesus died at the appointed time. He not only died on Passover but at the time of the evening sacrifice. He does things on time, on purpose. Jesus was never going to return at any time. He's going to return at the appointed time. He must. God is not in a hurry to return. Peter tells us that God is not slow in keeping His promises. What we call slow, God calls patient.

What does patience relate to? Love! Love is patient. When we are hurrying in our haste, we are being unloving. When we don't want to wait for someone, we are being unloving. Apply that to God. When we're not waiting on God, we are being unloving.

We can surrender ourselves to God each day, asking Him to order our steps and then trust He gets the timing of what needs done. He can bring to mind what needs doing. He can interrupt us without it causing hurried haste because He knows all that needs to be done. He has the plan. He knows. Let Him work it out.

What if we just gave everything to Him and let Him work it out? What if we didn't figure out how to get it all done and just gave it all over to Him?

The Lord is teaching me and my husband more and more to give everything to Him. We recently gave over a handyman situation. We had called multiple times, more than one place, and had gotten nowhere. We just ignored it for a couple of weeks. Then we actually stopped to actually connect with God over it and put it in His hands, meaning we were taking it out of our hands. Twenty minutes later we got a call from a handyman. He came over that afternoon. The problem was solved. What if you just gave up your life and let the Lord live His life through you? One thing for sure, you'd never be in a hurry.

Lesson 23 ~ John 5:8

Our verse for today is John 5:8. Jesus said to him, "Get up. Stand up. Pick up your mat and walk." I was asking the Lord about that. There are many lessons out there talking about *pick up your mat*, saying that this is your old way of life and you don't want to return to it, so pick it up. But I was asking the Lord why he had to carry it. Why were you taking it with you, if this is your old way of life? Why are you taking it *with* you? Your old ways, your old habits. Why is he taking it with him? Why the command to walk?

In the story of the paralytic lowered down through the ceiling, He says, "Pick up your mat and go home." I was praying about what the significance of that was and saw it as, yes, this was our old life and our old ways. The mat was a symbol of his weakness, and he was trapped in that weakness. He couldn't get up. In either story, whichever one you want to look at, they couldn't get up. They were trapped in that weakness. They were trapped on that mat. He tells him to take it with him. "Pick it up and take it with you." I see that as feet fitted with the preparation of the gospel of peace. This is your testimony. He saves us out of our weaknesses. It is *His* strength in our weaknesses. It's how He is shown strong. We want to show the world our weaknesses to show them Christ's strength, Christ's salvation, what so great a salvation we have!

For instance, the Lord saved me out of my weakness. My vice, that I had, was watching TV; especially movies, I loved movies. At the end of the day it was, "Now, I get to relax. Get some ice cream. Put my feet up and watch something." I'm human, so I'm very good at justifying. And I had limits on how much, and when, and what I would watch, of course, and I'd watch with the kids. But eventually the Lord helped me (you can ask Him to help you, we have a Helper), to not enjoy it anymore, to not want to do it. He showed me things like crying at the end of a movie: caring about these fiction people and then not crying over these people in the real world. Things like that, till I wanted it out. And He took it out. He took out the desire. He works in us the willing and the doing. He changed my heart to not want it anymore.

The hardest thing to give up was after the little people were in bed, one of my teenagers and I would watch something together: historical movies, foreign language films; we'd find things to watch and watch a movie over a few nights. It was the time we spent together. I kept praying that He would replace it and give us something else to do together, and He never did. I finally had to just tell my son I couldn't do it anymore. The Lord was taking this out of my life. And it still hasn't been replaced, but he's homeschooled so we still spend a lot of time together.

But that was the hardest part of it, that I had to make the choice. We still make the choice. It's our choice. God doesn't force Himself on us, but He does the work. He does the work, the willing and the doing. I don't want it anymore. There's never been any kind of backsliding because I don't want it anymore. Things aren't a temptation if you don't want them. It's easy not to give into any thoughts like that because your heart is really changed, because God really changes our hearts.

Salvation is real. It's not us trying to do anything. It's us choosing Him. Choosing to love Him. For the longest time, I would wonder if I was supposed to give it up. *Well, if I really knew I had to...*, but just right there showed my heart. It wasn't enough that *maybe* He wanted me to, or *maybe* this would give

me a better relationship with Him. It wasn't enough. I wasn't willing to just give it up, which showed my heart wasn't loving the Lord my God with all my heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.

So I encourage you, whatever those things are—those weaknesses which we justify, we laugh off, we make jokes about them, we want other people to agree that it's okay—it's not glorifying God and it's doing us no good. Pick up your mat and walk, and show the world what a great Savior we have.

Lesson 24 ~ Romans 5:5

Our verse, which we'll get to, is Romans 5:5. But first, a grammar lesson, “I kicked the ball.” The subject is I, the verb is kicked, the object is the ball. “He told me.” He is the subject, told is the verb, me is the object. “You bought the groceries.” You don't just buy; you buy something. Buy, told—they have to have an object. You can't just tell. You have to tell someone. And you can't just love. You have to love someone or something. Love has an object. Love is directed at someone or something.

If we are always loving someone or something, can you say that your love is directed at God and others? When, in your day, is your love directed at yourself instead? We have no command to love ourselves. We are told everyone does that quite naturally; everyone is naturally self-focused. We direct our attention on ourselves. What we are told to do, commanded to do, is love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Ask Him to show you where you are directing your love elsewhere. Then choose to get rid of that love. Ask for His help. Ask Him to fill you with His perfect love in its place.

Do you know what His perfect love is? Romans 5:5 “...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (NKJV). Have you ever wanted more Holy Spirit in your life? More holiness? More power? More fruit? There's a way to increase. The Holy Spirit in us is God's perfect love in our hearts. His perfect love loves God and loves others. When we remove false love from our lives, we make room for God's true love to take its place.

Lesson 25 ~ Deuteronomy 6:5

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5, ESV).

All God asks of us is that we choose to love Him. When Jesus was asked, what is the greatest commandment, this is what He quotes, and adds to it. “The second one is like it: that you shall love your neighbors as yourself.” All we are asked to do is love. There's not a list of dos and don'ts for us, per se, though the Bible does point out some things you should not be doing. It says people who do those things will not inherit the kingdom of God. However, our life as a Christian isn't a list of following certain rules in order to get to heaven.

Heaven is populated with people who have chosen to love God. Love is a choice. It's a verb. It's something we do. Phil Vischer, who some of you know as Bob the Tomato, would define love as deciding something is most important. When you love something, you think that is most important. What God is asking of us is to put Him first. We are to love Him. Love others.

What does the Bible tell us about others? We're supposed to think of others as better than ourselves. We're supposed to put others first. We're to love them. We need to love God. So, any time you're having thoughts like, *should I be doing this?* What are you making most important in that moment? It is the desires of the flesh, of the mind. So, lust. Lust could be lots of things. It could be food. You're making hundreds of decisions every day. Are you making them because God is most important? Love the Lord your God with all your heart.

Lesson 26 ~ Ephesians 5:1-2

“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Ephesians 5:1-2, NKJV).

How do we love as Christ? We love freely and fully. We don't require someone to earn our love. They don't need to do anything for us in order for us to love them. We choose to love them. We freely forgive.

How can we be sweet-smelling? We need to imitate Jesus. We need to imitate God. We need to be like Jesus. He loved us. He gave Himself for us, which was an offering and a sacrifice to God. An offering and a sacrifice are things that need to be given up, given over. It takes a death to self, an unselfish heart, to give up and give over. It's not really an offering and a sacrifice unless it takes something from us. A little part of self needs to die, which is what we want! When we are doing that for others, laying down our lives for them, putting them before ourselves, we are really giving an offering and a sacrifice to God.

God loves a cheerful giver. We need to serve others cheerfully. Every day we have the chance to give this gift to God and be a sweet-smelling aroma. We have chances within our families, every day, to put others first and serve others, giving up ourselves and our own wants, in order to choose to love others and give ourselves to them. And, if we can keep our focus on serving God and pleasing Him, then we can do it cheerfully, pleasing God and feeling good ourselves. It doesn't feel good to grumble, but it feels great to know you are pleasing God.

Lesson 27 ~ Romans 8:5-8

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:5-8, ESV).

There are two kinds of thoughts: flesh thoughts and Spirit thoughts. When Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." He pointed out that what Peter was saying were the thoughts of man. He didn't say that's devil talk. He said, "You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." It was about what Peter was setting His mind on. We can think God thoughts or "get-behind-me" Satan thoughts. Those are the options.

Who are you talking to when your mind is rambling? Are you talking to yourself? Are you trying to figure things out, yourself? Are you trying to plan, yourself? Are you trying to make sense of things, yourself? Are you worrying, or trying not to worry, by thinking of ways you can get control of the situation, yourself? Are you making yourself out to be god, turning to your own mind for help and salvation? Are you grumbling and complaining and arguing and plotting, as if God were not good and in control?

We have to get control of our thoughts! We need to stop talking to ourselves and start talking to God. Our minds run all day long. We could be in constant communication with God. We could be turning to Him all day long in fellowship, instead of driving ourselves crazy playing things over in our minds. We need to take EVERY thought captive, and turn them into opportunities for prayer and thanksgiving. Turn them into God thoughts. That's where we find life and peace.

Lesson 28 ~ John 6:18-21

Our verses are John 6:18-21, and it's from the story of Jesus walking on the water. The disciples are on the boat and Jesus is not with them. "The sea was tossed by a great wind blowing. When therefore they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing near to the boat; and they were afraid. But he said to them, 'It is I. Do not be afraid.' They were willing therefore to receive him into the boat. Immediately the boat was at the land where they were going" (WEB).

We have the disciples working really hard to row across the sea during a storm. Then God just picks them up and plops them where they need to be without any effort on their part at all. So, which is it? Does God want us to work hard, or does He want us to let Him do it all for us? And the answer is both!

God chose for them to row across in the storm. It was unnecessary. He could have just picked them up and put them on the other side. Philip was picked up and placed in another city in Acts 8. Paul, however, had to travel more than 10,000 miles, and a lot of that was on foot. Since God could just eliminate the effort and just give us stuff and take us places, but doesn't, we can know that He knows that's not the best way for us to live. He doesn't exist to be our servant that fetches us things and chauffeurs us around so that we can grow lazy. He chose for us to work. It's best for us.

But we can easily see from this story, that our labors aren't the best! We can work really hard for a long time and not get very far or hardly accomplish anything. God, in an instant, can accomplish more than we could have imagined. His ways are so much better than ours. And this is where we talk about working in His strength. We need to recognize our weakness, our need for Him. Then let Him accomplish the work through us. It's truly only His work that amounts to anything actually. When our works are tested, the only lasting works will be the ones accomplished by the Everlasting One!

How do we let Him work through us? Start each day by giving Him your whole self, your time, your body, your mind, your strength, your work, your energy, your thoughts. Ask Him to make them His and consecrate them for His purposes. Ask Him to order your steps and lay out the path. His plan for the day. Acknowledge Him throughout the day, thanking Him for answering your prayer and helping you. Live your life together with Jesus. Let Him show Himself strong through you.

Lesson 29 ~ Isaiah 3:10

Our verse is Isaiah 3:10, “Tell the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds” (ESV). I want to put it together with Psalm 37:19, “[The blameless] will not be ashamed in the time of evil, and in the days of famine they will have plenty” (NASB).

No matter what is coming on the world: war, famine, economic depression, pestilence, or whatever evil may come, there's something you should know. It will be well with you. If you are in Christ walking in the light of His salvation, you are righteous, blameless in His sight. Remember, Abraham and David and Noah and others were blameless in God's sight.

God's got special vision for those who have given their hearts to Him. If you are righteous and blameless, then it will be well with you. You will have when others lack. He gives food to those who fear Him (Psalm 111:5). Your blessing won't be just for you, but to share, to show the Lord's goodness to others. In times of danger, you will be protected. He will be a shield. You will be able to lie down and sleep because He keeps you in safety (Psalm 4:8).

How about these Psalms? Psalm 84:11: “For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly” (ESV). Psalm 5:12: “For You, LORD, bless the righteous one; You surround him with favor like a shield” (HCSB).

We could quote many more Psalms. Learn the Psalms. Remind yourself of the Lord's goodness toward those who are His. And choose to be His. Give yourself to His love and care, to His keeping.

Lesson 30 ~ Luke 10:42

“But only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42, BSB). I'll read a couple other verses as well. Psalm 27:4: “One thing I have asked of the LORD; this is what I desire: to dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek Him in His temple” (BSB). John 17:3: “Now this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent” (BSB).

There's just one thing. Being a Christian is simple, simple, simple. Not easy, but simple. There's just one thing. Just know Him. We have eternal life by just getting to know the Father.

Martha was fussing over many things. Jesus says only one thing is necessary. He says that Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to Him, had chosen the good portion and that it wouldn't be taken from her. We should want Him to help us focus our hearts solely on Him. He may need to remove, or temporarily remove, competing desires until we choose the good portion that will be ours forever.

David's desire was to just be with the Lord and to just look on His beauty, to sit in His presence and talk to Him, ask Him questions, listen to Him, and reflect on His goodness. Are you filling your days with needless things? Set your heart on the only thing that matters.

Lesson 31 ~ Jeremiah 29:13

“You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13, NASB 1995).

You should desire to dwell in the secret place, abiding in God's love at all times. But if you've wandered off, if you are struggling to connect, then stop and seek. Seek until you find.

Once you find Him, keep Him close, don't turn away. Throughout the day, turn to Him and acknowledge Him. If you lose it, get on your knees until you are restored into fellowship. Keep close. If you aren't living in that daily sweet fellowship, go after Him! He promises to be found.

Seek like you mean it. Determine to not give up until you have connected with the Father, heart to heart. Pursue Him in His Word. Ask for His help with reading and understanding and getting to know Him. Ask Him to show you any harmful ways in you, and get them out of the way! Ask for His help with that too. Pray and read and sing and thank and praise and seek out Biblical teaching, and seek and pray and read and praise and thank some more. Pursue Him. He's worthy of the quest.

Lesson 32 ~ Deuteronomy 17:19

Our scripture is Deuteronomy 17:19. We'll get to that in just a minute. The Old Testament is the majority of the Bible. It's not there to just show us how bad it was and how much better we have it now. It's there for our example, we're told. We have the example of the Israelites turning to God in their distress, being saved, and then forgetting Him and turning away. We have the example of them rejecting God to go after other gods, other ways of saving themselves. It led to God being forced to turn them over to their gods and being defeated by armies and taken from their Promised Land. Only some will get restored to the land in seventy-years' time. What other examples do we have?

What about this one? "And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them," (Deuteronomy 17:19, ESV). He's supposed to read God's law every day, to keep it before his eyes so that he'll keep it in his heart and do them. We have to know God's Word to do God's Word.

We need to know God's Word so that we make godly decisions that honor God and are best for us. We need to "owe man nothing," so we stay out of debt. We need to know that we freely received, so we should freely give—whether it be money or forgiveness. We need to know that God is the God of our salvation, so we can trust Him to bring us out of all those looming troubles. We need to know to do all things without arguing and complaining and to give thanks for all things, so our speech and thoughts honor God. We need to know to not worry and to be still and to turn things over to God with thanksgiving and watch Him work, instead of trying to control the situation ourselves.

But, to know those things, we have to know His Word. We have to keep it before us day and night, through reading, listening, singing, memorizing, meditating. Keep His Word before you, so you'll learn to fear the Lord and DO His Word.

Lesson 33 ~ 2 Samuel 6:14

“And David danced before the LORD with all his might,” (2 Samuel 6:14, ESV). “The king covered his face and cried out with a loud voice, ‘O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!’” (2 Samuel 19:4, NASB 1995).

David is another Old Testament example for us. He worships the Lord, and he acknowledges the Lord is the one who gives him deliverance when he faces an opponent, whether a lion or giant. He lives on the run from Saul, but at the same time he's given victory in everything he does. He acts on his Spirit-given convictions. He honors God and God honors him. He gets the kingdom. He wins every battle. He rejoices in the Lord's presence with dancing. His kingdom grows and is established. He sins. His life is no longer marked by continuous victory. He lives with the struggle of his son's sins. He lives with heartache. He has to flee his own home.

His kingdom goes to war with itself when his son announces himself king. While David does get the victory, it leaves him heartbroken and crying out, “Oh Absalom, my son Absalom!” It wasn't a celebration of the Lord's goodness. It was a reminder of the deadliness of sin. Yes, David was forgiven. The prophet Nathan tells him that his sin is wiped out. David can live in God's presence and spend eternity with Him. But is that the life you want to live? A life of defeat and heartbreak, as long as you get to heaven in the end? Or, do you want to live a life of joy and dancing and victory over God's enemies, seeing His kingdom grow and be established?

In God's mercy, we do not experience all the consequences of our sin. We wouldn't be able to bear it. David killed a righteous man. It was a big deal. God knew what David needed. He's a good God who does all things well.

Lesson 34 ~ John 14:15

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15, NASB). I used to think of this verse as saying, “If you love Me, you will obey My commandments.” I’m sure I’ve quoted it that way. That’s how I thought of it, but that’s not what it says.

Now to be sure, we’re to obey God’s commandments. I’ll start there. But what does the verse say? It says that we will keep His commandments. What’s the difference? To keep means to guard. But it’s a certain kind of guarding. There’s a different word for guarding, meaning to prevent escape. This word, however, means to keep your eye on something. We’re to keep our eyes on His commandments.

In the lesson about the Old Testament as an example (Lesson 32), I talked about how the king was to read the law daily so that he’d fear God and keep, and do, the commandments. Of course, Jesus is the Word (John 1:1). We can keep our eyes on Him, to keep His Word. That’s what abiding is: being with Jesus, seeing Him, talking with Him, knowing Him, all the time. To get to know Him better, we read His Word, but we read it *with* Him, with Him as our present help and teacher to guide us in His ways. And if we live with Christ in us, beside us, before us, our constant companion, keeping Him and He keeping us, how could we turn aside to sin?

It’s only when we lose sight of His presence that we can do such a thing. The verse isn’t, “If you love Me, then keep My commandments.” It says, “You WILL.” It’s what you’ll do if you love Him. A lack of keeping and doing God’s Word is a lack of love for Him. What can we do about that?

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3, ESV). Our keeping the commandments is the love of God. Love of God. How else could you write that? God’s love. Love of God, the love belongs to God, God’s love. It’s our love for God that keeps us living His Word, but it’s God’s love for us as well. He puts His love in our hearts. The only way we can love God the way we should is to have His love in our hearts. Just like everything, it’s a gift from God and not of ourselves. We choose to receive God’s love and choose to return God’s love. We make the choice to love. When something is drawing your eye, a lust of the flesh, a desire of the flesh or of the mind, you aren’t keeping God’s Word.

Choose for Christ to be the love of your life and don’t let your eye wander. Be faithful to your one true love.

Lesson 35 ~ Hosea 6:6

“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6, ESV). There's a similar thing from 1 Samuel 15:22, “And Samuel said, ‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams’” (ESV).

God didn't desire the sacrifice and the burnt offerings. What were they? When the Israelites were sacrificing animals and burning them, it was to have their sins forgiven. It was so that God's holy presence could remain with them. God didn't want them to have to sacrifice animals in order for them to be forgiven. He had no desire to see animals killed in His name. He'd prefer they'd obey, walk uprightly and in perfect communion with Him, and not need a sacrifice for forgiveness, to satisfy the demands of justice.

Jesus became the perfect sacrifice, but still today, it's better to walk in obedience and communion with God than to need Jesus to intercede for us to stay God's wrath because of our sin. That's not what God wants. God wants us in fellowship with Him, not sinning and separating ourselves from Him. He's not after our religious acts. He's after our hearts.

In our verse, that steadfast love in the Hebrew is *hesed*. It's translated steadfast love, loving kindness, mercy, grace, loving devotion, and such things. He wants to be in relationship with us. He doesn't want that broken and needing restored again and again through daily sacrifices. He wants to walk in communion with us. He wants us to receive His love and to walk in His love, and freely let His love flow out of us back to Him and to others. He wants us to be lovingly devoted to Him, as He is to us. That's that ABIDING: knowing His closeness, and fellowshiping with Him throughout the day in the joy of His presence, keeping your eyes on Him because He's your desire and He delights in you.

In Matthew 9:13, we read Jesus telling the Pharisees, "Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (ESV). Here the word is mercy or compassion. He is desiring to show mercy and compassion on "sinners," rather than desire the self-righteous sacrifice of the Pharisees. Of course, these sinners were getting a new identity. They were now followers of Jesus. They were seeking Him and seeking God. The Pharisees were denying Him.

How can we apply this? We can show mercy and compassion to sinners. Instead of thinking our sacrifice of money to the church is sufficient for helping those in need, what if we showed compassion to the poor and showed up with that love of God, and showed them the mercy and love of God? If you keep your eyes on Jesus, I bet He'll lead you to love others, to love sinners who need God's love.

Lesson 36 ~ John 7:23

“If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well?” (John 7:23, ESV).

This, of course, is Jesus speaking. He's talking to the Pharisees. So why were the Pharisees angry? They perceived being circumcised on the Sabbath as following God's law, but they perceived Jesus healing on the Sabbath as breaking God's law.

In the lesson on Hosea 6:6, I talked about God desiring love over sacrifice (Lesson 35). This is what the Pharisees were missing. They were missing the love part of obedience. Yes, God desires obedience. But why? So we can be with Him, so He can be with us. He's a holy God and sin separates us from Him.

Sin caused the separation, the breakdown of relationship back in the garden. Sin caused the separation of God having to remove His presence from the Israelites abandoning His presence in the ark and in the tabernacle. Sin causes the separation; it sends Jesus outside knocking on the door to be let in. God's not after our obedience. He's not on a power trip and needs to control us and see us bow before Him in cowering submission. He's not in this for Himself. He is love. Love is not selfish. He's in this for us. He's after us. He's wants to woo us. His desire is for us. He doesn't want to see us going after other loves. That's why He is a jealous God. He knows we are His and should be with Him. He knows that only His love can satisfy. He knows that any other love will ultimately destroy us. He wants to save us. He wants us to be perfectly loved.

Yes, we need to obey God, but we can't on our own. We need to keep His Word by keeping our eyes on Him, and keeping His Word before us and in us. But that's a result, a reaction of loving Him. We need to love Him. And of course, we love because He first loved us. It's all from Him, but we need to receive it all from Him. We need to ask of Him, look to Him for His love, His salvation. We need to choose to keep our eyes on Him and to turn from other loves. We need to choose to walk in obedience, which looks like love.

Remember, the law is summed up: “Love God and love others.” That means things like being patient, kind, selfless toward others; that's your calling. That's your task. Even simplified to love God and love others, you can't do it on your own. We need His love to be able to love Him and others. We receive His love by His Spirit being poured out into our hearts. It's a free gift. We just need to receive. Ask. He loves to give the Spirit to those who ask!

Lesson 37 ~ John 8:31-32

“Jesus therefore said to those Jews who had believed him, ‘If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free’” (John 8:31-32, WEB).

Let's walk through the logic of those verses backwards. “If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” In order to be free, we need the truth. We'll know the truth if we are truly his disciples. We'll truly be His disciples if we remain in His Word. We need to keep His commandments, guard them, keep our eye on them. We need to keep Him and His Word before us.

How about this verse? “And I will walk in freedom, for I have sought Your precepts” (Psalm 119:45, BSB). Precepts are commandments that were general rules for living: behavior, how we should act. Like, love God and love your neighbor as yourself, as opposed to a specific thing you had to do. We have freedom. We walk in freedom, when what our feet are going after are God's ways.

Lesson 38 ~ Philippians 1:15-18

“Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice” (Philippians 1:15-18, NKJV).

There are two main ancient manuscripts that translators use. Most modern translations use one that's different from what the King James Version uses, and occasionally the wording is a bit different. I had never read the New King James until this year, and it's been fun seeing new things in Scripture because they literally weren't there before.

In other translations, these verses end with, “in that I rejoice.” The King James and New King James have an additional little tag, “yes, and will rejoice.” I don't rejoice at preachers who are full of self-ambition, envy, and strife. While some might find Jesus in spite of them, I also think they will likely produce a lot of false believers, like themselves, who can talk like they know the truth, but their hearts are far from God.

I thought it odd that Paul is rejoicing that pretenders are preaching Christ. It didn't make any sense to me. But I can hear it differently in the New King James version. I hear the *decision* to rejoice, “I rejoice, and will rejoice.” We're getting to see an example of Paul rejoicing in all circumstances, of giving thanks for all things. He found a way to be thankful and rejoice in the midst of being in prison while other false shepherds are after the flock. He says, at least they can learn about Jesus. I can rejoice for that. Instead of gnashing his teeth at a situation he can do nothing about, he finds a way to rejoice, and makes the decision to continue to rejoice.

Lesson 39 ~ Romans 7:22-23

“For in my inner being I delight in God's law. But I see another law at work in my body, warring against the law of my mind and holding me captive to the law of sin that dwells within me” (Romans 7:22-23, BSB).

Now there's a debate over whether this man in Romans 7 is saved or not. I have at different times said one way or the other. When I would say he wasn't saved, it was because I thought he was a slave to sin, and a saved person is a slave to righteousness, not to sin. But that's not what it says.

He's not a slave to sin. That's not what it says. He's being held captive. The Greek says that he is a prisoner. I do believe this is a Christian who has love of God's Word, delighting in God's law, wanting to do right, but he keeps finding himself restrained, not free from sin but bound by it; an addiction or a thought pattern that's just not being overcome. However, even though this man is saved, this isn't the state of a Christian. This isn't where we're to stay. We're overcomers in Christ Jesus. The life of Christ alive in us through the Holy Spirit has overcome sin. We are set free from sin. We just have to get hold of that and walk in it.

The next verse says, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24, BSB). Well, who is the rescuer? It's Jesus, of course! “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set you free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1-2, BSB). In Christ Jesus you are set free from the bondage. For what the law was powerless to do, in that it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man, as an offering for sin. He thus condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous standard of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

We've talked about those next verses before. It then goes on to talk about how the mind set on the flesh is death, is hostile to God. This isn't at all about our freedom *to* sin. It's our freedom *from* sin. We aren't condemned when we sin, we can shake off the shackles and go free, not get bound up by it again. We forget what's behind, and we press onward and upward becoming more like Jesus.

A Note About Lesson 39

This is a person desiring to live out God's law. They are sincerely broken when they sin and seek repentance. They are living in a dangerous place, but God is patient! He will forgive again and again. But there is freedom to be found in Christ! We need to truly want the sin gone and to love Him alone with our whole hearts.

We tend to want God to remove the desire to sin before we give up the sin. That's not how it works. We have to choose to love Him alone. When you face the temptation, say, "I love Jesus more" and walk away rejoicing. He will be there to help. It will get easier and He can absolutely take away the desire, but we make the choice.

Lesson 40 ~ John 3:27

“A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven” (John 3:27, NKJV).

Can anyone be saved? Or does God harden some people's hearts so that they won't believe? Does God make it so some people have to go to hell and have no choice?

God is good! Yes, anyone can be saved. He made a way for everyone. Yes, there is a hell and people will be going there, but it's a place of their choosing. “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.” What did God give to mankind from heaven for them to receive? Jesus! The answer's always Jesus!

He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting, eternal life. Jesus wasn't lying when He said that. We're told in 1 Timothy 2:4 that God desires *all* to be saved. Peter tells us that God desires all to come to repentance. God wouldn't be in His right mind to say He desired their salvation and then create them with the impossibility to be saved.

I have lessons on the phrases, “God hardened Pharaoh's heart,” and “God sent a lying spirit.” God was acting in righteousness. His heart was for Pharaoh and King Ahab. He wanted them to be saved! He did more for them to show them His majesty and authority than most people will ever see. Yet they rejected Him.

We can take a look at some other verses that make people wonder. How about a verse like this? “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44, NKJV). What if God doesn't draw someone? What can they do? Let's remember that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He's unchanging. He's always Himself. He's always loving, always good, always holy, always just. He can't deny one part of Himself. He's never unloving when He's carrying out justice. He's always good when He's demanding holiness. The verse says the Father must draw people to Christ if they are to come to Him. Let's combine it with this verse. Jesus is talking again, “...if I am lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw *all peoples* to Myself” (John 12:32, NKJV). Jesus says *all people* are drawn to Him if He is lifted up. How did God draw *all people* to Christ? He sent Jesus to be lifted up. God made a way for *all* to be saved.

Lesson 41 ~ John 3:34b

"For God does not give the Spirit by measure" (John 3: 34b, NKJV).

God doesn't give the Holy Spirit by measure. God didn't decide to give some people more Holy Spirit or less Holy Spirit. Jesus, presumably, lived His whole life with the Holy Spirit with Him, from conception. But then the Holy Spirit descends upon Him when He's anointed for His ministry and is sent out. There's no other instance of the Holy Spirit coming upon Him. It flowed in and out of Him as natural as breathing. He felt the power leave Him when the woman touched his garment. He didn't then ask God for more Holy Spirit. It flowed in as it flowed out. We're told God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask, but we also never hear the apostles asking for the Holy Spirit.

The disciples were breathed upon by Jesus and received the Holy Spirit. The verb there shows that it happened then, not something that was going to happen. But they, too, had another experience of anointing with the Holy Spirit when they were launched into ministry. The Holy Spirit comes upon them and they receive power to be God's witnesses. The church grows. Peter preaches for the first time.

The word for *breath* and the word for *spirit* are the same word. Once we are baptized with the Holy Spirit, we have a continual flow, as natural as breathing. We breathe out, and our bodies, instinctively, breathe in. When the Holy Spirit flows out, it fills back in, if we are abiding in Christ. We know we can quench the Holy Spirit. We don't want to dam up the works. A life focused on loving God and others is a life flowing with the Holy Spirit. God pours His love into our hearts and we pour it out back to Him and in love and service to others. It's to be a continuous flow, rivers of living water flowing through us.

He gives the Holy Spirit without measure. You can't use it up. Stay in Christ and He will stay in you. You have in you the same power in you that resurrected Jesus from the dead.

Lesson 42 ~ Lamentations 2:8

“The LORD was determined to destroy the walls of beautiful Jerusalem. He made careful plans for their destruction, then did what he had planned. Therefore, the ramparts and walls have fallen down before him” (Lamentations 2:8, NLT).

A translation like the ESV, or the New King James, would read that God used a measuring line instead of “made careful plans.” I enjoy reading different translations because new things stick out to you. Something unfamiliar can make you perk up. The same thing goes for my husband who reads the Bible in different languages. It can come across a little differently.

I liked this idea of God carefully planning the destruction. Why? If you follow my teachings, you know that I will always defend the goodness of God. He is good and must always be good. He never stops being good. When He's carrying out justice and wrath, He's still being good. He can't *not* be loving or good, or He wouldn't be Himself anymore. He can't stop being God. His nature is unchanging. He must be Himself. Can you see the careful planning of the destruction of Jerusalem in the light of God's goodness?

He doesn't plot evil. He has the good of His children in mind. He loves Jerusalem. It's where He chose to put His name. It's where He had His temple built for His presence to dwell among His people, the ones He chose for His own inheritance. He loves His people. He chose them. He was like a mother and a father to them. He provided for them. He sheltered them. He protected them. He defended them. He taught them. He loved and cared for them. He had great plans to prosper them. He had big hopes for their future. They rejected Him and turned away. God must be Himself. He must be holy and set apart. He must carry out justice. He also wants to preserve His people. They will be utterly lost if they continue in the way they're going. They need to be woken up.

God will do whatever it takes for His children, even if it means destroying Jerusalem—His pride and joy—even if it means temporarily giving up the dream. God doesn't throw a fit and go on a rampage when He's had enough. He has planned the destruction that **MUST** come. He carries out His carefully planned destruction, at the right time, in the right way.

What does the verse say? That God did what He had planned, **THEREFORE**, the ramparts and walls have fallen down before Him. Therefore. There was no accident, no random occurrence that led to the walls being broken down. They came down at the Lord's direction. Even in punishment, destruction, we can trust God's good hand at work. There are those who will fall to His wrath, but justly. There are those who will be exiled and won't thrive until the appointed time. They will cry out to God and He will restore His people and their city. Until the next time they reject Him, and He must reject them to help them awake to the truth. One day, Jerusalem will be restored, and never again will they reject God as their king.

Lesson 43 ~ Lamentations 2:9

“Jerusalem's gates have sunk into the ground. He has smashed their locks and bars. Her kings and princes have been exiled to distant lands; her law has ceased to exist. Her prophets receive no more visions from the LORD” (Lamentations 2:9, NLT).

I did a lesson on Lamentations 2:8 (Lesson 42) about God carefully planning Jerusalem's destruction. We're going to look at what He chose. Now in verse eight, it says the walls are fallen. In verse nine, their gates and locks are destroyed. The wall, the gate and locks, they were a defense. God was their defense.

They were supposed to be relying on God for their defense. The walls needed to come down. What else? The kings were exiled. Who was to be their king? God was supposed to be their king and they rejected Him as their king and asked for Saul. They rejected God as king and they lost their kings.

It also says that “her law ceased from the land.” What was the law? It was supposed to be God's law. It was supposed to be the Torah. They had rejected God's law, ignoring it, so they lost God's law. Finally, it says that the prophets receive no more visions. God will still speak to His prophets and still care for His people, but there is no more warning voice at this point. They have been warned and warned and warned. They ignored the warnings, even attacking the messenger bringing God's Word, and so they lost the warning. Has your nation received any warnings? I bet it has. What can you do about it? Have you received warnings? What can you do about that?

Lesson 44 ~ John 9:22

“His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews. For the Jews had already determined that anyone who confessed Jesus as the Christ would be put out of the synagogue” (John 9:22, BSB).

This verse comes from the story of Jesus healing the blind man, a man who was born blind; *I once was blind, but now I see*. The Pharisees are struggling with this big miracle. They don't want to believe that the man was born blind. They ask for his parents to verify the story. The parents tell the Pharisees that he was born blind, but that they didn't know anything else. They say, “Our son is of age, ask him.” That's where our verse comes in. They said that because they were afraid of the Jews. Why? What does the verse say? The Jews were kicking out of the synagogue anyone who confessed Jesus as the Christ.

Jesus was challenging the Jewish leaders. He was challenging their system. He was challenging what it meant to be righteous and obey God. He was challenging what it meant to be a believer. While the earlier believers do go and teach in the synagogues, a natural place where people are gathered who are interested in the things of God, they also met together in the homes. They moved out from under the authority of the Jewish leaders. Peter questions their authority after being filled with the Holy Spirit boldness, asking, "Is it right for us to obey God or man?"

The blind man's parents needed to be put out. God wanted them removed from under the authority of the Pharisees. God wanted them serving Him, not the man-made laws of the Pharisees. God wanted them to rebel against what was obviously not right, to submit to what was clearly the hand of God.

We don't need to fear the thing we fear. God is perfect in all of His ways. God is only good! If you are His, He is on your side and working for you, for your good, for His glory. We don't need to hide and maneuver and manipulate situations to avoid the thing we're sure we need to avoid.

We can submit to whatever God is working out. We don't need to fear. We need to trust. We NEVER need to fear.

Lesson 45 ~ 1 John 5:4-5

Our scripture for this lesson is 1 John 5:4-5. I call this “Already an Overcomer.” Before we get to that scripture, let me share some other overcoming verses. “To the one who overcomes, I will grant the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Revelation 3:21, BSB). “The one who overcomes will inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he will be My son” (Revelation 21:7, BSB). “...he who overcomes will be dressed in white. And I will never blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before My Father and His angels” (Revelation 3:5, BSB).

Do you want to be one who overcomes? We read those verses in Revelation and think: *I want to overcome; Lord, I hope I overcome; help me overcome; don't let me shrink back.* But listen to these overcoming verses: “For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5, ESV).

Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? To be an overcomer, what do we need to do? It says: be born of God and believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Do you have those things? Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and are you born of God? Then you *are* an overcomer. There's just one more thing in those verses. The victory that overcomes the world is our faith. And what is our faith but a gift from God, the author and perfecter of our faith. When He gave us salvation, He gave us to be overcomers. It's who we are as children of God.

Lesson 46 ~ Psalm 92:4

I call this “The Difference between David and Solomon.” “You thrill me, LORD, with all you have done for me! I sing for joy because of what you have done” (Psalm 92:4, NLT).

I was realizing that David meditated on God's creation, on God's Word, on God's beauty, and delighted himself. Solomon studied God's creation, and His Word and came up empty. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon tells us that all is meaningless. That there's nothing out there for us except to obey God's commands. He describes it as our duty in the end of the book.

God, and His ways, were a delight to David and duty to Solomon. What are they to you? If we are finding our devotions a duty instead of a delight, how can we change? It seems like it's where our heart lies. If you love God with your whole heart, then drawing near and being with Him, thinking on Him, hearing His Word is a delight. Think of being in love and getting a call from the one you are infatuated with. It was a thrill! “You thrill me, LORD, with all you have done for me! I sing for joy because of what you have done.” David looked at his life and was overcome with gladness because of the goodness and mercy of the Lord. Solomon looked at his life and was overcome by its meaninglessness.

“Vanity. It's all vanity!” he exclaims. Solomon was shown more “goodness” than anyone. God gave him everything, but his heart wasn't in the right place. He loved his stuff. He loved his women. David loved God. What's your heart set on? What thrills and delights it? If you find yourself dwelling on and lighting up at something other than God, then it's time to get on your knees and repent. Ask for God's help. Reject those other loves and love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Lesson 47 ~ Ecclesiastes 12:1

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come...” (Ecclesiastes 12:1, NIV). I call this lesson “Remember Him BEFORE.”

We can't wait until the days of trouble come to remember God. We'll be floundering for a foothold if we aren't already standing firm on the Rock. Before the floods sweep in, we need to be high up on the Rock out of harm's way. How do we get on the Rock? Psalm 27 says *He* puts us on the Rock.

The scripture doesn't link the two, but the verse about being put high upon the rock comes next after the verse about seeking only to dwell in God's house, gazing upon His beauty, and inquiring of Him. Jesus says our lives are kept on the Rock by obeying God's commands. Remember your God. Walk through each day with praise and thanksgiving, continually remembering His beauty, His goodness, His grace, His mercy. He's the only reason you're alive today. He's the only reason you have everything you do. It's all by grace alone; His superabundant grace. So humble yourself to obey His commandments, and walk in His ways and not your own. You'll be in a safe place when the days of trouble come.

Lesson 48 ~ Hebrews 4:15

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15, ESV).

Jesus was tempted in every respect. I was thinking about that and wondered if Jesus ever struggled with unbelief. Unbelief is maybe the biggest struggle of humanity. I wondered how Jesus could be tempted to unbelief, when He knew the Father and He knew He and the Father were perfectly united as One. Then I remembered the cross and the separation. Jesus had to descend “into the lower parts of the earth.”

I don't know how long the separation lasted. But maybe, maybe it just lasted long enough for Jesus to be tempted to doubt. Maybe Jesus had to recall the promises just like we are asked to. Maybe He recited Psalm 16:10, “For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; You will not allow Your Holy One to undergo decay” (NASB). Jesus understands the trial of temptation. But He overcame. It's His life that is in you now, if you have been baptized into His death and risen to new life in Christ by His Spirit. We live this life by the faith of the Son of God, who loved you and gave Himself for you. Thank You, Jesus!

He gave Himself for us in every way. That wasn't just dying for us. That was submitting to the trials and troubles of human life, so that He would be able to be there for us and help us through. He did it for us. When you are going through trials and troubles, maybe you can have the same mindset: one that is submitted to the Father's good will. But also knowing that what you are going through, the Father can use as a blessing in someone else's life.

Lesson 49 ~ Ezekiel 43:12

“And this is the basic law of the Temple: absolute holiness!” (Ezekiel 43:12a, NLT).

There's a large portion of Ezekiel where the temple is measured. A measuring rod is drawn, and Ezekiel is taken around and sees all the measurements of everything, and everything is a precise measure. The measure of the length from here to there matches exactly the length from there to here. Things are perfectly symmetrical. There is a precise number of stairs. Everything is laid out just so, precisely, perfectly, down to the adornments, such as palm tree carvings. Ezekiel then sees the throne room, and God's glory fills the place. Ezekiel is told the law of the temple, that everything, including the area of the mountain it sits on, must be holy.

The New Living Translation puts it this way, “This is the basic law of the Temple: absolute holiness!” Although there seems to be another temple built for Jesus' millennial reign, where is Jesus' temple now? We are God's temple. Ephesians 2 ends with, “...you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19b-22, ESV). We are the temple, each of us, and all of us. We're to be absolutely holy. Holy means set apart.

Holy unto the Lord means, set apart for Him. A plate is a plate, but when it is consecrated and set apart for God's purposes, then it's holy and is useful for holy acts, like holding the Bread of Presence. We need to keep ourselves from being used for common purposes and be set apart for God to be used for His purposes. In order to be holy, set apart for God, we need to be set apart from the world. Be ye separate. Ask the Lord to make you holy and allow Him to remove the common things from your life.

Lesson 50 ~ Luke 1:79b

“...to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79b, ESV).

Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, prophesies once his tongue is loosed after the naming of his son. The prophecy talks about John preparing the way for the One who will give light to those in darkness and who will “guide our feet into the way of peace.” Have you ever described why Jesus came as, to guide our feet in the way of peace? Why did Jesus come?

He came so that we might have peace with God, be reconciled with our Father. Our relationship was severed by sin, and we were enemies of God. We couldn't love God, but we also couldn't love each other. God is love. And without God's unconditional love in us, we don't even have the capacity to unconditionally love others. Jesus broke down the wall of sin that separated us from God, so we can be united with Him forever. He pours His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit given us, and we can love Him and love others. We can live a life of peace with God and others. We can live a life of unity with God and other believers. In Christ, we find the way of peace.

Lesson 51 ~ Psalm 56:3-4

“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?” (Psalm 56:3-4, NKJV).

Did you catch what was interesting about those verses? First, I was interested that it says, “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.” He's afraid, so he's going to trust. The decision to trust comes after the feeling of fear. He has the feeling of fear. He's not so full of trusting—calm confidence—that he doesn't have the feeling of fear, at least for a time.

Then, in the next verse he says, “In God I have put my trust; I will not fear.” This is the opposite. The knowing feeling is in trusting God, and the decision is to not fear. There are two other parts to this verse. There is a decision to praise God and a declaration of truth, which we know as God's Word: “What can man do to me?” or in one translation, “What can mere mortals do to me?”

We have a feeling of fear come on, followed by a decision to trust, followed by a decision to praise, which results in putting our trust in God, knowing truth about who He is and who we are in Him, which results in a decision to not fear.

If we want to change our feelings, we have to change our thoughts. We change our thoughts by renewing our mind, by feeding it the truth of God's Word, meditating on it day and night, until that is what we are thinking and not the thoughts of man. When the thoughts of man come in and cause thoughts of fear, we go to God's Word. We put His truth in our mind, reminding ourselves of who God is and who we are to Him, and we make the decision to trust. We praise Him and choose not to listen to the feelings.

Lesson 52 ~ Psalm 23:5a

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (Psalm 23:5a, ESV).

Enemies, in this verse, is a verb used as a noun. While this word is sometimes used in other places to refer to the enemies of Israel, it's not the typical word for enemies, which is a noun and is related to the word for hate. In this verse, the verb comes from a word meaning to restrict, to bind, to tie up. That brings up a neat idea of celebrating in front of that which was trying to hold you back, but you broke through to the celebration. To be bound and restrained, that could describe someone in prison. Jesus says that He was anointed to proclaim liberty to the captives and freedom to those bound.

Jesus set us free from what binds us. There is the restrainer himself, Satan, and we are freed from his dominion, but there are also the things he uses to try and stop us, to hold us back, to bind us from running free in God's kingdom. Jesus sets us free. We're set free from the sin that so easily entangles us. We're set free from the fear of death. We're set free from attacks against body, mind, and soul.

That doesn't mean we aren't attacked and don't suffer. It's that we can get freedom from all of those things. We have God's Word that says He will deliver us out of every trouble, meaning that there is trouble that needs delivering from. But in Christ we are overcomers. When troubles come that try to steal, kill, and destroy, we just need to humble ourselves before God with thanksgiving. He's working out the blessing in it. He's got the deliverance all planned out and on the calendar.

We just set our hope on Him and praise the Great God who chose to set us free, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who opened the prison doors by His death and resurrection.

Lesson 53 ~ Jeremiah 26:3

"Perhaps they will listen and turn from their evil ways. Then I will change my mind about the disaster I am ready to pour out on them because of their sins" (Jeremiah 26:3, NLT).

I shared a lesson before on how God carefully planned Jerusalem's destruction (Lesson 42). He knew just what would happen. But God has other plans too. His desire is not to destroy the city and His people. His desire is to save them and prosper them.

He warns and warns and warns and hopes. He says, "Maybe they will listen and I can *not* carry this out." He knows they won't listen, but He continues to hope. Love believes all things. God's heart is only for the good of His children. He will never give up hope on you, on your loved ones. He will keep working on your behalf. He will keep doing everything He can to preserve you for His heavenly kingdom. God won't give up on you and your situation. Don't give up on God. Hope. Believe. Love believes all things.

Lesson 54 ~ Daniel 6:10-11

“But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God. Then the officials went together to Daniel's house and found him praying and asking for God's help” (Daniel 6:10-11, NLT).

I think we tend to balk at religious ritual, and maybe to our detriment at times. While I don't think we are under any law to pray three times a day facing Jerusalem, I really like this picture of the faithfulness to turn to God three times a day, to thank God and to ask for help. During the day, I'm more likely to throw out “Thanks Lord” or “We need this” prayers, than to stop and actually turn to Him. Think of the facing Jerusalem as looking at the Lord. When I'm tossing out “arrow prayers” like that, I'm more likely looking at the problem, the thing right in front of me, than at the Lord.

I like the discipline of stopping and actually turning to Him—body, mind, soul, spirit—and taking a minute. And it can be just a minute, to actually connect with Him and say thanks, and ask for help expecting to receive it, not just throwing off a prayer and continuing on with my day as if I wasn't expecting an answer. Kneeling is a good way to remove yourself from the ordinary around you and take a pause to turn yourself to God. Stop. Thank. Ask. Praise.

While my goal is to remain in the Lord's presence at all times acknowledging Him with me all day long, there is still very much a need for that stopping—not just letting Jesus tag along with you during the day, but be the One you turn to with your questions, with your thanks, with your excitement. Stop and pause. Turn your whole self to Him, and be with the Lord. Let Him refresh you throughout your day, not just fill up your tank to get the day started.

Stop and be still, and know that He is God. We need that, maybe even more, in the middle of day than in the quiet calm of morning.

Lesson 55 ~ Daniel 4:27

“King Nebuchadnezzar, please accept my advice. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper” (Daniel 4:27, NLT). Let me just add part of a verse, “...the righteous shows mercy and gives” (Psalm 37:21b, NKJV).

The context of the verse in Daniel is, of course, Daniel in Babylon. The king has had a dream that God is going to severely humble him until he learns that God rules kingdoms and gives them to whomever He wishes. It struck me to read Daniel's advice. He doesn't say put on sackcloth and humble yourself, acknowledge the Lord and what He's done for you. He says stop sinning and do what is right.

Can we make that parallel to the next sentence? Break from your wicked past and be merciful to the poor. Stop sinning: break from your wicked past. Do what is right: be merciful to the poor. You could boil that all down to “be merciful to the poor”. That's what King Nebuchadnezzar needed to do from Daniel's point of view, in his wisdom, in order to maybe have God relent from his plan. I've been saddened recently at knee-jerk reactions to people who talk about helping the poor, labeling it “Social Gospel!” No, helping the poor is what Christians do.

If you aren't showing mercy to the poor in some way, then you are disobeying large swaths of the Bible. The social gospel isn't helping the poor. The social gospel is making the “help” the good news, instead of the cross of Christ. Those carrying the cross with them to show God's love to the poor are ministering in the name of Jesus and to the glory of the Father. If you don't care about your poor brethren, then you are missing something of the love of God. It's the righteous who show mercy and give.

Lesson 56 ~ Ezekiel 11:8

"You fear the sword, so I will bring the sword against you, declares the Lord GOD" (Ezekiel 11:8, BSB).

In Ezekiel, we read this prophecy that they will face the sword, the thing they feared. God gives them what they feared. I have said before, when looking at how God gives people the thing they are desiring, that we should be sure that what our heart desires is God. This verse struck me the same way. If we are going to be turned over to the thing we fear, let it be God! David knew this and asked to fall into the hands of God because he knew He was a merciful God. What's the context of this in Ezekiel?

Jerusalem is about to be captured. Some will go to captivity in Babylon. Many will die. In fact, Jeremiah had prophesied that anyone who leaves the city and surrendered to the Babylonians would live, but that anyone who remained in the city, to preserve their own life, would lose their life. They are fearing the thing God said wouldn't happen. God said they would live if they went to the Babylonians. They didn't trust God and tried to save themselves by hiding behind their walls, which will be broken. They will die by the sword. Those who try to save their life will lose it. Those who lose their lives for His sake, leaving their home because they feared God and trusted His Word, would save their lives. Let's trust our good God. Let's fear God and nothing else.

Lesson 57 ~ Isaiah 14:27

“For the LORD of hosts has purposed, And who will annul *it*? His hand *is* stretched out, And who will turn it back?” (Isaiah 14:27, NKJV). I call this lesson “The Purposes of the Lord Shall Stand.”

We're going to talk about the will of God, but I don't want to use that phrase. We're going to use different words to talk about it because it can mean different things in the Bible. On the one hand, we have God's heart, His unchanging character. We'll call these things God's desires. God's desire is for all men to be saved, that none should perish but all come to repentance. His heart doesn't change. His heart for us will never change. His love toward us is steadfast and unchanging. Then we have His purposes. This is what He has decided and spoken. These determinations can be changed.

Let's go back to our verse. “For the LORD of hosts has purposed, And who will annul *it*? His hand *is* stretched out, And who will turn it back?” No one gets to override God's plan. There is no greater authority or power that has any ability to stop God's purposes from being carried out. He speaks and it stands firm. God brings the counsel of nations and the plans of men to nothing. They can't out-plot nor maneuver Him. The people try to seize Jesus, but no one can touch Him. Why? It had been decreed. It was not yet His time.

Who's powerful enough to change God's plans? He is! God says to Moses, “I'm going to wipe them all out and start over with you.” Moses prays. God changes His mind. God says, “If you disobey, I will bring these curses on you.” They disobey. He says, “I will bring these curses on you.” But if they turn back, God will change His mind and relent because His heart is unchanging in His steadfast love toward us.

Lesson 58 ~ Lamentations 3:33

“For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone” (Lamentations 3:33, NIV).

God didn't will that you break your leg. He didn't come up with a plan to have your leg broken and then speak it into being. He knew that it would happen, not because He wants you to break your leg, but because He has ordained that we be able to make choices in our lives that have consequences. And, He allows Satan and his minions to operate within certain boundaries.

Bad things can, and do, happen. Let's not call them God's will. God allows it because of His will, His heart's desire. Not that you suffer pain, because we know God does not afflict willingly, but because His heart is unchanging in its steadfast love for you.

What's God's will? For you to be with Him, for you to be conformed to the image of Christ. If He sees an opportunity to answer your prayer to become more Christ-like, through our bad choices or the devil's evil schemes, He might choose to allow it. He will use it for our good and His glory. That's the will of God, His heart-plan. That's God's heart: our good, His glory. Why His glory? Because we need to see Him high and lifted up. We need to worship Him to live! He loves us. He's thinking of us. He acts on our behalf, and His unchanging will of loving, good intentions toward us directs His plans.

Lesson 59 ~ Exodus 32:9-14

I call this lesson “Prayer in the Will of God.”

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.’ But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, ‘...Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, “I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.”’ And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people” (Exodus 32:9-14, ESV).

I've been thinking, we need to stop talking about the will of God. I think we get ourselves confused and start thinking the wrong way. I think we should talk about the heart of God; His steadfast, unending, unchanging love, and His kind intentions and good desires for us. And we can talk about his plans and purposes. God's heart loved the Israelites. God's head was saying *they have gone too far*. God's heart for us will never change. He will always love his children. He will always love, period. He will always be good, kind, patient; those things will never change. That's the unchanging God, His unchanging character.

His plans and purposes *can* change though. No one can outrun, out-maneuver, out-plot God and keep His determined plan from carrying out, but He can change His own mind. Why did He change His mind here, in this story? Moses prayed. His heart wasn't to hurt these people. He never inflicts willingly on His people. He does it because He has to, not because He wants to. He was ready and willing to answer Moses' prayer. We can change the course of history with our prayers. God changes His mind. God can change His plans.

He acts when we pray. He wants us to pray. Did He want Moses to pray? I would say, yes. He listens to Moses and does as He asks. God says, “Let me alone that I may destroy them.” He shows Moses how to stop it. Don't let Him alone. In the Gospels, we're taught to keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking. We're told God will answer persistent prayer. Jesus, Himself, tells us we can ask whatsoever.

God loves when we pray. When we pray, we give Him the right to act on our behalf and on the behalf of others. God's justice demanded that He destroy the stiff-necked people. Our prayers can intercede, as God's priests' did in the Old Testament: stand in the gap. We can stay God's judgment, buy more time allowing him to show off more of His great mercy and love. We can, and should, always surrender our whole lives to Him, giving Him the go-ahead to act on our behalf, for our good, for His glory, bringing about His heart's desire for us to know Him.

Lesson 60 ~ John 17:3

"Now this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent" (John 17:3, BSB).

I have been saying that God's desire is for you to know Him. This verse is why. To know Him is eternal life. He desires that all might be saved. His desire is that all come to repentance so that none perish.

How does knowing Him save us? One, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. To know His greatness, His awesomeness, His holiness, His majesty, His superiority, His transcendence, His power, His justice, His wrath, is to learn the fear of the Lord, is to learn humility, is to keep us submitted to Him and obeying His Word, which is the path of righteousness which leads to eternal dwellings.

Two, to know Him is to know His love, His kindness, His patience, His mercy, His goodness. To know Him in this way is to receive His love in all its fullness, all its splendor, and to become God's child and know Him as your loving Father who cares for you. And in knowing Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection to reconcile us to the Father, that we might have this access to Him to get to know Him. In that, we find eternal life. Seek to know Him. While it can be useful to learn about God, that's not what we need. We need to *know* Him. He needs to become a real and personal God to us.

Lesson 61 ~ John 10:3-5

“The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. Whenever he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. They will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him; for they don’t know the voice of strangers.” (John 10:3-5 WEB).

Did you ever wonder about these sheep? How did they know the shepherd's voice so well? How did they know so clearly to run away from other voices? It just doesn't seem that simple, does it? But the scripture just states plainly that the sheep know His voice and flee from the voice of a stranger because they don't know those voices.

I remember thinking and praying about this, thinking that we make things complicated, that sheep were dumb and just simply followed without asking questions. I prayed, “Lord, make me a dumb sheep.” It seemed like God laughed gently at me, at my thought that I was something other than a dumb sheep already.

So, if we're already dumb sheep, those of us who have entered into the fold through the gate, why does it seem not so clear and easy to discern the voice of God? I think the answer is in verse 3, “...the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out.” The sheep recognized His voice as the one to follow because they had been listening. They had also been following as He led them. In the practice of listening and following (obeying what we heard), is the development of our discernment in knowing His voice.

There's one other piece there. It says that He called His own sheep by name. That's one-on-one intimacy. That's face-to-face conversation. That's not Jesus preaching to the multitude; that's Jesus telling you He loves you and you are His. It's spending time in relationship with Jesus, where He calls you by name and lets you know that you are His, and you let Him know He is your choice too. That's where we hear and make the choice to follow. That's where we develop the ear of a disciple to know the Master's voice and to follow it alone.

Lesson 62 ~ Hebrews 4:2

“For indeed we have had good news preached to us, even as they also did, but the word they heard didn’t profit them, because it wasn’t mixed with faith by those who heard” (Hebrews 4:2, WEB). “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40, NKJV).

The Word has to be mixed with faith. God's Word doesn't hold salvation on its own. The Scriptures can't save you; they aren't enough. They've never been enough. We need to mix the Word with faith. Faith comes from hearing. The two go together. We need to hear God's Word and we need to have faith in God's Word.

Faith is a gift from God. It comes to us by the Spirit. We have to have the Spirit's help to receive God's Word and make it alive to us, to turn it into faith and belief and action. Don't read the Bible to diligently read the next chapter, or to get your devotions done for the day, or to check off your reading list. Read the Bible to gain faith. Read the Bible to stir up belief in God that sends you out in faith to act on God's Word. Read the Scriptures to gain life, not from the words on the page, but from the Spirit-breathed life in those words, that brings faith to life and brings life into our lives.

Lesson 63 ~ John 3:23

“John also was baptizing in Enon near Salim, because there was much water there. They came and were baptized” (John 3:23, WEB).

This verse stood out to me because of its practicality. God understands the details. God knows the needs. He baptized there because there was a lot of water. God doesn't have to make a special waterfall from heaven to baptize people in a supernatural way. He can use what we have. John had a place with a lot of water, good for baptizing. It's okay to look at the practical-ness of a situation. We just need to not limit ourselves to that, putting limits on what God can do because of the practical limitations of a situation.

If God's put you in a place and you can use it, go ahead. He can move you if He's got a better plan. We can start with what we know and what we have, trusting that God arranged our being here and has provided what we already got.

See Him in the details. He may already have them all worked out.

Lesson 64 ~ John 1-5

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it” (John 1:5, NLT).

The darkness can NEVER extinguish the light. The darker the culture gets, the fiercer the persecution, the greater the threat, the brighter the light. It doesn't put out the light of Christ. It doesn't hide it. It can't cover it. Light seems brighter the darker it gets. Christ's light doesn't fade, but in the daylight, it would never appear as bright as in the dark of night.

It's almost like we need the dark to be able to shine the light of Christ. The trials, the struggles, the problems in each day: see them as God's blessing to give you the opportunity to shine.

Lesson 65 ~ Acts 14:17

“...he never left them without evidence of himself and his goodness. For instance, he sends you rain and good crops and gives you food and joyful hearts” (Acts 14:17, NLT).

One evidence of the goodness of God is people's joyful hearts. When people are feasting and having a good time at a celebration, at a party, it's evidence of the goodness of God. He created us to enjoy life. He created us to enjoy good food. We didn't have to have taste buds. We didn't have to have the capacity for joy.

God shows us His goodness, in how He gives good gifts to even those who are His enemies. He gives them hearts that can rejoice and celebrate.

Lesson 66 ~ Isaiah 14:2

“They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them” (Isaiah 14:2, ESV).

This is the heritage of the saint. We were slaves to sin in Satan's kingdom of darkness. Then, by the blood of Christ, we were transferred into God's kingdom. He opened the prison doors. He set the captives free. We are no longer slaves to sin. That which once oppressed us, we now rule over. That which once held us captive, we now hold captive. But it's not our victory. It's the Lord's.

He fights the battles. He gets the victories. We get to be still and quiet. We get to trust. We get to choose to let Him fight for us and not turn to other gods to save us. We choose to love and fear Him. He fights on our behalf. He shows Himself strong to save.

When the feelings arise that want to draw or push you into something, you remember your choice. Declare it again. I choose to love God and to fear God. And you be still. He's got it from there. Of course, there's one other thing you should always be doing: rejoice in Him and give thanks!

Lesson 67 ~ Isaiah 42:15-16

“I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools” (Isaiah 42:15, ESV).

What's God up to? What's He doing? Is He forsaking His people? Is He destroying them? Is He going back on His promises? Why would He destroy the land, the gift to His people? Why does He tear down? He tears down to build up. It's demo day on the construction site. To build, you often need to tear down first. Let's read the next verse, “And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them” (Isaiah 42:16, ESV).

God isn't forsaking His children. He never stops loving His children. He never stops being *for* them. They sometimes stop loving Him and stop being for Him, but He is faithful even when we are faithless. You may go through times when it feels like you are withering. It can feel like you've dried up, and life is gone. What do you do? You remember that your God will never leave you nor forsake you.

You trust that He's drying up the rivers to make a smooth new path to lead you on. You always let it turn you *to* God and never away. You keep seeking Him and choosing to love and fear Him. You keep reading His Word and knowing it's all true.

Remember, you are the blind one. He knows the way through and the way out. Trust Him. Give thanks and rejoice.

Lesson 68 ~ John 10:29

“My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand” (John 10:29, WEB).

God is greater than all. Please, *please*, let's act like that is true. Believe you are in God's hand. What can harm you in God's hand? Believe you are in God's hand. What lack would you have, what need would you suffer? Believe you are in God's hand. What would we need to defend ourselves against? Believe you are in God's hand. How can we act like we are in danger, or don't have what we need, or need to protect or defend ourselves?

How could any of those things be true if we were in God's hand? Believe you are in God's hand. If nothing can separate you from the love of God, then nothing can snatch you out of God's hand. If you've asked Him to take your life, then trust He's got you in the hollow of His hand.

Lesson 69 ~ Luke 18:19

“No one is good except God alone” (Luke 18:19, ESV).

We aren't good. James says that the man who can tame their tongue is a perfect man. Paul says he's not perfected and has not attained what Christ has gotten for Him. You are never going to be a good person. Our goal isn't to become a good person or a better, and better, person. Our goal is to die to self and get out of the way, because the world needs someone who is good, and God alone is good.

We need the life of Christ to be formed in us and to live through us, so that all of God's goodness can go out to the world through us. It's His love. It's His wisdom. It's His understanding. It's His teaching. It's His patience. If it's good, it's Him, not you.

Hallelujah that He's producing good through you. That's the everlasting fruit, not that we get so good we do all things well, but that the One who does all things well has His way in and through our lives.

Lesson 70 ~ John 21:3

Our scripture is John 21:3, this is after the resurrection, “Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We will go with you.’ They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing” (ESV).

They didn't know what to do next. They'd just spent the last three years at Jesus' side. Now they weren't with Him always. They were at a loss.

It's good to wait on the Lord when you don't know what to do, but I also understand just doing what you know to do while you wait. I think they are both okay, as long as you know that you don't know what you're supposed to be doing and are ready to accept the re-direct.

They don't know what comes next or what they should be doing. They go fishing. They are fishermen. They know how to do that. Except, they fail. We need to see God at work in our lives like that. If you've surrendered your life to God to do as He pleases and guide you, the complete “fail” is a good time to stop and reassess. *Lord, do you want me doing this?* Maybe He does, but if you know you went ahead without *knowing* you were supposed to, it's a good time to stop and ask and wait on Him again.

Here, Jesus blesses their fishing. One, it shows who He is. But two, it also presents them with a choice. I don't think it was a hard choice for Peter. Jesus reiterates His call to them, “Follow me.” They abandon their catch (the thing they know), for the unknown adventure of following Jesus. They already knew it was worth it. It was worth the confusion and the fuss and the unknown and the waiting. Whatever God had planned, it was worth it.

Lesson 71 ~ Psalm 103:7

“He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel” (Psalm 103:7, ESV).

Moses knew God in a different way than the people of Israel. The people of Israel knew God's acts, His deeds, His exploits, His works, the things He did. They were what they saw God do. They were sensing. They knew what their senses told them. They saw Him act, so they believed the things they saw.

If they weren't seeing, then they weren't believing. They lived by sight and not by faith. Moses had a different understanding of God. God made known His ways to Moses. His ways are His mode of action, His course of life, the how and why He did things.

Moses knew the heart of God. He knew His ways, His will, His heart—he knew God. He knew God would defend them, not just that He had defended them before. He knew God would provide, not just that He always sent manna before, so we expect Him to do it again. He knew God wouldn't destroy His people; people feared destruction. Paul tells us to understand the will of God. We can know His will, because it's unchanging. His ways are unchanging. His nature is unchanging.

That's not talking about God's plans. They can change. It's talking about knowing God, who He is, what He desires. We can get to know Him through His Word with the help of the Holy Spirit. Ask God to show you His ways, to make them known to you. Get to know His ways so you can always walk in the paths of light and life.

Lesson 72 ~ Haggai 2:23

“On that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will take you...and make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of hosts” (Haggai 2:23, ESV).

The signet ring was a symbol of authority. The ring itself has no power. It's the authority behind the ring with the power. When God makes us like a signet ring, we are the symbol of His authority, not the authority. We just represent His authority. Jesus said that all authority, in heaven and on earth, has been given to Him. He does NOT then say, and I pass it on to you; He does say, “Go, therefore.”

How can we go without the authority? Because we go as His representatives. We cannot heal. God can. We have no power over spirits, but God does. We cannot raise anyone from the dead, but God can. We can't part the sea, but God can. We can't save anyone's souls, but God can.

We live in humble obedience to God. Humility is always our posture toward both God and man. Let God confirm you, honor you, expand your influence. You don't seek those things. You seek Him and remain humble.

Lesson 73 ~ Matthew 5:3

I call this “The Poor in Spirit.” “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3, ESV). I want to read another verse too, “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12, ESV).

I have been troubled by this verse, about taking the kingdom by force. I have heard many Christians use this verse to proclaim something like we should “violently” take God's kingdom. They don't mean take up arms, of course. They mean something like we *have* to go get it. We go get our healing, and such. Men of God, that I greatly respect, have quoted this verse as something we should do. But the verse talks about the kingdom suffering violence. That doesn't sound good. Why would I want to be one of the violent ones forcing myself on the kingdom causing it to suffer?

This verse is more mysterious because it talks about a short amount of time. From the days of John the Baptist until now. This is Jesus talking when this violence is happening. What's happened in the kingdom, besides Jesus doing kingdom-work perfectly within the will of God? This verse is right after the chapter where Jesus sends out the disciples with His authority. They did “kingdom acts” without knowing that relationship with God through abiding in Christ.

They were given direction, but they seemed to be able to do what they chose to do at that time. (They couldn't always, as they failed at freeing the boy with epilepsy.) Were they taking the kingdom by force? Remember that “they” included the thief Judas. People with wrong hearts were using God's power at will. Were they taking the kingdom by force? Maybe I'm missing something that others are understanding, but it reminds me of Jacob wrestling God, refusing to let go until he was blessed. He *got* the blessing, but he limped the rest of his life.

I have heard preachers quote this, telling us to hold on until you get your blessing. But again, it doesn't seem right to me. If God wants to give it, let Him give it. Why force Him? That doesn't seem right. Why suffer for the rest of your life to get the thing you want? That doesn't seem wise.

And then I read, again, the Beatitudes. And I see exactly how we're to receive the kingdom—it's not by force. We can receive the kingdom (in fact, told it is ours), if we are poor in the spirit. That seems the opposite spirit of one that takes it by force.

We read in the Bible how it's the meek that will inherit the land. Being poor in spirit is a posture of humility. It's realizing we can do nothing. We have nothing. It's agreeing with scripture that there is no good thing in me, that we come to God and have nothing of worth to offer. We just come humbly to God, seeking mercy and grace, and we receive all the glorious inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

Lesson 74 ~ Luke 10:38-42, John 12:1-3a

“Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42, ESV).

Now I'm going to read one more scripture, “Six days before the Passover” (that's when Jesus was going to die), “Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair” (John 12:1-3a, ESV).

I like how we get to revisit this scene. Jesus is back at the home of Mary and Martha. Mary and Martha are doing the exact same things. Mary is again at Jesus' feet. Martha is again serving. Jesus wasn't asking her to never cook or clean. There was still work to be done. But we're not told this time of her stewing in frustration. We're not told of her troubles and anxiety. She just served. I like that simple description. Martha served. That's all we're told. May that be how we are described.

They served. A servant needs no praise or recognition for just doing what they were told to do. It's expected of them. And now Martha has accepted her role. She's serving and not worried about what other people are doing. Mary is serving too, in her own way. They look different. They are both doing what is required of them. They served.

Lesson 75 ~ John 12:3b

This verse is about Mary pouring perfume on Jesus' feet. "The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume" (John 12:3b, ESV).

I call this "A Sweet-Smelling Aroma." She poured out her offering and her sacrifice to the Lord. It was a sweet-smelling aroma that filled the whole house. The Lord often called Israel's burnt offerings a pleasant aroma, a fragrant aroma.

Paul talks about Christ's sacrifice for us being a sweet-smelling aroma. He calls the gifts and sacrifices of others by the same description. The Philippians send him aid and he calls it a sweet-smelling offering, a sacrifice that is pleasing to God.

I liked the idea that her act of worship not only was offered to Jesus and pleased God, but it permeated the whole house. Her act of worship affected everyone in the house with her.

Honestly, I tend to chuckle a little at the word "atmosphere." It's thrown around a little too much. Everyone wants to change the atmosphere. Well, here's how to do it. You don't command God to do it. You don't sing and shout about it. You don't pull down anything. You worship God by presenting an offering and a sacrifice.

We're to present our bodies—a living sacrifice. You can present yourself on the altar each day, offering your life to God, sacrificing your heart to receive His instead, to live for His desires and not your own. He lights the fire on the altar and your life will become a sweet-smelling aroma, an offering and sacrifice well pleasing to God. Bless your whole household by your choice to worship God.

Lesson 76 ~ John 12:35

“So Jesus said to them, ‘The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going’” (John 12:35, ESV).

The light is among you for a little while longer. Jesus was talking about Himself. He is the light of the world. We need to walk in the light. If we don't, we have a warning: the darkness will overtake you. There is no standing still in Christ Jesus. We march on, climb upwards, ever pursuing that which is ahead, as Paul said. That's how we stay free of the darkness. Stopping our forward movement is a danger. Ease and comfort are a danger; like the hare taking a nap and letting the tortoise pass him by and win.

We have commands to stay awake, be alert. We keep our eyes on the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. He's ever calling us up, out of the clouds, into His marvelous light.

Lesson 77 ~ Luke 2:48b-50

“Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.’ And he said to them, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them” (Luke 2:48b-50, ESV).

They didn't understand. We need to always realize that when we are confused, if we are ever feeling like God's not doing right, it's *our* understanding that's the problem.

God cannot lie; His promises are true. God cannot fail; love never fails. God is never late nor can He ever be wrong. He always makes righteous decisions. He always makes the right choice.

We can look at a situation and see that it doesn't line up with the Bible, with the promises, but we don't get to say to God, “Why have you treated us like this?” He's not to blame. We're not understanding something. We need to understand the will of God, His heart's desires for us. We want the miracle; He wants us to dwell with Him forever. He wants us to produce fruit in keeping with righteousness; we just want things to be easy and comfortable. We need to set our heart on God's desires for us so that we respond with thanksgiving, and never accusation. God will not fail us. We, sometimes, just really don't understand.

Lesson 78 ~ Luke 8:37

“Then all the people of the surrounding country...asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned” (Luke 8:37, ESV).

I call this “The Wrong Kind of Fear.” This is from the story where Jesus casts the legion of demons out and they ask to go into the pigs, and all the pigs kill themselves. The people come and see what has happened, and they see the man freed and sitting there in his right mind. They *see* the miracle, but they also know what happened to the pigs.

They don't *understand* what just happened. It's too much to handle. They want Jesus to get away from them. They are seized with fear and beg Him to go. They have the wrong kind of fear of the Lord. The wrong kind of fear makes us hide from Him. The right kind draws us to Him. The right kind makes us fall to our knees to say *have mercy on me, a sinner*, and we receive from Him love and forgiveness. The wrong kind makes us not want to approach Him—makes us hide our sin, makes us not trust His plans and decisions concerning us. *He might choose prison and torture! He might take my kids! Or maybe it's, He might make me give up...*

It keeps us from surrendering our lives to Him. If you can't abandon your life to God's plan for you, then you don't have the right kind of fear of the Lord. You need to get to know Him. You need to know your good Father who is love, whose mercy endures forever! His love for you is steadfast. It's not going to change. He has plans for you, and they are good; “plans to prosper you and not to harm you” (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV). His thoughts toward you are peace.

Let the awesomeness of God not turn you away, but drive you to take shelter under His wings, knowing His greatness and power and authority and holiness and how He welcomes you there by His side!

Lesson 79 ~ Malachi 3:6

“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed” (Malachi 3:6, ESV).

God is unchanging. The fancy theological word for that is immutability. He is unmoved. He will not morph into something else. He doesn't grow and change and get new ideas. He's not a man. He is Yahweh, the self-existing One. His name means *I am*. He is who He is and He will never be anything else. If He changed, He would no longer be God; He wouldn't be Himself anymore.

His immutability, His “unchangeability,” is a good thing for us. Malachi 3:6 says that we are not consumed because of it. God preserves Israel because His heart for them will never change. He will always call them His children. They will always be chosen. They will always be His. There will always be a remnant.

As children of Israel, grafted in by our faith in Christ Jesus and our adoption into God's family, we are the ones now in danger of being consumed. Except, we're not. He's unchanging. If you are truly knit together in Christ, He will not leave you, nor forsake you. You will not be consumed if you are one with Jesus. If you are one with Him, He keeps His own. His love is unfailing and unending. His mercies endure forever. His truth is everlasting. His compassions never fail. He is unchanging.

Lesson 80 ~ Malachi 3:16a

" At that time those who feared the LORD spoke with one another, and the LORD listened and heard them. So a scroll of remembrance was written before Him regarding those who feared the LORD and honored His name." (Malachi 3:16, BSB).

A scroll of remembrance was written before Him, regarding those who feared the LORD and honored His name. God listens in on our conversations. He takes notes! What are you saying about Him?

This verse is talking about those who feared the Lord. They spoke to one another in the fear of the Lord and honored His name. How can you honor or dishonor God when you are talking to others? I'll give you an example from scripture. Ezra honored God by what he said and by what he didn't say. This is Ezra 8:22, "For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, 'The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him'" (ESV).

Ezra honored God with his words by telling the king that God's hand was on those who sought Him for good, and that His wrath was for those who forsake Him. He knew God was good and was *for* those who were *for* Him. He spoke of a God that could be trusted to only do good to those who followed Him. Ezra and the rest of the Israelites joining him on a four-month journey back to Jerusalem, were carrying with them piles of gold, silver, and bronze.

There was a reason to be concerned about thieves along the way, but Ezra chose to honor the name of God instead of obeying any fear he might have felt. He didn't turn to an earthly king for protection when he had a heavenly king already guarding him in all his ways.

He was embarrassed to ask for help. We *should* be embarrassed to turn to other methods of "saving" ourselves from our situations. We have a great God who offers us SO GREAT A SALVATION! Do you honor God with what comes out of your mouth? Do you speak like He is God, King, Ruler of the Universe, Ruler of all the Thrones of Earth, All-Powerful, All-Knowing, Perfect in All His Ways, Faithful, Trustworthy, Mighty to Save, and always, always good to His children?

Lesson 81 ~ Joel 2:13a

“So rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the LORD your God. For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving devotion. And He relents from sending disaster” (Joel 2:13, BSB).

The beginning of this verse says to rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the Lord. God didn't want an empty display of repentance—He wanted *actual* repentance. Of course, actual heart repentance will result in a change of behavior. Repentance can be seen outwardly, at least with some time.

Here is another return verse. “So now, come back to your God. Act with love and justice, and always depend on him” (Hosea 12:6, NLT). This verse gives them two things they are to do in terms of coming back. They are to act with love and justice, and they are to depend on God. God wants them thinking and acting rightly toward God and each other. They are to depend on Him, meaning: they are to trust Him to be their God. He wants to be their God. He wants to be their Savior and Deliverer. He wants them to turn to Him for help so He can be their God. He also wants them acting with love and justice toward each other.

Here's another verse that says the same thing with some different words to help us think about what the verse means for us. “The LORD of Armies says this: ‘Make fair decisions. Show faithful love and compassion to one another’” (Zechariah 7:9, CSB). Acting justly is making those fair decisions and making right decisions about matters. Acting with love is being faithful and showing compassion to one another.

If our hearts are turned to God, then those things are what we should be able to see. Those things should be able to be seen on the outside. The world should be able to see that our hearts are turned to God because we act with love and with justice and depend on our God.

Lesson 82 ~ Joel 2:13b

“So rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to the LORD your God. For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving devotion. And He relents from sending disaster” (Joel 2:13, BSB).

I did a lesson on the first part of the verse (Lesson 81). Let's focus on the second half this time. The first half is a command to return to the Lord. The second half tells them why they should.

Why do we want to be with the Lord? Why do we want to be on His side? Because He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in loving devotion, and relenting from sending disaster.

The Israelites earned disasters, but it wasn't the time to turn to other gods. It was the time to repent and turn back because God was gracious and compassionate and slow to get angry, and abounding in loving devotion, and willing to relent and not send planned disasters.

He is gracious, giving us over and beyond what we need and certainly more than we deserve. He is compassionate. He understands our weakness. He is slow to get angry. God is love, and love is patient. He waits and hopes. He waits for us, hoping that we will turn back. He does all that He can to get us to turn to Him. He is abounding in loving devotion. That's *chesed*—God's mercy, God's lovingkindness—that awesomeness of God that we don't even have a word to define it. His love for His children is unchanging, unending. He's devoted to us. He's devoted to the well-being of Israel, His chosen. He's willing to change His mind. No one outside of Himself can redirect God's plans, but God Himself can change His mind.

We see it in response to the prayers of His people. His children pray, and He changes His mind. *He* never changes. His love is always steadfast. God is good. He's all these things. Why wouldn't we want Him to take charge of our lives? Why wouldn't we want to be held by Him? Turn to God and rejoice. Rejoice in His gracious, compassionate, loving mercy.

Lesson 83 ~ 1 Corinthians 6:12

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12, NKJV).

Some people like to tout their freedom in Christ. Paul just got done listing a bunch of sins that people commit that exclude them from the kingdom of heaven. He wasn't saying they were lawful for him, or us, to do. If they were lawful, they wouldn't break the law and disqualify us from the kingdom of heaven. When we read all of Paul's teachings, we know he teaches we are not to sin. He emphatically says we are not to sin. What does this verse show us then? That even things that are lawful to him may not be helpful and need to be controlled so that they don't control you. An addiction is when you are letting something control you, whether it be social media, entertainment, junk food, or worse. If something is controlling you, that's wrong.

Could you call yourself an addict of anything? Or anyone call you an addict of anything? That's not okay. The thing, in and of itself, may not be wrong. It is not sin to watch a sporting event or to eat a cookie. But when that thing calls to us and we answer, we are being controlled by it instead of by the Spirit. We need to be free from controlling influences in our lives, whether the news, other people, or the things in our homes. We're to be under the influence of One alone.

If you find that something is able to steer your choices, then you need to take a fast from it to get your flesh back in its place. And you may, or not, ever get back to it. If you do, it needs to be in a different attitude, one that's ready to say no and walk away if you ever feel it directing your steps, your time, your thoughts. And always be working on renewing your mind. That's the real battlefield. Fill your mind with God's Word. Know Him. Know the Truth. The Truth will set you free. And if the Son has set you free, you will be free indeed!

Lesson 84 ~ Nehemiah 8:5-6

“And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen,’ lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground” (Nehemiah 8:5-6, ESV).

I call this lesson “The Posture of Worship.” There are several different postures here. I grew up Presbyterian, famously known as the *frozen chosen*. I have thawed somewhat over the years, but I am certainly freer in my worship at home than at church.

Why does posture have anything to do with worship? For one, worship literally means bowing down. I think its most literal translation is a kiss of the hand, bowing down and kissing the hand of someone. Like how they kiss the pope's ring; they are worshiping him. That doesn't sound right, does it? In the Old Testament, it will say things like “and they came before David and worshiped.” They are bowing down before him to show honor and respect before they make their request.

The people honored God by lowering themselves. It's a posture of humility recognizing your lowliness and His greatness, His preeminence, His exalted state. There are other postures here. Ezra is above everyone else because a platform was built so that he could be seen and heard.

When the people saw him open the book of the law, they stand. Standing is another sign of respect. They are honoring God's Word. At the church we currently attend, sometimes the pastor will have us stand if there is going to be an extra-long reading of scripture.

Ezra gives praise to God and the people say, “Amen,” and lift their hands. We certainly read about these postures elsewhere in the Bible.

In the Psalms, you can read about bowing in worship and lifting holy hands. “So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands” (Psalm 63:4, ESV).

“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!” (Psalm 95:6, ESV). And that gives us another posture of kneeling.

There is also scripture that mentions David sitting before the Lord. We can sit, we can stand, we can kneel, we can lie flat; we can lift up and bow down. Whatever you do, do it to the glory of the One who made you: your Creator, your Maker!

Lesson 85 ~ Amos 7:1-2

“The Sovereign LORD showed me a vision. I saw him preparing to send a vast swarm of locusts over the land. This was after the king's share had been harvested from the fields and as the main crop was coming up. In my vision the locusts ate every green plant in sight. Then I said, "O Sovereign LORD, please forgive us or we will not survive, for Israel is so small" (Amos 7:1-2, NLT).

These verses made me smile. Why? The destruction is set to come after the king's portion has been harvested. Our provision is not dependent on the world's supply. Our provision is not at the mercy of disasters, whether manmade or God-sent. Our King, our good Father, can take His portion off the top. The world is His and He's in control. He can direct the disaster to protect His children. He can accomplish many purposes at once. He doesn't get mad and send a disaster and forget about His children. He makes sure they are taken care of first.

Our King will always have a portion. He will never run out. God's economy is not based on the world's economy. The King's people live in an oasis in the midst of the trials around them. In the Psalms, we have multiple promises of how God's children, how those who fear the Lord, how those who trust in Him, will not lack any good thing and will be kept alive in famine and will eat and be satisfied. In Psalm 37, it says that the blameless will have an abundance in the time of famine.

That's the Lord's provision: the much from the little, the 5,000 fed from the meager rations. Our God can supply any need.

Lesson 86 ~ Jonah 4:2b

“I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people” (Jonah 4:2b, NLT).

God is EAGER to turn back from disaster. Let's read Amos 7:1-2 again. “The Sovereign LORD showed me a vision. I saw him preparing to send a vast swarm of locusts over the land. This was after the king's share had been harvested from the fields and as the main crop was coming up. In my vision the locusts ate every green plant in sight. Then I said, “O Sovereign LORD, please forgive us or we will not survive, for Israel is so small” (Amos 7:1-2, NLT). But now, verse 3, “So the LORD relented from this plan. ‘I will not do it,’ he said” (Amos 7:3, NLT).

The Lord didn't send the disaster. He was eager to not do it. God doesn't willingly afflict. That's from Lamentations 3:33. He doesn't want to hurt anyone. He loves you. He loves us. He loves the whole world. That's God's heart. Never think that God is out to get you. His thoughts toward you are peace. His plans for you are good—Jeremiah 29:11.

He might be pruning you, but it's because He loves you! He disciplines us because He's answering our prayers to be brought to Him in eternal dwellings, to be like Jesus, to be used by Him. He's working His good purposes in us. He's never getting us back or giving us what we deserve. We deserve hell, and we're not getting that!

Also, notice how Amos prays and God relents. Moses prayed and God relented. Pray for your nation! It is likely that your nation deserves wrath. You can pray and stay God's hand, for a time. In the end, the nations will be judged, but today, God is eager to relent from disaster. He is patient. I'm convinced God's the biggest optimist there ever was. He's always hoping we'll repent and He'll get to relent. He will wait; He will patiently wait, hoping.

Lesson 87 ~ Psalm 44:3

“For they did not gain possession of the land by their own sword, Nor did their own arm save them; But it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance, Because You favored them” (Psalm 44:3, NKJV).

We are not saved by our own sword, but by the arm of the Lord. This struck me this morning. It made me think of Jesus defeating Satan by the Word of God, and how Ephesians says we're to take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and how Jesus is the Word.

People try to win their battle, get back possession of the land by their own sword, by declaring phrases of Scripture, or phrases based on Scripture, as if that will bring the victory. But we aren't saved by our own effort, and there are no magic words we can wave around like a sword to defeat our enemy.

We come before our enemy as David did, in the name of the Lord. We're not picking up a Bible and waving it around. It's not the sword of the Scriptures, but the sword of the Spirit. We come against our enemy in Jesus' name, in the Spirit, letting the Spirit work in and through us His Word, to bring the victory.

Lesson 88 ~ Micah 3:11

“Its heads give judgment for a bribe; its priests teach for a price; its prophets practice divination for money; yet they lean on the LORD and say, “Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No disaster shall come upon us” (Micah 3:11, ESV).

Here's another reminder that knowing and declaring phrases from God's Word doesn't save you. All your declarations don't do anything. They aren't swords. They aren't magic words. We don't save ourselves. We already have a Savior. The Israelites are declaring that no disaster would come upon them. They are declaring the Lord is with them. Their saying it didn't make it true for them.

You may think you are declaring truths of the Scripture, but everything in the Bible doesn't apply to you. You can't just find a verse and decide that's your truth. Jesus is the truth. He's the only one who gets to decide what's true. Yes, God is with the believer. Yes, God protects from disaster. We can know that about God. But you don't know the mind of God. God disciplines His children. Sometimes there may be a disaster. Maybe you live among a people full of sin and they have invited a disaster on themselves. You may see and feel part of that. If you are hidden in Christ, you will have protection from it.

There will be a level of protection and provision at all times, but it may look like disaster around you. It may look like lack and not abundance, but it will be enough and what you need. Not just what you physically need but what you spiritually need to be holy, to dwell with Him forever, to have your prayers answered to become like Jesus.

We don't get to decide our future. God knows our future. Don't fight His best plan for you by trying to declare your own visualized version of your future. Humble yourself before God. Put your faith in Him and His unchanging character, not in the thing you are hoping for.

Lesson 89 ~ John 13:3-4

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist” (John 13:3-4, ESV).

Have you ever dreamed you could just snap your fingers and have the thing you wanted? Ever wish you didn't have to get up and get it, you could just make it appear in your hand? If we had the power to do anything, we would likely use it for our comfort and ease.

Jesus had everything. He knew He had everything. He knew His beginning. He knew His end. He used it to demonstrate humility. He laid it all aside and took on the form of a servant. Jesus had the right to demand anything. He demanded the winds to stop and the demons depart. He demanded salvation for others, not for Himself. He didn't live for Himself; He lived for others. He lived first and foremost for the Father, to fulfill the Father's will in all things. Then He lived for us, for His disciples, and for those whom He was drawing to Himself.

Leaders serve, not demand. Christians serve, not demand their rights. Americans are taught to demand their rights, and Paul calls upon his rights as a Roman citizen, but there's a greater glory than freedom from the government. It's the freedom to not need anything for yourself, to live given over, to know your life isn't what matters most. We surrender our lives to Jesus to be broken and poured out as an offering, a sacrifice well-pleasing to God, not because we sacrificed, but because we loved.

Lesson 90 ~ 2 Corinthians 5:14

“For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all, therefore all died” (2 Corinthians 5:14, BSB). This lesson was actually first inspired by a verse I did a lesson on the week before (Lesson 83). I'll read that again. “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Corinthians 6:12, NKJV).

I was thinking of it in another way, connected to our first verse about being compelled by love. There are other things we can be controlled by apart from addictions. I was thinking of duty. We can be driven on in our Christian life by duty. We're supposed to go to church. We're supposed to read our Bible. We're supposed to give. And we can accomplish outwardly seemingly good things but without the right heart behind it.

I'm not sure how much benefit there is to a dutiful Christian life. It's certainly better than forsaking Christ, but I also think it can be harmful in ways. It's an empty way of pursuing Christ. If your Bible reading is nothing more than a gathering of information, you might end up like King Solomon, who declared that increasing knowledge increased sorrow. If church puts you to sleep, then you may learn there's no point to it because you're missing the point to it.

We're not to serve Christ out of duty, though dedication and loyalty should be part of our devotion to Christ. We're to serve out of love. We should be compelled by love to get out of bed and pray and read the Bible, because we love God and want to spend time with Him and want to get to know Him and want to please Him. Out of love for the brethren, we should want to gather and see one another and encourage one another in the faith, stir one another on to good works. We're to give cheerfully with glad hearts to bless and to have compassion on those in need.

If you feel stuck in duty, ask God to restore your first love, to pour His love into your heart by the Holy Spirit, to search you for anything that's hindering walking day by day in a loving relationship with Jesus. May the love of Christ compel you in all you do.

Lesson 91 ~ Amos 3:2

“From among all the families on the earth, I have been intimate with you alone. That is why I must punish you for all your sins” (Amos 3:2, NLT).

That bold access we get with the Father comes with a responsibility. We desire intimacy with God. We long to dwell in the secret place of the Most High. We want Him to reveal His thoughts to us and make His covenant known to us, to reveal His secrets to us. But to live in intimacy with God means to live in holiness.

Sin separates us from God. We can't live in sin and in the secret place at the same time. Jesus is the light. If we walk in the light, our sin will be exposed. That's a good thing. We want that because we want to confess it and ask Him to remove it from our lives.

We want to grow from glory to glory into the image of Christ, the image that we were created to be in but was marred by sin. Israel is punished because they were intimate with the Lord. Israel is God's chosen. That's you, if you belong to Christ. We get adopted into the family and take the family name. We're the ones who can experience intimacy with the Lord, behind the veil that separated Him from the rest of the world.

But if we're going to stand in His presence, live in His presence, live before Him as Elijah said, then we must live in holiness and righteousness. We must be willing to let His light expose any harmful way in us and be willing to confess and reject it. We must be willing to take the discipline that will burn away all that is not of God so that only pure remains. It's the pure in heart that see God. If you desire to stand before Him, to see Him, you must be pure. It's a gift from God by faith, just like everything else, but we have a part in it. We choose to submit to His ways, His discipline, and His loving molding of us into the perfect image of His Son.

Lesson 92 ~ John 17:6

This is the first part of the verse; it's Jesus speaking, "I have revealed Your name" (John 17:6a, BSB). Colossians 1:15 tells us that Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God.

We look at Jesus and see God. He revealed, or manifested, God's name, to those who saw and experienced being with Jesus. God's name is His nature, His character and authority. We can look at Jesus to see who God is. We see Jesus speaking to the wind and controlling it: God's authority over nature. We see Him raise the widow's son from the dead because He was moved with compassion: His authority and character. He heals and delivers everyone, even when it makes life harder for Himself. The lepers are kept out of town because of their disease. Jesus heals them and commands them to tell no one, but they do, and then Jesus is the one who has to stay out of town because of the crowds. He feeds the hungry, moved with compassion. While Jesus says He was born to be king, He also says that He came to serve, not to be served.

When the disciples want to call down fire from heaven, Jesus rebukes them. God does not delight in wrath. He delights in mercy. Jesus would have been just in picking up a stone, but He forgave the woman caught in sin. God is gracious and compassionate. God is healer and provider. God is loving and merciful. God is forgiving and kind. Jesus spent His time with sinners-turned-disciples. At the same time, He was holy and kept Himself apart. He didn't allow anyone to move Him. He was compelled by love, love for His Father that looked like obedience, and love for others, that showed the Father's heart for those He created. When you read in the Old Testament about disasters brought on God's people, know the aching heart of God who does not delight in the death of the wicked, but desires all to come to repentance.

Remember Jesus touching the untouchable and demonstrating His divinity to all who would have eyes to see. Some just refused to believe. Of course, Jesus has the same name as God the Father, the same character, nature, and authority. God has always been revealing Himself to us. "I, the LORD, did everything I could to teach you about my faithfulness" (Micah 6:5b, NLT). He has shown Himself to us. He wants us to know Him as good, loving, merciful, trustworthy, faithful.

He has always shown Himself faithful. "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love" (Micah 7:18, ESV). The blood of Christ means our sins can be forgiven and death can pass over us. It's always been true. The blood enabled death to pass over the Israelites, the death we are owed for our sin. God does it because it's His delight. He delights in steadfast love, in mercy.

Lesson 93 ~ Micah 6:8

“He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8, NKJV).

The Lord requires things of us, if the Bible is true. We don't have an ethereal faith; it's a real faith that shows itself in works. And what does the Lord require of us? To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly. To do justly, is to make the right choice. A just verdict is when the right thing is done in a case. Doing justly is knowing the right thing to do and doing it. That's why justice and righteousness are interchangeable, literally the same word in Hebrew.

God requires you do the right thing. We need to know the right thing before we can do the right thing, but as we are learning God's Word and His ways, we walk by what we know. We do what's right the best we know and God delights in that.

We're required to show mercy. That's that *chesed* word also translated as kindness or lovingkindness or steadfast love. We *love* mercy because we've been shown great mercy. We *show* mercy because we've been shown *great mercy*! Blessed are the merciful because God will show them mercy. We show mercy because we've received mercy, and we receive mercy because we show mercy.

God requires you to walk humbly with your God. We need to live with a right view of God and ourselves. He's big. We're nothing. He's good. We're not. He's able. We're unable. He's all powerful. We're weaklings. And on and on. We can't do all things. Christ in us *can* do all things. There is no good thing in us, apart from all the goodness of God dwelling in us. The Christian life is not easy, but it's very simple: love God—love others.

Lesson 94 ~ Jonah 2:4

“Then I said, ‘I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple’” (Jonah 2:4, ESV).

You know the story of Jonah. The context of this verse is Jonah in the belly of the great fish. God has rescued him, drawing him up from the pit (the literal deep), to literally save his life. He says that God has driven him away from His sight. He's blaming God that he's not in God's presence. Why is that ironic?

“But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD” (Jonah 1:3, ESV). Jonah had fled the Lord's presence. He was trying to get away from God, which is also ironic because you can't flee God's presence. (We could refer to Psalm 139:7 here.) He is literally everywhere; it's part of the definition of who God is.

“Do not be like the horse *or* like the mule, *which* have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you” (Psalm 32:9, NKJV).

Jonah had to be dragged six feet under before he would draw near. And he does. Instead of running away, he turns back to God. In our original verse, it says, “I shall again look upon your holy temple.” The temple is where God's presence was among His people. Jonah is looking to God. We don't want to have to be harnessed with bit and bridle as one without understanding. We want to have understanding that God alone is our help, our refuge, our strength, our hope, our life, our everything. But God is willing to do what it takes to bring us to Himself. Jonah 1:14 says that it pleased God to send the storm. It's not because He enjoys bringing disaster. It's because He enjoys mercy and compassion. He enjoys restoring His children safely home to Himself.

The New Living Translation version of the verse doesn't use the word pleasure. It says that God sent the storm for His own “good reasons.” God doesn't lash out. He does things on purpose, and His reasons are always good. He was loving Jonah. He was being oh so very good to Jonah. But, may we experience the Lord's goodness in other ways, because we don't have to be dragged into God's presence, but seek His presence, always running to Him, not from Him.

Lesson 95 ~ Hebrews 13:19

Our scripture is Hebrews 13:19; context is in verse 18, Paul says, “Pray for us.” The Berean Standard Bible: “And I especially urge you to pray that I may be restored to you soon.” The Berean Literal Bible: “And more abundantly I exhort *you* to do this, so that I may be restored to you more quickly.”

I found this interesting that he seems to believe that their prayers can get him released more quickly. That he can be released soon if they are praying. Paul believed in the power of prayer: “for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance” (Philippians 1:19, ESV).

Paul believed he would be delivered through their prayers. He asks repeatedly for boldness to speak as he should. He wanted their prayers: “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will boldly make known the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:19, BSB).

Paul writes after listing the armor of God what he wants them to be doing in light of all that: “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18, NKJV).

Are you praying for all the saints? We need to: 1) believe in the power of prayer and necessity of prayer, but also, 2) move past our own needs and pray for the saints everywhere. The church was gathered praying for Peter when he was released. Who is bound today that your prayers could release?

Lesson 96 ~ Luke 1:75

“To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life” (Luke 1:74-75, NKJV).

We serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him. Or, if we want to serve God without fear, we do it in holiness and righteousness before Him. It reminded me of some other scriptures. In the Old Testament, prophets often came with hard words for the Israelites about how destruction was coming if they didn't turn back. God speaks through Micah these words, “If you would do what is right, you would find my words comforting” (Micah 2:7b, NLT). Or New King James, “Do not My words do good To him who walks uprightly?” Or you could say there would be joy, not fear, if you walked uprightly, if you served God in holiness and righteousness.

The Lord's words are powerful. We want Zephaniah 3:17—the Lord rejoicing over us—not Psalm 29:5, where the voice of the Lord breaks the cedars, splintering them. And there is a way to be on the good side of the Lord's words. It's living in holiness and righteousness before Him.

How do we do that? We surrender our lives over to Him to consecrate us, to set us apart for Himself. That's a choice to die to self, and to live to Christ. Philippians 1:21—to live is Christ, to die is gain. It's a choice to walk in His ways as He shows them to you.

It's not instant perfection, but it's a walk toward Him. You look to Him and go toward Him. A life of righteousness is one that has been washed by the blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, buried with Him in baptism for the circumcision of the body of sins, and being raised up to new life in Christ. I'm using Philippians, Colossians, Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews, a little 1 John too, in saying all that.

I've said this before, but a lot of what I'm saying is just Scripture. You can search “circumcision of the body of sins” and find that verse in Colossians. Some aren't as precise: “looking to Him and going towards Him.” You could still probably search that with the words “Bible verse” and come up with what one of the verses I might be referring to. It's things like: keep your eyes on Jesus, or let's fix our eyes on Jesus from Hebrews 12, or my eyes are ever towards the Lord, Psalm 25. It's also Philippians: pressing on to the upward call of God.

I'm seeking to share Scripture with you. That's where life is. God's Word. And when you read it, I want them to be good words for you, not words of wrath, but words that inspire love for God and others, because you are walking in righteousness and holiness before Him.

Lesson 97 ~ Nehemiah 8:2

“So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month” (Nehemiah 8:2, NKJV).

The law was given to those who had understanding. It had an audience. Think about not throwing your pearls before swine. God's law is for a certain people: those with understanding. Jesus talks about people who hear and never understand. We want to be those who listen to Him, hear, and understand.

Who are these ones who understand God's law? I found another description of them, “The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding” (Nehemiah 10:28, ESV).

Those who had understanding and were given the law were those who showed understanding by separating themselves. They separated themselves from the peoples of the land to the Law of God. It's not just a separation *from*, though important, it's also a separation *to*. We are holy unto God, separated *to* Him. Think of it as choosing sides. There's a line drawn in the sand. Most Christians want to walk one foot on each side of the line. God won't allow that forever. We need to choose our side.

In Nehemiah, I found a couple other descriptions of people who had understanding. It mentions David and calls him a man of God. He was God's man; he had chosen His side. It is said of Abraham that God found his heart faithful. His loyalty wasn't divided; he devoted himself to One alone.

May our hearts be loyal and true, separated out to God alone, that we may be one who hears and understands His word to us.

Lesson 98 ~ Lamentations 3:28

“Let him sit alone and keep silent, Because *God* has laid *it* on him” (Lamentations 3:28, NKJV). We're going to read some more verses from Lamentations 3 as well; here are verses 31 and 32, “For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion According to the multitude of His mercies” (NKJV).

When God's hand is heavy upon you, it is good to sit alone and keep silent. It is good to recognize God's hand in what's happening to you and not fight Him. Recognize His sovereignty, that He is in control, and accept His work being done in and through your circumstances.

We can pray for release, but we do it with thanksgiving and praise, and ultimately surrender to God's will, God's desire for the situation. Verse 26 says, “*It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the Lord.*” Quietly.

Our first verse said, “keep silent.” It is good to hope, but it is also good to keep silent. We don't need many words. We don't need to beg God; He sees what's happening. We seek to calm and quiet our souls within us, not pursue trying to understand the *why* behind everything, or figuring out what to do. It's good to keep silent and not turn to others for sympathy. Our misery doesn't need company. We should turn to God and find the peace and joy hidden in the midst of whatever it is. If He's with you, then you have peace and joy. They are there for you to receive in the midst of it. Sit alone. Keep silent. Hope and wait quietly. Be still and know He is God. Know He is the One who saves. Know He is good. Know He is in control. Know He loves you. Know He has the power. Know He will show compassion. Know that His mercy is everlasting, and according to the multitude of His mercies, He will bring you out of your trouble.

Lesson 99 ~ John 13:23

I'm going to say John 13:23 is the reference for this lesson, but I'm going to share about a phrase that's found many times in the gospel of John. It's the phrase that John uses to refer to himself. This is it: the disciple whom Jesus loved. John had an intimate relationship with Jesus. He loved Jesus and knew that Jesus loved him. In that John 13:23 verse, John is reclining against Jesus' chest at the table.

That may seem too familiar to some of you, but it's still common practice in some cultures for men to walk arm in arm or to be cozy in ways we would find awkward in America. Whereas, in those places, they wouldn't behave that way with a woman, even their wife, in front of others. My husband's language teacher used to lean on him just like in that verse or put his hand on my husband's knee just to make fun, because he knew it made him uncomfortable; he would get a laugh out of it. So, there's nothing weird about this close relationship. John just knew he was loved.

He knew he could lean back against Jesus and rest. Do you have that relationship with Jesus? Do you know you are loved by Him? Truly loved, not in the "God so loved the whole world" kind of love, but a love that's all for you. Do you know that you are God's favorite? I think every child of God should feel like they are His favorite because that's how He makes you feel when you are with Him. Do you know yourself as the one Jesus loves?

If you're not sure if you know a deep, personal love from God like that, ask Him to teach you about His love for you. Ask Him to help you live loved, a life of rest, reclining in the strong arms of Jesus.

Lesson 100 ~ 1 Corinthians 15:58

“So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless” (1 Corinthians 15:58, NLT).

Let's put the two parts of this verse together. Be strong and immovable, and work enthusiastically for the Lord because what you do for the Lord is never useless. We know there's such a thing as our works burning up as chaff because it was not work done for the Lord, but maybe in our own strength for our own reasons, not the Lord's good reasons.

“For no one can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, *or* straw, each one's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to *be* revealed by fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each one's work. If anyone's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet *only* so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:11-15, NASB).

We need to make sure we are working for the Lord, and not for ourselves. We need to do His work, in His strength. How can we do it in His strength? That goes to the other part of the verse: be strong and immovable. How? How can we be unmoved? I like to think of the vine and the branches. Jesus is the vine. He's definitely rooted and grounded in love and He will not be moved. Nothing can move Him. We are the branches. As long as we remain in the vine, we can't be moved from our place. And we have His strength because Jesus is the vine holding us up. He's nourishing us, giving us what we need (think of sap being pulled up through the vine to go to the branches.)

He does it all. We just rest in our fixed position on the vine. The fruit is produced because of the nourishment and health of the vine. We just bear it; His life coursing through us produces it. We just reach out our arms to the sun. And in that way, in His immovable strength, we can work enthusiastically because nothing we'll do will be useless. Give your independence up and let His life be yours. Offer your life to Jesus and let Him determine your work, your purpose, your usefulness.

Lesson 101 ~ Luke 10:25-28

“And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How do you read it?’ And he answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.’ And he said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live’” (Luke 10:25-28, ESV).

Now, let's back up and read Romans “...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved” (10:9-10, ESV).

We also know there will be many crying out with their mouths, “Lord, Lord,” and Jesus will send them to hell saying He never knew them. Just calling Jesus “Lord” with your mouth isn't enough. We can't make big claims about God, the Bible, salvation, and faith in Christ based on just that one verse in Romans. The second verse says that we are justified by a believing heart. Remember that faith without works is dead, that we show our faith by our good works (that's James 2:17-18). So, from all of this, where do we end up?

We are saved by our believing hearts. Out of the overflow of our hearts, our mouths speak, calling Jesus, “Lord,” and rightly so, because we have faith in our hearts that shows itself in love for God and others. It's not a worldly love that any unbeliever can show, but it's a love that comes from God giving us the power to love as God loves: unselfishly, obediently, surrendered.

It's a love that doesn't just think of its own interests, but also the interests of others. It's a love that thinks of others more highly than itself. It's a love that is united. It's not divided between God and money, or God and any other thing. It's a love for God alone. Everything is surrendered, given up and over to God. You let go of all people, hobbies, goals, desires, sins. You give them to the Lord because you love Him more; He is the most important thing to you. He can take them away, or He can consecrate them for His purposes and give them back. But it doesn't matter to you because you don't love those things any more, except with the love He's given you for them.

You love God with your whole heart, mind, soul, and strength, so you don't feel like you are missing anything. It's not giving things up for Him because you have to in order to be saved. It's loving Him with your all, so that it expresses itself in your abandoning everything to Him because you love him *most* of all.

Lesson 102 ~ John 6:29

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent’” (John 6:29, NASB). “Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’” (John 6:68, ESV). “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63, ESV).

This is a continuation of the last lesson on loving God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. God's work is that we believe in Jesus. We are saved by grace through faith. God's gift of salvation is a grace gift, which means it's undeserved. We don't, and we can't, earn our salvation. Doing good works, trying to prove we're good people and love God and others, doesn't earn our salvation. It has to start with belief.

What does it mean to believe in Jesus? Jesus' existence, even His death and resurrection, are historical facts. They are provable, if you care to accept the evidence for them. Just knowing He was an historical figure and that He died and rose again isn't belief. It's just knowing facts. Even believing that Jesus was God's son isn't that much more. The devil and his demons all know that fact. So, what is belief for a believer?

What sets us apart? We believe everything He says about Himself and about us. We obey His commands because we believe He meant what He said! Peter said to Jesus that He had the words of eternal life. Believers seek to know the words of Christ and to live by them, because they believe they are *life* to them. Hearing them isn't life. People heard Jesus and walked away. It's taking them into your life to produce His life in you that brings life. It's the Spirit interacting with God's Word in your life, in your thoughts, in your actions that demonstrate belief; that you are a believer.

God's Word is spirit and life. We read the commands of Christ and they are life to us. The flesh giving up stuff does nothing. The flesh is no help at all. Trying to do for God, or give up things for God, is nothing. Paul says that denying yourself may appear useful but does absolutely nothing against the indulgence of the flesh that we want to avoid, as we seek to die to self and live to Christ.

Our striving doesn't prove anything. It's the Spirit that gives life. Ask for forgiveness. Ask for God to pour the love of Christ in your heart by the Holy Spirit, and let His love transform your heart so that your life is transformed on the outside, and you will know that you are a believer in your heart.

Lesson 103 ~ Psalm 144:15b

“Happy *are* the people whose God *is* the LORD!” (Psalm 144:15b, NKJV). Are you happy? Many times, when you read “blessed” in the Bible, there are translations that say “happy.”

How can you be a happy person? Here is what the Bible teaches, “Happy *is he* who *has* the God of Jacob for his help, Whose hope *is* in the LORD his God” (Psalm 146:5, NKJV). Turn to God for your help.

Or this one, “[Happy] *is* the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight *is* in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper” (Psalm 1:1-3, NKJV). Set your heart on God's Word and His ways.

How about Job 5:17 which says happy is the man whom God disciplines. Recognize God's corrections and embrace them.

Here's Psalm 34:8, “Taste and see that the LORD is good. How happy is the man who takes refuge in Him!” (HCSB). Psalm 40:4, “How happy is the man who has put his trust in the LORD and has not turned to the proud or to those who run after lies!” (HCSB). Turn to God to care for you and protect you.

Psalm 41:1 Happy is the man who gives thought to the poor; the Lord will be his savior in the time of trouble. Think of the poor; be generous.

“Hallelujah! Happy is the man who fears the LORD, taking great delight in His commands” (Psalm 112:1, HCSB). “Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:14, NKJV). Fear the Lord. Love God. Read, love, and obey His Word. And you'll be happy.

Lesson 104 ~ Malachi 2:5

I'm reading to you Malachi 2:5. I'll read two versions; first is the New King James Version, "My covenant was with him, *one* of life and peace, And I gave them to him *that he might* fear Me; So he feared Me And was reverent before My name." And the Berean Standard Bible, "My covenant with him was one of life and peace, which I gave to him; it called for reverence, and he revered Me and stood in awe of My name."

God gave us a promise of life and peace. That was His side of the promise. Our side was to fear Him, to revere Him, to stand in awe of His name. Life and peace are amazing promises. We all desire life and peace. We all need life and peace. We all *desperately* need life and peace. There's not much to our side of things. We need to revere the Lord, fear Him, be in awe of Him.

It should be easy to be in awe of One who can speak life and peace. It should be easy to have reverent awe of the One who made heaven and earth, set the boundaries of the seas, and gave the sun its atomic energy. It should be easy to have reverent fear for the One who can throw us into hell, who can speak and have the earth open and swallow us whole. Except, that's not what He did. He didn't make a promise of torture. He gave a promise of life and peace that we might fear Him.

Psalms 130 says that there is forgiveness with the Lord that we might fear Him. He's not an evil tyrant to turn on in anger. He brings us to the fear of the Lord by His beautiful promises and merciful offer of forgiveness. He's the great God because He alone has it in His power to offer us what we really need: forgiveness. Forgiveness that gives us life and peace with God.

Lesson 105 ~ Hebrews 4:11a

“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience” (Hebrews 4:11, ESV). In the King James, “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”

The words strive and labor are used interchangeably, as are the words disobedience and unbelief. This is a striking verse. We are to work to rest. We have to work at entering into rest.

What is the Sabbath rest of the believer? The Sabbath was the acknowledgement that God was their provider. They didn't have to work for their food. God would cause the growth and make it enough. They didn't have to worry about defending themselves, God would protect them.

Our culture has lost this idea of the Sabbath in many ways. In America's history, there are famous Sabbath stories such as wagon trains heading out on the Oregon trail. It was important to travel quickly because supplies would run out and winter was always looming ahead. Some would honor what they understood of the Sabbath and not travel on Sundays and would get there faster than those pushing ahead every day. It wasn't about Sundays. It was about acknowledging God. God honors those who honor Him. They were trusting God and His ways, and He came through for them.

Why is it work to rest? Because it doesn't come natural for us. It's hard enough for us to sit still and do nothing, but that's not what God is requiring of us. God's rest is a trust in Him. We have to trust Him to protect and provide, to be our good Father, to be our God. We have to give up trying to save ourselves. We need to not rely on our own understanding of what needs to be done. It's a knowing that God already has accomplished it, that I just have to walk with Him and it will all be well, all taken care of. Our work of rest is working to get to know Him so that we know we can always be at rest in His strong and loving arms. Our work of rest is choosing to acknowledge Him at all times and turning to Him first. Our work of rest is refusing to rely on our own strength and understanding, and waiting on Him to act which may mean moving us to action.

Jesus challenged the Pharisees' idea of Sabbath rest. Jesus describes the Sabbath as being for us, as being for doing good. Only God is good. In order to do good on the Sabbath, we must be allowing God to work in and through us. By walking in the Spirit, we can live in the Sabbath rest of trusting His protection, trusting His provision, trusting His leading, trusting His will, trusting His working all things for good.

Work and strive to know that the God of the universe, who made all things and does all things well, is *your* God, and be at rest.

Lesson 106 ~ Hebrews 4:11b

Our scripture is Hebrews 4:11, "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience." That was the ESV; let me read it in the King James as well, "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

So, the words strive and labor are used interchangeably, as are the words disobedience and unbelief. I said before, this is a striking verse. I spoke about striving to enter the rest. Let's look at the end of the verse.

We need to enter into that place of quiet confidence in the Lord's power and love toward us because it's our safe place. If we don't live in the secret place, dwelling in His bosom, gathered into His arms, we may fall. The verse says that entering into the rest would keep us from falling. The falling is referring to the disobedience, the unbelief.

We talk about believing in Jesus, but many people don't seem to make the connection that believing in Jesus means *obeying* Jesus. If you believe in Jesus, you believe you are an overcomer, having overcome the power of sin, and can walk in victory by God's Spirit in you. Jesus didn't die so we could sin and go to heaven. He died so that we could be forgiven our past sins and have the power to walk in righteousness.

Belief leads to righteousness. Unbelief leads to disobedience. The Israelites didn't believe and died in the wilderness. They trusted what they saw and their own understanding, instead of trusting what they knew about God, and His ability and desire to step in and act on their behalf. It led to the Israelites complaining. It led to them refusing to take the good land, the good inheritance promised them. It led to their death. To prevent death, we just need to rest. We just need to believe. We just need to know that the Bible is true, that God is who He says He is.

It's not our efforts that keep us from falling, that keep us from disobedience. It's God's work to keep us from falling. The Psalms speak often of keeping our feet from falling, from slipping. Psalms 56, 18, 66, 94 are some places. We look to Him and He takes care of the rest. He takes care of the rest, and can keep you in the rest He's provided.

Lesson 107 ~ Genesis 1:17-18

I call this lesson “The Separation.” “And God set [these lights he's talking about] in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:17-18, ESV).

God is always creating a separation. At the end of the age, He will separate the sheep from the goats. At the harvest, He will separate the wheat from the chaff. The Israelites sat in the light, while the Egyptians were blanketed in darkness. Jacob He loved and Esau He hated. Shem He blessed and Canaan He cursed.

It struck me to see it from the very beginning, the literal beginning. God created the lights in the skies. He separated the light from the darkness. This is a literal light and darkness, but it is how God operates. He separates light from darkness. In 1 John 1, we read that in God there is no darkness at all. God is light. If we want to be holy, which means separated unto Him, on His side of the divide, then we have to be light. We can't walk in darkness and think we're on God's side of the separation.

Psalm 4:3, “But know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly; The LORD will hear when I call to Him” (NKJV). Here God defines the one set apart for Himself: the godly; those whose thoughts are toward God. Jesus defines the thoughts of man as “get-behind-me Satan” thoughts. Paul warns that those whose thoughts are on this world will end in destruction. Those set apart to God have their thoughts on God and on the things of the Spirit.

Malachi 3:17-18 says, ““They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him” (ESV). It says that once more we'll see the distinction. That means we don't always see the distinction now. While the arc of a believer's life is one of blessing, it doesn't look the same now as it did during the plagues. The good and the bad happen to the righteous *and* the wicked. The difference now is that the righteous suffer for the sake of righteousness.

The same thing may happen to a believer and to a nonbeliever, but a believer knows that God is using it to bring Himself glory and for the good of the believer. The believer isn't suffering under the punishment for sin but is training in righteousness. It may look like the same hard thing on the outside, but it's a blessing to the believer and a curse to the wicked. There *is* a separation.

Lesson 108 ~ Mark 12:10-11

“Have you not read this Scripture: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’” (Mark 12:10-11 ESV).

Has Jesus become the cornerstone of your life? Can you look back and see the difference? Can you look back and see a time when Jesus wasn't your all-in-all, when He was your morning devotions and Sunday church and occasional help when you had troubles?

But, now can you look at your life and see Him in your rising and your lying down, your going out and your coming in, your daily work and your special events, your first reaction and last thought? Has Jesus become the cornerstone of your life, what all else relies on to hold it up?

Do you know that it all falls apart unless the house is built on Jesus Christ? Do you know that He alone holds you up? Do you lean on Him like you know it's true? Jesus is the Rock and the Rock is the Word. The house built on the rock stands firm through the storm. The builder of the house that stands firm is one who obeys the Word of God.

If Jesus is your rock, your firm foundation, your cornerstone, then you are living according to God's Word. The Bible is your source of strength, direction, help, and hope. You love, you have faith, you live free from the bondage of sin. And you can look at your life and see how He's changed you and say, “This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in my eyes.”

Lesson 109 ~ John 12:40

“He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them” (John 12:40, ESV).

Did God not want the Pharisees to be saved? Was He actively preventing them from getting saved? Was He making salvation impossible for them? God is good. He's not calling out to people, “Get out, or you'll die!” and then blocking all the exits. We know God's unchanging character, His unchanging will, His heart's desires. God is good. God is love. God desires all men to be saved. God desires all men to come to repentance. (That's 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9.) That's God's heart.

So, what's happening in our verse today, where God is hardening hearts and blinding eyes? Psalm 81:11-12 explains it, “But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels” (ESV).

They chose to not listen to God. They refused to submit to God's direction, so God gave them over to their desires. We've talked about that before. You may get what you want. Be careful what you are desiring after. We need to delight ourselves in the Lord! We want Him to give us Himself, the desire of our heart.

I have a much longer teaching on this topic of God's goodness and God's sovereignty, called God Loved Pharaoh, because there are verses about Pharaoh's heart being hardened as well (see Lesson 180).

Lesson 110 ~ John 13:34-35

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35, ESV).

What's this new command? That we love one another as Jesus loved us. That's how people know we are disciples of Jesus. They will know if we have Jesus Christ's love for one another.

What does that look like? What does it look like to love one another as Christ loved us? What does Christ's love look like? It was a love that laid down its life for others, completely, literally. It was a love that prayed for others. It was a love that reached out and touched others. It was a love that wasn't too busy to change directions when someone needed help. It was a love that acted in compassion when it saw the pain and troubles of others. It was a love that rebuked and spoke the truth. It was a love that invited you to join in and that reclined with you at the table.

That was a long list, but think about these things. How do you lay down your life for others? How do you pray for others? How often do you pray for others? How often do you reach out? How flexible are you to drop everything when a call comes for help? How often are you moved with compassion into action? How often are you willing to speak the truth in love to someone's face? How often do you open your doors and your arms to take others in?

Love. That's our order. Let's walk in it.

Lesson 111 ~ Luke 12:25

“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?” (Luke 12:25, NIV).

Why do we worry? We think about things that might possibly go wrong out of wanting to save ourselves. We want to avoid these things we're worrying about. We try to avoid them. We try to control a situation so that we can avoid the thing we're worrying about. Sometimes we just worry even when there's nothing we can possibly do about it. Our worrying doesn't fix any problems. What does worry accomplish for us? Nothing.

In fact, listen to this verse, “...Do not fret—*it only causes harm*” (Psalm 37:8b, NKJV).

Worrying, the thing we're doing to try to protect ourselves, may I say save ourselves, is the very thing harming us. We are killing ourselves trying to save ourselves! That's what comes from playing God, from trying to control, from trying to predict and foresee the future, from trying to understand the motives of others.

Only God knows the future. Only God knows heart motivations. Only God is in control. Only God can work it all out for good, no matter how bad. Let God be God. You trust and give thanks in whatever the circumstance. Give it up to Him. Pray, yes. But pray with thanksgiving, knowing that He does all things well and is always and only good.

Don't *worry*. It can do nothing for you, but harm you.

Lesson 112 ~ Luke 22:25

“Jesus said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors’” (Luke 22:25, NIV).

A benefactor is someone who gives money to help a person or a cause. These rulers were calling themselves benefactors. They were telling people that they were the ones taking care of them, providing what they needed.

God is our benefactor. He's our provider, protector; He's our support. We need to not let anyone take His place. Governments try to take God's place. They start welfare programs and give housing and food and all sorts of things to get people to rely on them, to call them the benefactor.

We also need to not put ourselves in a position of being benefactor to someone else. We may take care of someone for a time, meeting a need, but it must always be God who is providing, even if it's through you. We must not let others look to us as their “god,” as the one who provides and supports and cares for them.

We can love and give and do all we can, but it must be as a representative of God. We serve in Jesus' name, not in our own name. We don't give with a press release or to have our names listed somewhere as the benefactor. We give quietly and in the name of Jesus. It's His money after all. Isn't it?

Lesson 113 ~ Matthew 1:19

“Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and was unwilling to disgrace her publicly, he resolved to divorce her quietly. But after he had pondered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to embrace Mary as your wife, for the One conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit’” (Matthew 1:19-20, BSB).

Consider, for a moment, what Joseph went through from the time he found out Mary was pregnant and the time he found out it was by the Holy Spirit. How much turmoil did he go through? What I noticed was that it said AFTER he had pondered these things, THEN the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The NASB says, “when he had thought this over.”

God had to send the angel to interrupt his plans because he had come up with his own plan. This was a big thing. Mary could be stoned. He was a righteous man. It had seemed to him that Mary had done an unrighteous act. That was tormenting enough. It meant losing his wife. That was tormenting. But the torment could have been avoided to some extent. He could have asked. He could have asked Mary and asked God.

The angel has to stop Joseph from carrying out his plans because he had made his own plans apart from God. He hadn't gone to God and asked what he should do. Why? Because he thought he had understanding. He thought he knew the situation. He thought there was only one course of action that he was willing to do.

We could save ourselves, oh, so much trouble, if we just went to God first; if we let Him give us His understanding, if we let Him choose our course of action.

By the way, many translations use “think” or “consider.” The translation I quoted used the word ponder. It's a completely different word than what is used when Mary is pondering over the things that happen surrounding Jesus' birth. Joseph's ponder means to discuss, confer, consider, meet with. I can picture him pacing back and forth, talking through what he should do, maybe with someone else, or even if he was talking to himself. Mary's ponder means to meditate. She was thinking over the things the Lord had done. One is man's thoughts. One is God's thoughts.

Lesson 114 ~ Matthew 21:12

“And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons” (Matthew 21:12, ESV). In John 2:15, we read, “And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables” (ESV).

This cleansing of the temple, as it's called, happened twice. It happened at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry in the flesh, and it happened at the end. Jesus had to do it again. After He first drove everyone out, dramatically reminding them of the Scripture that God's house will be called a house of prayer and not a den of thieves, they all just came back and set up shop again. They went right back to the same thing. Have you ever been convicted that something was wrong and then just go back to it?

God is forgiving. God is patient. That is true. But God's house will be called a house of prayer. He's not going to change who He is to accommodate their sin. There is a limit. Jesus won't drive them out a third time. But the entire temple will come down. Not one stone will be left one upon another.

God's forgiveness and loving patience isn't an excuse for our sin. It's not a loophole to live in the world and according to the desires of our flesh. Don't force Him to take up His whip even the first time, and most certainly not a second. If He has to, beware. The next step is the tearing down of the temple.

Lesson 115 ~ Matthew 26:34-35

“Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.’ Peter said to him, ‘Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!’ And all the disciples said the same” (Matthew 26:34-35, ESV).

When Peter says that he will never deny Jesus, what is he doing? He's accusing Jesus of lying! Jesus says he will. Peter says, “I won't.”

Would you ever make such an accusation of Jesus? Would you ever say, “I can't,” when Jesus has said we can do all things through Him? Would you ever say, “I'm all alone,” when Jesus has said He'd never leave you? Would you ever say that you are helpless in a situation when God says He's your ever-present help? Would you ever say, “It's impossible,” when God says that all things are possible for Him who believes, or that what is impossible for man is possible with God?

Ask the Lord if you are ever calling Him a liar by your words, or by your actions. Jesus is the truth! There's no room for doubt in anything He says.

Lesson 116 ~ Acts 9:31

“Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria experienced a time of peace. It grew in strength and numbers, living in the fear of the Lord and the encouragement of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:31, BSB).

The church was strengthened and experienced peace. Do you want to be at peace and be strengthened? This verse tells how. They lived in the fear of the Lord and the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. What does that mean?

First, the fear of the Lord. To live in the fear of the Lord is to walk in holiness. If you were really fearful of God, you wouldn't treat Him like it wasn't important what He said. You wouldn't treat Him like He'll just forgive you, so it doesn't matter if you just do what you want. You would honor Him with your life. To fear God is to just believe the Bible is true.

Our God caused the earth to swallow someone up for stealing. Our God knocked two people dead on the spot for lying to look impressive to the church. The Bible shows us, and tells us, that sin separates us from God. Eternal separation from God is hell. If we feared God, we'd fear being separated from Him and would hunger and thirst for righteousness instead of the desires of our flesh. The Lord has a promise for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. He promises they will be satisfied. Remember, it's still all His work. We set our heart on the right things, and He gives us the desires of our heart. (I'm quoting and referencing Matthew 5 and Psalm 37.)

The second part of their experiencing peace and being strengthened is that they were living in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is our teacher and comforter, and He teaches and comforts us to bring us encouragement, to move us along in our walk with Christ.

Our sin brings us discomfort. The Holy Spirit, as Comforter, doesn't come along and say, “There, there, it's okay. It's just a little sin.” He doesn't comfort us in our sin. The comfort is in dealing with our sin: coming to God, confessing our sin, asking forgiveness, asking Him to remove the sin from our life. The Holy Spirit assures us of God's mercy and forgiveness, and we worship in thanksgiving because the Holy Spirit is leading you on the path of life, and is answering your prayers to be like Jesus, to walk in righteousness. We read the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit makes a verse come alive to us. It stands out to us and it speaks encouragement to us, answering a question, confirming a thought, or reminding us of God's goodness and love.

If you want to walk in a revived state, alive and not dead or sleeping, then this is the key—the fear of the Lord and the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. If we are walking in the fear of the Lord, seeking to walk righteously because of it, then we are living acceptable to Him.

Acts 10:35, “But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (NKJV). When we are accepted by Him, then we can live in His presence, and the Holy Spirit, Himself, will be our encourager, to spur us along the paths of righteousness to eternal dwellings for His name's sake.

Lesson 117 ~ Acts 17:26-27

“From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their lands. God intended that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:26-27, BSB).

God knew us before we were born. He knew the end from the beginning. He knew our choices, our victories and failures. He knew our hearts; He knew us. He is infinitely more than we are. He could see all the possible outcomes. He knew if we were born in certain times and places, what our choices and outcomes would be. He placed each of us in our certain time and place. That's what it means that He appointed our times and the boundaries of our lands.

Why did He make that certain specific choice for you? For each of us? Out of His great love for us, of course. God is motivated by love. We don't have to question His heart, His thinking, His motives. He doesn't operate under shadows. There is no secret plot. He made known His intentions, “For God so loved the world...” That's why He does the things He does.

We see that in the second verse from our Scripture portion today. It says that God intended that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out and find Him. He chose the best time and place for us, hoping we would reach out. He already promises that if we seek Him, we would find Him. If you feel like you are searching for God, don't stop. There is a promise, a sure, unfailing promise that He will be found by you. It's His plan for you, His will, His heart's desire. He wants to be known by you. And even if you feel you are searching and not finding, know He is near. He is not far from anyone.

Lord, open our eyes to see you are near. Help us reach out for you and take hold and never let go. Thank you for loving us down to the details. Thank you for choosing this time and place for our existence. Thank you that we were born for such a time as this. May we use our time to bring you honor and glory.

Lesson 118 ~ Genesis 26:3

“Live here as a foreigner in this land, and I will be with you and bless you” (Genesis 26:3a, NLT).

The condition to this promise stood out to me. This is God speaking to Isaac at this point. He was blessed because of his father Abraham's obedience. Isaac has the blessing confirmed to him that he was to inherit the land and have descendants beyond number.

Our scripture today is a promise to Isaac where God says He will be with Isaac and bless him. What was the condition? To live as a foreigner in the land. Isaac was a sojourner, a wanderer. Abraham lived in tents. He didn't establish a city and name it after himself. He lived in the land of others. Isaac will do the same. Then all of Israel will end up in Egypt, foreigners again. Then they will wander in the desert. Then they will come into the Promised Land, but they will have to fight to claim it.

What's the application to us? If we want to live in God's presence and blessing, we have to live as foreigners. Our citizenship is in heaven, not in this world. We're called to be in the world, but not of it. We need to be strangers in this world.

If your life isn't strange in this world, then something is off. We're to be conformed to Christ, not to the world. “Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2, NLT).

To walk in God's ways, we need to walk differently from those around us. Be strange. Be different. Live as a foreigner in the land. Don't settle for this world. Set your eyes on heavenly places.

Lesson 119 ~ Luke 24:16

Our scripture is Luke 24:16. The context of this is the road to Emmaus, after Jesus has resurrected and he's first appearing to a few people. He comes alongside a couple men walking and talking about Him, and they're wondering what happened. I'm going to read some surrounding scripture as well. "While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (Luke 24:15-16, ESV). And then jumping ahead, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself... When he was at [the] table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:27-32, ESV).

This caught my attention because they were kept from recognizing Jesus, but I wanted to point out that it was for their benefit! God is only good and always good. He's not denying people salvation who are seeking it and desiring after it. He desires all people to be saved.

Why are they kept from recognizing Jesus? These are men who had already believed that Jesus was the Son of God. They are only being kept from physically recognizing Jesus. Spiritually, they are actually having the Scriptures opened to them. I think that's why Jesus had to mask Himself. He had something to teach them, and seeing Him resurrected would have been a big distraction!

God does not hide Himself from you unless He has a good purpose in it. God can't do evil! It's impossible. He can only do all things well. He can only be good. If you can't see Jesus, if He seems to be behind a cloud, hidden from sight, know there is a lesson to be learned.

Don't stop seeking Him and seeking to learn from Him. It will never mean that you've been rejected forever, that He's not really there with you, that He doesn't care, or that His Word isn't true. Seek Him even if you can't see. He didn't go anywhere.

Lesson 120 ~ Matthew 21:26

“But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet” (Matthew 21:26, ESV).

The context of this verse is the chief priests and elders questioning Jesus about where He gets His authority. Jesus then asks them where John the Baptist got his authority. They don't want to recognize his authority as coming from God, but they realize that the crowds believe John was a prophet of God, and so they don't want to say otherwise publicly.

What struck me about this verse was that the fear of man kept them from responding to Jesus. They didn't give Him an answer. How many don't respond to Jesus because of the fear of man. I recently talked to a man who obviously really cared about animals, but he did odd handyman jobs for a living. We found out that he had had some opportunity to work with animals, but he turned it down because he was afraid people would laugh at him.

God had put something in him, and he listened to the fear of man instead. Has God ever prompted you to speak to someone, or pray for someone, and instead you turned and walked away because you were afraid of man in that moment, more than you feared the Lord? Don't let it happen again. Hold in your mind the two choices. You can be like the cowardly, conniving leaders or you could be like the bold Peter and Paul.

When the fear of man is a temptation, it's just one more chance to keep our eyes on Jesus instead of looking at our circumstances. He's the way through. Letting the fear of man change your path is giving power over to your fear: taking it away from God. If fear is directing your steps, then you are making it your god in that moment. May the Holy Spirit be the only One who can direct our path and guide our decisions.

Lesson 121 ~ Acts 27:22-25

Paul is on a ship as a prisoner, and they are in a terrible storm and the crew is afraid that they are all going to die. “Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told” (Acts 27:22-25, ESV).

God is going to deliver Paul and the whole crew. God could just make the boat get to land, like He did the night of the storm when Jesus was walking on water. Jesus got in the boat and then immediately it reached the other shore. God could just pluck them all out of the ship and put them on shore. Philip found himself in another city suddenly. God just picked him up and put him where he wanted him. But God didn't do any of those things.

But God didn't fail. They were all saved. God delivered even though He didn't use super miraculous means. Paul might have reached shore clinging to a board. God can use natural means to achieve His supernaturally declared ends. God hasn't failed when we have to use natural means to get to His ends. We don't need the showstopper miracle to know that God was the one who accomplished it.

Paul knew God's will was to save them. Paul trusted God to bring it about and didn't make his own plan of escape. The soldier in charge was the one who gave the command to swim ashore or to grab a plank. Paul must have obeyed orders, natural orders from natural man, but supernaturally ordained by God to deliver Paul from his every trouble.

Lesson 122 ~ Psalm 37:8

“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil” (Psalm 37:8, NIV).

What does this verse say? I was listening to a song by the Psalms Project; they are multiple singers/musicians putting all 150 Psalms to modern music. As much as possible, they try to stick to the wording of the psalm and to use the whole thing. I was struck by this verse in the song and looked it up to see if that's what it really said.

In the song, they stated the end of this verse as, “Do not worry, for it only leads to sin.” That was really striking. “...do not fret—it leads only to evil” is a lot easier to read and skim over than, “Do not worry, for it only leads to sin.”

The best thing worry can do for us is cause us to sin! Stay away from worry! We have to take all those worried thoughts captive and turn them into thanksgiving, knowing God knows what's going on and has it under control.

He will be our shield, our help, whatever we need; we can trust Him to take care of us and redeem any trouble that comes our way. He does all things well. Our “helping out” by worrying, and then letting that direct our steps instead of the Holy Spirit (likely by some method of trying to save ourselves, or those around us) will only cause us harm.

We make terrible gods. Our trying to provide and protect and all those good things can never truly be our job. We may temporarily relieve our worries, but we can't really save anybody! It's an illusion, doing things to try to help ourselves. It's just an illusion. They are only band-aids. They don't take care of real issues. God alone is Savior. He alone knows what we really need.

Jesus healed the blind man by the pool of water and said, “Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you” (John 5:14, NKJV). He knew what the man really needed. To the man being lowered from the rooftop, He said, “Your sins are forgiven” (Luke 5:20). He knew what the man really needed.

Our worrying, and then working to relieve our worries by jumping in, only looks at the outside troubles and seeks solutions for those. God sees our hearts, and knows what each needs to be helped toward Him.

Isn't that what we want? Turn those worries to thanksgivings. Giving thanks is the antidote. Give thanks to the One who does all things well, who is good, who knows all things. Leave your life, and the lives of those around you, in His capable hands.

Lesson 123 ~ Genesis 3:10

“And he said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid’” (Genesis 3:10a, ESV).

This is Adam and Eve, of course, in the garden of Eden. They heard the Lord and it made them afraid. Now the voice of the Lord can be a fearsome thing. In Psalm 29, we read that the voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness. However, the voice of the Lord is a comfort and a blessing to God's children, to those walking in His ways. God speaks and things are set right. The Lord speaks and our victory is accomplished. The Lord speaks and we are consoled.

“If you would do what is right, you would find my words comforting” (Micah 2:7b); that was the New Living Translation. English Standard Version is, “Do not my words do good to him who walks uprightly?” The Lord is for your good, not for your harm. The last words of Psalm 29, about the power of the voice of the Lord, are, “May the LORD bless his people with peace!” (Psalm 29:11, ESV).

He doesn't want to shake us. He wants us to not be shaken. He wants our feet firmly planted so that we will not be moved. He wants our feet to not slip. We want the Lord to speak comfort to His people, but He will roar if we need it. That's His goodness too. If we need to be shaken, to maybe wake us up, He will do it out of His love and goodness. But better to walk in Him and know His voice as good and comforting.

Lesson 124 ~ Romans 4:25b

“...who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25, ESV).

This verse says that Jesus died for our sins and was raised from the dead for our justification. Justification means that He administers justice in our case so that things are made right. So, when you are justified, it's shown that you are in the right. When we try and justify our actions, we're making excuses. We give reasons why what we're choosing to do is okay, or at least, not so bad. We are trying to tell ourselves that we're right to do so.

The thing that jumped out to me with this verse is that anytime we're trying to justify our actions, we're playing into the anti-Christ spirit because we're trying to replace Christ. *He* is our justifier.

We don't get to play that role in our lives. Jesus had to die and be raised from the dead to bring justice in our case, in order for us to be justified. We don't get to play that role for ourselves or for others. Anytime you catch yourself trying to justify a questionable action (or one you outright know is wrong), telling yourself excuses to say a behavior is okay (one that you obviously question or you wouldn't feel the need to make excuses), it's a good sign to stop in your tracks. Don't justify yourself. You can't do it. Your justifications will never make anything right. It's a lie. Jesus is the truth and the justifier.

Don't give Him something needing justifying in your life! Of course, when we are justified in Christ Jesus, that doesn't mean He makes excuses for our sins. He makes them right by covering them with His own blood and cleansing us into new life, by the power of the Holy Spirit that raised Him from the dead.

Lesson 125 ~ Psalm 18:6-24

Our scripture is Psalm 18:6-24; I'll read portions, "In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry came before Him, *even* to His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; The foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, Because He was angry...He bowed the heavens also, and came down With darkness under His feet...He made darkness His secret place; His canopy around Him *was* dark waters *And* thick clouds of the skies. From the brightness before Him, His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire...He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, Lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them...He delivered me from my strong enemy, From those who hated me, For they were too strong for me...He also brought me out into a broad place; He delivered me because He delighted in me...Therefore the LORD has [rewarded] me according to my righteousness, According to the cleanness of my hands in His sight" (NKJV).

What's happened in this scripture? God's child is in trouble. He calls out to God. God gets angry at what's happening to His child. He bows the heavens to come down to rescue His child. He comes down with dark clouds concealing His light and sends out lightning and arrows to vanquish the enemies of His child.

This is the thought I enjoyed seeing in this scripture: When the darkness hides God, it's because He's bowed the heavens to come down to rescue me. When things look dark, we can remember this: God spoke the light into being and separated it from the darkness, but then God *uses* the darkness. He used it to show forth His light. It may conceal it for a time, but God's just using it on His way to complete His rescue mission.

We see another glimpse of that in God when Jesus comes into the world, where we read in Matthew (quoting Isaiah 9), that the people who were surrounded by darkness saw a great light. God's on a rescue mission. Don't forget that the dark clouds of troubles are just shielding the brightness of His light. He's riding the heavens to swoop in to save you.

Lesson 126 ~ Psalm 30:5

“For His anger is fleeting, but His favor lasts a lifetime. Weeping may stay the night, but joy comes in the morning” (Psalm 30:5, BSB).

I call this lesson “Favor Lasts a Lifetime.” The second half of this verse is the famous part, about weeping turning into joy in the morning, but it was the phrase “His favor is for a lifetime” that caught my attention.

That word favor is favor or acceptance. It's the same thing we read in Ephesians 1:6, "...to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved" (NKJV). That Ephesians 1 word translated “accepted” is only used one other time. It's when Mary is called “highly favored.” We are not only accepted by God, we are highly favored.

God gets angry at sin because we are hurting those He loves, which includes ourselves. He doesn't reject His children, but sometimes He has to painfully cut some of them off when they choose to reject Him, despite His constant work to draw them back to Himself. If you are in Christ, you are chosen by God. You are kept by God. You are accepted and will not be rejected. You are highly favored, desired—the apple of His eye.

God wants your love. He wants your loving devotion. His desire is for you; He wants you to desire Him. He may get angry, but He doesn't cast off forever. He doesn't afflict or grieve willingly. His desire is to bless you and honor you and give you gifts. You are favored. You are accepted by Him for life. You will never lose His good favor because He changed His mind about you. You just need to accept it and not reject Him, or walk away from the greatest, unconditional love you could possibly know.

Lesson 127 ~ John 16:22

“So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (John 16:22, ESV).

Our hearts rejoice when we see Jesus. We're to always see Jesus. Scriptures such as *fix your eyes on Jesus* or *I have set the Lord always before me*, remind us to keep our eyes on Him, to always be looking to Him. We're to live in a place of knowing the Lord's constant presence and always seeing Him before us.

This world strives to draw our attention away from Christ. Advertisers know that money is made when they can draw our attention. At every turn, people are hoping to addict us to their products so they have us coming back, turning to their food, or entertainment, or whatever. We need to keep at bay the things that try to draw our attention from Christ. We need to turn from them to Christ.

Our hearts and bodies should need Him alone. Psalm 16:11 says, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (ESV). When we live in God's presence, we live in fullness of joy and pleasure, and then no one can take our joy from us.

Lesson 128 ~ Isaiah 55:8

“‘My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,’ says the LORD. ‘And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine’” (Isaiah 55:8, NLT).

We are doing ourselves a disservice when we pray for things to happen at a certain time in a certain way. We are playing God when we do that. Unless God shows you something, we shouldn't be making such decisions for our future, or for the future of others. His ways are better than ours.

Praying for our way to happen is thinking we know best. We think we know what is needed or desirable, but we have such a limited view of the world. God's the only one who knows it all. God's the only one who is good all the time. God's the one whose ways are far beyond what we could imagine.

For instance, don't pray to get that job, or that someone would get that job; pray that God would lead into the position of His choosing for maximum impact for the kingdom. It might not look as good at first glance, but you go into it cheerfully, and even with excitement, because God chose it and has purpose in it for your good, for His glory, and for the building of His kingdom. He's doing things differently than we would do them, and that is a good thing.

Our verse today is reminiscent of the famous verse at the end of Ephesians 3, “Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think” (verse 20, NLT). People take this verse to mean that God is going to do these huge things because we can imagine some big, exciting things that God could do. But God's bigger and better isn't our bigger and better. His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are beyond what we could imagine. Our imaginations aren't His plans that He's then going to add to. Our imaginations are limited in that they often are centered around us. Even if they are prayers for an area, it's most likely an area connected to us somehow.

We are limited. God is infinite. God is working out more than we could possibly imagine. He's not just wanting to make this one little miracle happen that we're praying for because we think it would make our lives better in some way. He's working His life into us. He's working the image of Christ into us. He's answering the prayers to have more of Him and less of us. He's answering our prayers to be His witnesses. He's answering the prayers of those around us. It's not just us. He's working all things for your good and His glory, and for the good of His children around you. And He's using it all for His redemptive purposes on Earth. There's a lot going on, more than your tunnel vision.

Ask God to have His way with your life, your future, and with those around you.

Lesson 129 ~ Genesis 2:25

“And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25, NKJV).

When you come to God seeking forgiveness and new life, what you are seeking is to return to this existence that we see in Genesis, being before God naked and unashamed. You leave everything at the cross. Our past, present, future—it's all given to Him to strip away and create something new.

The old is to pass away so the new can come. You leave it all at the cross and stand before God as birthday-suit you. You come to God with nothing to offer. You give up to God and let Him strip away anything you might *think* you have to offer.

Good works? Filthy rags. You strip away your identities, labels, money, degrees, relationships, plans for the future, all that happened in the past. It's all left at the foot of the cross. Job says, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return” (Job 1:21).

When we're truly born again, we're naked. And we're unashamed. It's a blank canvas for God to work His masterpiece.

Lesson 130 ~ Hebrews 13:2

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:2, BSB).

In Hebrews 13:2, we're told to show hospitality to strangers because maybe we'll be hosting angels. This raises multiple questions. Should we show hospitality for the sake of the stranger?

When Paul is giving direction to Timothy about taking care of widows, one of the requirements is that she had shown hospitality to strangers, and in Romans 12:13, Paul also directs them to show hospitality to strangers.

It's interesting to note that the word for hospitality means to entertain strangers. There is no separate word in any of these verses for strangers. It's what it means to show hospitality, to take the “other” into your home.

To entertain a guest doesn't mean to put on a show. It means to take care of their needs, feed them, give them shelter. But, of course, this leads to other questions like, “Why would an angel need to be shown hospitality? They don't need a hot meal and a bed. Why would they even be there?”

We see a glimpse of this in the Old Testament story of Lot. The angels that went to save Lot didn't just go and save Lot and his family. Abraham didn't pray for Lot to be saved. He prayed that the city be spared if there were ten righteous people in it. He didn't ask for Lot's life.

God saves Lot for Abraham's sake, though. God sends in angels and Lot is tested. Will he show himself righteous, will he show hospitality to strangers? He does. He and his daughters are saved.

What if we saw everything happening in our lives as being set up by God? What if we believed that those we came across, were put there by God? What if we believed God were testing to see where our heart was, to decide if we should receive a deliverance or a blessing?

This isn't to turn every day into a high stakes event. It's to cause us to acknowledge Him and to live in a way that always honors Him. If Jesus was standing next to you, wouldn't you act in an honorable way?

We should believe that He is, and is even closer to us than that. So why shouldn't we always act honorably, as if Jesus were watching and looking to approve our works?

Lesson 131 ~ John 8:7-11

This is the story of the woman caught in adultery. The Pharisees bring her before Jesus and say that the law of Moses says she should be stoned to death. They ask Jesus what He says about it, and here's the scripture, "And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.' And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more'" (John 8:7-11, ESV).

When I read this recently, I asked, "If it was not possible to sin no more, how could he command it?" And I thought, well then, it must be possible. But then I thought, the reason she is alive at this moment was that everyone else had sinned. And if everyone has sin, then how can she be commanded to sin no more?

Her life, at this moment, almost seems to depend on her sinning no more. I think the easiest response is to say that Jesus was referring to her adultery. That she should forsake her sin. Once any sin is exposed, brought to our attention and we're convicted of it, we need to reject it, hate it, confess it, ask God to cleanse it away.

If this was a habit, it could be easily broken by a single encounter with Jesus where we recognize our sin and His salvation. It shouldn't make us feel secure in our sin, but make us feel like our life is owed Him, and giving up everything would be worth it to be with Him. If you aren't willing to give up your sin, then you love it more than you love God. If you think you can't give up your sin, then you are making it out to be more powerful than God, an idol in your life.

Jesus came to free us from the law of sin and death, not so that we could sin and not die, but so that we could have sin removed from our lives so we can live.

Lesson 132 ~ John 8:35

Our scripture is John 8:35, “A bondservant doesn't live in the house forever. A son remains forever” (WEB). We need to back up to the previous verse to get our definition of bondservant, or slave. “Most certainly I tell you, everyone who commits sin is the bondservant of sin” (John 8:34, WEB).

He who sins is a bondservant and does not live in the house forever. A bondservant can't abide in eternal dwellings. Are you getting this? A slave, a bondservant, can't inherit eternal life. They can't live in the house forever. They may have for a time lived in the house, but they can't stay there.

Jesus gives us an illustration of this principle. In the story of the prodigal son, we have a son who leaves the house by his selfishly-motivated choice and ends up becoming a servant, and then returns to his loving father who restores him to the position of favored son. So, what's the lesson? Don't leave home! The prodigal left his home by his choice to pursue selfish desires—that's sin. Don't choose your sin over God.

If you sin, then immediately turn to the Father. Don't leave home so you can continue in it without feeling bad about it. Confess. Return. The Father welcomes you. The Father didn't send the son out. It was the son's choice. You have the choice of what you will love, what you will set your heart on. It should be set on God and His Word.

Lesson 133 ~ John 6:12

“Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost” (John 6:12, NKJV).

Jesus just multiplied the bread and fish to feed the five thousand. He then instructs His disciples to gather up the fragments that remain so that nothing is lost. I knew someone who once ended up on a plane with Mother Theresa. She held my friend's baby as my friend settled in her other children. After the meal, Mother Theresa went around and gathered up everyone's uneaten food so that nothing would be wasted.

We once had a college student visit us on the mission field and he ate my kids' leftovers so that nothing would be wasted. We pointed out that overfilling an American belly wasn't exactly a better alternative. We had another young adult stay with us who ate all my kids' crusts so that they wouldn't be thrown out. In Turkey, we, along with everyone else, hung any leftover bread in bags on the sides of the dumpsters so anyone in need of food could get them. Some used it to feed dogs.

We need to not let any of God's blessings be lost. Whether it's possessions, money, time, energy, talents, or any other blessing from God—we need to use it, not lose it. We need to put it to kingdom use, give it to God for His purposes, for His glory.

But let's look at this verse another way. They were to gather the broken pieces so that nothing is lost. What of God's good blessings do we view as “broken pieces” and ignore, or worse, toss aside, instead of viewing as something or someone God wants to save. That person, or that neighborhood, or “those people” you want to avoid are all God's blessing.

The Bible says children are a blessing from the Lord. They all came into the world as a blessing. “That neighborhood” may be full of drug dealers, but they were each created in God's image. People aren't problems to be avoided or gotten rid of; even people who seem like “broken pieces.” They are all infinitely valuable to God. He wants to gather them, redeem them, bless them and make them a blessing.

Where do you see broken pieces in your world? Ask God to show you where the discarded, broken pieces are and gather them up so that none will be lost.

Lesson 134 ~ Daniel 6:20

“And when he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king began speaking and said to Daniel, ‘Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you continually serve, been able to rescue you from the lions?’” (Daniel 6:20, NASB).

The king describes God as the one Daniel serves continually. Continually means without stopping. That means that when Daniel was captured from his homeland in Israel and forcibly taken to Babylon, he didn't stop serving His God. It means that when he was forcibly made a eunuch to work for the king, he did not stop serving His God. It means that when he was thrown into the lion's den for praying, he didn't stop serving His God. His service and devotion to God were not conditional. He worshiped the one, true God because He was the one, true God, not because God gave him everything he wanted.

Yes, God prospered Daniel and gave him favor in his new land. But it wasn't easy. None of it was easy. From the beginning, Daniel was set on honoring God and not the ways of the world. Daniel and his friends turned down the king's choice food to honor their God.

Do you, Christian, turn down the world's offerings to honor your God? Or, do you try to have it all, the pleasures of the world and the pleasures of God? Do you serve the Lord continually or do you take breaks for “me time?” Do you serve the Lord continually or do you take breaks for vacation? Do you serve the Lord continually or do you do it on a schedule? Do you serve the Lord continually or do you believe you need balance in your life between work and play? The temptation is at every turn, especially in America.

Other people calling themselves Christians will even encourage you not to serve the Lord continually. There are distractions calling to us from every direction, including from the church. Can we keep our eyes on Jesus to serve Him continually? Loving God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength is not something you just do for a portion of the day. It's 24/7/365.

That should sound thrilling to you, to love God with everything at all times forever. If it doesn't, seek the Lord. Maybe you've been serving Him in your own strength and for your own purposes. Seek Him for His life of total devotion.

Lesson 135 ~ Luke 24:46-47

“...‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem’” (Luke 24:46-47, ESV).

Our good news message seems to skip a part most of the time. We want the forgiveness and the peace and the joy of God's presence, but we skip over the other part. Jesus, here, is telling His disciples the summary of the good news and the great commission. What's the message that needs to go out to the world? That we can have forgiveness of sins through repentance. Jesus is sending out His disciples to proclaim repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Now, there are people who decry that as “works.” But Jesus, Himself, said it. We don't just get our sins forgiven. We turn from them. Then the memory of them is washed away and the Holy Spirit helper gives us all the help we need to walk in God's ways. We don't get to choose sin AND choose forgiveness. We get to choose to walk away from our lives of sin and turn to a new life in Christ, where there is forgiveness and freedom and love and life. We don't get to choose forgiveness so that we can continue to walk in bondage and selfishness and death.

Lesson 136 ~ Nehemiah 9:12

“By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go” (Nehemiah 9:12, ESV).

God lit the way. God shined His light to show to them the way He was choosing for them to go. Sound like anything you experience?

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105, ESV). We still have God shining His light to show us His way. We have His Word to point us in the right direction, and to travel with us on the way as we walk in His ways and stay in the light.

We may think we would like that big fiery pillar to show us when and where to go, but it wasn't always easy. Waiting isn't easy. They couldn't leave until the pillar moved down. And going, when you are wanting to stay, isn't easy either. We have it easier now. We have His Word in us and with us. Jesus is the Word and He is with us. We don't only have a guide, but we have God's Spirit and His Word to comfort us and to encourage us along the journey.

Lesson 137 ~ Psalm 46:9c

Our scripture is part of Psalm 46 verse 9, "...he burns the chariots with fire" (ESV). Let me try to explain what I found so awesome about this verse. Chariots were a symbol of strength and power. Kings thought they could easily win a battle because of the number of their chariots.

David knew that God's people aren't saved by chariots, but by the strong arm of the Lord. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7, ESV). The prophet Isaiah had this to say about trusting in chariots, "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD!" (Isaiah 31:1, ESV).

When we're in trouble, we're not to turn to Egypt (a symbol for the world), in order to get help. We aren't to trust in the world's provisions for protection, deliverance, help in times of trouble. We're to seek the Lord's counsel, wisdom, direction, help, support, strength. We're to go to the Lord to deliver us, to be our Savior. We're to look to Him. God doesn't want us to be a "Woe!" —God wants to save us from trying to save ourselves.

How does God get rid of the chariots we're relying on instead of turning to Him? He burns the chariots with fire. That was our verse for this lesson. He sends fiery trials to show us our chariots can't save us. We try this and that and find temporary help maybe, but there's no real deliverance apart from the Lord. He will help us find our salvation in Him, and He'll burn the chariots we're relying on to help us get there. Better to turn to Him in times of trouble, but thank God for holy fire to burn away the things that keep us from Him.

Lesson 138 ~ Exodus 29:46

“And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God” (Exodus 29:46, ESV).

Why did He bring them out of Egypt? What does the verse say? He brought them out so that He could dwell among them. He wanted to be with them. To get them to Himself, He had to send plagues. He had to drive them through the sea. He had to lead them through land where there was no food or water. It was all to get them to Himself.

And, of course, to Him is where we want to go. He is our safety, our home. Our eternal dwelling is with Him. Let Him bring you to Himself. There may be disasters, looming threats, apparent lack. They are all within the Lord's control, bringing about His blessing, bringing you to Himself. Go with God and give thanks and praise along the way. You're going home.

Lesson 139 ~ Genesis 4:7

“If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it” (Genesis 4:7, ESV).

Sin's desire is contrary. Sin is working against us. When our flesh lusts for things of the world, we are desiring things that work against us. Use that knowledge to hate the lusts of the flesh. We lust after food, sugar—it's harming you. It's slowly killing you. It's after your body. It's after your future. Entertainment is after your mind. It's filling your mind with distractions from God and His Word. It's a replacement for God's joy! It's keeping you from seeking Christ and filling with His joy.

Is entertainment sin? Is it sin to fulfill the desires of the flesh and of the mind? Here's what Paul says about such people. Ephesians 2:1-3, “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others” (NKJV).

“For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is their* belly, and *whose glory is* in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things” (Philippians 3:18-19, NKJV). When your mind is set on earthly things, lusting for them, thinking on them, dwelling on them, being controlled by them—you are an enemy of the cross of Christ and your end is destruction. According to those scriptures, it's how we walked when we were dead in sin. Those who walk in the lusts of the flesh are children of wrath. It's what the scriptures said.

Sin wants you to die. Flee from it like you'd flee a hungry cobra or angry mother bear. God, however, is for us. The things He chooses for us, walking in the light of His Word, walking in the Spirit with our minds on Him and His Word and His love and His goodness, are life to us. They bring the peace and joy and love we crave. They bring us faith and hope and goodness and all the blessings of heaven.

Satisfying the flesh brings a momentary satisfaction but its end is death. Satisfying your spirit in Christ will mean denying the flesh in the moment, but eternal life is on the other side.

Lesson 140 ~ Proverbs 1:28

“Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me” (Proverbs 1:28, ESV).

God tells us that if we seek Him, we will find Him. But there is a limit. If you set your heart on Him, you will find Him. He wants you to find Him. He desires all to come to repentance and be saved. He reveals Himself in nature, in circumstances. He shows His faithfulness in the rising of the sun and His power in the storm. He's there to be found by anyone seeking Him. These people in this scripture have been set on themselves and have been ignoring God.

In earlier verses, God points out how He has been calling to them and has reached out to them, but they ignored Him and refused to listen. He also shows His heart for them, because even in this frustration, God says He will give them His words and His Spirit if they would repent. His desire is for them in all this.

That is His heart even when He turns away from them. It breaks His heart. His heart hasn't changed; it's just the way it must be to satisfy justice, to maintain holiness, to teach believers the fear of the Lord so that we can be saved. After all God had done to try and get them to come to Him, while they consistently ignore and reject Him, they then call on God just when they are desperate for something for themselves. God knows their hearts and doesn't respond.

He doesn't answer when they call. He doesn't allow them to find Him. It's like Pharaoh “repenting” just to get what he wants and then goes back to his selfishness when he gets it. God knows their hearts. They have shown Him their hearts.

Here are the verses that follow, “Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices. For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster” (Proverbs 1:29-33, ESV).

What is your choice? What are you seeking after? Do your actions show you are seeking after God or something else? What does your time, money, energy show about the choice you have made?

Lesson 141 ~ Proverbs 1:33

Our scripture is Proverbs 1:33, “but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster” (ESV).

This is a different “at ease” than we might think of. This is what we need: at rest and at peace because we're trusting God, not because we're satisfying the flesh. We think if we just had money in the bank, we could be at ease—rest easy. There are “Christian” courses you can take to learn how to store up money, so you can be at ease. It's a false peace that can quickly go away. One turn of the economy, and you can be right back to worrying. We think that if we just had the healing we're after, if the pain would go away, if that problem would just go away, then we could be at ease. It would be a false peace. Another pain, another problem, is always just around the bend.

We don't know the future. If a war broke out in our country, where would your “ease” be then? If major natural disasters came through your neighborhood, where would your “ease” be then? We can't find our ease in a problem-free life. It doesn't exist. It's not supposed to exist.

If we had no problems, we'd have no need of God. We need to need Him. We need Him to be our Savior. We need to learn to fear and follow Him. Ease and comfort turn us looking to ourselves and our own flesh. When we're seeking this kind of ease, we're looking to satisfy our flesh, the desires of our bodies and minds. We're trying to get what we think we want and need.

The truth is we just need Jesus. Seeking to live each day in Christ, in the secret place with the Most High, hidden in Christ in His tent, tucked under His wings of protection, is where we find our secure dwelling. Anything trying to get at you would have to go through Him first, if you are IN Christ. Then we can be at ease, not because life is always easy, but because we have no fear, no dread. No matter what may come our way, we know we are held secure in the loving arms of our God.

Lesson 142 ~ Proverbs 2:1-5

“My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:1-5, ESV).

I found it interesting that they are searching to know God, to know His Word and His ways, to understand God's Scriptures and commandments, and what they receive is the fear of the Lord. They had to first understand the fear of the Lord to find the knowledge of God that they were after.

To know God is eternal life (John 17:3). The fear of the Lord is the beginning of all knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. You have not even begun if you don't have the fear of the Lord.

People most often are led to Christ for what's in it for them and have never been taught the fear of the Lord. They are the most in danger of slipping away. In the Parable of the Sower, they are the ones who receive the Word with joy. The good news sounds great to them. It offers them freedom from guilt—and peace, and offers them heaven over hell. They may even have been promised more: healing, prosperity, their best life now. But as soon as the troubles come, the good feelings are gone and they turn back. They weren't getting what they hoped for, thinking of their flesh and not of God's desire for them. Any believer who is going to endure must learn the fear of the Lord. If you don't have the fear of the Lord, seek it and God will let you find it.

Without it, you haven't even begun to really know God and His salvation.

Lesson 143 ~ Nehemiah 9:17-21

“They refused to obey, And they were not mindful of Your wonders That You did among them. But they hardened their necks, And in their rebellion They appointed a leader To return to their bondage. But You *are* God, Ready to pardon, Gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, Abundant in kindness, And did not forsake them. Even when they made a molded calf for themselves, And said, 'This *is* your god That brought you up out of Egypt,' And worked great provocations, Yet in Your manifold mercies You did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud did not depart from them by day, To lead them on the road; Nor the pillar of fire by night, To show them light, And the way they should go. You also gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, And did not withhold Your manna from their mouth, And gave them water for their thirst. Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness; They lacked nothing; Their clothes did not wear out And their feet did not swell” (Nehemiah 9:17-21, NKJV).

He did not forsake them, but continued to show them in the way they should go. He didn't pluck them up and drop them in the Promised Land. They don't get to skip the following God and walking in His ways part. They had to continue to follow Him to get there. God won't give up on you because you sinned and rebelled. He will continue to show you the way in which you should go, but you have to walk in it. It's the paths of righteousness that He leads us on, and they lead to eternal dwellings, but we have to walk that path to get there.

He will show us the way. He won't give up shining His light on the path, but we have to choose to walk it. He doesn't even just point the way and leave you to it. He gives His Spirit to be with you and guide you and instruct you in the way, and provides for your needs and cares for you down to the tips of your toes.

He will do all that He can to bring you safely home to Himself. Just choose to go with Him!

Lesson 144 ~ Proverbs 3:3-4

“Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man” (Proverbs 3:3-4, ESV).

Did you catch what is so fascinating about verse three? It says to not let steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you. It's a command to not let God forsake you. Why would He do that? Don't we have a promise that He won't leave or forsake us?

The rest of the verse tells us how to avoid the fate, “Bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart.” We keep God's *chesed*, His mercy, His steadfast love, close to us. We keep His faithfulness, which is most often translated truth, with us. We keep with God by clinging to His mercy and truth.

He promises to not walk away. We just have to not walk away. Hold fast to what is good. That's God! Hold fast to His Word, His ways. Keep His Word in your heart and choose to abide in Him and live in the light of His Word.

Lesson 145 ~ Proverbs 3:5-6

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6, ESV).

Proverbs 3:5-6 is one of those verses I have known for probably over 30 years, maybe over 40 years, but I am still working on living. Few people give any thought to even the possibility of turning to God and not relying on their own understanding. But we try to go to God first and seek His wisdom and not the world's and we try to wait on Him to direct our steps, instead of acting on what we “know.”

For instance, for repairs needed in our home we've experienced all three of these: the problem just miraculously fixing itself; a repair man just showing up right after we realized the problem; waiting for direction and looking in a different place for help than we would have if we had acted right away, and we found the way easy and smooth. That repair man story is in the videos of miracle stories linked on the allinonehomeschool.com site. A repairman really just showed up without being called and had to have been on the way before we even knew there was a problem! It wasn't someone we knew. It was an official repairman. Another time, we prayed, giving our fallen banister over to the Lord, and 20 minutes later our handyman called us, asking if we had something for him to do.

We can go to the Lord and ask for wisdom about anything. In God is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He knows everything! We just think we know so much already and we don't want to take the time to ask, or to wait on Him, if that's what He requires.

But if you aren't willing to wait on His ways, then you are really rejecting His ways and choosing your own. Give each day to the Lord. Ask Him to order your steps, to guide your actions and thinking, to turn you in the way of His choosing. And stop and ask for help and wisdom. He can make smooth the path before you. That doesn't mean it looks smooth up ahead. But it means when your foot comes down on the path, there won't be a stone to cause you to stumble.

Lesson 146 ~ Proverbs 3:7-8

“Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones” (Proverbs 3:7-8, ESV).

In the Psalms, we read how David talks about his bones wasting away and all the torment he was in when he knew he had sin. In Psalm 32, he says how he got delivered from it by confessing his sin.

The Bible does equate sickness with sin, but it also says that different ailments don't have to be because of sin. We can't look at someone else's life and decide they are being disciplined, but you can go to God with your problems and ask if there is anything you need to repent of and confess.

There are a few basic Christian living principles in just verse seven that will guard your life. There will still be problems; Jesus had problems, but there would be many fewer of your own making!

One: Don't be wise in your own eyes. Go to God and ask for help and wisdom. You DON'T got this, and you shouldn't try to have this. Give your life over to God. Do it *His* way.

Two: Fear the Lord. I've said it before, but the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. Without it, you haven't even begun. You need to start there. Realize that the God who delivered His children out of Egypt also destroyed Egypt to do it. You want to be on the right side of that.

Three: Turn away from evil. You have to do good and not evil! We reap what we sow. Sow what is good, and good will return in some form.

Lesson 147 ~ Proverbs 3:9-10

“Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine” (Proverbs 3:9-10, ESV).

We can't outgive God. Our family believes that 100% belongs to God.

God shows us His economy at work in stories like the feeding of the 5,000. He multiplies what we have so that we can give and bless others, and as we do, it is multiplied again, so we can just keep going. Financial peace doesn't come from saving carefully and allocating your money. It comes from knowing your good Father who will see that you don't lack any good thing.

Our family has been exceedingly poor, but we remember that time with joy. God met every need. We got to know our good Father as our provider, so now that we have money, we know we didn't earn it or deserve it. It's a gift from our Father, multiplied to be used to be a blessing to others.

Lesson 148 ~ Proverbs 3:11-12

“My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3:11-12, ESV).

You may be long under a certain struggle. Give thanks. God loves you. God considers you, His child. He delights in you. Don't grow weary of the blessing God is working in you, and working out through the struggle and suffering of the moment. It may be years in the process, but it's still just a blip in terms of eternity. God's answering your prayers to become like Jesus. He's working in you the righteousness you received from Christ. He's leading you home to Himself.

In the believer's life, everything is a love gift from the One who delights in His children. He is working all for your good, and His good is the best. It's what you want. So be encouraged and thank God for the blessing of the struggle.

Lesson 149 ~ Proverbs 3:21-24

“My son, do not lose sight of these—keep sound wisdom and discretion, and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble. If you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet” (Proverbs 3:21-24, ESV).

I was struck how many verses in Proverbs 3 reflect many other teachings in the Bible. One that stood out was Psalm 91, which talks about the one who dwells in the secret place as not being afraid of terror of the night, and how the angels will keep their foot from a stone that would cause stumbling.

That would equate walking in wisdom with dwelling in the secret place. Matthew 6 talks about the secret place as where God is and how we interact with Him by praying and fasting in secret. This isn't the world's wisdom that offers these blessings promised in Proverbs. It is God's wisdom that is found in the secret place, in the place of abiding in Him, walking in the light of His ways.

Colossians 2 tells us that in God is all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge. Don't turn to books and blogs to find your way in the world. You have the source of all wisdom. Go to Him in the secret place and learn from Him.

Lesson 150 ~ Genesis 13:8-11

“Then Abram said to Lot, ‘Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.’ And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, ... (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other” (Genesis 13:8-11, ESV).

Abraham chooses by faith, Lot by sight. Abraham was willing to put someone else first. He took the high road and humbled himself and didn't demand to have the first and best as the oldest, or as the one God called to go there, or some other reason.

Abraham walked in love. By faith he trusted God's blessing on him wherever he went. The location wasn't important. It was God with Him that brought the blessing. At the moment, it seemed like Lot was getting the better deal. He thought he was choosing what would be a blessing to him, but blessings don't come from stuff. Our blessing doesn't come from getting the thing we want, not even the job, or spouse, or school or whatever it is. Our blessing comes from the ultimate blessing of Emmanuel, God with us.

If God goes with us, we can't *not* have the blessing. Wherever we are, and whatever is happening, it is a blessing in our lives if God is with us in it. We all know the Sodom and Gomorrah story. That's what Lot unknowingly chose, and he stayed even when he knew it was bad. He made his choice and his family with him. Abraham chose to walk by faith in obedience to His God, and therein lies his path to blessing: he walked with God. God's presence brought the blessing with Abraham everywhere he went.

Lesson 151 ~ Genesis 25:34

I call this lesson “Despising the Birthright to Go After the Flesh.” Our scripture is Genesis 25:34, “Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright” (ESV).

This is from the story of Isaac's sons, Jacob and Esau. Esau says to Jacob, “Give me some stew or I'm going to die of hunger.” Jacob snatches the opportunity and says, “I'll give you some, for your birthright.” The birthright was a big deal, having to do with their inheritance from their father. Esau says, “If I die of hunger, what good is my birthright to me? You can have it.”

And I wonder, how many people despise their birthright, their inheritance from their Father giving them freedom from sin, and instead go after what their flesh wants? How sad to give up the eternal for the temporal.

Don't give up eternal life. Don't give up your reward in heaven. Don't give up your fellowship with Christ and other believers because you are looking to your flesh and walking according to the desires of your flesh and of your mind.

Don't sell your soul for a bite of food or any other fleeting moment of pleasure. You have a beautiful inheritance, a perfect gift from your Father, and it's for eternity. Forever is a long time. This life is just a vapor.

Lesson 152 ~ Hebrews 13:6

I call this lesson “Free from the Source of Fear.” This lesson comes from my husband, though I am writing it. We were talking about it this morning, and I thought it was a great reminder for us.

The scripture we're using is Hebrews 13:6, “So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’” (ESV). That's actually a quote from Psalm 56, which I've talked about before.

But the thought today is that we have no reason to fear because the source of fear has been removed. People fear the unknown, but it's all known to God. People fear what might happen to them, but God is in control and works all out for good. People fear what other people are doing or saying against them, but no scheme of man can change God's good purposes for us.

Psalm 37:13 says God laughs at the wicked scheming against His children. He can turn their plotting and evil against them and turn it for your good and His glory. People fear being alone, defenseless, being helpless in a situation, but God's children are not alone and He Himself is their defense and help.

There is no reason to fear if you are a child of God. Even if you are disciplined by your good Father, it's not pleasant, but it's for your good. It's something to be thankful for, and helps us fear in the only way we should. We're to fear God and fear Him only. He has the power over the universe. He alone is awesome! We should respect and revere the God of all majesty, authority, power, and glory!

But in looking at the world, we're to never fear. We are loved, perfectly loved. Love leaves no room for fear. Jesus asked his disciples. “Why are you afraid?” (Matthew 8:26, ESV). Why indeed? Why would they be? For a disciple of Christ, for a child of God, there's no reason for it. Ever.

Lesson 153 ~ Leviticus 1:13

“...it *is* a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD” (Leviticus 1:13, NKJV).

What caught my attention about this verse (which honestly starts off by talking about animal entrails), is that it was an offering made by fire and it was a sweet aroma to the Lord. If we want our lives to be a pleasant, sweet aroma to the Lord, then we have to submit our lives to the fire. We have to offer ourselves as living sacrifices.

The fire on God's altar was from God alone. Fire literally came from heaven, when it was an acceptable sacrifice. We shouldn't consider it strange, as Peter says, when fiery trials come.

We need to see the hand of the Lord at work in the trial by fire. No evil shall touch you, you who dwell in the secret place of the Most High, abiding in Christ. So when something breaks in, see the Lord's strong hand allowing it, and working out His good will in your life—a sweet aroma.

Lesson 154 ~ Mark 10:21

I call this lesson “God Loves People and Desires All to Be Saved,” and this is from the story of the Rich Young Ruler. “Jesus looked at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘There is one thing you lack: Go, sell everything you own and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me’” (Mark 10:21, BSB).

Why did Jesus tell the rich young ruler to sell everything? Because He loved Him! God's motivation is always love. God so loved the whole world that He gave to us His one and only Beloved son, and suffered to watch Him misunderstood, betrayed, maligned, threatened, abandoned, beaten, tortured, mocked, and killed. Because He loved us. Jesus bore all our sins, the heaviest weight possibly known to man, because He loved us. God's heart is for everyone. God desires that all might be saved and come to a knowledge of Him. His will is that none should perish, but all come to repentance. (That's two different verses.)

That's God's heart. God didn't put up an impossible task for the rich young ruler to block His entrance to the kingdom. He told him what he needed to do in order to be saved. His heart was for him to be saved. He loved the rich young ruler, so He told him what he needed in order to be saved: to stop clinging to his wealth and let it go and follow Jesus instead.

In the Psalms we read the question, “Why, O Lord?” I can tell you exactly why. You can know why God is asking you to go do, or go through, something hard. The answer is always because He is good and loving!

Lesson 155 ~ Matthew 3:2-3

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight’” (Matthew 3:2-3, ESV).

John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way of the Lord, to make His paths straight. He did that by preaching, “Repent!” The kingdom of heaven is at hand today. The cry is still the same in order to prepare the way for the Lord. Repent.

Repentance is what brings revival, on a large scale, and on a small scale. If you are feeling a lack of life in your walk with Christ, in your prayer, in your Bible reading, you need reviving. You need to come alive again in your spiritual life. You get there by repentance. Confess whatever comes to mind and ask God to bring to mind what needs confessing. It doesn't have to be big, bad things. The longer you walk in holiness with Christ, the more and more the little things will be the big things that you need to confess. You are being sanctified, being made holy.

We don't stand still. There is no “good enough” in Christ. If we decide we're “good enough,” we plateau and things turn stale and we need reviving. God's showing you something new that He is calling you to walk in. You need to repent and go His way. It will bring life to your bones, to your mind, to your spirit. It will bring rejoicing. It will bring new struggles! But it's all in God's goodness of bringing you fully into His kingdom.

Lesson 156 ~ Psalm 16:6

“The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance” (Psalm 16:6, ESV).

When the Israelites came into the Promised Land, lots were drawn to see who would get what land; what their family's inheritance would be. Each tribe was allotted a piece of land within that territory. People wanted a good lot: land with water, that was good for growing and grazing. When Psalm 16 is talking about the lines falling in pleasant places, it's referring to that—how they got a good deal, a beautiful piece of land, and a beautiful inheritance.

Have you looked at your lot in life and seen how the lines have fallen in pleasant places? Do you see the good life chosen for you by God? He chose it for you. He formed you in the womb at the time and place of His choosing. He does all things well. He never makes mistakes. Do you see the beauty in your inheritance? In Christ, all things become beautiful; it just sometimes takes longer to see.

For instance, my mother-in-law is an invalid now. You could think that's not a great lot in life, but she has a devoted husband who lovingly dotes on her all day. When her brain shut off her legs, it seems to have shut off some other things too. She no longer has pain. She had been on heavy medication for her back and had had back surgery. The pain's gone. She no longer ever has moods. She is in a constant state of being chipper and delightful. She talks of the Lord's goodness and seems to have completely forgotten anything bad anyone has ever done; whereas, she used to bring things up time and time and again, struggling with not letting them go.

The Lord has given her a beautiful life. And, beyond our lot in life, we have a beautiful inheritance in Christ. We are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. We are co-heirs with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly places. We indeed have a beautiful inheritance!

Lesson 157 ~ Psalm 20:7

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God” (Psalm 20:7, ESV). Chariots showed a sign of power, of strength, of the force of your army. It's something kings relied on for victory. If they had many chariots and strong chariots, then they felt confident going into battle.

When we are in trouble, we can turn to things other than God for our salvation. God may use any of those other things, but it's Him we need to be trusting.

God may use a medicine, for instance, but our trust needs to be in God, not in the doctors and medicines. We don't look to doctors for our salvation, but to God. We run to God and seek His will and then follow it, however He might lead. God may use money to pay for the provision needed. We need to trust in God's provision and not just turn to money as a savior to get us out of the trouble.

We need to go to God first, and not react in our own knowledge and understanding of what is needed, to be saved from the situation. We need to not be in control of the situation. We jump in to save the day. We like to quickly try and get control whenever something goes wrong, but we need to turn to God instead of playing at being god. We need Him to be in control. Don't wrestle away the reins. Humble yourself in His sight and turn to Him and ask for help. Put the situation in His hands and let Him be God. Let Him direct your steps and the outcome.

God is our Savior. We need God to be our Savior. He's the only one who can save us from our sins. We need to be saved from our sins because the wages of sin is death and eternal separation from God. We need His saving. Put God in His rightful place as your Savior, deliverer, help in time of trouble, comfort in distress, friend when you are lonely, sustenance when you are hungry, provision when you have need. May Christ be your all-in-all. May you know the God of your salvation.

Lesson 158 ~ Psalm 139:12

“Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You” (Psalm 139:12, NASB 1995).

Jesus is the light of the world. When Jesus is present, there is no darkness. Did you get that? There is no darkness! We're afraid of the dark, but there is no darkness in Christ. There is no reason to fear. There is no darkness, wherever you are, because you are in Christ. He makes you the light of the world.

There is no darkness where you are. In Christ it all becomes light. His light shines and turns all darkness into light. Let's talk about this a different way. Another way to say it would be Romans 8:28, how God uses all things for our good, those of us who love Him and are called according to His purposes. He can take any evil plot of the devil (throwing Joseph in a well, killing Jesus, arresting Paul), and turn it into something for our good and His glory, and use it to carry out His purposes and further His kingdom.

When you get the bad report, the horrible news, the evil accusation, don't see the darkness. Let Christ's light shine through and shed light on the situation. There is no darkness there, just an opportunity to let Christ's light shine and transform it into glorious light.

Light produces shadows, and there are those who flee from the light. The world won't all be light until Christ returns and sets up a new earth, where He, Himself, is its light and there is no more night. So, the darkness will be out there, but it won't be where you are. It can't be. If you are in Christ and Christ is in you, you are the light of the world. Darkness can't exist where you are. Be encouraged and turn your face to the light. It all becomes beautiful in the light of Christ. Sometimes it just takes longer to see it.

Lesson 159 ~ Romans 14:17

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17, ESV).

This eating and drinking, is about how people viewed different things as lawful or not. Paul was determined that love would rule the day, and he wouldn't offend by what he ate even if he knew it was lawful for him. But our verse says those rules aren't the kingdom of God; that's not what it is about.

The kingdom of God is of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. If we are walking in the kingdom, that's what our lives should look like: righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Our lives should be marked with joy; a joy that's there even in the trial. Our lives should be marked with peace; a peace that sleeps in the middle of a storm. Our lives should be marked with righteousness; the righteousness of Christ Himself, not only in His cleansing, but in His sanctification, His cleansing us and making us more and more in the image of Jesus, leading us to choose what is right.

Lesson 160 ~ Romans 4:20

“No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God” (Romans 4:20, ESV).

I thought this verse gives us a great principle. We all want to grow strong in our faith. We all see places where our faith lacks—wavers when challenged. This verse gives us something we can do about it.

Faith is a gift from God, but there are also verses about stirring up the gift received from God. God gave us our muscles, and we know they grow weak if we don't use them. We can receive gifts from God and not use them. We can let our faith grow weak by lack of use, or we can stir ourselves up in faith and strengthen it.

This verse gives us a simple way to strengthen our faith. It doesn't require stepping out of the boat and walking on the water. It doesn't require stretching out our hand and walking through the midst of the sea. It just asks us to praise God!

Praising God should be part of your everyday life, not just thanking Him for the good things of the day, but praising Him for who He is and who He always will be. It's His unchanging character that we can rely on, that we can hope in, that our faith can rest on. Praising Him reminds us of who our God is and that we've chosen Him to be our God.

Praise the almighty king, ruler of the universe, the victorious, majestic, awesome God and be encouraged in your faith. The God who is mighty to save, is your God!

Lesson 161 ~ Luke 1:35

And the angel answered and said to her, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God*” (Luke 1:35, NKJV). I'm going to pair this with Psalm 91:1, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty” (ESV).

Did you hear the connection in the verses? The believer abides in the shadow of the Almighty. Christ was formed in Mary when she was in the shadow of the Almighty. I was thinking that's when Christ is formed in us, as we abide in the shadow of the Almighty. What does that mean?

Abiding is dwelling. When you abide in Christ, then He is your place of rest, provision, protection, refuge, comfort. There are other scriptures about being in the shadow of His wings. We would be in His shadow if He were covering us. It's an extra layer, or extra picture, of being IN Christ—sheltered, warm, kept close.

It's not a place of cowering. It's a place of rest and rejoicing. Psalm 63:7, “Because You have been my help, Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice” (NKJV). God made our fleshly, human bodies so that they grow in our sleep. That's not just when we are young, but even as we are old; it's as we sleep that cells grow. It's when repairs are made. We are built up as we rest. That's how we were created.

We abide in Christ. Our lives are hidden in Christ. We rest in Christ. As we keep near Him, keep our eyes on Him, we become more like Him. If you walk with the wise, you will grow wise. That's how Christ is formed in us, as we rest in Him, as we trust, as we rely on Him, as we live by faith, as we walk under the cover of His wings, so that we fear no evil, so that we see Him and not our circumstances.

I will continue this thought with the next lesson.

Lesson 162 ~ Colossians 2:17b

“The reality, however, is found in Christ” (Colossians 2:17b, NIV).

In the previous lesson, on Luke 1:35, I talked about being under God's wing; resting and trusting in Him, so that we fear no evil and that we see Him and not our circumstances. Let me give you a verse about those circumstances; we've talked about this verse before. “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you” (Isaiah 43:2, ESV).

Being hidden in Christ (that's Colossians 3:3) doesn't mean there are no bad circumstances. There are floods. There are flames. In Psalm 27 it talks about being confident as an army encamps around you. There are circumstances, but they are just a distraction from the reality. Our goal is to not see the circumstance, but the reality.

The reality is in Christ. The reality is that we are hidden in the shelter of His wings, hidden in his tabernacle (Psalms 91 and 27). If we are in Christ, then Christ is really the one going through the waves and flames; He's just carrying us through, in Him. He is the way. He is the way through—the safe passage. He, Himself.

Here's a New Testament verse to help you take hold and believe it. “We know that God's children do not make a practice of sinning, for God's Son holds them securely, and the evil one cannot touch them” (1 John 5:18, NLT). Jesus, Himself, keeps us. He keeps us from sin, so we don't get scorched. Jesus, Himself, preserves us, keeps us secure, so that the evil one cannot touch us. The army may be approaching. The heat of the flame may be felt. The crash of the waves may be heard. But it will not touch you.

Other translations are that the evil one cannot harm you. Psalm 91:10 says that no harm will overtake us, or no evil will befall us. We are kept by God. Our choice on our end is to remain in Christ. Our choice is to abide—to make Him our dwelling place. Let Him cover you with His feathers, and rejoice in the shadow of His wings.

Lesson 163 ~ Isaiah 40:30-31

“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall. But those who wait upon the LORD will renew their strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:30-31, BSB).

I had the thought that I could never fall, only fly. The picture was of falling, but being caught up by Christ and lifted up. As I was falling, my feet were not on the ground, so when Christ caught me up, I was flying. Then I realized there was a verse for that.

In the end of Isaiah 40, it talks about young men stumbling and falling. They have grown tired and weary. But there is another group that flies. Who are they? They are the ones who wait on the Lord. They don't rush into battle to defend themselves. They don't fret about what to do and seek to save themselves. They wait on the Lord. They keep at His side, not rushing ahead or fearfully staying behind. They look to Him. He, Himself—God, Himself—keeps them close, sheltered. And if they start to grow weary and faint, He, Himself, will bear them up. He will lift them up with eagle's wings. He will bear them up above the circumstances and give them an eagle-eye view.

From up there, things look different. We can see God's perspective better. We can see God's goodness and mercy, His care and provision, His good purposes being worked out. And we walk with hind's feet on high places, above the storm, above the flames, above the waves. They don't touch us. They are there. But that's not the reality; it's the distraction. Don't let the circumstances turn you from the truth of who you are in Christ: kept, secure, covered, carried, cared for, loved.

Lesson 164 ~ Philippians 3:18

“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3:18, ESV).

David laments in Psalm 27:12 that false witnesses have risen up against him. He describes them as breathing out fire. Accusations are being hurled. Slander and gossip is spread. Lies are told. David laments in Psalm 56 that they twist his words.

If you have ever come under such attacks (and they are common among believers), then you may wonder why these people are against you. What have you done that they would be so virulent against you? The big reason is because God is good and loving and has His own good purposes in it that He's working out for your good because He loves you and is glorifying Himself and building His kingdom. But underneath that reason, what spurs on such attacks is the simple reason that you are in Christ, bear His name, bear His cross. Believers are to take up the cross; we're to carry it with us. And those not walking with Christ, not surrendering self, are enemies of the cross.

They are enemies of the cross of Christ and we bear the cross of Christ. They are our enemies. We're to love them, bless them, pray for them, and Jesus tells us not to be surprised when they hate us because they hated Him first.

We're also not to consider it strange when we face fiery trials. We're to rejoice. We're to be thankful for the steadfastness and endurance being produced in us. We can be thankful to get the chance to be like Jesus and suffer as He did. It's a fellowship with Christ that only a true believer knows. So, be glad.

Lesson 165 ~ Luke 10:41

“‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me!’ ‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord replied, ‘you are worried and upset about many things. But only one thing is necessary’” (Luke 10:40b-42a, BSB).

I have talked about this story before, but I wanted to come at it from a different perspective. We talked about Mary choosing the one thing that mattered. Martha is worried and upset. Anything ever get you worried or upset? What was your response? Our natural, human, sin-nature response is to play God, the sin of the garden. We want to fix things, come up with a plan. Martha thinks she KNOWS the answer to her problem. She doesn't go to Jesus and ask what should be done. She goes to Him already knowing what needs to be done to solve her problem. She goes to Jesus and tells Him what to do, “Tell Mary to help me!”

Ever go to God in prayer, already decided about the thing that should happen? Ever tell God what to do? Ever command God to carry out your predetermined solution? Jesus corrects her gently. He points out the problem, her fretting, and corrects her understanding of what NEEDS to happen. There was only one thing necessary.

We think we need this or that to happen, or to get this or that, and our problem would be solved. It's an illusion. We did a lesson on Psalm 37:8, how fretting only causes harm (Lesson 122). Getting what we want is a band-aid solution. It doesn't change our hearts. The next time a problem arises, we'll be in the same state, and maybe even strengthened in it that we need the fix we see before we can feel better, because we hadn't found the better way.

There is only one thing we need in times of trouble, when the temptation is fretting and worry. It's to sit still at the feet of Jesus. Our strength in those times comes from quiet, trusting confidence in Jesus, who holds all things in His hands. Our joy comes from knowing His power, sovereignty, goodness, and love.

Lesson 166 ~ Luke 19:1-10

Our scripture is the story of Zacchaeus. “He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.’ So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, ‘He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.’ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:1-10, ESV).

The people grumble because Jesus chose to go with the sinner, to give a sinner the honor of welcoming Him. What a picture! Jesus came to save the lost. He gives us lost sinners—He gives us, the lost sinners—the privilege of welcoming Him into our hearts and homes.

And He comes! Why? It's not because we're sinners. Jesus didn't choose Zacchaeus because he was a sinner. Sin separates us from God. Sin is a tragedy that brings weeping. Sin doesn't draw Christ to us. Christ draws the sinner to Himself by the cross. We are drawn by the promise of forgiveness and a new life of freedom from sin.

Jesus isn't attracted to sin. He didn't choose Zacchaeus because of his great greed. Zacchaeus had left behind his identity of sinner. At the beginning of the story, he's a seeker. He's seeking after Jesus, pursuing Him. He's willing to humble himself to climb a tree in order to see Jesus. By the end of the story, his identity is disciple of Christ. He's given himself over to the law of love and embraced the ways of the Lord. Jesus chose Zacchaeus because Zacchaeus chose Jesus. It's that simple.

Choose salvation. Choose the cross. Choose Christ. It was not a burden to Zacchaeus to give up more than half his money. It was a joy to him. He felt the freedom of his salvation. He rejoiced. He did it willingly out of a changed heart, one that embraced Christ instead of the world.

Lesson 167 ~ Mark 15:21

“And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross” (Mark 15:21, ESV).

You can see this event different ways, but when I asked the Lord why this detail was in the Bible, the picture that came to mind was of Jesus bearing our burdens. Here's what I mean: We're all told to pick up our cross and follow Jesus. He doesn't ask us to do things that He hasn't already done. He didn't carry His cross to His death; He had help.

We're called to pick up our cross, daily. We are to die to self, daily. This involves hardship and suffering. Dying isn't the most fun thing to do. We're not left under the burden of the cross alone. The cross is where sin went to die. It's where sin was defeated. The cross is a place of victory. Sorrow comes with rejoicing.

When we feel like the weight of the cross is too much to bear, Jesus lifts it off of our shoulders and bears the weight of it. We're still walking the road with Him to the place of the skull. The destination, our goal, is the same. Dying to the flesh and living in Christ, with Christ—for eternity. We still have to walk the road to death to self, but we aren't left to do it alone. He bore our iniquity and He bears our burdens. We just choose to walk alongside Him.

Lesson 168 ~ Psalm 16:8

“I have set the LORD always before me; Because *He is* at my right hand I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:8, NKJV).

I ended the lesson on Martha's fretting about how we can have joy because of God's power, sovereign control, goodness, and love (Lesson 165). Those things are unchanging. That's why we can be unmoved when something tempts us to fret. We don't have to get frantic. We don't have to go into overdrive trying to figure out the solution to our problem and try to make it happen.

Though I want, “I shall not be moved” to mean that I can be stoic, unaffected, by what's going on around me. We see in scripture David saying he won't be moved but also weeping and despairing and confused and troubled, but he's unmoved in his godliness—in his choice to be God's alone, in his choice to seek after God and learn His ways to walk in them, in his choice to not turn to other gods or methods of salvation, in his choice to trust God for salvation, in his choice to thank and praise God.

Paul commands us to rejoice always and give thanks in all circumstances, but he also mentions how God healed his coworker, in His mercy, so that Paul wouldn't have sorrow upon sorrow. Paul was a man of sorrow and joy. David was a man of sorrow and joy. Jesus was a man of sorrow and joy.

Determine that you will not be moved, but don't fret over being moved as a human being. You were made with emotions, but seek the stillness at the feet of Jesus. There is a place in times of trouble where we can find rest for our bodies, quietness for our souls, and rejoicing in our spirit. It's in God's presence, looking at His beauty, getting to know Him, embracing the love He offers.

Lesson 169 ~ Hebrews 7:25

“Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25, NKJV).

God gave us His only begotten Son. Jesus gave up heaven to dwell among us, and then gave up His physical life. They created people and chose a people for Himself. God defeated armies and split seas. And God did it all to save you. God did it for us. God is angry every day. God suffers for our sake. Jesus gave up His freedom to take on flesh, and then suffer and die for us.

He didn't do it for nothing. He's not going to suddenly go half-hearted on you. He's all in! His mercy can also be called loving-devotion. It's that *chesed* word in Hebrew that translators struggle to transform into English. He's devoted to you in love, and shows it in His mercy that accepts you back again, and again, as you struggle to follow Him with the same devotion that He shows you. Sin separates us from God, and should make our hearts sick that we're turning from our God instead of clinging to Him, embraced in His everlasting arms.

But although the good news is freedom from the sin that hurts us and others and separates us from God, it was never about us *never* sinning. Yes, we're to never choose sin, but we still miss the mark of aiming at perfection in Christ, and sometimes we let the flesh win in its fears and desires and choose sin. God made a provision for that. When God commanded the Israelites to obey all His commandments, to keep His commandments and statutes and ordinances and precepts, part of those were daily sacrifices to cover their unintentional sins. There were special demands on those who had sinned knowingly, including recompensing as was fitting, but a sacrifice for sin was always part of the deal.

It was never about us walking in sinless perfection. It was about us walking with Him as our God. He wanted the Israelites to choose Him as their God. To look to Him to provide and protect. To obey His good order because they trusted He knew best and had the plan they should follow. Part of the plan acknowledged that they would need forgiveness of sin, but it also required a daily choice of obedience to His Word to make those daily sacrifices for forgiveness.

It's also not about sinning as our flesh desires and then just saying sorry each day. A conscious choice for sin requires a special sacrifice, a confession, a repaying, a humbling. It's not something that could be tossed off as not a big deal. It wasn't covered in the regular sacrifices. But it can be done. Jesus wants to save you.

God wants you to be saved. He sacrificed for you. Choose to sacrifice for Him. We can live in God's ways with hearts turned toward Him and keeping His commandments because we have the power of the Spirit at work in us and because Jesus lives to pray for us. Jesus is interceding for us. It's not to enable our sin, but to set us free.

God is at work setting you free from sin and self and all that keeps us from Him. He wants you. Entrust your life to Him and He will save you to the uttermost. He cannot fail at the task!

Lesson 170 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Romans 8:1

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1, NKJV).

The converse is true, too, that there has always been condemnation for those who walk according to the flesh.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23, NKJV).

This is still true. The wages of sin is death. Sin leads to death. Walking according to the flesh is living in sin. Walking according to the Spirit is living in righteousness. Death and condemnation are for those who walk according to the flesh, who walk in sin, who follow after the lusts and desires of the flesh.

Lesson 171 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ 1 John 1:9

Let's read from first John chapter one; we're familiar with verse nine, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (NKJV).

Does this verse mean that every day when we sin, we just say "sorry God" and then He forgives us and cleanses us, and we go on with our lives. Yay! Jesus died so that we could be sinners and go to heaven. Does that sound right? I hope not.

We were made to be in fellowship with God. In the garden, they walked and talked with God. That's supposed to be our life. That's supposed to be our every day, every moment life. What messed it up? Sin. Sin separates us from God. Sin means we have to die. He's life. We can't have life. We have to die. We're condemned. We need to go to hell. We can't be with Him in heaven. We can't be with Him. He can't be with sin. He is a holy God.

If the priest didn't do the right washing ceremony before they went into the holy place, they would die. They tied a string onto them so that if they did the wrong thing, or thought the wrong thing, while they were in the holy place, they would be dead, and they could pull them out because if someone else went in there, they would die. Someone dies because they touch the Ark of the Covenant. The cart looked like it was going to tip, so they put their hand out to steady it, and they die.

God is holy. Sin leads to death. You have to die. Sin means death. If you want to have not just abundant life in the Spirit (which we all should be living in), but life at all. If you want life, if you want eternal life, if you want to be with God forever, you need to be with Him now.

So, what do those verses say?

If we say we have fellowship with God, but we're walking in darkness (this is verse 6), we've lied. You're not in fellowship with God if you are sinning or living in sin. But if we walk in the light, we fellowship with one another, and His blood cleanses us from all sin. As we're walking in the light, we're being cleansed from all sin. It's all being removed from us.

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us... [He cleanses us from] unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10, BSB). Jesus came to save us from sin, not to just forgive our sin to save us from it.

The Bible says we are slaves of righteousness. You were a slave to sin, now you are a slave to righteousness. If you are a slave to sin, you have not experienced salvation. If you are a slave of righteousness, you are walking in the light, and He is cleansing you from unrighteousness. We'll talk more about that in a minute.

How do I know that's what He's talking about here? Not just us sinning all the time every day? The very next verse puts the context; he says, "I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin" (1 John 2:1a, ESV).

We're not supposed to sin. But if anyone does sin, don't come say you're sorry (not that you shouldn't throw yourself on God's mercy). "But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1b, ESV). He's still being our atonement for our sin. It's not that you sin once, and that's it. God loves you. He wants you to be with Him. He wants you to be saved.

So, what is this? We have no sin, and we do not sin, and we're slaves of righteousness, and we do what is right, but He's still cleansing us from all unrighteousness. We come to Christ, confess our sins, and He forgives us. He cleanses us from our unrighteousness. It's all removed from us. It's removed from His sight.

But then what? We don't necessarily see all of our sin at that moment. He reveals stuff to us over time. When He shows you something, maybe how you've been complaining, maybe how you've been trying to control things, when you see those things in yourself, then you immediately throw yourself on His mercy and you ask for forgiveness. And you hate it. You never want to do it again, and you just ask Him to take it from you. To cleanse you from all unrighteousness and put His life in you instead. His righteousness in that place instead. You never want to have anything to do with it ever again.

It's His work. It's His righteousness. He will do it in you. You cannot be good enough. You don't earn your salvation. You can't get yourself good and cleanse yourself from unrighteousness. It's His job to put His righteousness in you, to live out that righteousness through you. You just have to hate the sin and love God. Please know you are free from sin.

Lesson 172 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Romans 10:9

A popular verse, used to lead someone to Christ, is Romans 10:9: “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (NIV).

People have been told if they just believe in the resurrection and say “Jesus is Lord,” then they're saved. So, what's the problem? If you thought Jesus was dead, you couldn't think He was Lord, so let's start with saying, “Jesus is Lord.” There are no magic words. You can't say the magic words and then you're saved. One, we aren't saved by works. We can't do a thing and save ourselves. Right there, you can see this verse can't mean you just have to repeat these words.

To say Jesus is Lord, is to say Jesus is YOUR Lord. What does that mean? Can you imagine a medieval lord? He calls his servant to come, and he comes, “Yes, my lord.” He tells his servant to go, and he goes, “Right away, my lord.” He takes away what he has given to his servant, “Whatever you require, my lord.” And so on. Jesus must be your Lord if you want to be saved. It means you honor and obey Him with devotion.

Now, the devil believes that Jesus was raised from the dead. He knows that's true. He saw it happen. He knows Jesus is Lord. He must submit to Jesus. Whatever Jesus says, goes. But the devil isn't saved, so there must be something else here.

The preceding verse says that the word is in your heart and mouth. What is the word? Truth. Who is the word and the truth and the life, the resurrection life? It's Jesus. When we have the life of Christ in our hearts by faith, we are saved and are being saved. Jesus must be resurrected in our lives. His righteousness needs to be made manifest in our lives. His life needs to be made manifest in our lives. All that means is that Jesus needs to shine through us, by our obeying God's Word, loving God, and our doing of good works, showing love to others. If these signs of Christ aren't in us, then we aren't saved.

Lesson 173 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Matthew 6:24

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matthew 6:24, ESV).

Now this verse specifically says something, that you can't serve God and money. But let's assume the verse is true that you cannot serve two masters, that you will hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You can't have two masters.

What does it mean to have a master? We call Jesus our Lord; he's supposed to be our master. In another video I talked about saying, “Yes, lord, of course lord,” bowing to your master, doing his bidding, whatever he says, gladly (Lesson 172). Your master is the one you obey. You obey your master.

Who are you obeying? What are you obeying? If you're obeying the lusts of the flesh, if you are letting your flesh make your decisions—control you—if you are obeying when your body says, “I want this; give it to me,” and you're choosing that, instead of obeying who should be your true master, then you've made your flesh—you've made sin—your master. Sin is your lord.

You can only have one master. You will hate the one if you love the other. Do you love your sin, or do you love God? Now I know all the justifications people use. God knows our weaknesses. Yes, that's why He gave Himself to us. He gave us the Holy Spirit, God Himself, to dwell in us. Is the Holy Spirit, as God Himself, not strong enough to save you from your sin? To actually cause you, give you what you need to live in righteousness? Is God not enough? Is it impossible for God? If you think it's impossible for you to live in righteousness, to say no to the flesh, then you don't believe in the God of the Bible. There is no salvation for you. You don't believe. You can only have one master.

If you hate God, He'll give you what you want. He doesn't force Himself on us. If you don't love Him, He's not going to bring you to Himself. If you hate Him, He will let you go your own way. Jesus is praying for you when you sin. God is after you. He wants to be with you. But He gives you the choice. Do you love God or do you hate Him? Those are the choices. There's no in between. Do you love your sin or do you hate it? You have to make the choice.

Lesson 174 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Matthew 19:16-29

Our scripture is Matthew 19:16-29. It's the story of the rich young ruler. Maybe after reading the lesson you'll want to go read it and think about these things.

The rich young ruler wants to know what he must do to be saved, to have eternal life. Jesus tells him to obey the commandments, after He points out that only God is good. The rich young ruler is sure that he has kept the commandments and Jesus doesn't argue the point. Jesus tells him that to be perfect, to be complete, he needed to sell all his possessions and give them to the poor. Now the rich young ruler doesn't decide to do it, at least not then. Jesus doesn't chase after him and say, "Well never mind, just make sure you don't love your possessions in your heart." Our actions show our heart.

You're choosing to continue in sin shows you don't love God, because our love of God is wrapped up in our obedience. The rich young ruler felt like it was impossible to be saved, and the disciples had the same reaction. They're right, it's impossible for us to save ourselves. It's impossible for us to cleanse the sin out of our lives. You cannot save yourself.

If the rich young ruler had sold all of his possessions and given the money to the poor, would he have been saved? Yes, otherwise Jesus would have been made a liar. Would he have been saved by works? No way! He would have been saved because it was impossible with man. Jesus knew that for this man, that was impossible without God changing his heart. So, if he had obeyed Jesus, that would have meant God had changed his heart, so that now he was choosing to love God instead of his wealth.

The rich young ruler walked away sad. Some people say that if we're sad about our sin, it shows we're Christians because a non-Christian wouldn't care if they sinned. It's not true. The rich young ruler was sad. He was sad he couldn't obey Jesus' command that he needed to in order to be saved. He was sad over sin because of its consequences. It wasn't enough. He didn't walk away saved.

On the day of Pentecost, when the crowd is sad, cut to the heart, it's not then they were saved. They were saved when they repented and were baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. They were given new life. New life is new and different. We're not the same.

There was one more command, after the command to sell and give. He was told that he would, then, have to follow Jesus. It's not one and done. It's a lifetime of walking with Jesus, perfect and being perfected.

Lesson 175 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ John 9:41

Two scriptures for this lesson: John 15:22 and John 9:41. "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin" (BSB). "Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, "We see." Therefore your sin remains'" (NKJV).

We are perfect in Christ, and we'll never be perfect. It seems like all the Christian life lies in such paradoxes. These two verses say that we are not guilty of sin we are ignorant of. Christ's blood covers the unintentional sin, and we see that in the sacrifices in the Old Testament. So, we can be blameless in God's sight, while still having sin in our lives that we aren't choosing in rebellion to God.

These two verses also say that we are guilty of sin we know about. Sin separates us from a holy God. When we know it's there, it's got to go. The good news, the gospel, is that Jesus made the way for us to be saved, for us to be one with the Father, by cleansing us from all sin. When we come to Christ, we're supposed to come in the fear of the Lord, recognizing that we are a sinner before a holy God. We see some of our sin and we confess our known sin. God is faithful and just to forgive us, and we receive forgiveness.

Later, God might show us something else in us that we didn't realize we were doing wrong. Maybe we even knew we were doing it, but just hadn't come to the realization that in doing so, we were sinning against God. We immediately change our minds about this sin, repenting. We confess our sin and get forgiven. We want the sin out of us. We hate the sin. We hate that we've been sinning against God. We ask God to remove the sin from our lives. He is faithful and just and cleanses us from the unrighteousness. When the temptation arises, you realize you have the power to refuse, because you now hate the sin. Something you hate is no longer a real temptation.

If you do sin, Jesus is praying for you. Thank Him for teaching you, and correcting you, and guiding you, and disciplining, and cleansing. Believe His Word is true, that He is able to deliver you from your sin. He will work His salvation in you as you work it out. You will be putting the sin to death. You are the victor in Christ Jesus.

Lesson 176 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ 1 John 1:7-10, 2:1

The scripture for this lesson is 1 John 1:7-10 and 2:1. I did a lesson before on 1 John 1:9 and the surrounding verses (Lesson 171), but let's look at them again. Let's start with 1 John 1:7, "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (NKJV).

Ephesians 5 talks about the light, about bringing things to light. God shines the light of His Word onto our lives, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Word comes alive in our hearts. The Word and the power of the Spirit can convict us of sin and remove from us the sin that is killing us. As we walk by the Spirit in the light, with Jesus the Word, He will expose harmful ways in us, and we will repent and He will be continually cleansing us from unrighteousness.

Let's look at the next verse, "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8, NASB). We could take this a few ways, this knowing that we have sin in us. We can say this verse is before we are saved, which would be true. We could say this is at any point where God's light shines on us and then we are in need of confessing, which would also be true. We could also say that we aren't perfect. We aren't the perfect likeness of Christ yet, so obviously there are some things that still need to be worked out by the Word, and the Spirit, and the cleansing. There is still sin in us, unintentional sin, but sin nonetheless. (I have another lesson about being guilty of unintentional sin.)

The next verse, 1 John 1:9, is about confessing our sin and being cleansed. Verse 10 says that if we say we don't have sin, then we make God out to be a liar. If He has exposed sin in us, and we try to say it's not sin, and try to cover it, justify it, and excuse it, then we're making God out to be a liar. You have to confess it and get it cleansed away. The next verse, says that John is writing these things so that we will not sin (1 John 2:1).

These verses have nothing to do with excusing us as all sinners, that we'll just go on sinning every day. We are not to sin. You can walk perfect before Him because He has cleansed us. He does not hold us accountable for our ignorance, thank God, but He will hold us accountable when we know we have sin. We have to remove it by our choice and His cleansing power. That's the power of God unto salvation.

Lesson 177 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Romans 14:23

In previous lessons, we talked about how we need to confess sin, and choose to get rid of it when God reveals it to us. How do we know if He's shown us something that's sin? One, is outright reading it in the scripture that it is sin and knowing that's what you are doing. Actually, even then we might need the quickening of the Holy Spirit to make us realize our sin. Two, when you have that feeling you aren't sure if this is okay or not. How can you know *that* thing is sin?

The end of Romans 14:23 says that, "...whatever is not from faith is sin" (NASB). If you are unsure if what you are doing is okay, then you aren't in faith. You have no assurance. You're in doubt, and doubting is the lack of faith. It could be a big bad sin. It could be letting food or social media control your time and money. It could be refusing to speak to someone. It could be any number of things. If God has shown it to you, and you deep down know it because you aren't in faith about it, you need to confess and repent and want it away. Trying to act like you aren't sure if it's really sin is a sure sign that you actually know. You wouldn't be justify something you're in faith about, that it's not sin. Not being willing to give it up when maybe it is sinning against a holy God, and keeping you from close fellowship with Him, is a sure sign that you love your sin.

1 John 1:10 says that we make God out to be a liar if we say we don't have sin. Don't make Him a liar. Don't lie about not having sin. Trying to justify your sin by pointing out other people who do the same thing is another sign that you're in sin. Self tries to justify itself by talking around it with reasonings. God justifies you only through the cleansing blood of Jesus in the work of the Holy Spirit, not by rationalizing. Now, there may very well be someone with the same faults as you, but maybe God hasn't worked on that in their life yet. In their ignorance, they can be clean before God. That's not your concern. Your concern is your relationship with God and standing before Him clean by the cleansing of the blood of Christ. Are you willing to give it up (whatever it is—you're the one who knows), for the love of God? Whom do you love?

Lesson 178 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Never Again!

Do you realize that after you become a Christian you aren't supposed to sin deliberately? No Christian is ever to think, "I'll just do it and ask forgiveness later."

In the Old Testament, blood sacrifices were made regularly to cover unintentional sins. Jesus' death washes away our sin guilt. It covers the sins we repent and turn from, and the sins we don't realize we are doing. As we walk in the Light, walk with Christ and learn from Him, reading His word and getting to know Him, He shows us sin in our lives. We need to confess those sins and repent. And He cleanses us from them. It's called the process of sanctification, making us holy, making us wholly His, weeding out all those things that sin nature sowed into us.

For instance, maybe when you came to Christ you knew to confess that you were a liar. He forgave you. He gave you His Spirit of truth, so that you had the power to overcome lying and speak the truth. When you were in a situation where you might have lied before, you felt constrained to tell the truth. If you messed up, you felt awful and confessed both to God and the person and made it right and were forgiven.

Then maybe you read about the Israelites complaining and their destruction, and how they were an example to us, and how we're commanded to do everything without arguing or complaining, and you realize, because the Spirit is at work cleansing you, how you've been sinning against God acting ungrateful by your complaining. You confess. You ask God's help to turn any complaining thought into a declaration of gratitude. You ask for God's help being thankful always for all things. You partner with the Holy Spirit and He brings to mind songs of praise to help you meditate on thanksgiving and praise and renew your mind. And you are being cleansed from all unrighteousness.

Hebrews 10:26-27 reads, "Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received knowledge of the truth, there is no longer any sacrifice that will cover these sins. There is only the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies" (NLT).

Is there hope if you have sinned deliberately and repeatedly? Of course! God is a God of hope. He loves you! His desire is for you to be with Him. That's why He's so diligently at work cleansing us from unrighteousness.

What hope do we have? Jesus, of course! 1 John 2:1 says, "My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous" (NLT).

John says we're not to sin, but IF we do, Jesus will plead our case before the Father. Why does Jesus have to defend your life to the Father? Because the wages of sin is death. Your choice to sin earned you a terrible expectation of God's judgment. God would be just in opening the earth and swallowing you whole. Jesus pleads on your behalf; He pleads His own blood over you.

Please, think about this. This is not a situation you want to put the Father and Son through again and again. We want to please Him, not put Him through anguish. The greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Choosing to live in sin is loving yourself, not God.

He won't stop loving you, but He won't force you to love Him. He will, however, do all that He can to save you, which means turning you from your sin.

Isaiah 5 tells the story about how the Lord tenderly cared for His vineyard, protected and watered it, but it produced bitter fruit instead of sweet. The result is that He tears down its hedge of protection to expose it to destruction.

God doesn't stop loving at that point. God is love and can never stop loving. His heart is for you to repent. The beginning of understanding is the fear of the Lord, so He will allow suffering to teach you to fear Him and hate sin, and turn you to Him to cry out for saving. He wants to save you!

I'll share one final story, a parable from Jesus. God is a good Teacher. He is a good Father. He will do all He can so that you will turn to Him and repent, which is the only way you can truly love Him and receive the gifts He's offering you. But He can't *make* you love Him. He has chosen in His sovereignty to allow us the free will to accept or reject His love offering, His gift of freedom from sin so that we can be with Him. You have to choose Him.

Matthew 22:11-13, "But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who wasn't wearing the proper clothes for a wedding. 'Friend,' he asked, 'how is it that you are here without wedding clothes?' But the man had no reply. Then the king said to his aides, 'Bind his hands and feet and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'" (NLT).

That's not a story about allowing suffering to turn you to repentance. That's eternal separation from God; someone who was a wedding guest and called a friend.

God's love gift is freedom from sin so we can be with the one, true, holy God. Accept it through the fear of the Lord and give your whole heart to loving Him. Hate the sin and receive His love and freedom.

Lesson 179 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ Matthew 28:20b

Today our verse is from the end of Matthew, "And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b, NLT).

Jesus doesn't abandon His disciples. What do we need to keep Him with us? Nothing. He is ours. He gave Himself to us already. What do we have to do to keep us with Him? Nothing. We are kept in Christ by the will of God. If we wander off, He will search for us to bring us back. So, what's our job? Just turn your heart toward Him. Choose Him. Set your heart to just love Him. Don't seek or want anything else. You don't need to seek what you need. He knows what you need. He meets your needs. Just desire Him and enjoy every moment that your desire is being met. He satisfies you.

The Lord will never leave you nor forsake you. If you mess up and your relationship is disrupted (because sin is a separation; sin separates us from God), and your spirit feels empty, and your prayers are hollow, and answers aren't forthcoming, and anxiety is gripping, and confusion is filling your mind, and rest is absent from your heart... know that God didn't leave. He won't leave. He will never leave. Even if He has to turn His face away because of your sin, something He can't look at (He's Holy God),

or if Jesus had to slip out to the other side of the door because you shut Him out to choose your sin (rebellion). Even in such an awful case (which should not be happening frequently!), He is still there. Jesus stays at the door knocking, trying to get your attention to let Him back in. He doesn't go away. Even if His face is turned, He doesn't leave. He's right there.

The leaving and returning are ours. He is consistent. He is there. He's not leaving. We are the inconsistent ones. We wander and return. We get distracted, we refocus. We're lazy and then rally to diligence. He's right there. He never went anywhere. At any moment, we just need to turn to Him, get on our face, confess anything we know to confess, ask for His cleansing, and thank Him for continuing to love you. Praise His faithfulness. Shower your love on Him and receive showers of love back. That's all. Relationship restored. There's no work that needs to be done. No penance. He is wanting that relationship. He gave up His life to have that relationship. You can always know He loves you.

Lesson 180 ~ Sin and Salvation Lessons ~ God Loved Pharaoh

Our all-knowing, all-powerful sovereign God is always good and always loving.

In the beginning, God created the world and it was good. All of it was good according to the first chapter of Genesis.

Sin is bad. Evil is evil. God couldn't have created them in His good creation.

Lucifer was part of God's good creation. Lucifer looks at himself and instead of it causing him to give thanks and praise to the perfect Creator, he thinks of himself and how beautiful and perfect he is (Ezekiel 28:13-17). He thinks he's the best and deserves to be equal with God.

He had the ability to make the choice to love himself instead of loving God. God must have created him with the ability to make that choice. He's also our first example of why we need suffering, why we need troubles in our lives—because the abundance of God's blessing can cause us to forget Him.

Adam and Eve were more of God's perfect creation. They were good. It was all good according to the Word of God. And yet, they were able to choose to love themselves instead of loving God and obeying His Word. God must have created them with the ability to choose. He didn't create evil hearts in them to cause them to sin. He created only good. They were His good creation, yet they had the ability to make a choice that wasn't good. Just like Satan, they were enticed by the thought of being like God.

God only ever acts within His character. 2 Timothy 2:13 says that if we are faithless, He is faithful because He cannot deny Himself. Hebrews 6:17 says that God's nature is unchangeable. God is love and will always be loving. He can't *not* be loving. God is good. He can never not be good. God doesn't stop acting in one attribute to take on another. God is loving when carrying out His wrath. God is good when carrying out His justice. He never stops being Himself or He would cease being God.

For God so loved the world that He sent His Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16 is true. God loved the world. 1 John 2:2 says that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world. Who did God send Jesus for? The world, the whole world, according to the Word of God. Whosoever believes will have everlasting life because Jesus came and died for them all, as God's Word says.

Jesus said that no one could believe, no one could come to Him, unless the Father drew him or her (John 6:44). Whom does the Father draw? We know that God desires all people to be saved and that He wants all to come to repentance, that none should perish, but all come to a saving knowledge of truth (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9). Again, God's Word is true!

God desires all to be saved, but all are not saved. Why? Because God is love and God is good! God is love and love is not selfish; it doesn't seek its own way (1 Corinthians 13:5). God does not insist on His own way. He doesn't force anyone to love Him. Love is a choice we make, and if we were forced into loving God, it wouldn't be true love. God wants to be in a loving relationship with us. Because of His goodness and love, He will allow us to choose Him or reject Him.

Can a sinful person choose a good God? The Bible says we have no good in us (Psalm 16:2, Romans 3:10). Are we able to make the right choice? If a sinful man can fear and act selfishly, then, yes, a sinful man can make the right choice and choose God. All they need is the fear of the Lord. All they need is to see the raging storm, literal or metaphorical, and turn to God in fear, selfishly wanting to preserve themselves. There are all sorts of blessings prepared for those who fear God. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. God can take it from there and lead them in the everlasting way and teach them His paths. There are dozens of amazing promises to those who fear Him, including deliverance and mercy teaching those who fear Him the goodness and love of God.

Jesus gives us a look at the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). We can look at Jesus and see the Father. Jesus gave salvation (healing, deliverance, forgiveness of sin) to all those who came to Him seeking. He never turned anyone away. He never turned away these sinful people seeking salvation. They had made the right choice and had come to Him.

Whom does the Father draw if He wants all people to be saved? Everyone! We read in John 12:32 that Jesus would draw all people to Himself if He was lifted up. How did God draw all people to Himself? He sent Jesus to be lifted up on the cross, that all might not perish but have everlasting life if they would choose to believe, choose the love of God over the love of self.

Since we know that God desires all to be saved and that He loved the whole world, then we know that God loved people like Pharaoh. God's heart was for Pharaoh to be saved. God did more to show Pharaoh who He was, His power and supremacy over all gods, than most would ever see. Yet, Pharaoh chose not to believe. Why?

It says God hardened His heart. But we know God's character, that He is loving and good; and we know God's heart, that He desires all to be saved and none to perish. God couldn't have been preventing Pharaoh from believing and being saved. That would be like locking the door on someone trapped in a burning room. That would be evil. We know God is good. So, how did God harden Pharaoh's heart? God loved him. God gave Pharaoh exactly what he needed in order to be saved. What did Pharaoh need? Humility. He was set up as a god over his people. We learn in Joseph's story how the Egyptians despised shepherds. Whom does God send? He sends a shepherd to tell Pharaoh what to do. Pharaoh could have been saved if he had humbled himself to obey. He refuses to humble his heart before this shepherd. His heart was hardened at the thought. God's plan for the mighty Exodus was never in danger because God knew the end from the beginning and put a man in Pharaoh's place for such a time as this, knowing what his reaction would be.

There is evil in the world, but it's not because God is plotting evil and dreaming up new ways to torture people. God is good! There is evil in the world because God, in His loving goodness, allows people the freedom to choose Him or not.

God is not only loving and good, He's a lot of other wonderful things as well. He is sovereign, which means He has authority over everything. He is all-powerful. He is all-knowing. We are not at the whim of the choices of others. He will protect and care for His children. God sets up His hedges of protection around His own, lines that cannot be crossed until He removes the boundary for our good and His glory. Jesus was never at the whim of the Pharisees' plotting. He died in the way and at the exact time and

place God designed, and God is big enough, wise enough, and powerful enough to be able to use their choices to make that happen.

When God instructs Joshua to have everyone in Jericho killed, is God acting against His good and loving character? Of course not! God was acting in justice and in love. How do we know? God is just. God is love. If they lived, they would be a snare to His children. It would lead to their death. He was protecting His children. And in being all-knowing, God knew from the foundation of the world who were His. When He created each of us, He knew the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10). He knew who would choose Him. That's how we could be predestined (Romans 8:29), chosen from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). He knew us. He knew it all. He couldn't possibly choose the elect apart from His knowing our choices because He sees it all. He could put those who were His in the place of His choosing and those who were not His in another place (Acts 17:26). No one was destroyed who would have come to repentance. God saves out of Jericho the one who would choose Him, and in fact doesn't kill everyone, but saves a whole family.

Why was Rahab's family saved out of Jericho? She acted in the fear of the Lord. The others in the city were all in the same circumstance. God didn't do anything special for Rahab other than present her with an opportunity to make a choice. She was in the same predicament as the rest of the city, but the rest didn't humble themselves under the fear of the Lord. They felt the fear and instead of turning to God for salvation, put their trust in their wall and in their own gods.

Why did the children of Jericho have to die? Because God is good and loving. Instead of creating orphans, He brought the children home to Himself to always have a perfect and good, loving Father; He assured them salvation.

When God has His prophets speak of the destruction that God will send on Israel, it's out of His love for them. His plans for them are good. His desire is to prosper them, to bless them. He sets before His people a choice. He repeatedly sets a choice before them. He would be lying (and therefore no longer God) if He were saying they had the choice but they really had no choice, if He was forcing their hand like a trickster magician. God presents an actual choice. They could have chosen Him, chosen life. They choose their own destruction, and even that isn't at the whim of the invaders. Their destruction will all happen in the time and in the way God allows. He will allow it only because His end goal is to save them. He loves His children. He will save Israel. He will always act on their behalf. There will always be a remnant because God will always love His children. God can, and will, assure there is always a remnant.

How? The Bible tells us that God will have mercy on whom He wants to have mercy (Romans 9:18). God will sovereignly act to intervene to help some choose Him, and we're told that it is God's prerogative to be loving and merciful and we have no right to question that (Romans 9:15). We have to recognize He's God and we're not.

Paul is a good example of this. He gets special treatment in how God works to get his attention. The disciples were told by Jesus to pray for those persecuting them. There's a good chance some of them were obeying Jesus and praying for Paul, who was making a name for himself in his zeal to persecute the Christians. There's a good chance that God was working on Paul's heart before the dramatic events on the road to Damascus. Jesus says to Paul, "It's hard to kick against the goads."

It would seem God had been prodding, goading Paul along to knowing Him. Paul knew the Scriptures. Jesus had been lifted up and all men were being drawn to Him. Paul knew Isaiah 53 and all of Moses' teaching. God was working on Paul's heart and Paul was fighting it. People tend to be overly zealous against the thing they are struggling with themselves. Paul was ready to immediately make the choice to humble himself and repent when God dramatically showed up in His life. God can have mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, but Paul still had to make the choice.

Why does God not show mercy to everyone? Why does God create people knowing that they will go to hell? If He knows the end from the beginning, then why go through with creating the people who wouldn't choose Him? Because He loves His children! He does it for us. God is not acting unjustly or unloving toward those who will not choose Him. He gives them life. He gives them food. He gives them rain and makes the sun to rise (Matthew 5:45). He gives them displays of His power and majesty so that none have an excuse (Romans 1:20). God is good and just and holy and perfect in all of His ways.

He allows them to be born and to be destroyed at their own choosing because of His love for the elect, for His children, for those He knew would come to a knowledge of truth, and repent and walk in abiding love with Him through faith.

Isaiah 43 records God saying that He will give Egypt for the ransom of Israel, that He would give peoples for them. He is able to use the evil choices of others for the sake of His beloved children. He is willing to go through the heartache of losing rebellious children for our sake. God lives in sadness and anger over sin and hurt and rebellion and oppression, for our sake. He does not seek His own. He is love. He seeks our welfare. We needed to see the choice so that we would choose God. If we only saw good, we would be in danger like Satan and Adam and Eve. Ease and comfort are a danger to us. God uses the evil choices of others to urge us toward the good choice of Him.

God allows those who will not choose Him to live and carry out their evil choices. God's choice is to allow them their free will. That's why surrendering our lives to God and prayer are so integral. We need to give Him the "right" to act on our behalf and on the behalf of others. Not that we can prevent all suffering from the evil choices of others, but God is in control and can protect us from them, or design to use their choices, and redeem them in our lives to carry out His heart purpose of teaching us who He is. God says that He will show Paul how very necessary it is for him to suffer (Acts 9:16). God wasn't plotting evil against His chosen child, Paul. God was going to instruct Paul about the necessity of suffering. It is then, Paul, who teaches us about sharing in the fellowship of Christ's suffering (Philippians 3:10).

God means for good what is intended for evil (Genesis 50:20, Romans 8:28). Jesus endured the cross so that many could come to righteousness. We need to die to self that Christ might live in us. We need help crucifying self. We aren't good at doing it ourselves, but we need to die to gain Christ. Christ's life in us is our abundant life that we seek and desire. In allowing suffering in our lives, God is bringing about the desires of our hearts, if we are truly seeking to live as Christ and to love God with our whole hearts.

We can't do anything without God acting first. We choose to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength because He perfectly loved us first. He is good. He is our good Father who provides

and protects, guides and comforts, blesses with joy and peace. That's the heart of God. He never hurts anyone willingly (Lamentations 3:33). It is sometimes required, but His heart-choice is never to hurt, afflict pain, or cause grief.

No one can stop God's plans (Job 42:2, Isaiah 43:13), but God Himself. He can change His plans. However, He also must act within character, or He wouldn't be Himself and we'd all be in trouble. If God stopped loving, He would cease being God. If He stopped being just, He would cease being God. He is and always was and always will be. He can't not be, and He can't not be who He is. He cannot lie. He must remain holy and separated from sin. He must carry out justice. He presents His people with a choice: if you choose this, this bad thing will happen; if you choose that, this wonderful thing will happen. God is trying to help them make the right choice. The right choice is so clear. However, He sovereignly gave them free will, and He will let them choose. He also has to remain true to His nature, character, and authority. He must afflict; He must bring punishment and wrath. He must carry out His word against them, at their choosing, even if it's not what He would have chosen, not what His heart wants for them.

God is only good. God is only loving. May we always act, speak, think, and even react, in ways that only honor our God who is perfect in all of His ways.