

*the*

**JESUS**  
**BOOK**



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**MICHAEL KOULIANOS**

## **Jesus Image**

Lake Mary, Fl 32795

The Jesus Book

by Michael Koulianos Edited by Kent Crockett

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Printed in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2011927663 International Standard Book Number: 978-1-61036-077-7

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## DEDICATION

**T**HIS BOOK is dedicated to the One who suffered in shame and died on a Cross for my sin. To the One who lives today and lovingly revealed Himself to me when I did not deserve Him. To Him who wanted me when I wanted nothing to do with Him. It is dedicated to the love of my life, Jesus. I hope You are pleased with this, dear Jesus. You deserve this gift. It is my best and it is all for You.



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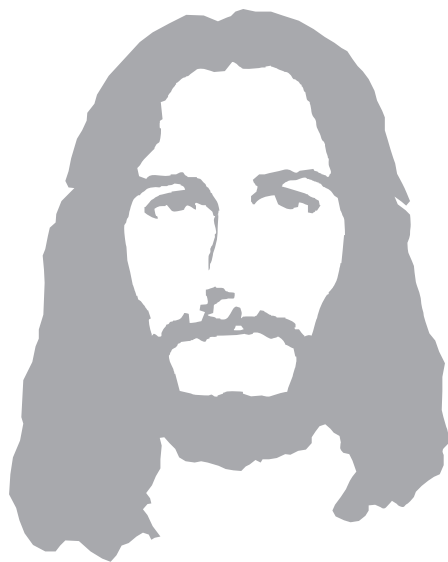
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## PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, let this heart fall in love with You as the Holy Spirit reveals Your precious Son in these pages. Only Jesus can lead this hungry soul to You. May this happen now. Wrap Your loving arms around this child and fill this needy heart. Beautiful Jesus, receive Your reward. May they love You forever. In Your matchless name, Amen.*





## INTRODUCTION

**WHEN THE PRECIOUS** Holy Spirit gave the vision to write this book, I instantly knew what would be written and what the heart of this message would be. It would be about one who really loves us; the One who is worthy of our honor and worship. His Name is Jesus.

This book has nothing to do with the author. I have no answers regarding your life except to introduce you to this person who transformed my empty heart. Jesus is a real person, which means you can know and love Him.

Loving Jesus is life's greatest achievement and your highest calling. Jesus is not a way for you to get to your destination. He is your destination. He is not a way to experience salvation, Jesus is salvation. So, what is *The Jesus Book* all about? Jesus.

“What else?” you may ask. Just Jesus.

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“But, is that enough?” By the time you finish this journey, you will discover that He is more than enough. In an age when churches are full and religion is trendy, lives are emptier than ever. The reality of the person of Jesus Christ must be the center of everything again. Church should be about Jesus, the One who purchased it with His blood. Christ is Christianity. He is life itself.

Worship should be about the One who is worthy of worship. Prayer should be about the person we pray to. The Bible is about the Father’s love, demonstrated by sending His Son, Jesus. Heaven is heavenly because Christ is there.

I do not intend for *The Jesus Book* to replace your time in the Bible, but I simply want to introduce you to the One the Bible is all about. The Word of God is the source for the teachings in this book. This work only touches on the characteristics of the Lord that I felt led to write on. I do not claim to encompass the entire person of Jesus because He is absolutely limitless. No book in the world could contain or explain the fullness of who He is.

Allow the Spirit of God to take you by the hand and place you at the feet of this Lord, who longs for you to love and know Him as never before. My prayer is that He will take you back to where it all started and where we must finish—Jesus Christ.

The vision for this work was not birthed in an hour of victory or success, rather in a time of defeat and discouragement. It was a period when my prayers seemed to go unanswered and the successes in my life were difficult to recognize. After months of seeking for answers, the One who truly cares lovingly entered my heart in a life-changing way.

What you are reading is a product of a loving relationship with God. However, this would never have materialized had He not used certain friends, family members, and spiritual leaders to touch my life. These people were the vehicles that God used to introduce himself to me as a boy, and they continue to influence me today. They have impacted my life for all eternity and I am forever indebted to them. Some led me to the Lord. Others kept me close to Him on my journey. I love you all so very much.

As you prepare to begin, please understand that this moment has been planned by God himself. Before you were ever born, He knew you would be reading this page at this very time. He has eagerly waited for this hour as the Holy Spirit desires to introduce Jesus to you in a very special way. In return, He simply wants your love. You are about to be taken by the hand and placed at the nail-scarred feet of the One who died for you. I pray that two things will happen as your read—first, that you may know the love of Jesus and second, that you would deeply love Him in return.

*Precious Holy Spirit, glorify Jesus in this heart today. Make the One You adore, Jesus Himself, more real than anything or anyone. You are mighty and divine. We honor Your Holy Presence among us and yield our wills to You. We realize our utter dependency upon You. In Your Presence, the Son is visible to our longing hearts. Without You, we remain blind to His beauty. Blow upon the waters of our souls now and possess us fully.*

*You who need your sin washed away, come to the Savior.*

*You who need your sick body healed, come to the Healer.*

*You who are unknown, be counted with the Servant.*

*You who are lost, cling to the Shepherd.*

*You who are addicted, be rescued by the Warrior.*

*You who are lonely, find this faithful Friend.*

*You who are suffering and do not know why, meet the Sufferer.*

*You who are in need, the Provider has not changed.*

*You who have been rejected by all, discover the Outcast.*

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*You who lack the power of God, the Baptizer awaits you.*

*You who fear the world and its future, trust this faithful King.*

*You who cannot escape the pull of God on your heart, simply yield to the Seeker.*

*You who know there must be more, release the Prisoner.*

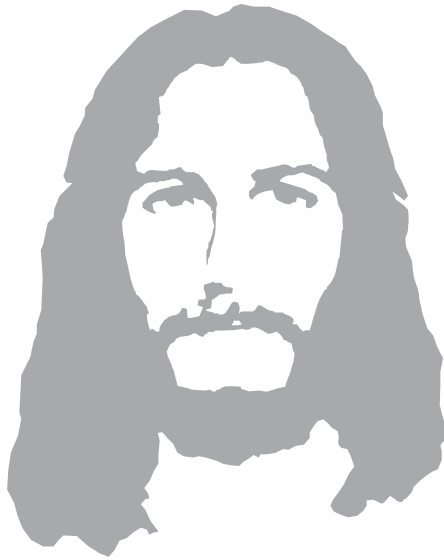
*You who have lived for yourself for too long, surrender to the Lord.*

*You who have stared at the night sky with awe and wonder, worship this awesome God.*

*You who feel that you are not worth loving, be swept away by the Lover of your soul.*

Who is He? Jesus is His name.

—Michael Koulianos



## CHAPTER 1

# *Lover*

*Jesus replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.”*

—MATTHEW 22:37-38

**I**N 1732, John Leonard Dober and David Nitschman, both in their early twenties, left their jobs and families to become the first Moravian missionaries. These two young men had heard that three thousand slaves from Africa had been taken to an island in the West Indies to work on the sugar cane plantations. God had placed a burden on their hearts to go to the island and present the gospel to these slaves who were forced to work there.

But there was a problem. The British slave owner, who was an atheist, would not let any missionaries on the island. He defiantly an-

nounced, “No preacher, no clergyman, will ever stay on this island. If he’s shipwrecked we’ll keep him in a separate house until he has to leave, but he’s never going to talk to any of us about God.”

Since they could not get on the island as missionaries, there was only one other option. They had to be willing to be sold into slavery! Selling themselves to the British planter was their only shot, and they took it. If they were going to share the gospel with the slaves, they had to become slaves themselves.

This was not a decision where they could come back in a few years. They would be working as slaves on the island for the rest of their lives and would never be able to return home.

Their families were shocked and could not understand why they had made such a radical decision. They had sacrificed their freedom and their entire future to serve Jesus Christ in a most unusual way. They wanted more than anything to answer the call of God to reach these slaves and please Him with their lives.

On October 8, 1732, their families stood on the dock weeping, knowing that they would never see them again. As the ship pulled away with the young men aboard, they linked arms together and shouted to their loved ones they were leaving behind, “May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering!”

These words became the anthem and inspiration for thousands of missionaries who would follow in their footsteps. Without realizing it, the two young men had birthed a missions movement. Over the next 150 years, the Moravians sent out two thousand missionaries to various places over the world.

If you ask, “What does it mean to love Jesus?” you have just read one of the purest examples.

Christ is thrilled that you are beginning this journey into His tender heart. He can hardly wait for you to experience Him as your True Love. As you continue reading, I pray that you will experience two privileges of great importance. First, that you realize how much He loves you. Second, that you fall deeply in love with Him in return. The two are forever linked together.



## THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENT

The Scripture cited above, Matthew 22:37-38, shows us the commandment Christ considers to be the greatest. In fact, Jesus was not at all reluctant to answer the question, which was asked of Him by a Jewish expert in the law. He gets right to the point and declares that loving the Lord is the greatest and first commandment.

Together, let us take a closer look at the heart and motive of God regarding our love for Him. Thousands of commandments are recorded in the Bible. Not many recommendations, but a huge number of commands. As you study His Holy Word you will be amazed by the amount and detail in God's laws and requirements. However, this one divine instruction— "love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind"— which means to love Jesus with your entire being, stands out from the rest. Since the Son of God validates this command, do you not think we should live by it and make it our greatest desire?

Now, for a most important question. Why is this command the "first and greatest"? Today, the answer appears quite simple, but it took me until I was thirty years old to finally learn this from the Lord. I asked Him into my heart at the age of twelve and began preaching shortly thereafter. Still, I had never discovered this great truth.

*The answer is because our love is what Jesus desires the most from us. It is the dearest thing to His heart, which is why He made loving Him the greatest of all commandments. It is breathtaking to think that out of everything God could have chosen, He longs most for our love. Jesus wants you to fall deeply in love with Him at this very moment. Your love is what He passionately yearns for. Will you give it to Him? Lovers always give what their beloved desires, because love longs to please.*

## A TRIP TO THE DESERT

One of the many reasons I love the Lord so much is because I appreciate His simplicity. I admire how non-religious He is, and how plain and simple He makes the path to finding His love. I am not implying the journey will be easy; rather that He never makes things complicat-

ed. He always offers clear and direct answers that can turn chaos into peace and rest.

There was a time in my life when I was confused and worried. I could sense that my time as a pastor in California was coming to an end. I knew that God had other things ahead and that He still had much for me to do. I just did not know how to go about doing what He wanted. I could feel this book burning in my heart, but had no idea how to write it, let alone how to get it published. I felt a move of location was in my future, but was not sure where. All I knew was that Jesus was very real to me and that He had something fresh on the horizon.

I decided to visit the Sisters of Mary in Phoenix, Arizona, for a few days to have some time alone with the Lord. The Sisters of Mary is an evangelical sisterhood of nuns founded by Mother Basilea Schlink, whose writings are a gift from God and are life-changing. Her ministry was used by the Holy Spirit to draw me close to Christ and to fall in love with Him all over again. She passed away in 2001, but I honor her memory and thank God for her impact on my life, which still continues today.

Two of the sisters, Sister Rebekah and Sister Pinea, have become very close to the hearts of my wife and me. They graciously listened to the cry of my heart and to what I was going through at the time.

I will never forget sitting under a tree in a desert garden, trying to sort through my confusion, when the sisters came and ministered to me. Regardless of what I told them, the sisters always turned me back to the love of Christ and His heart toward me. The size of the issue did not matter nor did it change their answer. They simply said to *trust in the love of Jesus and love Him in return*. Looking back on my life, I can honestly say that was the greatest advice I have ever received.

## “ONLY ONE THING”

*As Jesus and the disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem, they came to a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. Her sister,*

*Mary, sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what he taught. But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She came to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me." But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42).*

Please never forget these three words from that Scripture: "only one thing." What is the "one thing" that Jesus refers to?

The answer is in what Mary was doing. She was sitting at the feet of the Lord, delighting in His presence and loving Him—free from work and distraction; free from the stress that a religious meeting of great magnitude can create.

Her mind was not consumed with the work of ministry. Her focus was fixed on the Beloved, while Martha was busy working. Mary wanted nothing more than to be close enough to the Lord to touch Him and to hear His soothing voice. She wanted Jesus above all else, even above serving Him.

Love wants to be close to Him. Scripture describes this desire beautifully by saying, "Hide me in the shadow of your wings" (Psalm 17:8 NIV). This is the "one thing" we all need—and a treasure that can never be taken away: It is our love for the Lover. When this is found, your heart will cry, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" (Song of Solomon 6:3 KJV). This is a holy treasure and the pearl of great price!

You receive Jesus and He receives you. What a privilege! People can lie about you, ruin your reputation, steal your money, and attempt to wreck your life. They can rob you of what you have spent years trying to attain. But there is "one thing" they can never steal from you because they did not give it to you in the first place. This "one thing" is set aside for you and the Lover of your soul. It is private property that God Himself guards and is extremely protective of.

You may ask, “Don’t I need to do more with my life than just loving Jesus? Shouldn’t I be loving others and helping mankind? What about pursuing my dreams?”

If you love Christ, you cannot help but do all of these other things. St. Augustine said, “Love first, then do what you please.” Love for Jesus is the source for serving Him. If you love Him, you will want to do what He desires. One who loves the Lord will not want to offend Him. Even the key to the removal of sin in your life is a deep love for God. “If you love Me, obey my commandments” (John 14:15).

You will find that as your love for Him increases, you will accomplish more than you would have ever dreamed. Plus, you will be doing things the right way, with Him in mind. You will never desire to embarrass or let Him down since all you accomplish will be for His sake. Even self-sacrifice must be done for His sake, if it is to be accepted by the Lord.

Many people forget about Jesus when they serve Him. Christ said, “He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life *for My sake* will find it” (Matthew 10:39 NKJV). If you attempt to succeed without loving Him, you will “wear out” and be unfulfilled. As the Apostle Paul writes, “...though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:3 NKJV).

Falling in love with Him and sitting at His feet should be the foundation of everything we are and all we do. Now, close your eyes and clear your mind of all distractions. Ask the Lord to make this “one thing” your ultimate desire. Come to His feet by faith. Believe that He is with you and that you are literally in His presence. You are with the Master now, and nothing else matters. Whisper to Him, “Jesus, it is you I want. Not blessings, just you. Not help, just you.”

Dear friend, this is a prayer that He loves to answer. *Once Jesus becomes your prayer, you are finally praying.* When you discover Christ in this way and He is made real in your heart, you will begin to sense His great love and you will soon begin to love Him in return. This is the place of great achievement and true success. The person who finds the Lord and loves Him cannot fail in life because love never fails. (See 1 Corinthians 13:8.)

## HE LOVES TO LOVE YOU

His love for you is different than any love you have ever known. It is not limited to emotions, and unlike human love, it is not here today and gone tomorrow. It does not depend on your bank account, where you live, your college degree, the amount of time spent in church, the number of Bible verses you have memorized, how you look, or how old you are. His awesome love is unconditional and eternal. It is absolutely beyond our comprehension!

God promises, “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3 NIV). This means His love is so great that it has no beginning and no end. It cannot be measured. The best news is that Jesus is thrilled beyond measure to show you His love. He says, “You have ravished My heart” (Song of Solomon 4:9 NKJV). His greatest pleasure is to give this love to you.

Did you know that you have captured the very heart of God? Have you ever loved another person to the extent that you did not know whether you should hug or squeeze them until they scream—the kind of love that feels so good it hurts? He has this same passion for each of His children. In fact, His love has brought you to this moment in your life. It is His love that led you to read this book.

Christ’s love is literally drawing you to Himself. The Scripture says: “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19 KJV). The reason you long to love Him is because His love for you is pulling you into intimacy. He does not want to wait a second longer for your heart. He is offering His love to you right now—hoping you will return what He so freely gives. Please do not reject His offer.

## JESUS PROVED HIS LOVE

The Son of God is not asking that you love Him without a reason. Scripture tells us, “Rightly do they love you” (Song of Solomon 1:4 NKJV). He is worth loving and it is right to love Him—nothing could be more appropriate. “He is the fairest of ten thousand.” His beauty stands alone and there is no one more worthy of your love.

## LOVER

The Lord has arranged it so that we are without excuse when it comes to returning His love. He endured and suffered much to reveal how deeply He longs for us. Jesus' entire life on Earth was an act of selfless love. From His birth to His suffering and death, it was love being demonstrated. Every miracle and healing He performed was because of His intense passion for His people. Every wound on His back and the very Cross He endured is because of His limitless love.

As you continue to discover the Lord while reading these chapters, I am praying that you hear these words flowing from His heart: "I love you with all My heart and it cost Me everything to prove it. It cost Me My life."

John 3:16 is quoted and used by people all over the world, but I wonder if they actually take time to digest the words and consider its true meaning: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him will not perish, but have everlasting life" (KJV). Notice that God did not just love you, He "so" loved you. This incredible, overwhelming love caused Him to send His only precious Son into a sinful world to die.

## AMAZING LOVE

I will never forget playing with our oldest son, Theo, when he was a baby. He used to love for me to hold him up high and act like he was flying. One time I held him up and let him touch the wall. When I did this, I instantly saw a picture of God the Father offering His Son to die on the Cross and allowing Him to be lifted in shame.

I was shocked by what the Lord allowed me to feel in that moment. I asked myself, *Could I offer my son for my enemies?* I was frozen by the thought. I love my two sons, Theo and Benny, more than words can describe. To offer them in death for a friend is beyond my imagination, let alone for an enemy.

The Bible clearly teaches that we were enemies of God, yet Jesus still gave His life for us. (See Romans 5:10.) Never again question God's feelings toward you. His love is so great that it makes no sense

at all. No reasoning in the world can comprehend it. This truly is an amazing love.

The very arrival of Jesus is marked and flooded with love for mankind. He came to suffer for you—and He did so willingly. Christ’s purpose on earth was to demonstrate His feelings toward you, so that you would truly understand and appreciate all He did on your behalf. He could have found a way to escape the suffering He endured, but His love had to be shown. Only Jesus offers a love that has been so proven. “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13).

## OUR HUSBAND

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine” (Song of Solomon 1:2 NIV). This Scripture reveals the precious heart of someone who is in love with Jesus. We want to be near Him like any bride should. We want to draw close enough to kiss His face.

Have you ever stopped to realize that a true believer is married to God? He says, “I will make you my wife forever” (Hosea 2:19 NKJV). We are also told, “Your Maker is your husband” (Isaiah 54:5 NKJV). Once this truth is revealed to you by the Holy Spirit, you will experience Him in a new depth.

The wife belongs only to the husband. In the same way, because of His great love, God is jealous of you. “A garden enclosed is my sister” (Song of Solomon 4:12 NKJV). Jesus wants no rivals to come between you and Him. He wants us all to himself. In fact, one of His names is “Jealous.” (See Exodus 34:14.)

Jesus said, “You cannot be my disciple, unless you love me more than you love your father and mother, your wife and children, and your brothers and sisters. You cannot come with me unless you love me more than you love your own life” (Luke 14:26 MSG). Like any husband, He expects that our eyes look to Him and only Him.

I have seen so many men become jealous when their wives give attention to other men. They want the love of their wives to be theirs,

## LOVER

and theirs alone. They have every right to desire this. How much more does God deserve our undivided love? We must never place it in things or money, but in Him. He wants you all to himself.

## TIME WITH JESUS

In order to have a quality marriage, a couple must spend time together. Words of love must be exchanged privately and face to face. How can a marriage survive when there is no quiet time with each other?

Some couples have sacrificed their union because they have neglected this “alone” time. As a result, the union becomes incredibly “surface.” They miss the old days when they first got together and things were exciting and fresh. Does this sound familiar to you?

Our marriage to Jesus is no different. He desires the one-on-one intimacy that you once shared with Him when you first gave Him your heart. Hear His request, “Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away” (Song of Song of Solomon 2:10 NKJV). Lovers crave the love of the Beloved. They want Him to look at them differently than the rest. They ask Him, “Keep me as the apple of your eye” (Psalm 17:8 NIV).

If you have drifted away from the Lord, remember He longs to share His feelings with you and desires that you open your heart to Him once more. What could be more valuable than spending precious time with your eternal Husband? If this intimate relationship is not maintained and nurtured, your marriage to Jesus will suffer like any other union.

Christ has been, and will continue to be, the perfect Husband. He protects and provides—and will never forsake you. However, it is our choice to accept His offer to spend time in His presence and remain close to Him.

## FIRST LOVE

May we fully grasp the kind of love God wants from us—and that He has for us. Jesus makes it clear that He desires a specific kind of love; a certain passion that satisfies Him. It is a love which puts all things in



proper order, making Him and His feelings top priority every second of our lives.

Actually, it is the only love He will accept. It is called *first love*. This means that the heart of Christ takes priority in all I do, think, and say. We should constantly ask ourselves this question, “Will this hurt Him or bring Him joy?”

First love rises above all people and their demands—and you will be tested in the process. God gives us a way to measure our love for Him. It is called obedience. He said:

*“Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them[...]All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey me. And remember, my words are not my own. What I am telling you is from the Father who sent me” (John 14:21,23-24).*

What a reward for obeying and loving the Master! We are loved by the Father and Jesus will reveal Himself to us. Both the Father and the Son promise to live and make their home with us. This indescribable blessing is ours if we simply possess “first love”—making Him our everything.

## YOUR ALL IN ALL

We may have to put friends and family aside for times of prayer, or make decisions that upset those close to you. I am talking about the love you had when you first met the Savior of your soul, when He was your all in all and the focus of your heart. It is a passion that lives for the Lover and elevates Him to the very throne of our hearts.

Jesus speaks of this first love when He addressed the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2, which is known as the “loveless church.” The congregation was experiencing what many churches go through, and perhaps you have experienced the same. They fought for the truth of the faith and opposed lies that were trying to destroy the church. They performed good deeds, were patient, and suffered much. These people tested and resisted false teachers and strongly opposed evil. However, even with all this good “work,” Jesus was not pleased. All of their actions failed to satisfy Him. He was not interested in their deeds unless they were motivated by love. This is why the Lord declared, “You have forsaken your first love” (Revelation 2:4 NIV).

As a lover, every action we take is to be fueled by a first love for God. Without it, our works are empty and we begin putting our deeds above Him. The Lord knows that if our love for Him is great, these works will follow naturally and will withstand the test of time. Any other effort will fail and is temporary.

The highest honor is not to simply be used by God. Many people we read about in Scripture who were used by the Lord were also judged and punished severely by Him. Look at Judas. He performed miracles with the rest of the disciples and helped in giving to the poor. He was part of the ministry of Christ. However, there was one thing Judas lacked—first love. This is why he was found stealing money from Jesus’ ministry, even while he was a disciple. (See John 12:6.) He would ultimately betray the Lord. A lack of love is the source of betrayal.

## A FALSE LOVE

We can be actively working for the Lord but still not love Him. The judgment on such a person is frightening. To the church at Ephesus, the Lord warned that if they did not return to their first love, “I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches” (Revelation 2:5 NKJV).

What was He referring to? According to Scripture, “...the seven lampstands are the seven churches” (Revelation 1:19 NKJV). Jesus has every right to remove His blessing and power from a church that falls

out of love with Him. This is a scary thought, but it is as true as the Bible itself.

If the house of worship you attend is just going through the motions, begin to pray that Christ would use you to help birth “first love” in the hearts of the people. After all, if God used a donkey and a colt to bring Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He can use your prayer and life to bring His presence to the hearts of those in your church.

Do not make your objective simply to be used of God. Rather, make it your goal to have “first love,” and then being used of Him will naturally follow. First love may seem like it is a bit much. Maybe you think that Jesus is asking a great deal from you. But remember who is asking for this love. He is God. He died for you, and He is your eternal Husband, who has every right to ask for your love in this way.

## THE ULTIMATE PRICE

A friend shared this true story about a boy in another country who truly loved his Savior. This youngster was confronted by a band of men who hated the Lord and His teachings, and did not want anyone to love or serve Him. They were determined to remove Christianity from the area in which they lived.

The young believer was asked by these angry men to forsake and renounce Christ. The boy refused to reject the One he loved, so they cut off his arms. Again they demanded that Jesus be renounced, but the boy would not obey. Next, they cut off his legs. The young man would not turn his back on the lover of his soul for anything in the world, so they cut the boy in two.

Only first love can give the strength to go through such pain and agony. It is the only power that will strengthen you to endure persecution. Jesus promised that we will face persecution for His sake. It will surely come and intensify as His return approaches.

Just a quick question. What would you leave Him for? Have you left the Lord for much less than this boy faced? If so, come back and pledge Him your love once again.

## CHEATING ON GOD

Did you know that it is possible to cheat on God? Most people never realize that they can actually cheat on the Son of God and break His heart. No true bride wants to grieve her husband. Someone who is passionately in love with Him, is frightened by the very thought of hurting their Lover.

The Lord called the nation of Israel a prostitute because they went after other gods or idols. (See Hosea 9:1.) Today, our culture is filled with idols. We can chase them just as easily. They just look a bit different in our society. Our idols can include social status, money, cars, homes, work, family, or even our church. For those of you working in full time Christian service, your ministry may even be your idol. There is a definite distinction between Jesus and ministry, and we are to love Him first.

Anything we place before our love for Christ is considered an idol in His sight and according to Scripture, we are cheating on God when we seek these things above Him. Even though these idols look different than they did thousands of years ago, in His heart they produce the same disappointment. He sees it as being unfaithful in your marriage to Him, a betrayal—and it hurts Him deeply. He is extremely sensitive to this issue of our faithfulness.

## HOW TO FALL IN LOVE WITH JESUS

The true sign that God is our Father is whether or not we love Jesus. As the Lord told His religious critics, “If God were your Father, you would love me, because I have come to you from God. I am not here on my own, but He sent me” (John 8:42 NKJV).

*Did you know that your love is the reward that Jesus receives from the Cross? He yearns for it daily. It would not be right if His love was never returned. How horrible it would be if He showed such love only to never receive it from those He died for. Your love is the trophy of His sacrifice.*

Before we go any further, here is a question: do you really know how much Jesus loves you? Remember, God loved us first, and what

we give Him in return is simply a reflection of this love. “We love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19 KJV). The Holy Spirit, and only the Holy Spirit, can reveal the love of God to us. “The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5 NKJV).

Now is the perfect time to ask Him to help you. Simply say, precious Holy Spirit, reveal the love of Jesus to my heart. In order for you to really fall in love with Christ, you must first realize His great love for you. “God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins” (1 John 4:10-11).

Even when you did not desire Jesus at all, He loved you. When you wanted nothing to do with Him, He wanted all of you. When you were running away, He was running toward you. When the world hated Him He died for all. To truly love Christ we must accept the fact that our sin sent Him to the Cross. It was our filth that created such a horrible situation and caused Him to suffer and sacrifice His life.

Until we fully comprehend the magnitude of this, we will never know a passionate love for the Lord. We must personally take responsibility for our sin and what God had to do to permanently erase it. In addition, let us understand the purity of Jesus and how detestable our sin is in comparison. When we experience this anguish, we begin to walk the path that leads to true love for God. May we be allowed to see the pain our sin caused His heart.

## YOU HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN MUCH

The Father judged His Son because Jesus had to become our sin. How our sin hurt Christ! What it cost Him! Our sin was so awful in God’s eyes that it would cost an unimaginable price to pay the debt.

Perhaps you do not think your sin was a big deal and that others have done much worse. Please do not fall into that trap. The Holy Spirit will let you feel what your sin looked like in the eyes of God. Then and only then can you begin to fall in love with Him. It is at

that moment we will realize we “have been forgiven much.” This is a pivotal step in falling in love with the Lord. True love is right around the corner.

It might hurt to get to this point, but it is well worth it. You may weep with guilt and conviction, but this is necessary. This is the road to love that very few want to walk. Realize your sin and you will find that God nailed it to a Cross. You will want it no more. Then, when you ask Him to forgive you, you will find that He will do it with ease and with love.

You will discover that He will never remind you of your sin again. He will never hold it against you and you will realize how much He wants you. You will find that He is in love with you and you are “fair” in His eyes. You will be amazed that He has accepted you, regardless of your past. Now, love is birthed because you finally realized just how much you have been forgiven of. Now you love much! This Scripture contains the key: “I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love” (Luke 7:47).

## A PATIENT LOVE

One of the most powerful examples in God’s Word depicting mercy is the life of Peter, the disciple who denied the Lord three times before the crucifixion. After the resurrection, we find Peter jumping off a boat, swimming to get to Jesus for a breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Peter knew that He had much to be forgiven of. He remembered when he wept bitterly after denying Christ just days prior. (See Matthew 26:75.) He was well aware of how much he had hurt Him, but this was his moment for redemption.

While the others stayed behind to haul in the giant catch of fish that the Lord had provided, Peter dove into the water to swim to the Master. He was not consumed with the abundance of fish, he wanted his lover back. He wanted the Lord more than he wanted His blessings.

Oh, that we would all desire Jesus more than the things He gives us. Peter outran everyone to meet Him. Why this passionate outburst?

Why such fervor? He knew He had been forgiven much and now He loved much in return! Peter must have been amazed that after all the heartache and pain he had caused, Jesus still wanted him and was calling him to be by His side on the seashore.

While the disciples were all together, Christ asked Simon Peter, “Do you love me?” (John 21:15). The Lord did not ask the question once, but repeated it three times. Peter had to be embarrassed since the others were sitting there and listening to the conversation. They knew that Peter had denied the Lord three times. But now Jesus was forgiving him and offering him another chance. Yes, Peter had denied Him three times publicly, but now God was giving him the opportunity to declare his love three times publicly.

Our loving Husband has the right to ask us all who claim to be His the same question. Peter was consumed by the love of Jesus in this moment as His Master was giving Him another chance. Now the love of God was being revealed to this disciple who had failed Him just days prior. In such a moment, love is birthed. Peter found that Christ’s love overshadowed his own failure. He discovered that Jesus still wanted him in spite of the pain he caused the Lord.

This type of love does not make sense and is not fair to God. This is what makes it so priceless. All Jesus wanted was Peter—and now all Peter wanted was Jesus. This truly is “amazing love.”

*Instead of running away in shame, Peter ran to the one he had hurt.* Not even the waters of the Sea of Galilee could keep Peter away from this tender Christ. He made the right choice and would ultimately die a martyr’s death by being crucified upside down for His commitment to the Lord. Only those who truly love God finish with strength. “I love you, Lord; you are my strength” (Psalm 18:1). This is a far different Peter than the one who denied Him when questioned by a young woman.

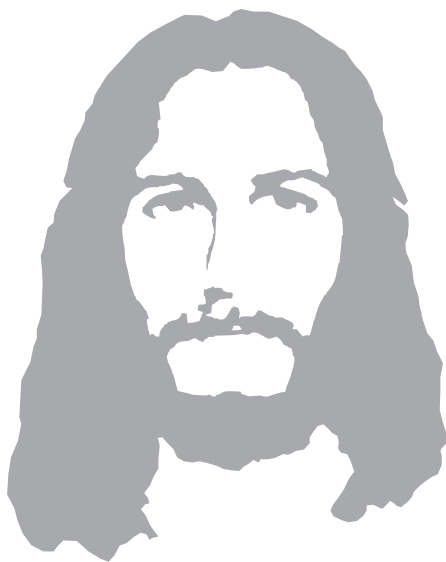
You may ask, “How could there be such a change?” It was divine love for Christ that was birthed in his heart by the Holy Spirit. Nothing changes the heart like the love of God. It is beyond compare. Regardless of how you have hurt Him, His love is available to you this very moment. Run to Him and you will never be the same.

## GOD

*Dear Jesus,*

*What a lover You are to me. I am amazed by Your love. I cannot believe that You would willingly die for me when I had forgotten about You. It seems almost too good to be true that You want me as I am—and in return I receive You. I want to love You as a bride loves her husband. I want to fall in love with You all over again. Convict me of my sin, so I will always love You more. Never let me forget the Cross and help me remember how much You want my love. From this moment on, let me fall in love with You daily. With my whole heart, Amen.*





## CHAPTER 2

# *Seeker*

*“For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”*

—LUKE 19:10 NKJV

**A**RE YOU reading this book because you are seeking Jesus? If you are really searching for Him, you are in a beautiful place. You are facing the greatest opportunity of your life. The Son of God said, “Seek and you will find” (Matthew 7:7 NKJV). Again, Scripture states, “If... you seek the Lord your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 4:29 NIV).

So, if it is truly the person of Jesus you are after, you will find Him. If you are seeking just a church, you may not find Him. If you are seeking religion, you will not find Him. If you are seeking earthly

## SEEKER

riches, you will not find Him. But if you want Christ Himself, He will be yours.

At that divine moment everything changes and you will meet beauty itself. Jesus will become your destination and desire for eternity. As difficult as the road has been and as much as you have labored to get to this point, you must understand that the first person who was “seeking” was God. And He is doing so right now. He has yearned for you this entire time.

The Lord started this journey by pulling on your heart first. The Scripture explains this truth by saying, “Draw me away! We will run after you” (Song of Solomon 1:4 NKJV). First, He draws us, then we run after Him. What you thought you started was really a response to the Seeker’s invitation. “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters” (Isaiah 55:1 NIV)

## HE CAME TO YOU

To understand Jesus as Seeker, we simply need to look at the basics of His Life. How wonderful that He came to Earth; you did not have to go to Heaven to find Him. It was the Lord who took the initial step and descended to Earth to die for you. Thank God He was willing to come all the way from glory to show you His love.

Imagine if in order to find God, He demanded that we had to be perfect enough to find your way to Heaven. We would be lost forever and would never have known Him. But out of His great humility, He chose to become a man to prove to us that He is the true Seeker. While He was walking and ministering on Earth, He constantly put aside His own needs to seek the lost.

The Bible paints a beautiful picture of Jesus’ determination in seeking out those who needed Him. After He had healed and helped so many in Galilee, the people tried to persuade the Lord to stay with them. This would have been much easier on Him after such a tiring and demanding ministry schedule. He could have remained in one place and rested a while, but Christ answered, “I must preach the Good

News of the Kingdom of God in other towns, too, because this is why I was sent” (Luke 4:43).

## EXCHANGING HEAVEN FOR EARTH

Jesus did not put Himself first when He delivered and saved His creation. He would travel to every city His Father wanted Him to go to and nothing could stop Him, not even His exhausted body. We cannot downplay this awesome act of love. To understand it, simply look at how appalling the Earth can be at times and compare it to how the Bible describes Heaven.

Think of the filth that spews out of the mouths of people; the hatred and wars that covered the land during the days of Jesus. Prostitutes lined the streets of many cities. Lying and cheating was running rampant. The Temple was full of thieves. The world had reached a point of such evil it forced Him to step in. Think of what He traded to reach us. He would be exposed to the worst man could offer. God was now surrounded by the gross sin of His people.

Heaven is described as having a street of clear gold, gates of pearl, and a sea of glass. A place of absolute perfection where there is no death, no filth, no hatred, and no lust. Christ was constantly worshiped while He sat on the throne of the universe. The angels honored and adored the King of Glory. The twenty-four elders sat before the throne and bowed down in holy worship as they cast down their golden crowns.

Heaven is so breathtaking that the Apostle Paul said, “I saw things I cannot utter.” Its purity is without compare. Jesus held the forces of all creation together. There was no darkness because He was the Light of Heaven. In the celestial city, He never grew tired and never worried about physical limitations. What a contrast to His time on Earth.

During His ministry on Earth, He said, “Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Luke 9:58 NKJV). Only the Holy Spirit can pierce your heart with the power of this passage. The King of the universe traded Heaven’s luxury to be a man who could not find a place to sleep or a home to call His own.

## SEEKER

While in Heaven, the Son of God never grew weary. The Bible tells us, "...the one who watches over you will not slumber" (Psalm 121:3). However, while on Earth, for the first time in all eternity, He felt what it was like to be physically tired. When His disciples were on a boat with Him on the Sea of Galilee, He fell asleep during a storm because He was so exhausted from helping people. The Creator of the universe found it necessary to rest.

The greatest sacrifice in Him coming to this world was leaving His Father. For the first time, Jesus would leave Heaven. Though united in Spirit while Jesus walked the Earth, He would still have to leave His Father's side. He enjoyed the adoration of His Father in Heaven, yet He traded the surroundings of being constantly loved to come to a place where He was mocked and hated. Please remember that a great and holy exchange took place for you. The only reason you can approach Him is because He sought you first.

## HE SEEKS THE UNLIKELY

Jesus pursued men and women who had been rejected by everyone else. He loves going after those who are "poor in spirit." (See Matthew 5:3.) Why? It is these individuals who realize that God's love—and only His love—could forever change their lives. They take no credit, and as a result they humbly love and appreciate the Savior.

Do you feel unworthy to have a relationship with Christ? If so, you are a perfect choice for Him. We have all sinned, but it is His love and mercy that seeks you out at this very moment. Remember, the Scripture at the beginning of this chapter states that He came to seek a certain type of person: "the lost."

Just look at His disciples. He went out and chose the most unlikely mix of men. Jesus took the time and effort to search for the exact people He wanted, and invited them to be on His team. They did not choose Him and demand to be His disciples; the Seeker sought and found them.

This is exactly what is happening as you read these pages. The Lord is personally inviting you to know and follow Him with all your heart.

He walked up to Matthew, a tax collector, and said, “Follow Me.” Tax collectors were known sinners who the religious leaders could not tolerate. Jesus did not care! He loved Matthew regardless of his reputation. In fact, the Bible says He “went out and saw” Matthew (Luke 5:27 NIV). This means He made an effort to find him and instantly invited him to be His follower. Christ wanted Matthew as he was. He did not interview him for a couple of hours to see if he was spiritual enough. He looked at him through the eyes of love.

Are you not thankful that Christ will seek you, even if your reputation among people is not the best? He traveled from city to city and village to village on His mission to “seek and save the lost.” His passion and commitment is unmatched, seeking night and day for people to say “yes” to Him.

Before He appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, this man (then known as Saul) was actively killing Christians. Paul was present when the first Christian martyr, Stephen, was killed. He watched this saint of God give his body to be stoned because he refused to deny his loving Lord. Paul not only watched, but was involved in this murder.

What could be more evil than overseeing the killing of someone so faithful to God? Paul was on a mission to destroy the spreading of Christianity by arresting and killing Jesus-followers. Little did he know that Christianity is much more than a message, a faith, or a movement. It is a person named Jesus who cannot be stopped as He seeks anyone He pleases.

To Paul’s amazement, Christ came seeking him. He immediately called Jesus “Lord” and gave Him his life. The rest is history, as Paul was used to change the world and that transformation is still felt today. He would ultimately die as a martyr himself, being beheaded in Rome. The church in our generation is a descendant of what Paul planted two thousand years ago. All of this happened because Jesus went seeking someone who most people would consider unworthy of the Lord. “Thank you, Jesus, for not seeking the worthy. You search for us because you love us and only because you love us.”

## A MIDNIGHT REQUEST

As a boy, before I gave my heart to the Lord, I would often get scared at night and find my way into my parents' room. My brother Theo and I would either sleep on the floor or jam our way into their bed. One night I was sleeping in their room at our home in Tarpon Springs, Florida. A New Testament, which was distributed by the Greek Orthodox Church, was sitting on their dresser. It was next to a picture of my grandmother who had just passed away. I remember it like it was yesterday.

As a child, I was always intrigued by the priest and the reading of Scripture in the beautiful services. As an altar boy, I would listen and watch attentively. My father was on the church board, so we had a close relationship with one of the priests. I remember asking him all sorts of questions about the services and Christ. Sometimes my brother, cousins, and I would imitate the chanting of the Scriptures and prayers as we played at home. However, we always had a respect and reverence for God and His Word.

That night I woke up around midnight and felt an urge to read that New Testament. It was not an audible voice, but I could distinctly hear it—like a constant tugging on my heart to pick up the Bible and read it. The urging would not leave and became increasingly stronger. I “knew that I knew” that this was not coming from me.

Finally I asked my mother, “Ma, is it a sin if God tells you to read the Bible and you don’t?” She probably thought I was nuts, not to mention she was half-asleep at the time.

She passionately replied, “Go and read it!”

I jumped out of bed, shut myself in the bathroom, and opened the Scriptures. Little did I know that God was calling me. I was not walking with Jesus during those days, but I knew enough not to ignore Him. It was through that experience that I started reading the Bible.

I hope you see what happened that night—I did absolutely nothing to receive this prodding from the Lord. He sought me out in that bed as a young boy. All I did was say “yes” to Him. That was the beginning of a life with God. Not always a perfect life, but He wanted me; even

though He knew I would hurt Him badly so many times. He came searching for me because that is what seekers do. Thank God, He still seeks you and me as He desires our love every moment of every day.

## HE WANTS YOUR YES

Do you understand the weight of knowing that Jesus is seeking you right now? It does not matter if you have known Him for years or have never given Him your heart before. He never stops pursuing us. He seeks us with an unquenchable passion. It is the “yes” of our heart He wants.

There is always another “yes” that we can offer Him:

- A “yes” to Him as Savior and Lord
- A “yes” to finding Him in the Scriptures.
- A “yes” for spending more time alone with Him.
- A “yes” for offering more words of love to Him.
- A “yes” to give to the poor.
- A “yes” to sharing His salvation with others.

## A VULNERABLE GOD

Jesus even picked Judas to follow Him and be one of the twelve disciples. Judas would ultimately betray the Lord and have Him arrested, but that did not stop the Seeker. He still sought out this man, knowing how he would hurt Him.

Christ seeks us, understanding full well that we will cause Him pain time and time again. His love consumes and motivates Him to find us regardless of the anguish we may one day cause Him. Even though we should love God enough to never hurt Him, sadly, it happens all the time.

## SEEKER

Peter was one of the Lord's three closest friends. Jesus shared with him things that only two others had ever heard. Those two were James and John. Peter was part of this close-knit group. The Lord chose Peter to follow Him, knowing that he would deny Him three times when He needed him the most.

As we discussed in the prior chapter, it was not as if Peter renounced Jesus in private. He did it publicly, with many people around him as they warmed themselves by a fire. Not only that, but Peter forsook Jesus while Christ was near him. We know this because the Lord looked at Peter when the rooster crowed, after Peter's third denial.

What a look that must have been, as pain filled the heart of the Seeker. His swollen, beaten face and His holy, piercing stare must have shattered Peter's soul. His tender and beautiful eyes fixed on Peter. Words were not needed in that moment. The disciple could hear the very heart of the Master saying, "Even though I have loved you, you are embarrassed of me. I need you now, Peter. You have broken my heart and I need my friends. Yet, you are forsaking me. Nevertheless Peter, I still love you. I will soon wash away your sin. I do all this for you." He looks at us in the same way when we deny the Lord. Amazingly, Jesus longed for Peter's love.

When Christ and His disciples had finished the Last Supper, He washed their feet. These were the very feet that would run away from Him when He was arrested hours later. He gently washed the feet of those who would cause Him rejection and pain.

The Seeker's love overshadowed their weakness. *Our love is so valuable to Him that He is willing to be hurt in order to receive it.* He healed many thousands of sick people, yet only a few of His closest followers stayed with Him while He suffered.

Why would the Lord heal those who were unfaithful to Him? It was because of His pursuing and relentless love! He seeks you now, regardless of your past.

## AN OPEN HEART

Think about your own experience, telling someone for the first time,



“I love you.” Do you remember how exposed you felt? You did not know exactly how they would respond or whether or not you would be taken advantage of.

I remember the first time I told my wife, Jessica, that I loved her. I knew she loved me, yet I was still nervous. I loved her so much, but saying those words for the first time was a different story. In my hometown, Greek guys like me are not taught to be tender and vulnerable. Thank God she responded by saying, “I love you too.” What a beautiful feeling when she returned her love to me.

Jesus becomes even more exposed and vulnerable when He seeks us out and gives so much of Himself for us. He is not prideful like we are. He has no problem announcing His love for you from the very beginning. Just stop and think for a moment. Close your eyes and reflect on the fact that the Son of God is constantly seeking you. He is putting His heart on the line. Yet, He continues to do so.

When I proposed to my wife overlooking a cliff along the Pacific Ocean in Southern California, I was even more nervous. I had worked so hard to pay for the ring and wanted to marry her with every fiber of my being. In our culture it is very important to ask for the blessing of the girl’s father. I did so, and thank God the answer was “yes.” I was very confident it would be, but it was still nerve-wracking.

The biggest challenge was getting a prideful guy—me—to get down on his knees and ask her to spend the rest of her life with me. I had planned to sit on a bench overlooking a gorgeous view and ask her to marry me. When we finally reached the bench, I just could not do it. Instead, we talked about things that I could not have cared less about at the time.

My heart was pounding through my chest. Then we stood up to walk home and I saw another bench about 150 yards away. I thought, *Great, I get another shot!*

I asked her to sit on that bench too. I finally summoned up the courage and proposed to her. She screamed, but did not say “yes” immediately. That was the longest ten seconds of my life!

## SEEKER

Finally, the yes came and I was so relieved. She committed her life to me and that meant the world. I had never felt my heart so exposed as I did when I was “seeking” her commitment and love.

Jesus requests the same from us. He becomes even more vulnerable every time He asks you to love and follow Him, knowing you may say “no” and break His heart. Remember, this is Almighty God who is asking for your love. When He makes Himself known to us via the Bible, teachings, or a relationship with someone who knows and loves Him, we must realize this is far deeper than joining a church and merely being able to say “I am a Christian now.”

When we give Him our hearts, at His request, we marry Him forever. Heaven records a holy covenant for eternity. He literally asks us to be His Bride. How He desires our love! This is so much deeper than our limited minds allow us to understand. The Lord actually requests our hand in marriage when He offers His love to us.

At that moment, Christ feels more exposed than we do. He is much more majestic than we could ever hope to be, and for Him to request our love means that He must lay aside His awesome power and become meek and gentle in such a moment. Yes, Jesus pledges himself to you when He asks for your life. Will you pledge yourself to Him?

## HEAR HIS KNOCK

Jesus said, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20 NKJV). Is the Beloved knocking on your heart’s door right now? Is He asking, “Do you love me like you once did?” Or He may be saying, “Let me in for the first time.”

I remember the day I went to a rough neighborhood and knocked on people’s doors to let them know that a church in town wanted to help them. We simply wanted to be there for the poor and show the love of God. I was extremely nervous and concerned I might have a door slammed in my face. The Lord knows exactly how I felt, because He has doors shut in His face every second of every day as people close

their hearts to Him. Imagine His pain as He only wants to love and help us.

I pray that your heart will be one that says, “Come in and dine, Jesus. You are welcome in this heart forever.” The knock of Christ is persistent and strong. Yet it is not rude or abrasive; but is perfectly loving. He is so tender that when He walked the Earth, which was His, He never forced Himself to stay with anyone—only to those who opened their doors to Him.

See Him standing outside the door of your heart waiting for you to let Him in. Please do not shut Him out. Let your spirit receive these words from Scripture as the Lord draws near to you in this holy moment. Hear His voice: “Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with the dew, my locks with the drops of night” (Song of Solomon 5:2 NKJV).

He is using the word “sister” to speak of His people as His bride. I trust you hear His love for you in this passage. *Notice that He waits so long that His hair is wet with the dew of night. He patiently waits for you to open your heart as He is left outside on a cool damp night. This is a beautiful example of Jesus’ loving patience for you.*

## ASK, SEEK, KNOCK

The Son of God gives us this awesome promise: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9 NIV). When you give your heart to the Lord, you begin to ask Him for things as a little child would. To your surprise and delight, you find that He gives what you ask for.

Things seem to come quickly and easily during this time. You discover that He is so wonderful and faithful. Happy and amazed by His goodness, you now begin to seek the one who has been continually giving to you. You do so by praying, reading the Bible, and having fellowship with those who have found Him. Like the Scripture promises, you find the one whom you have been seeking all this time.

When you meet this precious Jesus, whom you have been seeking, you never want to leave His side and long to be constantly in His pres-

## SEEKER

ence. You are in awe of His beauty and love. He becomes the center of your focus and you cannot help but tell Him how marvelous He is and what He means to you. You find that He is complete and “altogether lovely.” Do not stop here. There is more. Soon, you will begin to knock, and true union is found behind the door.

You asked and you received; you were seeking and now you have found Him. But surprisingly, you are not satisfied. You want to truly know the one you have found. Finally, you begin to knock—on the heart of the Master himself. You want in. You want His heart to be your home. Out of great trust and privilege, He opens the door of His very being to you. What an honor!

To your astonishment, you begin to feel both His pain and His joy. Something within you wants to minister to Him and give Him comfort. Your needs disappear in the midst of His deep yearning. This is the place where “self” vanishes. It is not about you anymore. This is where you become a companion of God. The Master will literally share the secrets of His heart with you, His Bride. You begin to see people as Jesus sees them. Your heart begins to break over issues that never concerned you before. You have been overrun by His desires. You have entered into a blessed union. It is the place of true relationship—the place of love.

## MATCHLESS GAZE

“He is looking through the windows, gazing through the lattice” (Song of Solomon 2:9 NKJV). He sees through the windows of our hearts directly into our soul. Jesus is not looking with anger or pride, rather with love and amazing patience. He is longing for you to know His love and to show you how much He truly cares. May the Holy Spirit help you see the Seeker of your heart, standing outside all alone, waiting patiently for you to open your very soul to Him.

His gaze is one of passion. His eyes are piercing, yet full of gentleness. He waits and waits. All you have to do is open the door, and genuine love will be yours. The Bible tells us, “The king has brought me into His chambers” (Song of Solomon 1:4 NKJV). This means that

each time you feel an urge to pray, read the Bible, or to take time to worship Him, you must realize that Christ, the King, is humbly asking for your time. This is a knock we should not ignore.

Remember, this is a royal invitation—and He is calling you into the deepest intimacy. This chamber is the place where the Lord shares His innermost feelings; His hurts and joys. It is where the walls of protection come down and His heart becomes exposed. God Almighty is literally asking you for your time and love. He is seeking you so you will seek Him back. He is knocking so you will knock on His heart's door. If you open your heart, He will open His.

I wish I could tell you that His knocking will never end, but this is not the case. There will come a time when His gentle request will not be heard as loudly. Another moment like this may never come again for you. The Seeker's knock is heard loudly at times, but then the cares of life drown it out. One day it will be gone forever and the Lord will no longer seek you.

This will happen when He returns or when you pass from this life—it is guaranteed. No person can escape the end of this life on Earth. It is vital that you know this opportunity has been planned by God. Life is fragile and fleeting. Tomorrow is not a certainty. "Seek the Lord while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near" (Isaiah 55:6).

## YOUR ANSWER?

Let me invite you to pray and answer the call of this committed Seeker. All He wants in return is for you to seek Him. What He has planted within you as you have been reading, simply respond by saying "yes" to Him. He will never reject you.

*You may ask, "How do I seek Him?" Start by whispering His beautiful name. It is His name that makes Him feel so close. Whisper "Jesus" again and again. You can do so right now. Mention His amazing, matchless name and you will discover how near He is. "Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out" (Song of Solomon 1:3 NIV). As someone's fragrance makes you aware of their presence, so His*

## SEEKER

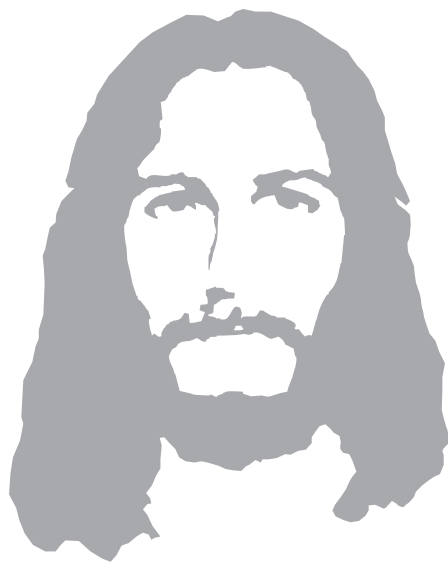
*name makes you aware of Him. Jesus, what a name! What beauty and power. What peace and joy. All in one name.*

It is important to understand that since you have read these words, you will be held responsible for knowing His desire to seek you—and for how you treat Him. Please receive this truth: after He has revealed himself in such a way, it is very dangerous to refuse Him. However, the greatest treasure is to say yes to Jesus.

As the Spirit draws you, know that regardless of where you stand with Him, this prayer applies to you. He seeks those who already know Him, to a deeper love. He seeks those who have never met Him to fall in love with Him for the first time.

*Dear Jesus,*

*Thank You, loving Seeker, for seeking me. You have been so patient and kind. You have been pulling on my heart for so long. You seek me every day. I do not ever want to say no to You again. When You seek me, I will seek You. When You knock on my heart's door, I will open. Forgive me for ignoring You. I am so sorry. Jesus, I say "yes" to You. Come into my heart and find rest there. I am Yours always. I love You. Amen.*



## CHAPTER 3

# *God*

*“My Lord and my God!”*

—*JOHN 20:28*

**J**ESUS CHRIST is so tender and meek—so loving and kind. No one can match His patience and humility or compare to His lowliness of heart. None other would trade the glory and perfection of Heaven to come to this imperfect world and die for our sins. He is the most softhearted person who ever existed, giving chance after chance to the one who says no to Him, time and again.

His voice is the most comforting you will ever hear, and it causes His children to weep. However, let us never lose sight of the fact that He is God Almighty, who is worthy of worship, fear, and honor. He came to Earth as fully man and fully God. The Bible commands us to know and honor Him as God. “Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He

made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture” (Psalm 100:3). As you continue reading, you will discover Him in His humanity and divinity.

Experiencing Him as God is crucial to your faith and will affect the way you approach Him. “Make the Lord of Heaven’s armies holy in your life. He is the one you should fear. He is the one who should make you tremble” (Isaiah 8:13).

You are about to find out just how powerful and awesome Jesus is. When you comprehend who is reaching out to you, you will fall into a love that no one can break. So be absolutely certain of one thing; this loving Jesus of Nazareth is God Almighty.

How humbling it is to realize that He opens His very heart to us. Later in this chapter you will have the rare honor of saying yes or no to an invitation from God himself. You are not being offered the chance to fall in love and worship a mere man or woman of great stature; you are being given the opportunity to love and worship the Creator of the universe. What a holy privilege!

## HE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AND ALWAYS WILL BE

One of the greatest moments of all time is when Christ was born in a humble manger in Bethlehem. This was the beginning of our hope and freedom. However, this was not where He had His beginning. In fact, He has no starting point and was never created. The Savior has no beginning and no end. Neither Joseph, Mary, nor His heavenly Father, God, created Him. Christ has always been.

In the words of this Scripture the truth of Jesus is explained: “In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2). In this passage, the “Word” is referring to Christ, and it clearly states two things. First, that He is God, and second, He has always been in existence.

Many believe in His reality and even accept His works and teachings, but they do not believe He is eternal, which means that He has



no beginning and no end. The Son makes a beautiful statement as He prays to His Father, just before He is arrested and begins His suffering. He looks up to Heaven and says, “Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began” (John 17:5). These are the words of the Lord and if one is to accept His teachings, every statement He made must be believed, or His instructions and integrity cannot be trusted.

From the beginning of His ministry to the end, He made it perfectly clear that He has always been in existence: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 22:13). Christ was not just *there* in the beginning, He is the beginning. Jesus will not cease to exist once everything He wants to do is completed. As a matter of fact, He has no end!

Why? Because He is the end of all things. As difficult as it is for our limited minds to understand, Jesus is forever. He does not operate in days or hours, nor is He bound by time as we know it. It operates in Him. Since He is the beginning and the end of all, it means that when everything as we know it is finished and done, Jesus will still be there. He is the second person of the eternal Holy Trinity, which is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is no less powerful than the Father or the Holy Spirit.

## HE IS ETERNAL

Starting in the Book of Genesis, the Scriptures refer to Christ and the Trinity. The Bible states, “Let us make man in our Image” (Genesis 1:36 KJV). “Our” is referring to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is vital that you understand that these are not the theological opinions of seminary professors. The Lord made statements about himself regarding the fact that He is eternal.

He was asked a question by the religious “experts” regarding this matter. Jesus said that Abraham rejoiced to see His day. The religious leaders wanted to know how that could be true, since Abraham had lived two thousand years earlier and He was only about thirty. The

Lord's answer was to the point. He replied, "Before Abraham was even born, I AM" (John 8:58).

Notice Jesus did not say, "Before Abraham was, I was." He proclaimed "I AM" because His existence is eternal and everything finds its being in Him. He always is. This is why the Bible says concerning Christ, "...the one who always was, who is, and who is still to come" (Revelation 4:8).

## THE CREATOR

Jesus was never created, but is the Creator of all. Most people never discover the fact that all creation went through Him, the Word of God. Scripture tells us, "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3 NIV).

It could not be *clearer*. He was involved in making all things—this includes every planet, star, moon, sun, and you! The Son formed you and now He wants you to come to Him with respect and reverence in your heart, honoring Him as God.

How could He command the wind and angry waves to obey His voice when He was aboard a boat on the Sea of Galilee? He was the one who created the wind to roar and the waves to crash. The elements had to listen to the one who made both the air and the water! Who else could walk on water with such ease in a storm, after praying for much of the night on top of a mountain? Only the one who is above all earthly laws and limitations.

The Creator always dominates the strongest of His creation. A raging Sea of Galilee was no match for the focused footsteps of Christ, the God of the universe. His birth was announced by the stars. What other night was as bright as midday, but the night God entered the world?

Even the stars of the sky honored their Creator, when He lay in a manger. When He died on the Cross in the middle of the afternoon, the sky was dark as night and the rocks broke in half as the earth quaked. Why? Because creation was mourning the death and torture of its Maker. The Earth became dark when Jesus died on the Cross. Even the sun knew to bow down and worship the greatest act of love

the Earth has ever seen—God dying for His creation. Yet the sun and rocks honored His death more than people did. It is impossible to truly believe in Him as Savior without understanding that He is God. *Who else could save creation but the Creator?* Who else could make you a new person but the one who formed you? Who could save a soul but the one who breathed into man and made a living soul? Jesus fixed a problem that only He could solve. *Only God could make a way back to Himself.*

## THE SON OF GOD

For Christ to call Himself the Son of God, He was stating that He was God. He was basically saying “I am God in the flesh.” The Bible explains this beautifully: “...but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18 NIV).

For Jesus to proclaim that God was His Father, He was declaring that He himself was divine. Just as children are no different in nature than their parents, Scripture tells us, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1:15 NKJV).

He told Philip, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9 NKJV). To find the Father, just look to Jesus. Again, He says, “If you knew me, you would also know my Father” (John 8:19). The Son knew exactly who He was and He made it very clear as He introduced himself.

This is not an ordinary person that you are going to meet as you read these pages. He is beyond comprehension. Your imagination only skims the surface of Jesus’ greatness. Because He is God, He was a worthy sacrifice for your sin. If any other person had died on the Cross, it would have accomplished nothing because even good people are stained with sin. The Bible tells us, “No one does good. Not a single one” (Romans 3:12).

Who else would be able to pay the price for sin but God himself? Only the blood of the Son of God could be accepted by the Father on behalf of your trespasses. Hebrews 9:22 says, “without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness [of sin].” *Only the blood of the Son of*

*God would be holy enough to cleanse every sin by every person throughout all time. Only God sacrificing himself on a Cross could be sufficient enough to pay such a price. This is why Peter places a value on His blood by saying, “the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:19).*

*You must know that God the Son hung on a wooden Cross in shame to bring you to this moment in your life. Even the holy rugged Cross finds its honor in the fact that the Son of God was nailed to it. Countless crosses were used to kill thousands of criminals before and after Jesus died. The Cross of disgrace became a respected and revered symbol, but only because Christ hung upon it. The tomb is also special because it is where the Creator dusted off death. If you remove the fact that He is God from these accounts, you would have just another execution by crucifixion and an occupied tomb.*

## ONLY GOD FORGIVES SIN

Jesus was not only hated by His enemies because of what He did; He was hated because of who He claimed to be. Ultimately, they tried to use His own words to condemn Him. But since His words are truth, they could find no fault in Him. (See John 19:6.)

One pivotal moment in the Scriptures sets the tone for Him as God. I pray you will open your heart as you read this account:

*Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.” At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!” Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk?’ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...” Then he said to the paralytic, “Get up, take your mat and go home.” And the man got up and went home (Matthew. 9:1-7 NIV).*

Can you envision Jesus' piercing stare as He looked in His enemies' eyes after the paralyzed man walked home healed? The scribes boldly stated that only God can forgive sins. (See Mark 2:7.) *When Jesus forgave this man's sins, He was declaring himself to be God.* The Lord did not back down an inch after making this statement. *The only one who can forgive sin is the same one who we all have sinned against.*

## THE RESURRECTION

Jesus is not asking you to believe that He is God through your imagination or by blind hope. The greatest event in history was the moment He destroyed the power of death by walking out of that tomb two thousand years ago. Because of this miracle, we no longer have to be afraid of death. Christ conquered this old enemy which so many fear.

I have walked into that tomb in Jerusalem—and it is certainly empty! If His body were still in a grave on Earth, do you not think that it would have been found? He was the most famous person to have ever lived. Even holidays and our calendar hinge on His life. Good morals find their roots in His teachings. The greatest nations of the world are those who govern according to His ways and instructions.

My heritage is from the eastern Mediterranean, and in that part of the world, the graves of the deceased are honored and respected. It would be a terrible dishonor to Jesus if His own disciples stole His remains and moved them. Plus, these common men would have had to overthrow the Roman soldiers to reach the tomb—possibly the same men who killed Christ.

These disciples were the same individuals who were so afraid for their lives that they abandoned the Lord when He was arrested. How could they suddenly muster such boldness? And if His body were found, do you not think the corpse would have been put on display as proof He did not rise from the dead?

The reason no one has ever discovered the remains of the Son of God is because He is not in a grave. He is in Heaven, waiting to come

and receive His Bride, which are those who love Him. Jesus lives! Because He lives, we will live.

Let me ask you this question: why would so many of His disciples die for a lie? Why would they travel the world preaching a message they were not sure of? Why would they spread the gospel and be imprisoned, beaten, and killed for a God who was dead?

Today, lovers of Jesus all over the world often face death because they love Him more than their own lives. They are not doing this to occupy a land or to make a political statement. They die because of their love for Jesus. They know beyond the shadow of a doubt that He is alive. We can look death in the eye on that day and smile, because we know Jesus is alive and that He crushed the power of the grave.

### “EVERYTHING IS READY”

I had the awesome privilege of having a relationship with Rex Humbard, who was a faithful servant of Christ throughout his life. Rev. Humbard was one of the most respected ministers of the gospel in our time. He traveled the world sharing the love of God to millions. Not only was he a powerful minister, he was also a wonderful father and husband. He lived what he preached, whether he was behind a pulpit or behind the scenes. God used his wise advice to lay a foundation for my wife and me, and we have been forever impacted by his life.

After battling several physical problems, Rev. Humbard knew his time to be with the Lord was near. What I am about to share with you is truly amazing.

The day before he passed away, Jesus visited him in his room. Rex told his son that this actually happened and was not something that he just imagined. Jesus looked at him and said, “Everything is ready for you. It is time.”

Joy filled his heart, knowing that the Lord was ready to welcome him in glory! After the Lord appeared to him, he knew his time on this Earth was over and it was just a matter of hours before he would be standing in the presence of His Savior. After sharing his experience

with his son, he commented, “It is time for me to go and be with Jesus. I am finished.”

The next day, with his family standing around him singing the old hymn “Blessed Assurance,” Rex Humbard took one last look at each of the faces surrounding his bed. He smiled, looked upward, and then his face lit up, as if he were seeing into Heaven itself. Donnie, his son, shared with me that his father’s face looked as youthful as when he was a young man. At that moment, he closed his eyes and he breathed his last. He had finished what God had called him to do, and he is now enjoying the glories of Heaven.

## LIFE IS JESUS

Jesus proves himself to be alive by the fact that He is tugging at your heart right now. He is pricking the depths of your soul with a hunger for Him. Part of you may be resisting, yet that little whisper in your innermost being is saying, “I AM alive and I love you. Come to me and you will never thirst again.”

No man raised Him from the dead by saying a prayer. Jesus sat up in that tomb without the help of any human. How was this possible? It was because the Earth could not hold the one who spoke it into being! Death could not contain Christ because He is life itself— and life is more powerful than death. The tomb had no chance of keeping Life captive. “it was not possible that He should be held by it.” (Acts 2:24)

The Lord never offered a method or a checklist to live by. *He simply said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6 NKJV). To be absolutely clear, life is Jesus and Jesus is life. Any pursuit outside of Christ, even though it may be good and known as being “Christian,” is not life. It is nothing more than existing.*

When Lazarus died, Jesus stepped on the scene four days after his death. His sisters had been crying and mourning, and they could not understand why He had not come earlier. When He finally arrived, Jesus assured his sister Martha that Lazarus would rise again.

She assumed that He meant Lazarus would be raised on resurrection day, sometime far off in the future. What she failed to understand

was that the Resurrection and the Life was standing right in front of her! Real life has feelings, a heartbeat, and emotions. Life is *Someone*.

*Life is not blood flowing through the veins. It is the person of Jesus.* The Son of God said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). Moments later, with a single command, Life himself called Lazarus out of the tomb, where he had been rotting for four days. Lazarus came back to life and walked out, still wrapped in his grave clothes!

## ETERNAL LIFE

It is a waste of your time to seek the meaning of life if it is outside of Christ. He is all you need. Once you have found Him, you have found Life. The search is over. When you find Jesus, you find it all.

Please pay close attention to these words: “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:8-9 NIV).

Is your life in pieces, struggling to keep things together? Is your body broken from sickness? Does your family or marriage need to be restored? Is your heart shattered from the pain of the past and the stress of life? God is speaking the only answer: “...in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). *The key to being made whole is finding the one who holds all things—Jesus Christ.*

If you are searching for eternal life, it will not be found in a “way” or a pilgrimage. Eternal life does not mean existing forever because everyone will exist somewhere in eternity. Multitudes of people are in hell at this very moment, even as you read this book. Their souls will be there forever and will never get out. They have an existence in eternity, but they do not have the eternal *life* that Jesus promised.

Jesus said, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3 NIV). To know the Father, we must know His Son. Eternal life is Jesus and knowing Him. It is that simple. How beautiful!



## GOD VISITS THE ONE HE LOVED

Perhaps one of the most feared portions of the Bible is the Book of Revelation. Even though it deals with events that will take place in the future, it also reveals Jesus in His glory and strength. As you read this passage you will see the awesome majesty of the Son of God:

*When I turned to see who was speaking to me, I saw seven gold lampstands. And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp two-edged sword came from his mouth. And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance.*

*When I saw him, I fell at his feet as if I were dead.  
(Revelation 1:12-17).*

What an amazing sight for John to see, while he was a prisoner forced to live in a cave on an abandoned Greek island. All because of his love for the Beloved.

This vivid description shows that He is to be greatly feared and honored. John fell on the ground as a dead man before Him. John had known Jesus during His ministry, but this revelation was a much different side of Jesus that he had ever seen before. He did not look like the lowly and rejected Christ who hung on the Cross.

John was beholding God's Son in His full power and glory. The Lamb of God was being worshiped in Heaven, instead of the way many hated Him on Earth. This time His hair was not matted with His blood; it was as white as wool. His eyes were not swollen shut from

the beatings; they were blazing with fire. He was not lying naked and in shame; He was wearing the robe of Heaven. His sash was not made of cloth, but was pure gold. His feet were not wearing the sandals of a carpenter, but were like bronze glowing in a furnace.

His voice was not weak and short-winded, as it was on the Cross. Now it was like the sound of many waters, shaking the soul. His face was not covered with the spit of men; it was shining like the sun, difficult to even look upon. Jesus revealed himself to show John how majestic and powerful He really is.

Why was John given the honor of seeing Christ like no other person has? John had witnessed a portion of His glory when the Son of God was transfigured on top of the mountain, but this was something altogether new. Why did He appear before John in such a holy and frightening way?

First, God can do whatever He wants to whomever He chooses. But could there be a deeper, more beautiful reason? Could it be because John was the only disciple to put his head on Jesus' chest at the Last Supper, when the Lord's heart was grieving because of the suffering that lay before Him? Could it be because John stayed with Him while He hung on the Cross when the others left? John was not ashamed of Christ at His lowest point, so Jesus visited him when John was at his lowest point as a rejected prisoner on the island of Patmos. If you will stay committed to Jesus when the world hates you, He will show himself to you with great power.

## BROUGHT TO MY KNEES

I will never forget a service I attended when I was in my early twenties. I had been away from the Lord for a few years but had decided to attend a worship service with my family. We had driven two hours and waited for the service to begin. My life was a wreck, but I knew He would not reject me.

After singing and worshipping God, I began to feel His presence like I had as a boy. It seemed as if He and I were the only people there. Near the end of the service, I made my way toward the altar. I wanted my life

to change so badly and desired to walk with Christ again. I had drifted so far from Him. I can still remember the overwhelming reverence and fear that washed over me.

At the pastor's invitation, I ended up on the platform. God's holy presence was so tangible. I could feel it like blazing heat all throughout my body. Everything I had done over the last few years flashed before my eyes, but the events were magnified and I felt dirty. It was as though I was being X-rayed by God. *I could not hide anything from Him.* I knew exactly how horrible the things I had done were in the sight of this holy King.

Out of great fear and respect, I began to weep in front of the huge crowd. I fell on my knees and begged for forgiveness. My body felt so hot and weak in His presence. This was the last thing I had planned on when I came, and I was at my most vulnerable state ever. However, I did not care because I knew instantly that He had forgiven me.

*When you have a divine encounter with God, the opinions of people mean absolutely nothing.* As long as I live, that moment will stay with me. Jesus is to be honored above any person or anything. His power and strength will bring the strongest and most prideful of people to their knees. He holds our breath and last heartbeat in His hand.

## GOD WANTS YOU

Before you talk to God, know His desire for you. One of Christ's names is Immanuel, which means "God with us." His name alone reveals who He is. His desire is to be "with you." How wonderful of Him!

I pray this touches your heart. He promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5 NKJV). Be certain that if you give Christ the honor and love He deserves, God will be by your side forever. If He is with you, all is well!

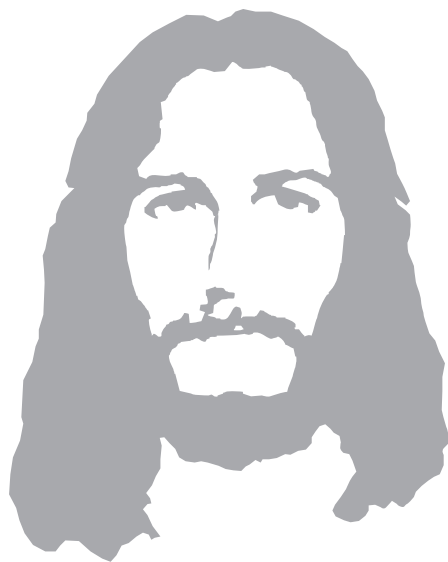
Jesus is worthy of all the worship and honor you can give Him. He is to be revered. He sees all and searches the inner depths of your heart. He understands your motives and knows the truth. Nothing can be hidden from Him. His strength and abilities are limitless, and so is His

## GOD

love for you. If you are ready to give the Son of God what He deserves, He will listen to your prayer and will accept it with joy.

*Dear Jesus,*

*You are holy and awesome. You are God Almighty. I worship and honor You. Your holiness is beyond my imagination. Give me a holy fear for Your power. You have conquered death and You are alive. You are my Life and my Source. Let my life bring the honor that You, the Son of God, deserve. Help me love You more and more each day. In Your name, Amen.*



## CHAPTER 4

# *King*

*On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:  
KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

—*REVELATION 19:16 NIV*

**O**NE OF the most comforting truths you will ever lay hold of is the truth that Jesus is King. This world is in absolute chaos. Pandemics, fear, hatred, racial unrest and a culture of dishonor are sweeping our countries. Nuclear threats are popping up all over the globe. Resources are scarce. Amazingly, even in these modern times, many people lack adequate food and water. Countless people die of thirst and starvation, while at the same time space programs are spending millions on missions we know little about.

AIDS has claimed millions of lives around the world. Genocide, wars, and conflicts are breaking out between nations, and terrorism

has become a very real force. Children are growing up faster than ever and are being exposed to alternative lifestyles that were never before accepted by our society.

Families are breaking up at unprecedented rates. The world is facing a massive recession. Jobs are disappearing, homes are being lost to foreclosure, and parents who once spent their weekends at country clubs and shopping malls have lost everything.

For many, this is a very difficult and scary time to be alive because nothing is for certain. The greatest advisors have made devastating errors in judgment. We should pray for our leaders, but to be honest, it is quite difficult to have trust in men or women these days.

When you put all these factors together, you will have absolute fear and uncertainty for the future. People do not know whom to believe or trust. So, what promise of hope do we have?

Scripture explains it well perfectly by saying, “there is another king, one called Jesus” (Acts 17:7 NIV). Be assured that King Jesus is our greatest and *only* hope.

## JESUS IS MY KING

In the United States we have city, county, state, and federal leadership. We submit to and honor those in office, and thank them for their service. We are a blessed society that has the right to vote these people into office.

However, let me be very clear about one thing: the moment you give your heart to Christ, He becomes your King. “The Lord has made the heavens his throne; from there he rules over everything” (Psalms 103:19).

No other king has the power and glory of Jesus. None is more beautiful or lives in a more magnificent palace. Who else can call Heaven His throne and the Earth His footstool? He is above any human leadership, regardless of their position.

As followers of the Lord, we are obligated to be peaceful and law abiding citizens. (See Romans 13:1.) However, when He shows up in

your life, you become part of a new system, which is both different and higher than the world's way.

The Son of God is greater than any form of government, and so is His Kingdom. The Bible refers to Him as “the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Revelation 1:5 NIV). This tells us that Jesus reigns above any dictator, president, or king of this world. He and His Kingdom are not under the authority of any human, but the other way around. You can have peace in the fact that regardless of what happens on this planet, you do not have to be afraid.

Be certain that things will become more unstable and more chaotic as Christ's return approaches. Regardless of who the world appoints in leadership, the Bible teaches that the world's way and system will be shaken, and that sin and “gross darkness” shall cover the Earth. (See Isaiah 60:2.)

If Jesus is your King, it becomes His responsibility to take care of you. “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:3 NKJV).

On the other hand, if you make the mistake of following the values which society has embraced, you will experience the consequences it is now facing and will continue to face. By humbly receiving the Lord as the King of your life, you will experience the peace of knowing you can trust Him to be the faithful King He promises to be.

## JESUS AND THE WORLD

Nothing could be more opposite than Jesus and the world system. He said, “My kingdom is not of this world...But now my kingdom is from another place” (John 18:36 NIV). Compare what King Jesus says with what the world will tell you:

- Jesus says, “Love your enemy.” The world says, “Let your enemy suffer.”
- If someone attacks us with hate, Christ says,

“Turn the other cheek.” The world tells us, “Hit back harder.”

- When you are lacking in money or food, Jesus counsels, “Give and it will be given.” The world replies, “You cannot help anyone with anything right now. Put yourself first.”
- God’s way is to treat the poor no different than the rich. The world gives honor to those with large bank accounts.
- Jesus says, “When you do a charitable deed, do it in secret.” The world’s way is to draw attention to yourself.
- Jesus, says, “If you lose your life, you will gain it.” The world’s advice is to follow whatever makes you happy in life.
- Jesus says, “It is better to give than to receive.” The world puts pressure on us to pursue possessions.
- Jesus says, “Anyone who leaves husband or wife except for the reason of adultery, commits adultery.” The world believes, “When your marriage is not working, get a divorce. Do what pleases you.”
- Jesus, the great Physician, says “I will come and heal.” The world says, “This disease will kill you.”
- In Jesus’ kingdom, we are to take the lowest



rank and serve (Luke 22:24-27). The world says,  
“Use your authority and be served.”

The world system promotes self. In God’s Kingdom, however, we honor Him by looking away from ourselves. But what has man’s way done to really help people? Have things ever been worse? Has the world ever been more confused and void? Why would you want to trust in a failed world system instead of King Jesus.

## THE KINGDOM IS JESUS

People often wonder, “What is the Kingdom of God?” Some have devoted their entire lives to the topic. Their work has been informative and helpful, but to make this really simple—the Kingdom of God is Jesus Christ.

To find out what the Kingdom is like, take a look at the life of Christ. It is Him! When He began His ministry, He made a statement that would describe His next three and a half years. He declared, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near” (Matthew 4:17).

He was saying. “Listen, get ready for a transformation.” Jesus could truthfully say that God’s Kingdom was near because the King was present. He was standing in their midst.

If He had not come to Earth, the Kingdom of God would have never been made known. *There can be no Kingdom without the King.* Jesus makes the Kingdom what it is. The King-Dom with the King is dumb(dom). Joseph of Arimathea, who provided a tomb for Christ’s body, “was waiting for the Kingdom of God” (Mark 15:43 NIV). This man discovered the Kingdom when he found Jesus the King.

*If you only learn about the system of the Kingdom and never meet the King himself, you will come away empty and disappointed. He is the beauty and the majesty of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the King.*

For example, many have been taught to give because they will receive back many times over. This is true because Jesus declared it. I believe this principle with all of my being and have personally experi-

enced it. However, the Lord also looks at our heart when we give. He is looking at our motives.

Are we giving because we love Him, or because we know that the law of the Kingdom will bring money back to us? The King wants to be the center of all we do as servants of His Kingdom. If the only reason we give is to get more back, our motive is for self gain. This is not acceptable or pleasing to God.

## ACCESS TO THE KING

Today, some countries still operate as kingdoms. They are ruled by kings or queens. Even though the citizens live their entire lives in these kingdoms, they are never given one single moment to speak with their ruler. They never have the chance to see the king in person, let alone have a private audience with him. Even if they did, their time would be brief.

Our Savior is no ordinary King, and the Bible shows us just how accessible He is. We are told, “People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, He was troubled. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me. Don’t stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children’” (Mark 10:14).

Not only did He take time for adults, but He opened His arms to the children and blessed them. No other leader rules with such love and tenderness. *Christ is the greatest and most majestic King, yet He still offers us all the access we want.* We have an open door to His chamber. (See Song of Solomon 1:4.)

The Lord not only gives us entrance, but also gives us the privilege of making personal requests regarding our lives. Hebrews 4:16 (NIV) says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” He listens as we pour our hearts out to Him, and He is never too busy to meet with us. *We can actually go to the King of the Kingdom and ask for help.* If what we ask for is according to His will, He promises to grant it.

What could possibly be more awesome than having a loving invitation from the Ruler of the universe? Do you have accessibility to the leaders of your state or country whenever you would like? Has your personal life really changed since the candidate you supported with such fervor was elected to office? Can you go straight to your leader and spend as much time with him as you wish? Jesus wants more to spend time with you than you can imagine.

*But there is one more question worth considering. Do your leaders love you enough to die for you? While many citizens shed their blood for their leaders and country, only one King has died so you could be with Him in His Kingdom.*

## “I AM A KING”

Jesus had to answer belittling questions regarding His position as King. Both religious and government leaders forced Him into humiliating situations, but He never ran from them. In fact, He embraced moments of humiliation.

At one point, He was standing on trial before religious leaders and Roman officials. He knew the time of His death was approaching. After being accused of calling himself a King, Pilate, the governor of Judea, asked Him directly “Are you the king of the Jews?” (John 18:33 NIV). Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king” (18:37).

This may seem like just another account of what happened to the Lord while He was on trial, but it has a much deeper meaning. Only the Holy Spirit can reveal the weight of the moment to us. Christ looked nothing like a king in this hour. He had not slept all night. Perhaps He had not eaten or had anything to drink. He had been beaten when He was first arrested and the abuse had not stopped up to this point.

*His clothes were not the robes of a king, but were filthy and unkempt, stained with blood. His body did not smell like perfume. It had the odor of the dungeon in which He was forced to spend the night. His face was not groomed, but was bloodied and swollen from the beatings and the pulling out of His beard. He was not covered in gold, but rather in the spit of men.*

*In order to mock Him even more, “Pilate posted a sign over him that read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews’” (John 19:19 NIV).*

Let me attempt to compare this moment, but still it does not do justice. Imagine a beautiful model who has been burned in an accident. Her once-photogenic face is now scarred and difficult to look at. A face that was placed on magazine covers and billboards is now a spectacle of pity. Envision her being forced to stand in front of an influential crowd in a packed room and asked the question, “Are you a model?” For her to have to answer such a question is degrading, painful, and shameful.

The Lord faced an hour like this, but one that was even worse. Even so, in humility Jesus spoke the truth to Pilate and answered his question by saying, “You are right in saying that I am a king.”

The shame He experienced could never keep Him from declaring that He is your King. He would willingly wear a crown of thorns before He would ever wear a golden crown made by man. *This humiliation is what He chose—above any honor the world could give Him.*

## ONE ANSWER

Life’s treasures often disappear; here one day and gone the next. Jesus is the only one who is consistent. The greatest advice any leader could receive would be to submit to the ruler of the nations and trust in Him. With His help, the right solution is always available.

If we will truly honor God, He will come through with provision. Where Jesus is honored and obeyed, His Kingdom operates. What are the results of His rule? “Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17 NKJV). These blessings are manifested when He reigns in our lives. When a person or nation rejects Him, the opposite is experienced—immorality, war, and fear. Sound familiar?

## A HIDDEN TREASURE

Jesus explained, “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field” (Matthew 13:44 NIV). The privilege of calling Christ your King is of such importance that He declared:

*“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:43-48 NIV).*

God says it would be better for you to go through the pain of removing your own hand, foot, or eye than to be separated from Him for eternity. The world’s pleasure is worth nothing in the light of Christ’s Kingdom. No earthly king is more important than Jesus. He is worth all we are and all we have.

## THE JUDGMENT OF THE KING

As King, He has the right and authority to judge good and evil. He will make eternal decisions according to the faithfulness and love we have shown to Him. I pray you will read this passage with an open and humble heart:

*I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with*

## KING

*an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:11-16 NIV).*

He is strikingly fierce and will judge and make war against the evil that opposes Him. We are talking about the one who holds the universe in His hand. Notice from the above passage that “He judges with justice.” This means whatever evil has been committed must be paid for by all individuals unless they find redemption through His blood. His wrath is as perfect as His love.

## WE WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT

I pray that you receive a revelation of Jesus, the Judge. It is a frightening thing to oppose Him. The nations of the world will be judged on how they have treated the Son of God. Has His life, suffering, death on the Cross, burial, and Resurrection been honored, obeyed, and accepted, or has it been rejected and mocked?

As followers of Christ, we will stand before Him and give an account of our lives. This will be an incredibly intense moment, not to be ignored. Scripture says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10 NIV).

Before His throne will be glass mingled with fire. It is worth mentioning that God himself is a consuming fire. The angels of heaven will witness this frightening scene. This will be the hour when we answer to God Almighty for what we have done in return for His love that was demonstrated toward us.

We will be faced with questions that will reveal all the things that were more important to us than Jesus.

*“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.” (1Cor. 3:11-13)*

All our motives will be revealed. We will not be judged merely on the basis of what we did, but why we did it. Nobody will be standing with you. It will be just you and your eternal Creator. No one else will speak on your behalf. And you will not receive a second chance to go back and do things differently.

## NO EXCUSES

The Son of God declared, “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37 NIV).

Not a single pastor, bishop, elder, priest, evangelist, or church member will be exempt from providing an account. The highest ranking leaders in the church will all have to face God. In fact, those who have taught God’s people will be held to a higher standard. (See James 3:1.)

Every hidden sin, if not repented of, will be revealed. (See Romans 2:16.) When you see the scars on His hands and feet, you will have to explain why the things of this world meant more to you than the one who was pierced for you. No man will be able to negotiate or lie to our all-knowing, all-seeing King. His judgments are final and just. Only by surrendering our hearts to Him do we have a chance of pleasing Him on that awesome day.

*However, we have this wonderful promise to cling to: “Unto him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious pres-*

*ence without fault and with great joy” (Jude 1:24 NIV). Thankfully, He is also called “Faithful and True.” He will reward us for our love, and will honor us for honoring Him. He will give us all He has because we have done likewise. What we have left behind to follow Him, He will reward a hundred times over. If we have confessed Him before men, He will confess us before His Father and the angels of Heaven. (See Matthew 10:32.)*

## THE COMING KING

Jesus would often let His disciples know that His time on Earth was coming to an end, and that He would suffer and die for the sins of the world. Even though He was seeking comfort in such trying circumstances, He did not want them to worry. He told them:

*“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know” (John 14:1-4 NKJV).*

Imagine how beautiful our heavenly home must be if the Lord has been preparing it himself! What an awesome assurance. He promises, “Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds” (Revelation 22:12). It will be an amazing sight to see Jesus coming in the clouds to take us to our true home. Christ will return with the same body He had after He was raised from the dead. “Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26).

*He was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly*



*stood among them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!" (Acts 1:9-11).*

Just as Jesus was taken away in great majesty on a cloud, so He will return with greater glory to receive us if we are His. He will return visibly and all will see Him. Any other theory or teaching goes against Scripture and the creeds of the early church—all of which taught that Jesus would return. The Nicene Creed states, "He shall come to judge the quick (living) and the dead."

## NO MORE PAIN

What a moment it will be when the Lord returns for His own. This time He is not coming to die on a Cross, but to rule as a King. Every knee will bend in humble worship as all will view this breathtaking sight of Christ in all of His glory. We will finally experience what the Bible calls "a grand entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11).

All struggles will cease, all pain will end, and all worry will disappear when we who love Him will see the King of kings. You will see Jesus face to face and will be rewarded for your faithful labor and suffering. You will be reunited with your loved ones who lived for Him.

How long will this last? For eternity! His Kingdom will never end. *Jesus rules forever.*

Although He will not look as He did when He suffered so greatly, His heart will never change. He will still be as loving as ever, yet His strength will be evident. He will be wearing a majestic golden crown and holy garments, yet His love will be the same as it was during His life on Earth. The same heart that said, "Here is my back for the whip. Here is my face for the beating. Here is my body for the Cross. Here is my life, for your life."

The First and the Last will be here soon. In the meantime, obey and love Him. Wait in eager expectation for His return. Yes, the world

will suffer greater than we can imagine in the years ahead, but God assures us that He will rescue His own from the wrath to come. (See 1 Thessalonians 1:10.)

*“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 NIV).*

## THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells a story about ten virgins. Five of the virgins were wise and five were foolish. The wise eagerly waited in expectation for the groom and prepared for his arrival. The fools did not wait in anticipation and faith for his coming. They were not prepared for him, so they panicked and attempted to ready themselves at the last minute. The bridegroom arrived while they went looking for oil for their lamps.

What happened to the wise virgins? They were welcomed into the wedding banquet and the door was shut behind them. In contrast, the foolish virgins came back late and begged, “Sir, please open the door for us.” The groom answered, “I tell you the truth. I do not know you.”

They came to him when it was too late and missed their moment. They would never have the opportunity to make things right again. What was missing? They did not truly “know him,” which kept them from watching for the groom. The groom in the parable is Christ, and those who love Him are living their lives in preparation for their Beloved’s coming.

## ARE YOU READY?

Regardless of your opinion on the Second Coming, He will return. Ask yourself, “Do I really know Him? Am I living for Him as I wait for His return?”

If you are not looking for Jesus, you will be like one of the foolish virgins who will be unprepared and shocked by His arrival. If you are not ready, it will be too late for you. Regardless of how many times you plead, you will hear the Lord say, “I do not know you.”

That statement will be the most frightening words that a person could ever hear. Your life will flash before your eyes and you will see the many chances you had to prepare for His coming. When you have finished reading this book, you will never be able to say, “I didn’t know what I was supposed to do, Jesus.” You will have no excuse.

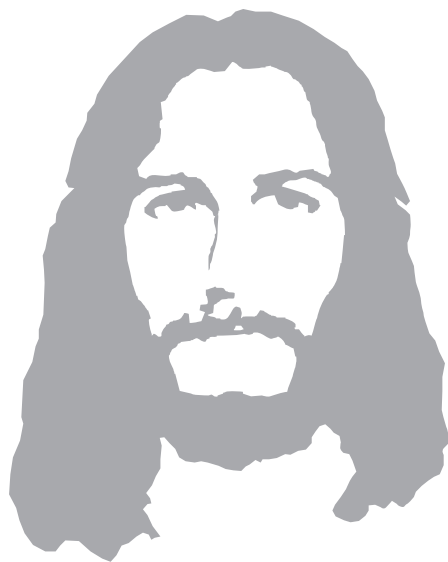
With His heart breaking for those who said no to Him, this righteous King must punish evil. He will mourn at the sight of so many who were not prepared.

Are you ready? Is your eternity secure? Loving and following Him is the only way to prepare for this appointed time. Please allow Christ to rule your heart and life. Ask Him be your King. Simply bow your heart and pray, “Yes, Lord. I am Yours!”

*Dear Jesus,*

*What a King You are! Your power and majesty are above anything this world has to offer. I want You to be my King. I submit to Your rule and Kingdom. Teach me to worship and honor You as You deserve to be. I want to be ready for Your return. I am Yours now, and Your responsibility. Make me ready, my King. Come Lord Jesus, come. Amen.*





## CHAPTER 5

# *Lord*

*God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

—ACTS 2:36 NIV

**I T WOULD** be safe to say that Jesus is addressed as Lord more than He is called anything else. Saying “Lord Jesus” has become a common phrase all over the world. It is used as a casual term by people who are followers of Christ.

However, it is the Master’s desire for you to actually know Him as Lord and that you understand what this truly means. The weight of the word “Lord” will change your heart toward Him forever.

Before we go any further, let us look at the meaning of the word “Lord.” The word derives from the Greek, *kurios*, which means, “he who completely owns something, about which he has power of de-

## LORD

cing; a master.” It is also defined as being the possessor and decision maker over something. It is referred to as being sovereign, like a prince or chief—a title of honor, reverence, and respect by which servants greet their lord or master.

This is probably different than what you thought the last time you said, “Lord Jesus.” Perhaps you never considered that every time you uttered these words, you actually were calling Him, “the one who completely owns me and has total control over me. One who absolutely possesses my entire being. The one who leads my life in every area.” I can sense the shock in your mind as you respond, “I had no idea it was so deep.”

The Lordship of Jesus is no small matter. Submitting to Christ in this way is the best and only way to live your life.

## LORD OVER ALL

“This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel— that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36). Now that you know what “Lord” means, it is essential that you understand what Jesus is the Lord of. *According to this verse, He is Lord of all.* This means that every person, being, and creation is subject to and beneath His authority. All means all!

Everything must submit to the power of the Son. No matter how much the world may resist Him as Lord, it does not change the fact that He is more powerful than anything or anyone. For example, He is Lord over sickness. We saw this throughout His earthly ministry as His very presence healed entire villages and all who came near Him. (See Luke 6:19; Matthew 9:35.) He is not afraid or intimidated by cancer because cancer is beneath Him. Heart disease is not above the lordship of Christ. Even your doctor’s report is subject to the healing power of the Lord.

## A NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES

He is Lord over death. Most people think everything is over once

someone dies. Not for Jesus. The Lord stared death in the eye and came out the other side. Because the grave could not hold Him, He is still ministering to millions of disciples around the world today. He is reaching out to you at this very moment because He is Lord over death.

He is Lord over our material needs. “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine” (Haggai 2:8). When Jesus’ blood poured out of His holy body on the Cross, He became Lord over the plan of the devil, as all authority was given to Him.

Of course, the enemy wants to destroy your life and keep you from following Christ. But the Lord crushed his head when He said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). So do not be afraid of the devil and his evil work. Jesus has the power, not satan.

There is no end to the list of what is under His rule, because He is truly Lord of all. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Philippians 2:9-11).

## IS HE REALLY YOUR LORD?

His instructions are actually His commands. Jesus is black and white, and wants us to get off the fence. Choose to be either hot or cold, but do not take the middle road. Jesus tells the church in Laodicea, “So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth” (Revelation 3:16 NKJV).

What a scary thought! To think that Christ could be so dissatisfied with us that He would literally reject anyone who has not made Him their true Lord. That should put a healthy, holy fear in all of us. His commandments are to be obeyed by His followers.

We do not prove our love with our words alone. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15 NIV). How do you know if you really love Him? The only proof is if you obey His words.

## LORD

*Let me ask you a personal question. Do your actions match your words? If you have called Him “Lord” with your mouth, have you given Him complete ownership of your life? As direct and firm as He is regarding His Word, He will never stop being a gentleman. He will never force Himself on the human heart to the point that He removes our ability to say yes to Him. If He took that away from us, we would never be able to love Him. Our love is still His ultimate objective. It is the reason He died on the Cross. *Love is never forced. We must have a choice if we are to freely love Jesus.**

*What does it really mean for Christ to be your Lord? It means that He has all say in your life from start to finish—and that you are totally surrendered to His desire. It means you stop living for yourself so that He becomes your everything. “For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3).*

## YOUR WILL BE DONE

If He says move, you move. If He says go there, you go. If God tells you to leave a certain group of people who are pulling you away from Him, you leave them. When you feel guilty for committing the same sin over and over, knowing you are hurting Him, you stop. If the Lord says give to the poor, you do it. If He says to leave all for His sake, you obey. *His will comes before yours.* This is the simplest and clearest explanation of what it means to have Jesus as Lord.

The Apostle Paul describes lordship perfectly when he says, “However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me” (Acts 20:24 NIV).

We all have desires for our lives. Some are from Him and some are not. All longings and ambitions, good or bad, are worth nothing in comparison to His desire for you. Our will must bow down to His. *He means everything, and all else is absolutely meaningless.*

You may be saying to yourself, “This is a little harsh. You don’t know what I’m going through. Jesus never had to go through this!”



Yes, He did. He bowed down to the will of His Father during His time on Earth. He only said what the Father said and only did what the Father did. (See John 6:38.) Everything He ever said or did was done out of obedience to His Father. *Everything.*

When He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was about to face the most gruesome abuse and rejection any man would ever encounter. He surrendered His will to His Father's and said, "Not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42 NKJV). If the Son lived this way for the Father, He wants us to do the same.

## DEATH TO SELF

One of my greatest passions growing up was playing golf. I began taking lessons at the age of five and started competing on the national level by age eight. The first tournament I ever played in was one of the largest for our age group in the nation. I finished in second place and that began a love affair with this great sport.

Over the next few years, I traveled the country and often won the biggest tournaments I played in. Ten to twelve-hour days of practice were the norm during the summers in my high school years. I would eat, sleep, sweat, and dream "golf."

After a successful junior career, I received a scholarship to the number one ranked college golf team in America, the University of Florida. This was a huge achievement for me, especially since it had been my longtime goal for years.

Following my time in college, I competed professionally for a short while, but an injury limited my time as a professional golfer. However, the desire was still there and I hoped to play again.

One day, the Lord spoke to me as I was praying, "Give these competitions up for me."

I could not believe what I heard. This decision was much deeper than giving up a few tournaments or trophies. He was asking me to give up my dream. It was sacrificing twenty years of discipline and hard work. I would be giving up my identity.

“Lord,” I replied, “you gifted me with this talent. I want to use it for your glory.”

He answered, “Do you love me, or the gifts I have given you? I want you to find your identity in me alone. I’m asking you to give them up because you love me, and only because you love me.”

This was heartbreaking to hear, and a huge sacrifice. After days of trying to negotiate a deal with God, I got on my knees in my prayer room, and with tears rolling down my cheeks, cried, “Jesus, take all of me. Take the good and the bad. I love you more than anything or anyone.”

This was a huge victory in my life. I honestly believe that if I had not surrendered my dream to God, that my life and ministry would have been a failure in the eyes of the Lord.

Whether or not He will ever allow me to compete again, I do not know. I am willing to accept anything He chooses. It is easy to give Him our filth, but it is an entirely different thing to give back to Him what He has given us. He wants to be on the throne of our hearts without anything else sharing that spot.

Abraham greatly loved his son Isaac. He was a blessing to his father, not a curse. But God wanted to be first in Abraham’s life, so He demanded that Isaac be placed on the altar as an offering. Abraham obeyed what God asked him to do, and he passed the test.

Everyone has a blessing named “Isaac.” Do you love Jesus more than His blessings? In His faithfulness, the Lord provided a ram caught in the thicket to take Isaac’s place.

God wants all of us or nothing. He does not ask for half of us, or even ninety-nine percent. He wants all. I can tell you without hesitation, everything we surrender to Him is well worth it. The reward is Jesus Himself!

## ON THAT DAY

You are about to read some of the most sobering words ever spoken by Christ. The Lord loves you and His desire is for you to have a beautiful life with Him.

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Matthew 7:21-23 NIV).*

You have just read what will be the fate of *many* people when Christ judges mankind. The fact that multitudes of people deceived themselves into thinking they were followers of Christ— when in reality they were not—is simply horrifying! The thought of anyone being cast away from God into an eternity of suffering is simply overwhelming.

The Lord clearly describes this torturous eternity, which is the destiny for those whose lifestyles and actions do not match their words. We must receive His warning and carefully examine our own lives to make sure that we are not included in this group. Please make absolutely certain that you are not one of the “many” mentioned in this passage.

Even though these people will call Him “Lord” with their mouths, they obviously lived immoral lifestyles that contradicted God’s Word. This is why Jesus called them “evildoers.” As they were declaring Him Lord with their lips, they were actually living as their own lords.

*Why are they evildoers? Because the Master told them, “I never knew you.” To live a life that lines up with your words, you must know Jesus and He must know you.*

If He is truly your Lord, you will do the will of His Father. What is the Father’s will? “For this is My Father’s will and His purpose, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in and cleaves to and trusts in and relies on Him should have eternal life” (John 6:40 AMP). The will of the Father is to cling whole heartedly to the Son Himself.

We must follow His lordship whether people are watching us or not. If you call Him Lord when it is convenient, and then live as the lord of your own life the rest of the time, He is not your Lord. If you

are living a lie and you know that Jesus really is not in control of your life, you will be one of the “many” that God rejects on that day. Christ came so you would spend eternity with Him. *He came to save you, not hurt you.*

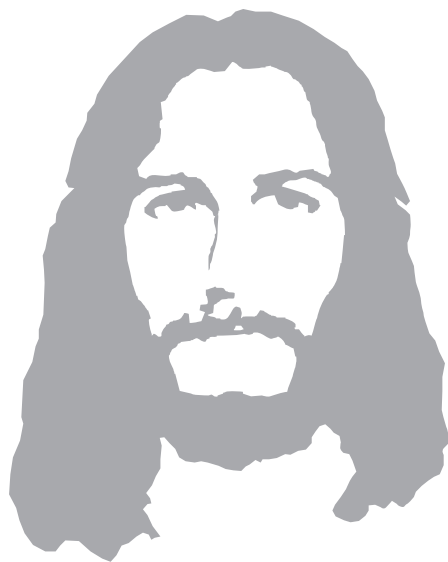
## LOVE IS THE ANSWER

How do you reach the place of submission? As difficult as it may seem, the answer is the same as it has always been—Jesus must be your first love. *That is the only way His feelings will ever mean more to you than your own.*

First Corinthians 13:4 tells us that love is not selfish. Love magnifies Him instead of self. He is not interested in being a cruel taskmaster who wants to hurt and rule over you with an iron fist. He is loving and caring, and will lead you on a path that will ensure His protection and blessing. He wants to be your Lord because He loves you—and you should want Him to be your Lord because you love Him in return. You can trust Him more than anyone and your life will be secure with Christ.

*Dear Jesus,*

*Everything bows down to You and nothing can match Your power. Help me to live a life that matches my words. I want to live with You as my Lord. Take every bit of my life and do what You please. I surrender to You, right now in every way. You are my Lord forever. Help me obey each and every day. I love You. In Your holy name, Amen.*



## CHAPTER 6

# *Shepherd*

*“I did not lose a single one of those you have given me.”*

—*JOHN 18:9*

**P**EOPLE ARE desperate for guidance. Many search for ways to navigate through life. In the process, confusion often fills their minds and making decisions can be incredibly difficult. The questions never end: What do I want to do for a living? Whom should I marry? Where should I live? Do I want children? How do I get out of this mess I am in? What is life all about? Why am I here?

All of these questions are a plea for guidance. Books are read, seminars attended, and thousands of dollars are spent in this quest of seek-

ing a system or a formula to fix the problem. However, the true answer to the questions of life is none of the above.

The answer is a Shepherd who has been guiding people since their very creation. The Bible describes Him as the “Chief Shepherd.” (See 1 Peter 5:4.) This means He is the most secure and qualified Shepherd in existence. By now, you know His beautiful name because it is the sweetest name of all—Jesus.

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

For the past two thousand years, Christ has been known as a shepherd. Not just any shepherd; He is the Good Shepherd. This means that when you are in His fold, you will be taken care of. It is amazing that He was not called the Good Shepherd by others. Jesus used those words to describe himself saying:

*“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep” (John 10:11-13).*

The fact that Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd means that He takes complete ownership of this title. He has a burning passion to lead and faithfully guide your life. He actually cares for you more than a mother cares for her child. **“Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you!” (Isaiah 49:15).**

A mother is more likely to forget about her nursing baby than for God to forget about you. “He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young” (Isaiah 40:11).

*Jesus proves that He is the Good Shepherd because He “sacrifices His life for the sheep.”*

## YOUR PROTECTION

Notice what the Lord says about the false shepherds who are hired to take care of the flock. They will flee and abandon the sheep at the first sign the wolves appear. They have no commitment toward the sheep because they are just working for a paycheck.

But Christ’s devotion is much different for His sheep. You are His property. He died on the Cross to purchase you, and rose again to protect you from the wolves and other predators.

Have you ever been abandoned by those who promised to help? Were you forsaken when the enemy came to assault you? Did those whom you thought truly cared vanish at the first sight of opposition and leave you to face the battle all by yourself?

The Lord will never leave you when attacks come your way. He will stand by your side in the worst of circumstances. Why? *Because you are His.* When you give your heart to Him, you become His prized possession.

We always take better care of things that belong to us. And God looks at His sheep exactly the same way. When you are part of His flock, the Good Shepherd is your defense.

## JESUS FIGHTS FOR HIS FLOCK

If you belong to Jesus, He will keep the attacks of satan from harming you. You have divine protection. With great force and passion, He will run to fight the wolves and fend them off long before they get to you.

When you surrender your heart to Him, He does not promise that you will always have a serene and peaceful life without any conflicts. However, He does give you the assurance of help during difficult times.

The devil continually attempts to attack those who are under God’s care because he wants more than anything to see you fail. The enemy

## SHEPHERD

cannot stand the fact that Jesus washed the sin away from His sheep. He is always on the lookout for those who wander outside the fold, and that is when he strikes. The key to your safety is to always stay close to the Shepherd and remain within the flock.

How close? Close enough to spend every moment in His shadow. He is the safest place to be. “Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalm 91:1). Make it your mission to spend every moment at the side of the Lord. He will use His awesome power to place a hedge of protection around you that nothing can penetrate.

Rest in the assurance that Jesus is your Shepherd and is with you. He is committed to ensuring that you accomplish all He has called you to do. Without God’s protection you would have been destroyed and killed a long time ago. Just think of how many close calls you have experienced in your life while driving. The very presence of the Lord has kept you from harm and will continue to protect you.

The enemy will never win if you stay close to your Lover. Christ’s strength burns with passion when it is time to defend His sheep. We would be shocked if we truly knew how many threats and attacks He has fended off for those in His flock. Take comfort in this statement from Jesus Himself: “...no one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28 NIV). No one means *no one*. What a strong grip our Shepherd has. With one hand He holds us tightly and with the other He strikes the enemy!

## THE PRAYING SHEPHERD

Jesus told His Father:

*“My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory. Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy*



*Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are” (John 17:9-11).*

This is amazing—to think that the Son of God prays to His Father for you. He does not just defend you with His power, but also protects you with His prayers. Christ makes this request on your behalf: “I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one” (John 17:15).

As a believer, do you want to know why you have remained safe all these years and have not endured the hell so many are going through? Why are not you hooked on drugs? Why are seeking to please Jesus, while others hate Him with a passion? The answer is because He prayed that the evil one would be kept away from you.

If you are experiencing these horrible things and are not living the fullness of life under the protection of the Shepherd, the prayer He uttered will never vanish. It is forever remembered in the heart of the Father. Jesus said, “My words will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:35 NKJV). They still hold the power to change your future.

Friend, become part of His flock so that His prayer will cover your life. What the Son of God prays will come to pass. He will always be our advocate: “He lives forever to intercede with God on [your] behalf” (Hebrews 7:25). You cannot lose when God himself is on your side!

Perhaps you are still saying to yourself, *Sure, Jesus prayed while He was on Earth, but it only applied to the disciples who were with Him.* No, what He said includes you and me today. We were on the heart of Christ the night He said, “I am praying not only for these disciples but also *for all who will ever believe in me* through their message” (John. 17:20). This includes you personally!

While the Lord was praying for you, He was about to be arrested, tortured, and killed. What a faithful Shepherd—thinking about His sheep in His most trying hour. Christ continued to be the Shepherd during the time of His suffering.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, as He was sweating drops of blood. (See Luke 22:44.) He began to teach Peter, James, and John the secrets of prayer. He told them, “Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!” (Matthew 26:41). Even while suffering the pain and agony of the Cross, He told John to care for His mother, and for His mother to take John as her son. (See John 19:25-27.)

Maybe you do not believe in Christ. Why would you not want to make this Shepherd the love of your life? Who else is so selfless and dependable?

## THE HEART OF A SHEPHERD

When I stop to consider Jesus’ selfless faithfulness, my thoughts immediately turn to my grandmother, Theodora Liolios. She was a guiding force in our large Greek family. I can never remember her being perfectly healthy. She limped because of a bad knee and underwent surgery for a tumor in another part of her body. Her legs ached and she soaked them almost daily to ease her discomfort.

The last fifteen to twenty years of her life were a challenge physically. She always seemed to have a condition she was battling. She did not hesitate to ask me, my brother, or my cousins to rub her legs. We did not enjoy the task, but we also could not fully relate to what she was going through.

Her mother died while she was in the seventh grade and she took on the responsibility of taking care of her father, brothers, and sisters who were still living at home. After years of serving and working so hard, her body began to feel the effects.

By the time I came along, she was often in pain, yet these limitations never kept her from being a rock in our family, always putting us first. Even if she had to limp to the stove, YiaYia (the Greek word for grandma) was in the kitchen. The majority of mornings, she had eggs sizzling in the pan. And nearly every evening, the table was packed with a massive Greek meal to feed a host of cousins, aunts, uncles, and friends.

She never allowed her struggles to inhibit her from being a shepherd figure in our family. Her house was spotless. She did laundry and ironed clothes, and still found time to offer us advice on just about everything—even if we did not want to hear it! She never missed a family function and always managed to be the life of the party. She would spank us with a slipper at the drop of a hat and kiss us seconds later. YiaYia was amazing, and the perfect example of God’s heart to be a shepherd, even when things were not going her way.

I remember the last year of her life while she was confined to a bed. She was still telling us what to do and giving us advice about how to live. That is the heart of Christ. She was not very famous here on Earth, but she is famous in Heaven. She is always in my heart and I will never forget her influence. How I miss and love her. Thankfully because of Jesus, I will see her again.

There are not many people like YiaYia these days. She never had to beg anyone for love or acceptance. With such a heart, it was impossible to not love her.

## KNOWING THE WHISPER

The Lord said, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). Since it is highly unlikely that we will physically see Jesus every day, we must know His voice if we are to stay close to Him.

Knowing and hearing are entirely different. Jesus said we would “know” His voice. If we do not recognize the sound of the Savior, following Him will be impossible. If we do not follow Him, our lives will be destroyed.

The voice of God is not reserved for those serving in full-time ministry. If you are part of His flock, His voice can be heard and known continually. He speaks to us in many ways—through Scripture, other people, circumstances, and through the Holy Spirit. But it is important that you allow Him to speak to you personally. By spending time with Him, you will get to know His voice and how this wonderful Shepherd speaks to His flock.

The voice of Jesus is different than any other and stands alone. It is more beautiful than any sound on Earth, more powerful than any force, yet it is still and small! *The Lord whispers into our hearts more often than He screams in our ears. That is the key.*

He did speak loudly and with force to some, but most of the time He communicates with a gentle pulling. Once you realize that He whispers with a quiet voice, you will discover that unless you are right next to Him, you will be unable to hear what He is saying. *Can you hear someone whisper to you from a mile away? If a person is speaking in soft tones, you must lean in close in order to hear him or her. The same applies to God. If you are going to hear His beautiful whisper, get close to Him.*

He does not want your relationship with Him to be confusing. If you are by His side you will hear Him. Talk to Him and He will begin speaking to you. If you will draw near to Him, He will draw near to you.

*Why has He chosen to whisper to us as our Shepherd? Why does not Christ just shout so everyone can hear, regardless of our proximity to Him? Because He wants you to draw close to Him. He has designed it this way because He knows you cannot survive without His still, small voice. The very nature of how He speaks will force you to run to Him in order to hear what He has to say. This gives Him exactly what He truly yearns for—you!*

## IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

For most people, the other side of the grave is scary. The mysterious nature of death has millions bound with fear. In fact, the amount of money spent to avoid death cannot be measured. The preventative measures taken by society to avoid this “moment” is incredible. Regardless of anything you may do to postpone the inevitable, unless Jesus returns before then, you will die. “For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2).

You are getting one day closer to death each time you wake up in the morning. You are seven days closer to leaving this Earth than you

were one week ago—and ten minutes closer than when you started reading this chapter. Do yourself a favor and just accept the fact that you are going to die. Why do I say this? Because if you will accept it, then you can prepare for it.

Do not let this depress you because dying can actually be *good* news. Since Christ has defeated the power of death, He will not leave you alone in that moment. He will walk you through those unknown waters. If you are His, God will be your Shepherd during that dark time. In the words of the Psalmist:

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me (Psalm 23:1-4 NKJV).*

You have nothing to fear in your departure from this world when the Son of God is holding your hand. He will be with you and will guide you with His rod and staff into the arms of the Father.

## PEACE AND TORTURE

Two individuals who were very near to me passed from this Earth in very different ways. The first was my grandmother. When she left this life for her new residence in heaven, I was with her earlier that day. I closed the door and it was just the two of us in the room. I opened the Bible and began to read the words of Jesus to her.

She was too weak to talk, but she knew I was by her side. A tear rolled down her cheek and we could sense that the Lord was with us. Peace filled the room and as much as I did not want her to leave our family, I knew she would be with her Shepherd soon. That made things much easier, though still very difficult.

Suddenly she began to point at things in the room. I could not see anything, but she was trying to show me something. Perhaps she saw angels or even the Lord. The atmosphere was so holy. As the Bible tells us, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints” (Psalm 116:15 NKJV). Later that night she passed away in great peace, with her family surrounding her. Today, she walks with Jesus in the beauty of Heaven.

The next example is a different family member. He was very sick for several months and my family attempted to share the love of Christ with him on many occasions. My parents and brother tried to talk with him in person. I even wrote him a letter while living in another state.

Sadly, he wanted nothing to do with the Savior and he clearly made it known, “I don’t want prayer.” He even told his wife to stop reading the Bible at his bedside. He rejected the relentless love of God, and the Lord who so badly wanted to shepherd him.

Then the dreaded time came for him to pass away. Instead of calling out to Christ to be saved, he chose to face death by himself. According to my mother and father, the last few minutes of his time on Earth were incredibly disturbing. As he was passing from this life to the next, he began to punch and kick, as if he were fighting an enemy. Several in the room began to softly sing a hymn and his thrashing would temporarily ease.

A nurse came in and commented, “He does not know Jesus, does he?” She told us she had been at the bedside of hundreds of people who were dying and could often tell who followed Christ and who did not. This man was clearly being tormented as he faced eternity.

When I heard her say this, it shook me. The reality of the afterlife intensified as I reflected on how my two relatives died so differently. The Scriptures became more vivid to me regarding Heaven, hell, and eternity. This was a loved one who entered a horrible, terrifying existence that would never end. It saddens me to think about his rejection of Jesus.

On the other hand, I am so thankful that the Lord has promised to shepherd us all the way to Heaven and take care of us for eternity. This promise is only for those who want Him and live for Him.

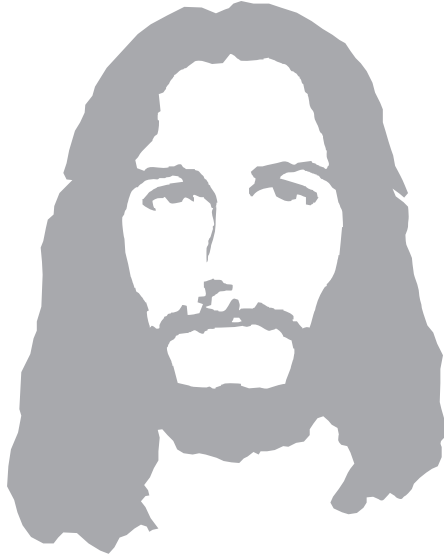
Do you want this promise of peace? If so, this book is in your hand for a reason. Give the Good Shepherd your life. Get close to Him, hear His voice, and follow His leading. Open your heart and you will hear Him saying to you, “Please make me your Shepherd. I love you more than you know. I will never abandon or leave you alone. Just be mine.”

*Dear Jesus,*

*Thank You for promising to be my Shepherd—for being so faithful, selfless and strong. I want to be part of Your flock. Never let me leave You, Jesus. Lead me wherever You want me to go. I am asking You to protect and guide me from this day forward. Keep me close so I can always follow You. I am all Yours. Amen.*







## CHAPTER 7

# *Provider*

*“I feel sorry for these people. They have been here with me for three days, and they have nothing left to eat. I don’t want to send them away hungry, or they will faint along the way.”*

—MATTHEW 15:32

**T**HIS BOOK is being written during the worst economic crisis the United States of America has known in the last one hundred years. The problem is not only affecting the USA, but is also touching the entire world. Without question, it is an incredibly difficult time.

However, the words of the Provider never change and will remain forever. To the one who believes, His words are still true and comfort-

## PROVIDER

ing. Jesus told us to not to worry about everyday life. (See Matthew 6:25.) He was referring to what people would eat, drink, or the clothes they would wear.

Why would He say something that seems so hard to do—to not worry? The reason is because God has everything under control!

I have met those who say that Christ spent a great deal of time talking about money, so they do the same. They are correct in saying that Jesus discussed money, but what did He say regarding material possessions? He stated, “Do not worry about those things the heathens [unbelievers] do.” These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers” (Matthew 6:32).

He did most certainly say that if we give, it shall be given back. He meant that if you give in faith to Him, you will receive. But receiving should not be our motive when we give. Jesus should be the focus of our gifts. He said, “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need” (Matthew 6:33). “Things” must not be pursued to the point of consuming our lives. We are to pursue Him in obedience and He will do the rest.

Your provider is not your employer, government, family, college degree, or special talent. Your provider is not your church. Jesus is your Provider! Remember, it is the Lord “who gives you the power to get wealth” (Deuteronomy 8:18 NKJV). “God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory” (Philippians 4:19 KJV). Your gifts, talents, and abilities come from the Lord himself. Instead of trusting in your own strength, place your trust in Him.

## MIRACULOUS MULTIPLICATION

The following amazing true story was shared with me by a dear friend of mine, Joy Dawson. She is an international Bible teacher and author of many books. She and her husband Jim are missionaries with Youth With A Mission (YWAM). They are true lovers and followers of Jesus. Joy tells this story:

My dear New Zealand friend, Joan Brock, wife and mother of four children, had a remarkable ministry of hospitality. I had no idea how

God had honored and blessed her in the out-working of it until my husband Jim and I were having Sunday lunch in her home, along with fifteen other people.

We watched amazed as the normal sized bowls of food were passed around the guests. Instead of being returned empty, they always came back half full, although everyone had taken normal portions. There was no natural explanation for this. I waited until I could get my hostess alone in the kitchen and asked her to explain the phenomena that had taken place before our eyes.

*She smiled and explained that the miraculous multiplication of food we had just witnessed had been going on for the many years. It started when she opened her home in hospitality to lonely teenagers who attended our church in Auckland, New Zealand, before our coming to live in America in 1971. One Sunday, there was enough food miraculously supplied that Joan was able to give her married daughter a quart sized preserving jar full of food to take home with her.*

*She went on to explain that she always prepared enough food for about twelve people for Sunday lunch, which provided for her family of six and at least six guests she regularly invited. However, at times as many as thirteen guests would show up, so that meant having enough food for nineteen people. She never knew ahead of time how many people she would need to prepare for.*

*When I asked her why she had never shared these obvious miracles from the hand of God, she said that by drawing attention to them, people may have been tempted to focus on her instead of the Lord, the miraculous Provider.*

*Later, God showed me that through my international Bible teaching and writing ministry, I was released to share her*

*remarkable story. I pray that my friend's loving availability to the Lord on behalf of lonely people, accompanied by her strong faith, will inspire others to live in God's miraculous provision when needed, for His glory alone.*

## EVERYONE NEEDS JESUS TO PROVIDE

*Many have become distracted by pursuing prosperity.* The trap is to believe that God exists only to give us material possessions. The focus must never be on a formula instead of Christ. It is dangerous to gauge one's walk with the Lord by material wealth. Paul said that men would be deprived of the truth, supposing that godliness is a means of gain (See 1 Timothy 6:5).

However, even the most humble, pious individuals would agree that they need to eat and have clothing. They would like a roof over their heads and a home of their own. They want their children to have the necessities of life, be well-nourished, and receive a good education. In addition, they want their church to keep the doors open and meet their spiritual needs. But all of this requires money and goods. *Everyone needs the Lord to supply.*

*Prosperity is the ability to do all God has called you to do for His name. Moses had nothing in his hand but a staff when he climbed Mt. Sinai and remained there for forty days and nights with no food. However, he had the presence of God on that mountain. That is true wealth.*

When you live for Jesus, you receive nourishment that is beyond the riches of this world. He tells us, "I have a kind of food you know nothing about" (John 4:32). *Peter and John owned no silver or gold at the Gate Beautiful, but they had the power of the Holy Spirit, which was able to make a lame man walk. Today, great wealth exists in Christian circles, but many are sick and dying without ever being healed. Many lost people walk into huge, beautiful churches and leave lost.*

*Are bigger buildings the answer? Does our money make us wealthier than Peter and John, who were used by God to heal the sick? We must ask ourselves if this is true prosperity.*

## HE WANTS TO BE INCLUDED

In an economy that changes like the wind, Jesus never changes. His ability does not shrink when people's ideas are failing. He is not afraid just because we are fearful. Although the thought of your future may cause you deep anxiety, Jesus has absolutely no fear.

When Christ is your Provider, He takes care of you at *all* times. Stop searching for provision and turn your eyes toward the Provider. God's Word reveals the heart of the Lord and His desire to supply exactly what you need:

*Then Jesus called his disciples and told them, "I feel sorry for these people. They have been here with me for three days, and they have nothing left to eat. I don't want to send them away hungry, or they will faint along the way." The disciples replied, "Where would we get enough food here in the wilderness for such a huge crowd?" Jesus asked, "How much bread do you have?" They replied, "Seven loaves, and a few small fish." So Jesus told all the people to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, thanked God for them, and broke them into pieces. He gave them to the disciples, who distributed the food to the crowd. They all ate as much as they wanted. Afterward, the disciples picked up seven large baskets of leftover food. There were four thousand men who were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children (Matthew 15:32-38).*

Not only did Jesus meet their need, He supplied a surplus of food. This was very important to the Lord. He was excited about being involved in this miracle of multiplying the food. When the disciples questioned where the provisions would come from, Jesus had everything planned and under control.

## PROVIDER

You may know people who walk closely with God. Yet, if you ask for advice, they have no idea what to tell you regarding your finances, food, clothing, education, or children. Who was closer to Jesus than His disciples? They were with Him every day. Still, they could do nothing but turn to Christ.

We must realize that the Lord is the only one with the answers, and He is pleased when we go to Him for help. *Never bypass Jesus in search of His blessings.* That would be using Him. In fact, in the above Scripture these hungry people had no plan or strategy in mind. They simply remained with Christ.

What an astonishing display of the character of the Savior. He wants those who follow Him to know that He is their Provider. Our God does not send the people away to find food for themselves. He takes personal responsibility in providing for them. He does not want them relying on anyone else but Him—not the market, the government, or even the Temple. Just Him. He even created enough for leftovers!

## DO NOT FORGET HIM WHILE USING HIS WORD

I believe whole-heartedly in the Bible—from cover to cover and every word on every page. I believe in biblical principles such as giving and receiving. I base my life on the truth of Holy Scripture. I believe in being faithful with our tithes, offerings, and giving to the poor. God rewards such obedience with abundance.

However, we must constantly be careful to never lose the heartbeat of the Word of God. *The Scripture can be summed up in one word. Jesus. If we miss God's Son while reading the Word, we have missed the heart of the Bible.*

The Lord looks at the motives of our heart. When a “Christ lover” gives, they should do so because they love Him. He will do the rest if our faith is in Him and not our greed. If I had all the money in the world and lacked a deep love for Jesus, I would be the poorest man.

Whenever I give a tithe or offering, or contribute to an individual in need, I feel that I am actually placing it into the hands of God. *The offering plate is not a tray to me; it is a connection to the Lord.* I am not a believer in using scriptural formulas to simply raise funds, even for a good purpose. We give because we love Him.

## STAY CLOSE TO YOUR PROVIDER

There was something beautiful in the hungry people who were on the hillside listening to the teachings of Jesus. The story recorded in the Bible contains a jewel of truth that begs us to take a closer look. The Lord said, “They have been here with me for three days” (Matthew 15:32).

Without realizing it, their nearness triggered the heart of the Provider. They remained close to Him. The Scripture says “here with me” for a reason. God wanted to highlight their close proximity. They stayed with Jesus when there was nothing else around but wilderness. If you stay near Him, regardless of what your surroundings are, He will take care of you.

Notice that the Lord was not affected by the fact they were in a desolate place. This region in Israel can be brutally hot, and no other means of provision was nearby. Yet these people longed for Jesus and wanted to be close to Him. They followed Him with as much commitment in the wilderness as they did in the plentiful villages. The Lord was their focus, not their material needs.

The sweat, sore feet, and crying babies did not stop them. They were with the one who created everything out of nothing. The elderly must have been so captivated by Christ that they followed Him until they were exhausted. They wanted to see Him, hear His words, and touch His robe. They had to be near Him. *Though their bodies were hungry, their hearts were hungrier.*

This Scripture became a reality to those people just as it is true for His Bride today. Remember, “God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn” (Psalm 46:5 NKJV).

## HIS FEELINGS RESULT IN ACTION

Jesus walks on a path of His choosing, and we must follow if we are to remain with Him. Whether His footsteps take us to a green pasture or a rugged canyon, staying close will keep you provided for. What about obedience and its role? *The best way to remain obedient is to stay with Him.* Those that are close to Him will want to obey.

What a caring and compassionate Christ. He shares your pain and longs to be involved in every aspect of your struggle. He not only feels sorry for the people, He feeds them. Why? Because His feelings cause Him to act on our behalf. When He saw the multitude, His heart was so touched by their weary bodies and hunger that He miraculously provided nourishment. He was not only emotionally involved, but thrilled and eager to help.

A secret to receiving all the Lord has to offer is staying by His side regardless of where He leads you. Remember, the people were following Jesus in a lifeless place, but as long as the Son of God was in their midst, the wilderness become a haven of life and abundance.

Dear reader, the Lord will always be there for you if you will follow Him. It is far better to be in the wilderness with God than in a palace without Him.

## A PROVEN PROVIDER

On two occasions, He provided catches of fish so large that they could not be hauled in. One day when Jesus and the disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee, the disciples discovered they had not brought any bread with them and were worried about what they would eat. He dismissed their concern by saying, “Don’t you remember the five thousand I fed with five loaves, and the baskets of leftovers you picked up? Or the four thousand I fed with seven loaves, and the large baskets of leftovers you gathered?” (Matthew 16:9-10).

In so many words He said, “Come up to higher levels. Don’t worry about bread. As long as I am here you won’t go without food. Focus



on more significant matters, such as staying pure and trusting me for all things.”

When taxes were due, He paid them with a coin that miraculously appeared in the mouth of a fish. When the Lord sent His disciples out to the villages to preach, they took nothing with them. All they had was the message of Jesus in their hearts and the Provider taking care of them. And that is all you really need too!

After the disciples finished their ministry journey, the Lord asked them, “When I sent you out to preach the Good News and you did not have money, a traveler’s bag, or extra clothing, did you need anything?” They replied, “No.” (Luke 22:35-36).

He was driving home a point. “Just relax. I’ve always had things under control. Do you know who I am? I’ve been doing this a long time.”

## A TON OF FISH

Here is another true account that will explain why your faith must be in Jesus alone. This story comes from Loren Cunningham, founder of Youth With a Mission and author of *Is That Really You, God?* He tells what happened to some YWAM missionaries who were on board the *Mercy Ministries* ship owned by the organization.

When they were in Athens, Greece, they fasted and prayed that God would supply the money they needed to continue in ministry, along with their other everyday needs. The Lord was about to answer their prayer in an unusual way.

One of the ship’s crew was walking the shore when twelve fish jumped over the rocks and landed at his feet. He gathered the fish up and took them to the hotel where the missionaries were staying. That night they had nothing to eat but rice, but were thanking God for the meal they were about to eat.

At the moment, in walked the crew member, delivering the dozen fish to them. It was almost like a modern day miracle of the loaves and fish, except this time He provided rice and fish!

## PROVIDER

A few days later, an even larger fish jumped onto the shore, which became another miraculous meal for the missionaries. But God was not finished.

Not long after this, one of the missionaries was praying and reading her Bible on the rocks by the sea. Suddenly, fish started jumping out of the water on to the shore. At first, it was just a few fish, but more followed. Dozens of fish, flopping on the rocks, and they kept coming. When they finally stopped, the girl had gathered up 210 fish, while others came and picked up several hundred more. The YWAM missionaries rejoiced in God's miraculous provision and answer to their prayers.

But God still was not done. One morning the missionaries came to the shore and the fish started jumping out of the water again. This time they brought containers, buckets, dishpans, and large bags and spent forty-five minutes gathering up all the fish. The local Greeks took note of this extremely unusual occurrence and were exclaiming, "God is with these people!"

After carefully counting the catch, they had picked up 8,301 fish that had jumped onto shore. This equaled *over one ton of fish*. It was not much different than the disciples catching so many fish that their boats began to sink.

The same Jesus who did the miracle for the disciples is alive today and wants to be your Provider. If He can do something like this, why do you worry over your bills?

## MAKING HIM CHOOSE

We must never forget that Christ is the Provider of far more than finances. He supplies everything we need. Most important, the Son of God is the salvation of our souls. It is essential to understand that salvation does not start and stop the moment we ask Him to be Lord and Savior. He also keeps us saved.

God is well aware of the things we have placed before Him and He is concerned about the danger this presents. As much as the Lord wants for us to have money to enjoy life, He also knows that "the love of

money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10). If we possess things that will ultimately affect our love for Him in a negative way, He will allow them to be removed from us. As Job said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away” (Job 1:21 NKJV).

Look at the people of ancient Israel. When the Israelites obeyed God, they had all they needed. But when they left Him, they suffered financially. However, because of His patient love, the loss usually was not immediate. It happened over time.

In His mercy, He gives us a season to change and turn our love back to Him. But if we turn His blessings into idols, He has every right to remove them, even if they are good. Why? Is it because He is mad at us? No, it is because He loves us. He is protecting His children, and out of His loving commitment to our eternal destinies, He allows us to lose certain things to gain Him again, or to turn to Him for the first time.

## LOSING MUCH TO GAIN ALL

Let me give you a personal example from my life. When I was young, my family went from having money, cars, property, and status, to having practically nothing. We went from driving a Mercedes and a Cadillac to driving an old pickup truck. We went from a beautiful condominium on a golf course to moving in with my grandparents.

I can assure you that it was not because of a poor work ethic. My parents are the hardest workers I know. Both of them are very well-educated and successful. Some people concluded this happened because of God’s wrath, since we were not serving Him at the time. However, I view it differently. *I see the Lord’s love in everything that took place.*

When we lost it all, my whole family committed their lives to Him, and now all are serving in ministry. If we had to lose it all to gain Jesus, what a treasure we gained.

I do not believe the path we took is for everyone. It is not necessary to wait until all is gone before you will love Him. Perhaps you loved Him at one time but have forgotten Him. Maybe you are successful

## PROVIDER

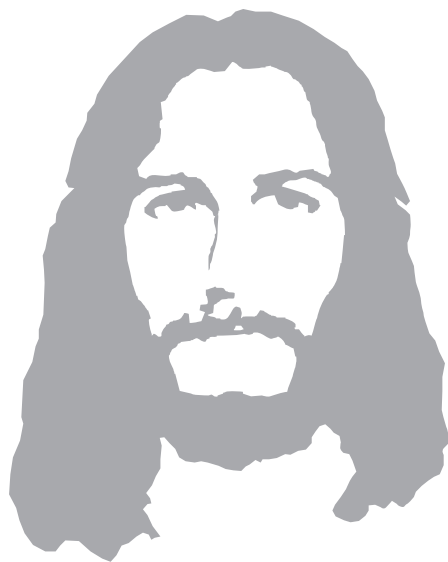
and living the good life, and think you do not need Christ. Let me warn you not to take one more step without Him. All could be gone in a second.

It may be that you have lost everything and are terrified about your future. The Lord is waiting for you to call on Him. He is ready to help you. The keys to being provided for are quite simple: 1) Stay close to Jesus, 2) be a giver for the Lord's sake, 3) obey His entire Word because you love Him, and 4) do what He puts on your heart. It is no more complicated than that!

Now, let us talk with our precious Provider.

*Dear Jesus,*

*You are the only provider in my life. You may use other people to help me, but You are my source. Forgive me for putting things before You. Let me never do it again. I want You more than anything You could ever give me. I never want You to feel used by me. You know exactly what I need and You promised to take care of me. I know You will. Lord Jesus, I am coming directly to You and asking You to meet all of my needs. From this moment on, I will love and obey You. I trust You as my Provider. In Your beautiful name. Amen.*



## CHAPTER 8

# *Warrior*

*Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war.*

—REVELATION 19:11

**AFTER PREACHING** my first public meeting at the age of sixteen, I went away to college two years later. During this time of my life, I made many decisions which disappointed the Lord. Even though I hurt Him so badly, His mercy still amazes me. Many nights when I was partying, I could hear His still small voice saying, “Please do not do that. Come back to me.” I should have listened.

For several years I ran away from Him, and my lifestyle became darker and darker. My friends and my love for sin were more important to me than my Savior, the love of my youth. All the while, my parents were ministers, yet here I was, living in the depths of sin and rebellion against God. *I am forever amazed that He gave me another chance. I can only give glory to Him.*

During my rebellious days, my father often took mission trips to Brazil. He always preached about the love of God and poured out his entire heart in ministry. While he was serving Jesus, I was visiting nightclubs just about every night of the week. He was leading men and women to Jesus and seeing miracles take place, while I was listening to the devil and destroying myself. You do not know how much I regret living such a sinful life.

After being out all night long, I would wake up many mornings hearing my mother's voice. I could hear her praying for me in the other room. As you can imagine, her prayers cut deep into my heart. She prayed for me all the time. If I was out late, she would stay up praying for me until I got home.

Many times I would not get home until the sun was up. When I walked in the house, she would be watching Christian television. One time she was watching my father-in-law's program, "This is Your Day." She said to me, *"One day you will serve the Lord by helping Pastor Benny in his meetings."* I thought she had lost her mind. Five years later, I was serving the Lord with my father-in-law, just like she had said.

If you are praying for a family member who is away from God, do not quit praying. Never give up. Never lose faith. Keep praying until they come home!

To this day, I am still shocked by the incredible patience of Christ. After all my rebellion, it took me a few years to surrender to the Lord's call and to begin traveling in the ministry. I kept thinking, *I have plenty of time. I will change when I get older.* Little did I know that God had seen enough and was about to give me a wakeup call.

## A FRIGHTENING ENCOUNTER

One summer day in the middle of the afternoon, I was lying down in my bedroom. To this day, I am not sure if I dozed off or what happened. All I know is that this experience was real and not imagined.

I was alone in the room when suddenly a horrible, evil feeling came over me. It was by far the most spine-chilling sensation I had ever known. The atmosphere quickly turned cold and dark. Something extremely unusual was happening, so I looked toward the door of my bedroom.

I was horrified to see a figure about eight feet tall floating off the floor. This being was dressed in black with a hood covering its face. It pointed at me with its long, extended arms as if it was coming for me. I could not see its face because it was covered with a dark mist. I had never been so terrified in all my life!

It is one thing to hear stories about such encounters, but it is another to experience it firsthand—and that is exactly what was happening to me. I was frozen in fear and could not move a muscle. It felt as if I was glued to my bed.

After staring at me for what seemed like an eternity, this figure lunged at me with amazing speed and tried to grab my throat. I did not know whether I was going to live or die. As it attacked me, I tried to say the only name that had any chance of rescuing me, the name of Jesus. The problem was that the words would not come out of my mouth.

This was the name I had called on every day in prayer as a boy. This was the name I had called on when I needed to be saved. This was the name I called on when I needed to be healed. Now I needed to call on Him for deliverance, but the words would not come out! I honestly thought I was going to die that afternoon.

Years before when I was a teenager, I boldly proclaimed the name of Jesus in front of crowds. However, this was an entirely different situation, because now I was calling on the name of the one whom I had turned my back on. I had ignored Him for so long that I was ashamed to come back to Him. I had treated the one who sacrificed His life for me worse than an enemy. But now I had no other name to depend on.

Even though my words would not come out of my mouth, I desperately cried to Him from my heart. I wanted to feel His presence like I had in my younger days. I wanted Jesus, the one whom I once served and honored, to rescue me.

Immediately, out of nowhere, a much greater power filled the room. As intimidating as that dark image appeared to be, this holy presence made it seem like nothing. As I felt the warmth and comfort of His love, I realized that I had known this power as a boy. I recognized the presence in the room as Jesus Christ, who had changed my life as a twelve-year-old.

As soon as He stepped into the situation, what looked like certain defeat vanished. When the power of God filled that room, the dark figure could not get out of there fast enough. This fear-producing spirit became terrified by the presence of Jesus. I literally saw it quickly turn around, flee out of my room, and take a left down the hallway.

Through this experience I learned a lesson that I will never forget until my dying day—no one is a match for this Warrior! This verse has become very real to me: “The Lord Himself will fight for you. Just stay calm” (Exodus 14:14). The Lord fears nothing and is powerful when He steps in to rescue us. I know He heard the earnest prayers of my parents for all those years.

## FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE

*The purpose of this book is to introduce you to the real Jesus—the Jesus of the Bible.* The one who has passed the test of time. The Jesus that the masses have followed and many died for as martyrs. He is incredibly strong and will fight for the people who belong to Him. This side of the Son of God can frighten the most prideful of hearts. The Scripture refers to Him as “the man of war.” (See Exodus 15:3.) Jesus is the Warrior of our souls and will wage a battle on the forces of hell when they attempt to harm His people.

This characteristic of Jesus is not merely something I have heard about. In my travels all over the world, I have seen Christ deliver people from the devil’s power. I have personally witnessed many people



who had demons, and if you could have seen their manifestations, it would shock you to the core. You would have no doubt as to the reality of demons, and the power and authority that Jesus has over them.

I have seen the Lord save people and set them free from their bondage, and have experienced His incredible power myself. In some places overseas, I only had to mention His holy name and the powers of darkness reacted in fear and trembling.

## HE DESTROYED THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL

The Bible tells us, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8 NKJV). Notice the verse does not read, “He hurt the devil pretty badly.” It says He *destroyed* the works of the devil. This means the enemy has no power whatsoever over anyone who really knows and belongs to Christ.

As much as I cannot stand to even mention the word “devil,” he is real. I do not want to give him any attention in this book because it is dedicated to the Lord Jesus. *Nevertheless, if you love the Lord with all your heart, he has no power over you at all.* However, if you are not surrendered to God, the evil one can have a great deal of control over you. If this is the case, this chapter will deeply impact your life as you encounter the Warrior.

When Christ died on the Cross and His blood poured out of His body, evil was defeated. His death was the price that needed to be paid for your sins to be forgiven. His resurrection took all power away from the evil one and gave us power to live in perfect freedom. This is why Jesus says, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18).

The death and resurrection of God’s Son shattered the strength of every evil force. Jesus is in authority now, not darkness. It is His finished work that “destroyed the works of the devil.” Jesus said, “I don’t have much more time to talk to you, because the ruler of this world approaches. He has no power over me” (John 14:30).

Since Christ has all authority over evil, the only way for you to be free is to come to Him. You must come to the source of freedom to be free.

## HE WAGED WAR

When Jesus walked the Earth He attacked the power of satan with a vengeance. He was constantly casting demons out of the people. When the spirits saw Him, they screamed and cried out, begging Him not to harass them. (See Luke 8:30-31.) They knew who He was.

He never backed down. Although He was meek and humble, these moments called for strength and power. The following passage of Scripture describes the Lord's unmatched strength:

*Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him. Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, "What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out" (Luke 4:31-36 NKJV).*

## A TWO-EDGED SWORD

Christ is so powerful that all He had to do was speak to these evil

powers and they trembled with fear. The Bible describes His tongue as a two-edged sword. (See Revelation 1:16.) When He speaks to people who love Him, they receive life. When He speaks to evil spirits, they are judged. No person's words carry more strength than those of Jesus. They are feared by the most evil of forces.

He knew who He was and if evil showed up, He took care of it immediately.

Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee to deal with a legion of demons that had possessed a man, who had been chained and living in a graveyard. A legion in the Roman army was a unit of meant 6,000 soldiers. Some biblical scholars say there were probably 6,000 demons inside this tormented man.

Common sense tells us that the Lord was in a difficult situation because He was outnumbered by so many evil spirits. Christ is far from common. The legion of demons knew that He was the Son of God. When they saw Him, they cried out in terror and begged for mercy. Jesus cast the evil spirits out of the man. Immediately they went into a herd of swine, which ran over a cliff into the sea.

Perhaps you have never heard of this side of the Master. He can deal with the worst of circumstances with incredible strength and power. Nothing intimidates Him!

## HE FIGHTS FOR YOU

Do you ever wonder why Jesus was so committed to fighting these evil powers while He walked the Earth? After all, He was a walking devil-destroyer. He healed the sick who were afflicted by the enemy. Think about the woman who was bent over and bound by the devil for eighteen years. He freed her from the evil spirit that caused her condition. (See Luke 13:10-13.)

The Lord even cast a demon out of a young girl who was miles away. The child's mother begged Him to set her daughter free. He performed the miracle even though He was not physically with the little girl at the time. (See Mark 7:24-30.) No one fights for you like Christ!

Everything God does is fueled by incredible love for His own. He confronts evil because He has compassion on those who are hurting. When He sees someone suffering, He wants their pain to end because of His caring heart. When He sees a person attacked who belongs to Him, He protects His Bride. Like any worthy husband, if anyone touches His beloved, it means war. When the powers of darkness attempt to assault you, God will step in.

You may ask, “What about those He helped who did not love Him? Why did He offer His mercy to them?” The answer is simple. He fights for them so they would one day love Him and be His.

Even after Jesus sets people free, they often choose to go their own way again. It will not be long before they find themselves in a situation worse than before. This is inevitable when His willingness to fight for your love is wasted and thrown to the side. When a demon is cast out, Jesus explained, “Then the spirit finds seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they all enter the person and live there. And so that person is worse off than before. That will be the experience of this evil generation” (Matthew 12:45).

## GOD’S PROPERTY

When you give Jesus your all, you become His property. You no longer belong to yourself. This is marvelous because in His eyes nothing in creation is more valuable than you. “For he who touches you touches the apple of His eye” (Zechariah 2:8 NKJV). You are the love of His life.

If you stay close to Him, He will not allow the power of evil to defeat you. “I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice. My body rests in safety” (Psalm 16:8-9). Paul says, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31 NIV).

## A LION

In the Savior chapter, you will read about the quiet and gentle side

of Jesus as the Lamb of God. However, He has another side to Him that is called the Lion. Scripture refers to Him as the Lion of Judah. (See Revelation 5:5). We see Jesus as a Lion when He entered into the Temple, where the money changers had misled the people and turned God's house into a place of business. In a display of anger, He picked up the money tables and threw them over. He actually took the time to make His own whip and used it to drive the money changers and those selling oxen, sheep, and doves out of the Temple. (See John 2:14-16.)

Few people want to think about this side of Christ because it demonstrates God's anger and judgment. "It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). The Bible tells us some things we do can stir up His anger and cause Him to take action. The Temple was sacred to the Lord, and so is integrity as it pertains to money. The misuse of these two things generated a heated reaction from the Lord Jesus. "Who then is able to stand against me? Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me" (Job 41:10-11 NKJV).

## HIS STRENGTH

Jesus walked the Earth with strength, even though His days were full of stress and labor. He walked on the water while the waves were angry, just to reach His disciples. The storm-tossed seas could not keep Him from His purpose.

When the religious leaders confronted Him, He boldly called them snakes and hypocrites. This does not sound like weakness to me, but someone with incredible authority. He walked the Holy Land to preach and minister. *Who else shook the world with a ministry that only lasted for three and a half years?* Only hard work produces such results.

Today, we complain about long flights and cramped, uncomfortable seats. Many church members cannot stand being in a worship service that lasts longer than an hour. Yet, Jesus would pray all night and heal people all day. When the Lord was not healing or delivering the sick, He preached and taught the Word.

During the entire time, men and women were seeking to get His attention, pulling on Him, and trying to touch Him. Imagine Him casting demons out of one and healing another. He had the strength to do whatever His Father told Him to speak or perform:

- He spent forty days in the wilderness with no food.
- He told the religious leaders that their father was the devil.
- When He knew the critics wanted to stone Him, He looked them in the eye and said, “At my Father’s direction I have done many good works. For which one are you going to stone me?” (John 10:32). He was not afraid of their control or threats.

## HE SPEAKS TRUTH

Christ never backed down or was afraid of His enemies. Neither did He bend the truth just so He could obtain favor from those in power. On one occasion, He was invited into the home of a Pharisee. (See Luke 11.) This religious leader had a problem with the fact that Jesus was eating and had not washed His hands. Remember, the Master was a guest in this man’s house.

He told him, “You Pharisees are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and wickedness!” (Luke 11:39). Then He added, “For you are like hidden graves in a field. People walk over them without knowing the corruption they are stepping on” (11:44). Those were strong words!

In defense of the Pharisees, a so-called expert of Jewish law spoke up and told Him, “You have insulted us...in what you just said” (11:45). How did Jesus handle this accusation? He looked directly at them and stated, “Yes...what sorrow also awaits you experts in religious law! For

you crush people with unbearable religious demands, and you never lift a finger to ease the burden” (11:46).

How bold! He harshly corrected the religious leaders to protect those who really wanted to know God and He did so in the Pharisee’s own home.

## STRENGTH TO FINISH

Only Jesus of Nazareth could have endured such torture and death on a Cross. Even after the crucifixion, Christ kept working on the assignment given by His Father. The Bible says He went into the underworld and faced the powers of hell and defeated the devil. (See 1 Peter 3.)

You would think that after His brutal torture and death, He would finally find rest. Not this Lion! He journeyed into hell and made an open show of its destruction. He stripped its authority and every being that was down there witnessed it. Finally after three days, Christ was raised from the dead. This was the ultimate display of power and authority.

He left the tomb with your soul’s security in His strong, nail-pierced hands. Even then He was not interested in resting. Jesus continued appearing to the disciples, teaching them the Scriptures, restoring their hearts, and eating with them. He walked and talked with two of them on the road to a town called Emmaus. On the fortieth day, He ascended to heaven. Would He now have the rest He so richly deserved?

No, the Bible says, He is our great High Priest and “always lives to make intercession for [us].” (Hebrews 7:25)

## HE IS GREATER

Many of those who came to Jesus were in hopeless situations. Some were facing sickness that would ultimately lead to death, while others were possessed by evil spirits because no one could set them free. Their only future was a life of pain and sorrow. Men and women would be crippled for the rest of their lives, and others were being

destroyed by sin. Some were addicted to adultery and others to greed. No human could give them a remedy or prescription for their problems. Then out of nowhere, the Lord came through their town or village and everything changed. Now the chains that once held them so tightly faced a God who could shatter them in an instant.

You may be trapped in a similar situation, bound by chains which have held you far too long. Perhaps you are addicted to perversion or have a drug habit. You have tried time and time again to beat the problem, but you are still hooked more than ever. You are tormented by nightmares, and the fear of the future is strangling the life out of you. Maybe you are afraid of getting sick, or a tragedy striking you or a loved one.

Do you fear failure? Are there things you hate about yourself? Are you tired of feeling unclean and dirty in your heart? Perhaps you are sick and the doctors have given up. All of these can be caused by the powers of hell. As strong and as powerful as they seem, they are nothing to God. "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17 NKJV).

Why not call on the one who was called on by the masses so long ago? Millions of people have sought Him since those days. He lives today and wants to step into your situation so He can set you free. Ask Jesus to stretch out His powerful arm and destroy the hell you are facing. He is your only hope.

Just as He freed men, women, and children who were in a hopeless place, He will break every chain that is around your neck. "Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36 NKJV).

## JESUS IS PASSING BY

The wonderful freedom He offers us is eternal. Whenever Jesus entered a village, the word would spread to all who were discouraged and desperate, "Jesus is passing by!" This announcement was the beginning of their liberty. All they had to do was believe in Him and accept His touch.



Today, you are hearing the same message, “Jesus is passing by!” Just reach out to Him. Before you meet this awesome Warrior who has never lost a battle, you must surrender your heart to Him. Receive His will for your life. Come to Christ in humility and brokenness. He knows you better than you know yourself.

Be honest with Him. Admit your mistakes and hide nothing because He sees everything. “Can anyone hide from me in a secret place? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?” (Jeremiah 23:24). Again, the Bible declares, “He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see?” (Psalm 94:9 NKJV).

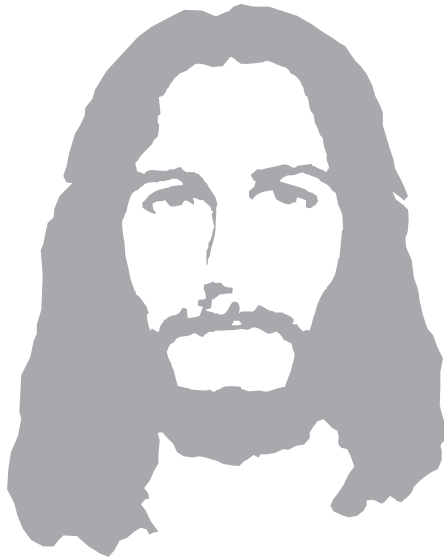
Find a place alone with Him and start by admitting your worst sins. Do not leave anything out and be willing to receive His help. Nothing is too sinful or dark that the power of Jesus Christ cannot overcome. He is ready to free you, and He loves you more than you could ever know. If He loves you enough to die for you, He will certainly deliver you. This is your time. He is ready.

*Dear Jesus,*

*Strong and powerful Warrior, I am broken before You. I am a mess and need Your help. I cannot turn to any person or place other than You. You are my only hope. I need Your strength to set me free from my chains. I am so tired! I surrender my will, my sin, and my addictions to You. I believe You are alive and You shed your blood on the Cross for me. I ask You to cover me with your precious blood. You are Lord. I believe You are stronger than any evil force. I am tired of living for myself and being controlled by the power of the devil. You have destroyed the enemy's work. I reject satan and submit to You. Your holy Word says, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8 NKJV). The devil has been destroyed by Your death and resurrection. I want You now. Set me free, great Warrior.*

## WARRIOR

*Break every influence and sin over my life, Jesus. I belong to You. In Your awesome name, Amen.*



## CHAPTER 9

# *Friend*

*“I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.”*

—JOHN 15:15

**I**T IS amazing that the God of all creation longs to spend time with us. He does not want us to know Him from a distance and only worship Him as the all-powerful Savior of the world. He genuinely longs for a personal friendship with us. God wants even more people to be in a close relationship with Him than He now has. He is always looking for those who will stand with Him. Yes, Christ wants to be your Friend!

One of the greatest anxieties people have is the fear of being alone. The thought of having no companionship and interaction is incredibly frightening to so many. This is understandable. After all, who would want to have no conversations or friendships in life?

All throughout the world, people are crying out for connection. Social media is proof of this. What is it about friendships that make them so treasured? We were designed for connection.

## A FRIEND FOREVER

Jesus became my best friend when I was twelve years old, after I heard someone speak about Him in such a real way. I was in Orlando, Florida, and listened in awe with my mother, brother, and cousins sitting next to me. We had driven all the way from Tarpon Springs, which was about two and a half hours from the church. The minister was of Greek descent and had grown up Greek Orthodox as I had.

I was instantly attracted to the person he was speaking about. This man was not talking about someone he had heard about or studied in school. He talked about the Savior like he knew Him personally. My heart was touched by the reality of his relationship with the Lord, and it made me hunger to know Christ as this man knew Him. This is what I had been looking for.

As a boy I had already traveled and won some of the biggest golf tournaments in the world. Newspapers were writing stories about this kid who was bound for greatness. I won over twenty tournaments in a row and my future as a professional golfer looked promising. My grades were excellent and I had accomplished more by the age of twelve than many adults had. Even so, I knew something was missing in my life. I believed in God, but wanted to *know* Him.

That night I heard Pastor Benny Hinn speak of a caring, present Christ who can be known in a personal way. What was drawing me to such a hunger? I cannot help but think of the Scripture that says, “And they realized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13 NKJV). That is exactly what it was! I knew he had been with the Lord and I wanted to walk with Him too.

That Sunday night, as a twelve-year-old boy, I ran up to the altar with my heart exposed and asked Jesus to be my everything. It was that simple. And guess what—He did! He made me aware of His presence and began requesting time with me.

I thank the Lord for using Pastor Benny. My family and I are forever changed because of the impact of those days.

Over the next year or so, I spent countless hours in my room alone with the Lord. I was excited to seek His face and discover His heart. It was not long before I began to sense Jesus with me continuously. I did not have any doubt that He was with me all the time.

I started carrying my Bible around and told my aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and friends that they needed to turn to the Lord. My grandfather gave me the name, “Little Pappa,” which means “the little priest” in Greek.

One of the wonderful priests, whom I still honor to this day, came to question me about the Lord’s work in my life. I simply opened my Bible and answered Him with what I heard the Lord telling me through His Word. He left a bit frustrated, but I think He sensed the presence of Christ in a real way and did not know how to argue with my experience.

I will never forget being cornered by one of my aunts who disagreed with my relationship with God. She wanted to know what I was doing by reading the Bible and praying so much. I told her, “We are all sinners and we need the Lord to forgive us.”

“If you call me a sinner one more time,” she replied, “I am gonna slap your face!”

Greek women are tough! I did not care because I knew God was pleased with me. I even taught my first Bible study at this young age. How can it be that a kid would teach the adults about the Lord? Because He was my best friend. We had a real relationship. I constantly talked with Him and He kept speaking to my heart.

Was I perfect? Of course not. In fact, I turned my back on Him for a few years. When I was around the wrong people, I acted as if I had never met Him. I cannot imagine how badly I hurt Him. Nevertheless,

He still wanted me for Himself. Today, He is my everything and the air I breathe. Now, this same Friend wants to know you.

## HE WANTS TO BE YOUR BEST FRIEND

For a person to claim the title of “best friend,” they must set themselves apart from the rest of the crowd. True friends earn a higher level of trust because they prove themselves loyal over a period of time. Such individuals just do not show up out of the blue. They have gone through difficult times with you and remained faithful when everyone else doubted and left.

*No one has proven himself or herself as a friend more than Jesus.* He said, “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). He demonstrated His friendship by dying for you. God’s Son put His own interests aside and willingly sacrificed His life for your good. That is a proven friend.

You can always trust the Lord with any secret. In fact, the more you open up and tell Him your innermost private thoughts, the more you will sense God’s presence. (See Matthew 6:6.) There are some things that only belong to you and Jesus. Do not be afraid to share your deepest secrets with Him. When you do, you will discover the secret place of intimacy. He will tuck your secret away in His heart, where it will remain just between you and Him.

I know many people who have been in church for most of their lives and have been betrayed by other Christians. They revealed their deepest secrets and shortcomings in confidence, but the other person broke the trust and shared it as gossip. Instead of being protected and covered, they were betrayed and judged. As a result, this caused them to hate the church and everything related to it. Unfortunately, they put the blame on Jesus and turn away from Him.

But it was not Jesus who did this wrong. The truth is that He is just the opposite. He will deal with you gently, if you will listen to Him. You can trust Jesus today.

## HE IS ALWAYS THERE

One of the things you want most from a friend is for them to simply be there for you, both in good times and in bad. Even when you do not need anything, it is nice to know that the relationship is always available.

Jesus promised to be our friend by assuring us, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Notice He said “*always*.”

What an awesome promise! He even goes out of His way to say “surely” because the Lord is placing His guarantee on this vow. It is His pledge to be with you twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Even in Heaven, He will be with you for eternity. God is never too tired to listen when you talk with Him. Regardless of the millions who call on the Lord every day, He will always hear you. Only Christ can make you feel that it is just you and Him in this divine friendship—yet all the while He is helping mankind everywhere. “From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth” (Psalm 33:13-14). His eyes are always focused on you!

## THE ATTENTION OF CHRIST

What about those times when you feel isolated and totally alone? What then? What can be done to sense Jesus’ loving presence?

The answer is not complicated at all. The fact that you “feel” alone can be your greatest opportunity. He loves one-on-one time with you. Now you are free from distractions and ready to be with your best Friend.

Just close your eyes and whisper the wonderful name of Jesus. He is a person, and by calling on Him with love in your heart, you will gain His attention. He will become real to you in your darkest moments.

## FRIEND

When you have the attention of the Lord, nothing else matters. You will find a sense of calm and deep appreciation when you realize that Christ is focused on you in that very moment.

Remember, He will never leave you. He just becomes more noticed by us when we communicate with Him. Gently whispering the precious name of Jesus will wipe away the distractions of life and bring you back to Him.

Close out the distractions of the world and say His name until His peace fills your heart. Go ahead. He is waiting for your attention. Whisper, “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.” You can sense His love right where you are, even while reading this book. Nothing is more fulfilling than saying the name of Jesus with sincere affection, and knowing He is with you.

As long as you have His name on your lips and in your heart, you never need to feel lonely again. With this in mind, who can stop you from accomplishing all God has called you to achieve? It has been said, “Show me your friends and I will show you your future.” If your best friend is Christ, your tomorrow is going to be amazing!

You must come to the place in your life where you believe without a shadow of a doubt that He is with you at all times. Whether you are in church, at work, at home, or on vacation, He is present. If you are in a hospital room and doctors have given up hope, God is still with you. When you are reading your Bible, He is right there. If your parents have just divorced, He stays close to you. If you are forgotten by those around you, He will not leave. He is so thrilled about your friendship that He looks for every opportunity to be have your full attention. Even when you fail and have hurt His feelings, God is by your side.

## A RELATIONSHIP

For a friendship to last, it must be a mutual relationship. One-way friendships are unfair and rarely endure. What usually happens is the individual who is putting the most effort into the relationship ends up feeling used and taken advantage of.



One of the reasons people who have given their hearts to Jesus revert back to their old ways is because they lose the enjoyment of the relationship. They may have gotten side-tracked by giving their lives to churches, fellowship groups, the Bible with no desire to know Him personally, prayer, ministry, a belief system, or a denomination. When the person of Jesus is forgotten we fall into lifeless religion.

Remember, Jesus redeemed us so that we can have a relationship with the living God. We must never stray from this truth: Christianity is about *someone*, not something. Once the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to this revelation, you will want to spend time with the Lord.

There must be something more substantial to your relationship with God than just asking Him for favors. He wants you to become more interested in knowing Him as a friend than merely someone who will provide your needs. Jesus longs to be known.

## WHERE WERE THEY WHEN HE NEEDED THEM?

Perhaps you are thinking, *This is crazy! Why would Jesus ever want me to be there for Him?* To find the answer, let us look at His life on Earth. During that dark moment in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He was struggling with taking the sin of the world upon himself, what did He do after He prayed to His Father? He went to His three closest friends, Peter, James, and John, and asked for prayer. (See Matthew 26:40-43.)

Why? Because this was the hour when Jesus looked to His disciples most. Up to this point, the Lord had always been there for them. He fed, took care of them, and had washed their feet as a Servant. He had even invited them to experience one of the holiest moments in history, when He was transfigured on the mountain. (See Matthew 17:1-9.) He allowed these men to see the cloud that would overshadow them and let them hear the voice of His Father. This was the same cloud of glory that Moses encountered on Mt. Sinai.

What a touching act of trust, and what an honor for the disciples. The Son of God even promised that one day they would share in His

## FRIEND

glory and beautiful radiance. (See John 17:22.) He also promised to give the twelve disciples twelve thrones to judge the tribes of Israel. (See Matthew 19:28.)

Very few friends love another person enough to share their glory. Human relationships can get competitive, but not with Christ. The Lord let them into His heart of hearts and now He deeply wanted their support. This was their golden opportunity to show Him they were faithful. Instead, they fell asleep and Jesus faced this moment in the Garden all alone.

## TOO BUSY?

Since the Savior does not change, He still longs for His friends to be loyal to Him. At times He desires for us to minister to Him. The Lord requires the type of friend who will jump in a car or hop on a plane to minister to just one hurting soul. He is looking for the kind of relationship where He can wake you up at three o'clock in the morning just so you will talk with Him. That is the kind of friend God is to us, and we should offer the same loyalty to Him in return.

What stops us from having this kind of fellowship with the Lord? Perhaps we are too busy or tired. He would not be much of a friend if you prayed to Him and He responded, "I am a bit overwhelmed at the moment. Please try again in a day or two." Think what would happen if you were lying in a hospital bed and the Lord was preoccupied or too tired to hear your prayers. Thankfully, He is dependable. "He never grows weak or weary" (Isaiah 40:28).

## CAN HE TRUST YOU?

Jesus yearns for people He can confide in. He has many things pressing on His heart and He longs to share them. You confide the secrets of your heart with those who are closest to you. It helps to ease the burden.

Jesus said, "I no longer call you slaves, because a master does not confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you

everything the Father told me” (John 15:15). You can hear His passion and desire in this Scripture. He is excited to reveal the secrets of His Father with us, and He does so because we are His friends.

We have the opportunity to commune with the greatest one of all. Since the creation of man, God has been looking for those who He can share His affection with. The problem was that He could not find many whom He could trust. For that reason, He often chose to share His deepest truths with certain individuals instead of the masses.

He chose Abraham and opened His heart to him. He selected Moses and did the same. He called David, Samuel, Jeremiah—and many more. I used to believe that God could only find a few people that He could use. But I have changed my mind because I now realize He can use anything or anyone.

He even used those who did not honor Him for His purposes. King Saul consistently dishonored the Lord but God still used him. *The greatest need, both then and now, is finding men and women the Lord can trust with His innermost feelings.* Once He finds this type of person, they become His vessels without even trying. Their lives become tools in the hands of God.

*The better you know Jesus, the more you become like Him.* The more you become like Him, you begin to do what He does. As you say what He says, love as He loves, and please the Father as He does, you will find that you will make a great impact on many lives. Your entire being becomes a living picture of Christ’s life in you. The word for this lifestyle that I am describing is called *Christianity*.

## BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Perhaps you are a pastor, minister, or church member, but you have neglected your friendship with Him. At one time in your life you answered His most delicate calls. He used to tell you His most intimate feelings, but now things are different. The work of the ministry became more important to you than fellowship with God, and it has actually become your idol.

## FRIEND

The voice that was once so clear is now a memory of the past. You are doing more than you ever thought you could accomplish, yet you are empty. *You can now see there is a huge difference between working for Jesus and knowing Him.*

Now is the time to return to the best friend you have ever had. He still longs for your company. Tell Him you are sorry and hold His hand again. Talk to Him as you did long ago and share the secrets of your heart, even if it is confessing sin. He already knows, so do not try to hide anything. Apologize for ignoring Him and surrender your heart to Him once more.

We are the ones who neglect Him. He never forsakes us. Have you placed His work before Him, thinking it would please Him? Come back to the Lord and together you will partner in ministry as it should be done. Only with the Son of God does your work really last for eternity.

## A REAL FRIEND OF JESUS

Some people pledge friendship with their lives. One of the great lovers of Christ was a church father in the second century named Polycarp. He was a disciple of the Apostle John and was the Bishop of Smyrna in what is now modern day Turkey.

During his time, Roman authorities inflicted intense persecution against all Christians and Polycarp became a marked man. Someone notified them of the whereabouts of the Bishop and they came to arrest Him. His captors were surprised that this man, whom they thought was a great threat to the empire, was just an old man.

Polycarp offered them food and drink, and asked if he could pray for an hour before they led him away. As the hour of prayer turned into two hours, the men were flooded with guilt because they had arrested such a devout follower of Christ. Finally, they took him away to the city, where he was met by two officials in a chariot.

The officials commanded him to worship Caesar and renounce Jesus, telling him his life would be spared if he did. Polycarp informed them that he would never do such a thing. The officials then threw

him out of the chariot which made him cut his chin on the ground. As though nothing had happened, Polycarp picked himself off the ground and walked with dignity into the arena where his enemies were waiting to kill him.

As he entered the stadium, a voice from heaven spoke, *“Be strong and show thyself a man, O Polycarp.”* History records that no one saw the speaker but everyone heard the voice.

The Roman officials again threatened him, “We will release you if you will just revile Christ.”

Polycarp boldly responded, “Eighty-six years have I served Him, and in nothing has He wronged me; and how, then, can I blaspheme my King, who saved me?”

Infuriated, the Proconsul threatened to release the wild animals on him in the arena. Polycarp answered defiantly, “Send for them.”

*Next, he threatened to burn him with fire. Still unwavering, the elderly saint told them the flames were only temporary, but if they did not repent, they would be awaiting the flames of eternal punishment. Without fear he responded, “Do whatever you wish.”*

The impatient crowd began chanting for Polycarp to be burned alive. As the Roman soldiers were getting ready to nail him to the stake to be burned, Polycarp asked if they would let him hold onto the stake instead of being fastened to it with nails. He believed God would give him the strength to voluntarily hold on to the stake even as the flames engulfed him.

In the presence of everyone, He thanked God for the honor of dying as a martyr and allowing him to suffer for Jesus. When they lit the fire, the onlookers were shocked that flames were not burning Polycarp.

Previously they had witnessed other believers being burned at the stake and had smelled the stench of burning flesh, but this time the fire could not hurt this godly man, who appeared to be invincible. The executioner took out a dagger and plunged it into his heart. Blood gushed out of him, which to the amazement of the crowd, quenched the fire.

Those watching this incredible act of courage had witnessed the martyrdom of a true friend of God. We remember this act of love to this day. Heaven will honor him forever.

## NO MIDDLE GROUND

Are you certain that you are a true friend to Jesus? He said, “He who is not with me is against me” (Matthew 12:30 NKJV). We are either His faithful friends who are loyal regardless of the cost, or we are lukewarm or cold. Lukewarm is an average commitment, which is unacceptable in His eyes. (See Revelation 3:16.)

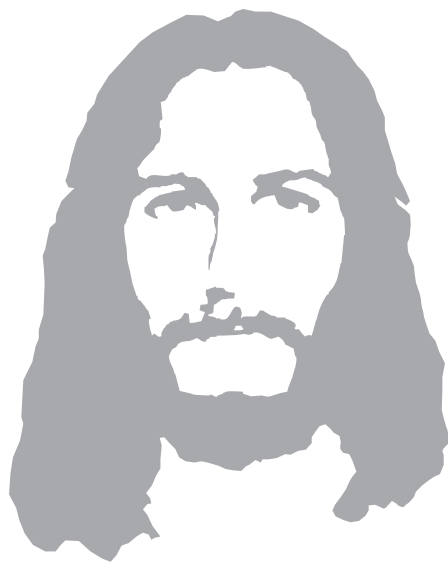
As you think about the commitment of Polycarp, how would you gauge your friendship with the Master? He gives the answer by telling us, “You are my friends if you do what I command” (John 15:14). Do not assume that just because Christ is your friend, it is okay to not obey Him. His commands are non-negotiable. He declares, “Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Luke 21:33 NKJV).

Your obedience is the indicator that shows the closeness of your friendship with Jesus. His instructions should be our passion because we love Him.

If you have ruined this relationship, now is your chance to tell the Lord you are sorry and return to Him. Have you used Jesus? He wants you for who you are, and cares so much about you that He poured out His life for you. Come to this great Friend now—and you will never be lonely again.

*Dear Jesus,*

*My loving Friend. Thank You for Your wonderful promise to always be by my side. You have always been there for me regardless of myself. Now, I want to be there for You. I want to be Your friend, Jesus. Trust me to stay in fellowship with You, even when others walk away. Be my best friend forever. I love You. Amen.*



## CHAPTER 10

# *Healer*

*“Lord,” the man said, “If you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean.”*

*Jesus reached out and touched him. “I am willing,” he said. “Be healed!” And instantly the leprosy disappeared.*

—MATTHEW 8:2-3

**F**OR OVER four years, Theo suffered with a blood disease referred to as Mycobacterium Marinum. This condition caused significant damage to his left knee and bursa, which required four surgeries. For much of a four-year period, Theo was unable to walk without the aid of crutches or a wheelchair. As would be expected, his left thigh muscle deteriorated. In addition, the knee cap grew very sensitive to the touch.

Then one evening, while visiting a cousin's home, a miraculous and life-changing event was about to occur. As we sat in the living room, Father Anthony Morfessis, who was a Greek Orthodox priest, walked in the front door. The moment he entered the room we sensed something special about him. His face seemed to have a glow that reflected his walk with Christ.

I was only five years old at the time, but I still remember sensing the presence of Jesus as I sat on the floor. It was as if Jesus walked in with the priest. The atmosphere was charged with the power of God. It was as if heat and electricity filled the air.

Father Anthony took a seat directly across from Theo. The priest looked at him and asked a life-changing question, "Have you ever seen Jesus?"

Not knowing how to respond to this unusual question from a person he had never met before, Theo replied, "No, I don't think so."

Father Anthony asked forcefully, "Why not?" "I don't know," Theo quietly answered.

Suddenly, the priest walked across the room and placed his hand on his knee and said, "In the name of Jesus, be healed!"

At that very moment, Theo felt electricity running through his leg, which then went throughout his entire body. Previously, touching his knee would have caused tremendous pain. But this time it was different. When Father Anthony grabbed the knee, Theo felt the power of God as fire.

Stepping away and walking across to the other side of the room, Father Anthony then ordered Theo to walk toward him. Theo's first reaction was to reach for his crutches, but Father Anthony insisted that he come to him on his own.

By faith, he stood up and began to approach the humble man. Instantly an overwhelming feeling of love washed over Theo. He began to weep tears of joy as he walked across the room— totally healed!

A couple of days later, Theo went to the doctor for a continuing therapy routine to restore muscle tone to his weakened thigh. When the doctor examined the left quadriceps, he was puzzled when he discovered that the muscle tone had returned.



Theo explained to the doctor that a man had prayed for him a couple of nights before. He described the incredible moment when God touched his leg and the fire he felt. When the doctor examined him, Theo tested out stronger in his healed knee than his other knee.

*You are probably wondering who this person is that was healed. Theo is my father!*

At that time, my father was the farthest thing from a righteous person. He was light years away from being a true Christian. However, what He did was the key to his healing.

When asked by the priest if he wanted to see Jesus, my dad responded that he did. That is the key—the secret to experiencing healing. It is finding and wanting the Healer.

My friend, do you want to see Christ as the healer of your body? If you do, He is ready to touch you. It makes no difference to Him whether you are Baptist, Greek Orthodox, Methodist, Catholic, Pentecostal, or even someone who does not live the most righteous life.

He never said, “If you are good, I will heal you.” He never stated, “Go to church and then I will heal you.” Just look at the man at the pool of Bethesda. First He healed him and then He commanded him to sin no more. (See John 5:14.) It is His love and mercy that brings the Healer your way.

## JESUS WANTS TO HEAL YOU

Many people believe that God can heal, but few believe that He wants to heal them. Perhaps you are reading this book and are suffering with an illness. You may have a family member who is sick, or a friend fighting cancer. Regardless of the circumstances, it is vital that you discover Jesus as the healer of your body, just as He is the savior of your soul.

The doctors may have given up on your medical situation, and perhaps your pastor has too. Your Christian friends have told you, “This is just the way it is, and it is God’s plan for your life.” But once you discover the heart of the Healer, you will see otherwise.

## HEALER

This moment has been ordained by Christ Himself. In fact, the Lord wants you to never forget His desire and promise to heal. ***“Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases” (Psalm 103:2-3).***

He is your Healer. He does not try to heal. He is healing—and healing follows Him wherever He goes.

## JUST AS YOU ARE

The Scripture at the start of this chapter, Matthew 8:2-3, is a perfect example of His desire to heal. The passage demonstrates both His desire and His ability to heal.

Notice the leper begins by asking Him, “If you are willing...” He knew that Christ had the power to do it, but He was not sure that He *actually* wanted to heal him. Take a look at the Lord’s response: “Then Jesus put out His hand and touched Him saying, ‘I am willing, be cleansed.’”

*It is significant to note that He stretched out His hand and touched the leper before He ever prayed for him.* The Lord wanted to heal the leper more than the leper wanted healing. It was as if He could not wait to physically touch his sick body.

This was no ordinary illness. Leprosy ravaged a person’s body as a horrible and sometimes incurable disease. The leper’s skin was covered in raw, open sores, which made him unclean according to Jewish Law. Those afflicted with leprosy were the outcasts of society. They were forced to live in separate areas and had to shout “unclean” whenever a healthy person came near.

What I love about Jesus is that He could not care less what others thought. His heart was fixed on healing this suffering child of God. He did not pray for the leper from a distance, nor was He repulsed by the outward appearance of this man. The unsightly sores did not keep Him away.

*Instead, He saw the man’s suffering, which drew Him toward the leper.* The Master stretched out His hand and touched his diseased body. Do

not ever think that you are too repugnant to have the Son of God reach out to you!

Regardless of how appalling you may look or how sick you are, He still longs to touch your body. He wanted the leper healed immediately and did not waste a moment in letting him know, "I am willing." He is passionate and anxious to make you well.

Perhaps you are thinking, *Well, there must have been something special about that leper.* The only thing unique about him was that he was an outcast. God does not reserve His healing power for those who meet a special criterion or are "good" enough. *Because of His mercy, He heals the sinful as well as those who are faithfully living for Him.*

## NO HESITATION

In case you are still not convinced, look at this beautiful example from the life of the Lord in Luke 7. A Roman centurion had a loyal servant who was extremely sick. The centurion desperately wanted to see him healed, but felt too unworthy to personally approach the Master. Instead of going himself, he sent some of his respected Jewish friends to this man he had heard so much about. When they found Him, they asked Jesus to come to the centurion's house to heal the servant. He instantly agreed because of His desire to heal the sick. There is not a hint of hesitation mentioned in this passage.

With every step Christ took toward the house, the centurion probably felt more guilty and unworthy. As Jesus came closer to the home, he sent his friends to meet the Lord and tell Him that he was not worthy to receive Him into his home.

However, he believed that if the Son of God just spoke the word of healing from a distance, his servant would be healed. Jesus marveled at the centurion's faith because he understood that distance did not have anything to do with His power to heal. In response to his faith, Jesus healed his servant.

Perhaps you are one of those individuals who feel inadequate and unworthy to approach this Healer. You feel more comfortable communicating with Him via other people. Maybe you have some so called

“religious” friends that you think God loves more than you. Just as Jesus headed straight to that man’s house, He will come directly to you right now if you will just look to Him.

*This soldier was not righteous, but he was honest with Christ and did not put on a holy disguise. He only knew that he was not worthy, and that Jesus heals. That is a beautiful way to approach the Lord when you need His healing touch.*

## JESUS HEALED WITHOUT TRYING

In Mark 5:25-26, a woman had been hemorrhaging for twelve years. She had spent all of her money on doctors, but the problem only worsened. According to Jewish law, this condition made her an out-cast.

Imagine the embarrassment and pain she felt. Unable to go to the Temple to worship God. Unable to live and socialize like other women. After twelve years with this affliction, think how weak her body must have become. Thank God, healing was about to come her way.

The good news was not about a new doctor who had moved into her neighborhood. Nor did it promote a special medicine. She heard someone say, “Jesus of Nazareth is walking by.” That was all she needed for faith to rise up inside of her heart because where Christ is, faith is available.

She rose out of her bed and took off the old garments she had been wearing around the house. When she walked outside, she saw crowds chasing after Him and pulling on the Lord from every angle. The huge gathering, which included people with so many needs, could have been seen as an impossible barrier to break through. But she was desperate. She knew that this Healer offered more hope than any of her doctors, so she forced herself through the masses.

We do not see this woman complaining, “Look at all those sick people. He already has too many people to deal with. Why would He concern Himself with me?”

*Instead, she pressed through them and touched the bottom of His robe.* When she did, the Scripture tells us that power left Him. Instantly, she

felt the bleeding stop—and she would never suffer again. Her life was restored and she would no longer be controlled by that sickness. He healed her without even trying! In fact, He did not even pray for her. Remember, He heals as naturally as we breathe because that is who He is.

## A PASSION FOR HEALING

No condition is too great or too small for the Lord to extend His hand of healing. For example, Peter's mother-in-law only had a fever, but He healed her. (See Mark 1:30-31.) No situation is so difficult that Jesus cannot perform a miracle. He raised dead bodies numerous times. Jairus' daughter, the son of a widow, and Lazarus were all raised from the dead. *Even in the clutches of death, there is hope when the Author of Life is involved.*

The Lord wanted so much to heal people that He did it in front of the Pharisees, who were plotting to kill Him. He performed miracles when He knew it would cause controversy and ridicule. If He did not heal, the Pharisees would not have gotten angry, and it would have made His life less stressful. So why would He choose to heal people when it would have been much safer to not rock the boat?

The reason is because He was sent by His Father to destroy the works of the devil. He was committed to making people whole. Christ was so passionate about healing that it was part of His personal prayer life. He prayed, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10 NKJV). It is safe to say that Heaven does not have any sick people, which means that He does not want people sick here on Earth!

## TRUST HIS WAYS

I have met individuals who believe Jesus wants to heal, but are too concerned about *how* He will do it. It is not worth getting hung up on how it happens.

## HEALER

Jesus did not always heal in the same way. One time He spit on the ground and made mud to rub into the eyes of a blind man. (See John 9:1-12.) On another occasion He spit directly into the eyes of a man born without sight. (See Mark 8:22-26.) The Lord even used His own spit to touch the tongue of a deaf mute—and the man began speaking! He healed from a distance, spoke healing words, laid His hands on people, and allowed people to touch Him. Different methods, same Healer. The multitude of methods reveals His great desire to heal.

If my body was full of pain and ravaged with disease, I would not care how He healed me, as long as He did. Be open to all of His ways and be assured that the Great Physician knows exactly what He is doing. Remember, when you find Jesus you will find healing. Just pursue the Healer as the woman with the issue of blood did and healing will come.

## JESUS HEALS AN ENEMY

In case you are still in doubt regarding God's desire to heal you, this next example should prove His heart once and for all. As He was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, a mob approached with clubs and swords to arrest Him. Peter took out his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, the servant of the high priest, who was part of the mob.

You would think that Christ would have let that man suffer and bleed. After all, he was part of the group trying to capture Him so He could be tortured and executed. If the Son had a right to withhold healing from anyone, surely it would be Malchus.

Instead, He touched the man's ear and healed him. (See Luke 22:51.) If Jesus healed a person who came to take Him to His crucifixion, why would not He heal you? Even if you do not love Him, He still loves you and wants to heal you, your friends, and family.

## HE NEVER CHANGES

The Bible shows us how the Lord treated the sick while He walked this Earth. In fact, He constantly healed people, and His purpose

has never changed. ***“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness” (Matthew 9:35 NIV).***

This same God who brought healing to the multitudes is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (See Hebrews 13:8.) The very mention of His name is ointment to the sick. (See Song of Solomon 1:3.) The name of Jesus can heal any sickness in the world. If His name can save a soul, nothing is too difficult for Him.

To deny His desire to heal today is to ignore the fact that He was scourged and beaten. The Old Testament prophesies that the Messiah would heal. “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5 NKJV). To brush aside His ability and willingness to heal is to challenge the validity of God’s Word.

The character of Christ does not change. What He so willingly did two thousand years ago, He longs to do today. To believe otherwise is to go against everything Scripture teaches. You cannot tell others, “God can heal, but He does not want to heal today” and still believe the entirety of the Bible. Why read Scripture if it cannot be applied right now? If the promises of His Word are for this present time, either they all are valid, or none of them are.

Christ is a “now” God. *It is really quite simple. If He is alive and has not changed His heart toward you, He still wants to heal you.* If your doctor has given up on you and you have only a few days to live, Jesus is able to heal you right now.

Cancer dies in the presence of Christ. If you are lying in a hospital room as you read this book, He can get you out of that bed in an instant. If you have been in a wheelchair, know that He can touch your body and make you walk today. Regardless of your circumstances, the Lord is still your Healer.

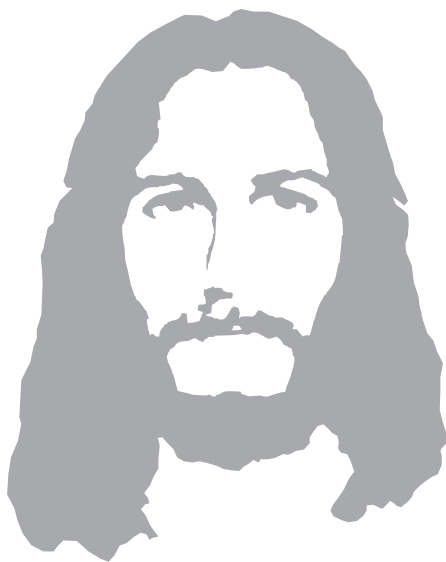
This is the moment to trust in Jesus. Talk to the one who loves you more than you can imagine, and ask Him to heal your body.

*Dear Jesus,*

## HEALER

*Thank You for wanting to heal me. You are my Healer. Thank You for being passionate about healing me. You have not changed and I know You can touch my body today. I know You want to heal me because of Your great love. I believe that You are good and full of compassion. I believe You suffered and died for my healing. You were scourged for this moment in my life. I surrender my body to You right now, and ask You to stretch out your hand and remove my sickness. Make me perfectly healthy, so I can tell others about You. I love You. In Your name I ask this. Amen.*





## CHAPTER 11

# *Servant*

*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

—MARK 10:45

**G**OD CAME to Earth to serve the very people who were sinning against Him. The Bible says that our sin causes Him anguish: “The Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. So the Lord was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart” (Genesis 6:5-6). In spite of our wickedness, He came to serve us.

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In an age when pride fills people's hearts as never before, it is vital that He be known as servant. I have attended church since I was a boy, and have been around various denominations and ministries for years. In the process I have found that the people who have most impacted my walk with Christ are those who know the Lord as a Servant. They are the ones that I choose to receive guidance from and have a deep relationship with. You can see Him in their eyes.

Why is this the case? Because they know the *real* Jesus and have a genuine understanding of the fact that He came to serve others first and put himself last. If the Son of God placed the needs of others ahead of His own, we should do the same.

If this example were truly followed today, men and women would be drawn to Him in an astounding way through our lives. As you continue reading, I pray that the Holy Spirit will open your heart to three truths. First, that He will allow you to see Jesus as a humble servant. Second, that He will cause you to become a servant like Christ. And third, that you will fall deeply in love with Him as you see Him in this light.

*To be a Christian means to be like Christ. He is our role model. When we stop serving others, we cease to be like Him, which means we are not living a genuine Christian life.*

## HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Think about the Creator of the entire universe becoming a man. (See John 1:14.) This fact alone carries enough meaning and depth to change our lives. However, the Holy Spirit has much He wants to reveal to you as you discover Christ's meekness. For Him to leave the halls of Heaven to be born in a lowly manger is absolutely amazing. He was not born in a palace or a temple, but in a place for the keeping of animals, because there was no room for Him anywhere else.

To think that the God of Heaven slept where animals lived and was wrapped in rags is beyond our understanding. If anyone ever deserved to be honored with the best of care and adorned with the most expen-

sive linen, it was Jesus. This did not happen—and it shows you the humility of our loving Lord from His very arrival on Earth.

Not only did He enter this world in humble surroundings, but He was raised in a lowly city called Nazareth. This was not a community for the most respected and wealthy, nor was it a place that everyone wanted to move to. In fact, one of the Lord's own disciples commented, "Nazareth. Can *anything* good come from Nazareth?" (See John 1:46.)

Should He not have been born in Jerusalem near the wealth of the Temple, and raised by the high priest or some other person of influence? After all, this was the Son of God. Should He not have been brought up by a king, since He is the King of Kings?

But this was not God's plan. The Father desired that His Son come to Earth in humility. Mary and Joseph were not royalty. Joseph was a carpenter, not a king. It is significant that Christ was raised by a family of common people in a neighborhood that was frowned upon. What we think is so important in life, really is not important to Him at all.

Perhaps you live in a Nazareth-type setting and your family is looked down upon. If you have been treated with less honor and respect because of your lack of finances or the location of your home, He knows exactly how you feel. He understands your pain.

## A SERVANT WITH HUMILITY

Jesus' entire life and ministry speaks of His unmatched humility. It is impossible to be a true servant in the eyes of God if a humble spirit does not reside within you. Aside from discovering and falling in love with the Lord, being humble is vital. It puts reputation and self aside, and places others first.

Even true prayer depends on humility. We pray with a lowly heart, making sure His desires come first. We cannot truly fellowship with the Lord if a spirit of meekness is not present. To come to Him in prayer means to admit that He is totally able and we are not. And to pray for others, we must put their needs before our own.

Many pray for individuals with the attitude, “If he or she receives what I am praying for, I will get the credit.” True humility operates on an entirely different level and does not care about receiving honor or recognition. The main concern in prayer is for God to meet the need of the person so that Jesus will be glorified. “But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12). This is the way that Christ honors people. When humility is present, we find favor in God’s eyes.

## A HISTORY-CHANGING EVENT

Let us examine the life of the Lord and allow the Spirit to reveal this humble Servant to our heart. Imagine being an onlooker that sacred day when Jesus showed up at the River Jordan. This was the moment John the Baptist had been waiting for. It was the hour when he would have the privilege of laying his eyes on the Son of God.

How I wish I could have been there. When love burns within you for Christ, seeing Him is a cherished experience. John had preached about Jesus when he shouted to the crowds, “This is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me’” (John 1:15).

The Lord’s arrival on Earth was the central theme of John’s ministry. His assignment was to prepare the hearts of the people for the Messiah. Now the moment arrived when the Son walked up to the shores of the Jordan River, and John saw the one whom he had been so faithfully serving all this time. What a wonderful reward.

Finally, they spoke to one another as the people looked on. The massive crowds that had been gathering to be baptized by John were witnesses of this history-changing event. The two of them stared into each other’s eyes as they understood the weight of the moment. The Word of God, Jesus, looking at His representative, John. A man standing with God.

The holy waters of baptism were flowing past them as the heavenly Father paid close attention to this meeting. In just minutes He would send the Holy Spirit upon His Son and speak from Heaven saying,

“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17 NKJV). This gave Him the power He would need to complete His mission.

However, Jesus had one more requirement to fulfill. What was the final act of obedience for the Holy Spirit to rest upon the Lord? He would have to be baptized by John.

It is amazing to think that out of the two, John would baptize the Son of God—and not the other way around. But God desired that it happen this way. (See John 1:32-34.) Jesus insisted that John baptize Him.

As a human, who was John to baptize God? Jesus shows His character as a humble servant by willingly putting His reputation aside to please His Father and identify with mankind. *The final step before receiving the power of the Holy Spirit was obedience rooted in humility.*

Literally thousands of people reached out and pulled on Him as He ministered to the masses for three years. As tiring as that must have been, He continued to help the people. He fed them, healed them, saved them, cast out demons, and preached to the multitudes. From village to village and house to house, the Servant moved forward regardless of how fatigued His body felt.

## THE WASHING OF FEET

You would think that after years of serving others that Christ would spend His final night with the disciples by focusing on himself and letting them minister to Him. Yet, Jesus does something so typical of His heart; He washes the feet of the men who gave up everything to follow Him. God washed the dirty feet of men!

I believe these words from Scripture will sink into the depths of your heart:

*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water*

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*into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.*

*Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, "Lord, are You washing my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this." Peter said to Him, "You shall never wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (John 13:3-8 NKJV).*

Holy treasures are hidden in this passage that we cannot overlook. Jesus wants you to take away more from this account than the fact He washed their feet. He desires for you to go deeper in your understanding.

*Notice the Scripture says, "The Father had given all things into His hands." He had everything available to Him, but "His hands" did not start grabbing for gold, or riches of the world, or the crown of His kingdom. With all the authority at His disposal, He chose not to perform a miracle, but to serve. He wanted more than anything to hold the unclean feet of those He loved in His hands as He washed them.*

These would be the same feet that would forsake Him in His hour of need. Yet His love chose their filth over His honor. *Taking the role of a servant, Jesus had wrapped a foot-washing towel around Him. In other words, He wanted to wear the towel and have it bound to Him. The Lord was showing us, "I am not just serving you, I am a Servant." He wanted that title.*

This passage also states that He "laid aside His garments" before He wrapped himself with this cloth. Those were clothes He wore as He taught, healed, and provided for the multitudes. He symbolically lays aside the honored roles of Teacher, Healer, and Provider, and embraces the role of a lowly Servant.

## ON HIS KNEES

If we are really going to be like Christ, we must take the initiative to disrobe ourselves of all honor and authority. When we do, we are actually being honored by the Father in such a moment. *When we feel the lowliest, we are the highest in the eyes of God because we have become like His Son.*

The Lord could not have washed their feet standing up. The knees of the Son of God had to bend on the floor for this occasion. The one who held the breath of the disciples in His hand was on His knees doing the job of a slave. No king would ever consider doing such a thing. But Jesus was no ordinary king. This Servant King was displaying His genuine love. He laid aside honor and power, and did not care what others thought of Him. This is the true Jesus who is worth loving—the Jesus we should follow.

## THE X-RAY OF A HEART

One of my greatest privileges was being the pastor of a wonderful church in Orange County, California from 2005 to 2008. The experience changed me forever. It was during this chapter of my journey when the heart of the Lord became my desire. It is also where I learned just how valuable each and every person is to God.

I was blessed to minister to a group of people I love so much, many of whom are continuing to speak this powerful message of Jesus today. When I first began to pastor, I had many dedicated individuals helping me with the church. They were passionate as they volunteered their time and energy in the work of God. Our church staff was second to none and I had never worked with a group who loved God as they did. They helped oversee so many things that needed to be taken care of, so I could minister freely. I am so appreciative of their hearts being in the right place.

However, I must admit there was a time when mine was not where it needed to be. I can recall a time when my focus was on myself—and

I even began to think these people were there for me and my needs. How mistaken I was.

Looking back, I can see that I was ministering in a way that was contrary to the example of the Lord. About a year and a half into being their pastor, Jesus became incredibly real in my life. After I began to discover the Lord's feelings and heart, it opened my eyes to see how different He was from me. I suddenly realized that these church members and staff were not just there for me, but I was to be there for them.

If they were going to serve me, should not I be willing to do the same? This aspect of His character changed my life as both a pastor and a follower of Christ. As my heart began to burn with this message, I could sense that my time as a local pastor was coming to an end. Nevertheless, until God moved me, I would be obedient and give Him and His people my very best.

Just before this chapter in my life would close, He had a test in store for me that I never saw coming. I had asked the Lord to forgive me for the pride that was once in my heart regarding the early days of the church. When I changed and started putting others first, I felt I had passed the test and learned a valuable lesson. I could not have been more wrong. God wanted to break me completely before I would move on.

## EXPERIENCING THE SERVANT

I was in bed at about five o'clock in the morning when I literally saw myself washing the feet of the leaders in our church. It was such a vivid image! It was as if I was physically there. I saw the room we met in for Sunday services. I saw the people. Then I heard that still, small voice of the whispering Shepherd say, "Wash their feet." It was more real than any audible voice.

When Jesus speaks to us, it touches our entire being. I knew it was Him. Then He added, "If you do not do this, you will have failed the test of being a pastor and the last three years will have been a wasted time for you."



While these words were said with love, they were extremely direct. I woke up surprised and shaken. I felt I was not to share this with anyone. For the next few weeks, I was constantly thinking about this act of obedience. For the life of me, I could not get it out of my mind.

One of the people on our team was my brother, Theo. His wife Rachel was also in leadership. It is one thing to wash the feet of staff members and church leaders, but it is another to wash the feet of your brother and sister-in-law. However, God's message was unmistakable and He was not going to budge. It had to be done.

When the night arrived, I began to preach on "Loving Jesus— The Highest Calling." I knew that every second I preached I was inching closer and closer to the moment of breaking. I would either say "yes" or "no" to the one I love. There was no way around it.

When I was finished speaking, I asked for buckets and cloths to be brought out to the front of the church. We lined up a row of chairs by the podium. The people were glued to their seats in complete silence. They knew what was about to happen and could sense the presence of God in the room.

I asked the leaders to come forward and sit down in front of the people. The breaking of my heart needed to be public and the congregation needed to see it. When I took the first cloth, an overwhelming sense of His Spirit swept over me. I began to weep like a baby. I could hear others crying all over the room.

I washed my friend Tim's feet and my brother's feet. I continued to wash the rest of the leaders' feet. Tears were streaming down their faces as the Lord was touching them. As I continued weeping, the Servant was teaching me a lesson that I would never forget. If I was going to share Jesus with them, my final test would be to experience His heart. I had to know the one I was talking about.

Then the leaders began to wash the feet of others in the congregation. A holy reverence for the presence of the Holy Spirit permeated the room. We knew we were meeting with God. It was by far the most touching moment in the history of our church. I knew that my obedience had pleased the Master and I had passed His test.

## TRUE SERVANTS

It is not by accident that foot washing was the last act Jesus would perform during the final night He would spend with His disciples, following the Last Supper. He knew that this event would be remembered by many for thousands of years to come.

When a person knows that their time with loved ones is drawing to an end, they will often say or do something that the loved ones will always remember. My grandmother, just before her passing, exclaimed, “I love my children!” She wanted us to never forget this.

The Son of God washed feet that night so we would never forget the importance of being humble servants to everyone. I believe this is the reason the Lord asked me to follow His example and wash the feet of our church members. He wanted us to remember to always take the lowest position.

How awful pride is, and how strongly it fights us! I believe that if I had not obeyed His call and finished strong, the power of the Holy Spirit would not have come upon me to write this book.

*Regardless of our title or position, He is our perfect example.* Who had a greater right to cling to His position than the Lord? Pastor, when is the last time you washed another person’s feet in your congregation? Man of God, what about you? Preacher, have you ever considered washing the feet of your staff? Would you be willing if the Holy Spirit placed it on your heart? What would keep you from becoming a servant just like Jesus? Could it be pride? We know what pride brings—a fall. (See Proverbs 16:18.)

Those in ministry should be the first to become servants to people. We should have a burning desire to be like Christ and show the world what He is like, even if it breaks common protocol and tradition. Dear pastor, how many times have you been served a glass of water by a precious person in your church? Would you be willing to do the same? Would not it be just like the Lord if we as leaders would be open to pouring these wonderful people a glass of water?

The purpose of everyone who claims to be a Christian is not to merely talk about the Master, but it is to know Him. How can we do this if we do not do what He said and what He demonstrated?

The Lord's example applies to all those who follow Him, and not just those in full-time ministry. Are you willing to look like the lowest of men for His sake? We will not discover Him in His fullness until we experience His feelings. This can only come through brokenness. If you really want to know the Savior and remain on His path, humility is a must. "He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way" (Psalm 25:9).

## FROM SERVANT TO LORD

As you read the words of this passage of Scripture, may you sense His heart being opened to you:

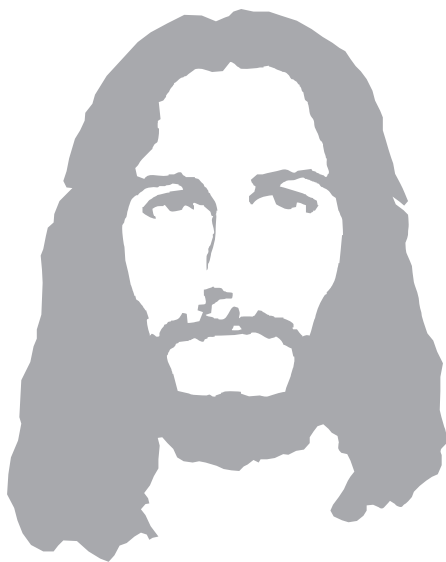
*You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a Cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).*

It was Christ's humility that caused Him to be rewarded by the Father with the most matchless name in existence. My friend, regardless of what you have experienced or seen, this is the real Jesus. He is the one you need—the one who will change your life forever!

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*Dear Jesus,*

*What a humble Servant You are. Thank You for giving Your all, so that I could know and love You. I am sorry for being prideful. Forgive me for putting myself before You and others. I am amazed at Your humility. It makes me love You so much more. Help me serve those around me. Make me a selfless servant for Your name's sake. Amen.*



## CHAPTER 12

# *Outcast*

*“But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”*

—LUKE 17:25 NIV

**O**NE OF the greatest tragedies the world has ever known is rejecting the one who only wanted to love them. Treating the Lord as an outcast was the most despicable act of hatred and pride that man has ever demonstrated. May the Holy Spirit help you make room for Him in your heart, even though so many dismiss Him.

We remember the wonderful celebration by the angels and the gifts the wise men brought to the newborn King. We know of the worship of the shepherds and the beautiful star that hung over Bethlehem. But

we forget that some people wanted the holy child dead before He even had the chance to live.

When the wise men came to King Herod regarding the birth of Christ, the Scripture says, “King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem” (Matthew 2:3). Herod was consumed with jealousy and anger, and ordered the murder of all male babies who were two years old or younger. He thought this mass slaughter of infants would certainly kill Jesus, but already God knew about his malicious plot. He sent an angel to warn Joseph of Herod’s evil plan, and instructed him to take the newborn to Egypt. This helpless baby was under attack before He could even walk. It was the beginning of many more rejections to come.

## REJECTED BY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Nothing hurts more than when your family does not accept who you are. “For even his brothers did not believe in him” (John 7:5 NKJV). When your family does not support you, it usually causes deep wounds with great pain. Christ experienced this anguish with His own family.

One day He returned to His hometown of Nazareth to bring a new revelation of God’s kingdom, heal the sick, and perform miracles among these hurting people. Those who knew Him as a boy simply viewed him as a carpenter’s son, and refused to believe that He was actually the Messiah that they had been waiting for.

So what did they do? Instead of welcoming the Lord as their loving Savior, they were filled with rage and tried to throw Him off a cliff!

You can imagine how rejected He must have felt at that moment. He had prepared His life for thirty years in perfect obedience to His Father. Now was His moment to help those He loved and set them free with His power. Tragically, His offer was rejected.

Following His baptism in the Jordan River, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to endure forty days and nights of fasting and temptation. Finally the appointed time had come to begin His ministry. The Father had sent the Holy Spirit to empower Him to perform

any miracle He needed. His words would now bring life to the most shattered soul. Israel had waited centuries for the Messiah to appear, and now was His moment.

How did the people in His hometown respond? They wanted to kill Him! God's Son came all the way from Heaven to save and heal, but "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:22 NKJV).

## HE LEFT THROUGH THE CROWD

When the Lord was rejected in His hometown, He did not remain there and beg to be accepted and honored. *With a spirit of gentleness He departed.* When He walked out of town, the people did not realize that their hope had also gone.

He departed in a way that made it all the more painful for those who pushed Him aside. After Jesus preached in the local synagogue, many became upset: "Jumping up, they mobbed him and forced him to the edge of the hill on which the town was built. They intended to push him over the cliff, *but he passed right through the crowd and went on his way*" (Luke 4:29-30).

What a powerful example of how Jesus will depart from people when they do not want Him. He passed through them so closely that they could reach out and touch Him. He did not run away from the crowd to escape. Instead, He walked through them, which made His departure that much more dramatic. *The Savior was in their midst and He left so slowly. They rejected the Son of God, and one day they will be reminded of just how close they were to the Master.*

## NO PLACE TO REST

There has never been, and never will be, a more committed and hard-working person than Christ. He covered land by foot, climbed mountains to pray, walked on water to get to His disciples, was pulled on by thousands for healing, preached to multitudes, and traveled from village to village setting people free. He would ultimately die on

a Cross that He chose to carry.

You would think that many would eagerly open their homes to Him and offer a place to rest. He loved Jerusalem and wept over its sin. The Lord healed many in that city and taught in the Temple, but He could never rest there. The religious leaders constantly conspired together to kill Him. He never felt safe in the city He wept over. He was forced to go to the Garden of Gethsemane to find a place of peace. This King had to sleep where the poorest would lay their heads.

One day Jesus had healed all the sick in Capernaum, the town where He would make His headquarters. A scribe saw the healing power of this loving Savior and said to Him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matthew 8:19-20 NKJV). The one who had just healed the entire city had no place to call His own.

### GIVE THE OUTCAST A PLACE TO REST

One evening my wife and I were on our way to a dinner being held by some friends that we greatly admired. We were excited and honored at the thought of being with them. We got dressed up for the occasion and walked into the restaurant, only to reach the table and find there were no seats reserved for us. No one made any attempt to make room for us or find a larger table. Everyone at the table just stared at us, which made us feel really uncomfortable and out of place. We quietly walked out embarrassed and found somewhere else to eat.

To be honest, we felt like outcasts in that situation. Imagine Christ walking up to the table of your heart, wanting to sit down and spend time with you. How would you react? Would you just stare?

How many times does He face rejection every day by millions around the world? How must He feel when He is ignored by you and has to find another heart who will let Him “sit down”? Please never make Him feel like an outcast again.

What do you say when He asks for your time in intimate prayer? Instead of brushing Him aside, consider His feelings the next time



He wants to be with you. Recall how you felt when you were not welcomed by others. This will keep you aware of what Jesus so often goes through. After all of the miles He walked and messages He preached, only a few took the time to minister to Him.

At this very moment, many around the world regard Him as an Outcast. How will you treat Him? Will you open your arms with love and invite Him in?

## OPEN THE DOOR OF YOUR HEART

Today the place He desires to rest most is in your heart. Allow Him to enter and never reject Him again. Make it like the home of Lazarus, just outside of Jerusalem. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus always kept the door open and greeted Him warmly. They showed the Lord the love and honor He deserved. In return, we are told that “Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus” (John 11:5).

*Mother Basilea Schlink’s ministry taught me this great lesson: When you give the Lord access to your heart as a place to be loved and rest, He will go out of His way to proclaim His love for you, just as He did for this family. The greatest honor you can have is to be the one to whom Jesus proclaims His love. As a result, after Lazarus died and his sisters were grieving, Jesus came and raised him from the dead. The Lord will always come through for those who lovingly open their hearts to Him.*

## A SIMPLE REQUEST

One night when I was twelve, my church had an all-night “lock in” for young people in the massive St. Nicholas Cathedral in Tarpon Springs, Florida. It was a beautiful, historical church that my ancestors helped to build. The flickering candlelight mixed with the stained glass and the ornate artwork was breathtaking.

I had already given my heart to Jesus by this time and had been faithfully reading my Bible. Even at that age, I knew the importance of welcoming Him at all times. I grabbed the hand of a close friend of

mine and we bowed our heads as we sat on the old wooden pews. As I prayed, I invited the Lord by saying, “You are welcome here.”

The loving presence of God immediately overtook me and I could sense Him so strongly. It was as if a warm blanket of peace and power covered us. I did not want to say anything to my friend because I did not want him to think he had to feel what I was experiencing. However, he immediately looked at me with huge eyes and asked, “Do you feel that?”

We felt honored as we had the privilege of sensing Christ in such a unique and real way. He responded to the simplicity of our hearts because He knew how badly we wanted Him. *When so many millions cast Him away, He yearns for those who truly desire His presence.*

Our prayer to welcome the Lord was answered in seconds. Now He wants to find rest in your heart, as He did with me that unforgettable evening.

## HE WILL ONLY SETTLE WHERE HE IS WELCOME

Jesus loves everyone, but He will not take rest just anywhere. *He settles where He is received and loved.* Just think, even though He created all of the Earth, He never had a home of His own. Still, He is so polite and gentle that He never forced himself into any place, regardless of the fact He owns it all. When certain cities did not open their arms to the Lord, He departed and went somewhere else where He was wanted. Are you not the same way?

He is not impressed by the beauty of the location, but the hunger of the heart. He opted for Bethany, a humble village, over the prestige of the grand Temple of Jerusalem. Why? Because the people of Bethany showed Him love and made room for Him. He felt safe there.

Again, when Jesus was born they did not have room for Him in the inn. Rejected by the innkeeper, He was then taken to a humble manger because He was welcomed there.

Perhaps you do not feel good enough for Him, or worry that your heart is too filthy. Have no fear. He will settle there if you will invite

Him. He does not care about your family history, the amount of money you have, or the neighborhood you live in. If you become a haven of rest for the Lord, He will gladly enter and reside within you forever.

Whether your body is sick with disease or you are locked in prison, the Outcast desires to live in you. If you have repeatedly pushed Him away, He still wants in. Remember, His birth was announced to both the wealthy King Herod and to the lowly shepherds. But only the shepherds had the honor of seeing the baby because they wanted Him.

## NO OTHER NAME

Today, Jesus is being driven out of so many places and hearts. The name of Jesus infuriates millions, and their goal is to remove Him completely from our society. While His name cannot be mentioned in schools, other religions are enthusiastically embraced and accepted.

The name of Jesus in some government circles is no longer allowed to be mentioned in prayer. Sadly, this is even happening in churches that talk about everything but the one who is the head of the Church. He purchased the Church with His own blood, yet He is forgotten by the very churches He redeemed. (See Acts 20:28.) Systems and programs have replaced the living Christ in many congregations. Rather than mentioning the blood He shed, “feel good” topics have taken center stage, hoping not to offend anyone.

What is the benefit of having a church that is packed to capacity if the people in the seats have not met Christ in His fullness? What good is it to increase church membership without seeing souls saved?

I am not talking about using His name at the end of a prayer. Jesus must be the center of all ministries from start to finish. His holy name is more than a postage stamp at the close of a blessing. If He is not the focal point of ministry, there can be no eternal results.

***Anything produced outside the work of Christ will fade away. It is not enough to just mention the word “God.” The Bible says, “There is salvation in no one else. God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). That name is Jesus.***

*When the Son is ignored, the Father is dishonored.* In John 5:23 NKJV we read, “He who does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent Him.”

The desire of every Christian should be to love and honor God. If Jesus is not lifted up in our services, daily lives, and ministries, the Father is not honored. When Christ is no longer the focus and He is conveniently pushed aside, it is proof that the Holy Spirit is no longer leading. Jesus said, “He [the Holy Spirit] will testify of Me” (John 15:26 NKJV).

Christ declared, “You will receive power, after the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses to Me” (Acts 1:8 NKJV). The Holy Spirit’s major purpose on Earth is to reveal Jesus to mankind. If you want to find a life or ministry that is led by the Spirit, look for one that is in love with Jesus. Return to the one who owns the Church. Let us never exclude Him while we claim to work for Him.

Pastor, priest, reverend, minister, and believer, please do not ever forget the Lord again. Make Him the heart of every sermon, ministry, and action.

## CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT CHRIST

Should not Christ be the focus of our “Christianity”? Many feel unfulfilled after being around some Christians and churches. They are looking for something different than what they have seen in the world, only to discover that the same sins destroy the churches and ministries they have attempted to connect with. Many are defeated by the same sins and addictions that they fought prior to joining church. This is due to a so-called Christianity that lacks Christ.

When Jesus and His suffering are forgotten, sin will become more entrenched in our lives. (See Romans 1:21-32.) We must never forget Him, His death, and the agony of the Cross. Every leader and believer should note that the early first century church of Ephesus lost their “first love” for the Master. He warned them that if they did not return to Him, He would remove the “lamp,” which was the church.

Not much later, the church at Ephesus had their lamp taken away. It is a dangerous thing to lose our focus and love. It is not enough to know a religious “system.” We must know the Lord himself.

The forgetful are unthankful, and those who fail to offer gratitude cannot even approach the Lord. We are to “enter his gates with thanksgiving” (Psalm 100:4). How can we be thankful if we have forgotten Him?

*We must always remember His walk up Golgotha’s hill with a heavy Cross, the Father turning His face on His Son, the vicious words spoken by those mocking Him, the shame of being naked, and last but not least, the precious blood that was shed on our behalf.*

## MOCKED AND FORGOTTEN

Today, the Lord is being forgotten by families who no longer stop to thank Him for the meal set before them. He is being ignored by businessmen who once trusted God to provide. By young people who forget about the love they knew as children. Officials in authority, who once prayed in Jesus’ name for His help to get into office, now will not mention Him in public. Our Lord must feel grieved because so many have mocked His holy name and forgotten about His sacrificial death.

He was mocked by a small crowd as He suffered on the Cross, but today He is ridiculed worldwide through movies, television programs, and the media. Some individuals have actually devoted their lives to making Christ a distant, historical figure of the past. To forget about Him is to crush His heart.

I am amazed when I hear how some men and women have generously donated a kidney in order to save the life of a loved one. What a selfless act of true love! Imagine if the donor never heard a “thank you” from the one who received the kidney that saved his or her life. Yet, the Lord gave so much more; He gave His life. After all He did, so many fail to recognize Him and are even ashamed to mention His name in public.

Unless their hearts change, He will be ashamed of them. He tells us, “If anyone is ashamed of me and my message, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in his glory and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels” (Luke 9:26).

Christ died for the world, yet so few want Him. As long as you have breath, stand for Him and remind everyone of the loving name of Jesus.

### “AWAY WITH HIM!”

As a freshman in college, I turned away from Jesus and went my own way. One day I was walking to class depressed and under conviction. I knew that God was not pleased with the way I was living, and I was ashamed of myself whenever I looked in a mirror. I had not prayed or read the Bible in months. I was absolutely miserable.

As I walked through the campus at the University of Florida, with each step I seemed to sink deeper in the void of emptiness and guilt. I had stayed up late the night before and was exhausted. I had no desire to do anything, let alone sit in classes for several hours and then try to find the energy to practice with the golf team. I just wanted to disappear into my dorm room.

All of a sudden, I heard the screaming of a large crowd coming up the hill behind me. The loud chorus of voices chanted in unison, “Away with Him! Crucify Him! Kill Him!”

I could not believe my ears. Was I going crazy or was this really happening?

I turned around and saw a huge group of people dressed in the same type of clothing people would have worn in Israel two thousand years ago. In the middle of the huge crowd was a man covered in blood, wearing a crown of thorns, and carrying a huge cross on his back.

I could not believe what I was seeing! Was it a vision where I was somehow transported back in time to witness this event? As I investigated I discovered it was a group of young people from a local church. They were presenting a Passion Play as an Easter outreach to the campus.

As I watched these actors ridicule this loving Savior, my heart started breaking. Before my eyes was a vivid reminder of what He went through for me. It was as if God had sent this group of people here just for me.

The mob continued marching up the hill to the busiest area of the campus. As the students came out of their classes, they were immediately drawn to the crowd to find out what was happening.

The actors continued to yell “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” as they lifted up the man acting as Christ up on the cross. As hundreds of students watched, one of the actors preached the message of His love to all the onlookers.

As I watched all these things take place, I knew this was not a coincidence. It was the very thing I needed at that moment in my life. And then I heard that still, soft voice speak to me, *I still want you with all my heart, even if you do not want Me*. He was still seeking me, even when I was not seeking Him!

I silently prayed, *Lord, I cannot get away from you if I tried. You are chasing me down no matter where I go.*

I looked around at the faces of the other students. Some were shocked by what they saw. Others were angry and mocking, like they were part of the mob crucifying Him. I heard others who were making sarcastic comments and were upset that such a display would be allowed on campus. What is it about Jesus that draws such opposite responses—either love or hatred?

It was at this point that I realized I had to choose which side I would be on. Did I want to keep living a life of rebellion, or would I draw near to Him again?

God used this experience to bring me back to himself, and I will be forever grateful to those student actors who were courageous enough to come to a hostile campus and present the gospel.

## WHY HATE JESUS?

Some people become absolutely infuriated when they hear the name of Jesus. It brings out the best or the worst in people. Talking about a

generic God does not offend some people, but if you specifically mention Jesus, it is an entirely different matter. Even some who attend church are comfortable talking about “God” as long as you do not mention Jesus. Why? Because He is still hated today, just as He was when He walked on the Earth.

Jesus said, “They hated me without cause” (John 15:25 NKJV). Perhaps because of your love for the Lord, you are now looked down upon and rejected by those who once loved you. This should not come as a surprise. The Lord warned, “And everyone will hate you because you are my followers” (Luke 21:17).

Why are you hated? It is because you belong to Jesus. I am not talking about a dislike, but a determined hate for Christ and all who follow Him. As long as the world’s system is in place, this will never stop.

This is not shocking at all. The Savior was continually mocked in the midst of His suffering. On another occasion they accused Him of having a demon. This was after He told the crowd that He was the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. What a harsh response to such a loving statement. To compare the Holy Spirit to a demon is the worst of hate.

## HOW HAS HE WRONGED YOU?

When the Son of God stood trial, His accusers were given an option. In honor of the Passover celebration, they could choose to free one prisoner—either the Son of God, or a murderer named Barabbas. They picked the murderer. The killer was chosen to receive mercy over the Savior!

Even today, many would pick Barabbas over Christ. Sin is constantly chosen in society over God’s Son and His ways. When Pilate asked the crowd what he should do with Jesus, they screamed “Crucify Him!” Pilate’s response was “Why, what evil has he done?” (Matthew 27:23 NKJV).

I echo Pilate’s words by asking, “What evil has Jesus done?” He has never harmed you, so why should you despise Him?



Please do not look at the faults of others and blame it on Him. If you are upset with some Christians, I will admit we have been inconsistent. Please forgive us. If you do not trust preachers and pastors, we understand. We have messed up an embarrassing number of times. How wrong we have been!

Are you sick of hearing sermons that are driven by financial greed? This too is wrong. Are you tired of church politics and pride? Please forgive us. Jesus is nothing like what I have described above.

Unfortunately, many of us who are in church and ministry fail to act like the Lord behind the pulpit and at home. Forgive us. Please, never take your anger and hurt out on Him. He does not deserve it. Look past men who have damaged and soiled His precious name and see Christ himself. You will discover that there is no one who should be loved more than Him.

I beg you. Do not hate Jesus. He is wonderful—and He loves you.

## A LONELY ROAD

The Lord will lead you to a secluded place as you are searching for Him. You will begin to experience rejection from others. He will allow you to chase after Him, but as you pursue this Outcast, you will leave your sins behind. You will find Him in the lonely places.

*“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. I will give her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; She shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. ‘And it shall be, in that day,’ says the Lord, ‘That you will call Me “My Husband,” and no longer call Me “My Master” (Hosea 2:14-16 NKJV).*

If you feel sad and stagnant, spend time alone with Christ and you will one day sing as you did when you “left Egypt”—your old life.

## OUTCAST

This is the place where you will find your heavenly Husband. Love will come to you and bondage will disappear.

The Bible says, “Truly, you are God, who hides Yourself” (Isaiah 45:15 NKJV). As He “hides” from you, everything that once defiled you becomes a thing of the past. His path of loneliness removes you from the people and things that once attracted you. The Lord has His way of hiding from us at times because He desires that you search for Him. This searching soon turns to an insatiable hunger.

May He look at your heart and say, “Regardless of how I am treated by others, this is a heart that will always welcome me. It is a place of rest.”

## PURE LOVE

When Jesus was hanging on the Cross, a criminal being crucified next to Him was the only one to defend Christ and speak kindly of Him. How could those witnessing this event hate someone so innocent and unselfish? Even the worst of people usually feel sympathy for another person in agony—even if they are enemies. How could they be so cruel to a man who showed such love and did so much good?

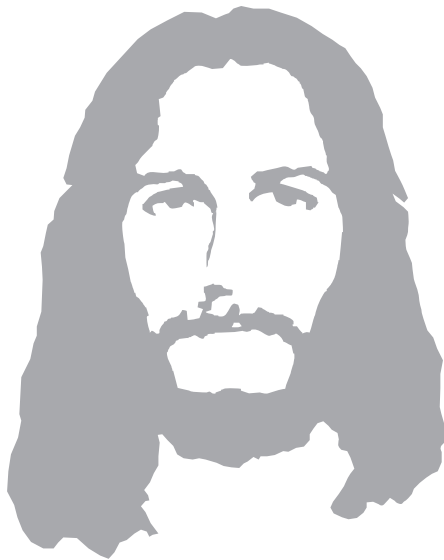
I pray you are not one of the many who still despise Him. How has Christ wronged you personally? What has He done that was so terrible? Was it His willingness to be tortured on the Cross? The tearing of His flesh by the scourging? The thorns that pierced His skull? The nails driven through His hands and feet? The spear in His side? The spit mixed with the blood on His beautiful face? The beard being ripped from His cheeks or taking the blows while blindfolded? Was it leaving Heaven’s beauty for this violent earth? Was it that He was lifted in horrible shame when He was crucified for all to see? What has He ever offered you that is anything less than pure love?

*Dear Jesus,*

*Many hate You for no reason. I want to love You with all my heart. Let me be someone who welcomes You, regardless*

*of how others treat You. Help me show the world who You really are. Never let me say no to You again. Jesus, let this heart always love You and cause those who hate You to see Your wonderful love. Amen.*





## CHAPTER 13

# *Prisoner*

*Then Jesus addressed the mob: “What is this— coming out after me with swords and clubs as if I were a dangerous criminal?”*

—MATTHEW 26:56 MSG

**M**OST PEOPLE have their own idea of Jesus—a mental picture of who He is and how He lived. We like to think of Him in a certain light. As appreciative as I am for all He did and continues to do for me, I am still pained to think of what He had to go through. Part of me is so thankful, yet another part cannot stand the thought of His suffering.

One of those times was when the meek Savior was falsely accused and betrayed. To think that the Son of God, who sat on the throne of Heaven, was arrested and treated as a criminal is unimaginable. Nevertheless, it is a truth that we must accept. With the help of the Holy Spirit, let us look deeper into this situation and experience the Lord's feelings during this horrific moment.

## JESUS' HEART DURING THE ARREST

How do you think the Lord must have felt when the soldiers came to arrest Him? The guards treated Him like He was some kind of dangerous criminal. Isaiah prophesied, "He was taken from prison and from judgment" (Isaiah 53:8 NKJV). Jesus had no intention of resisting their arrest so He told His accusers, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs to take Me? (Matthew 26:55 NKJV).

After helping and healing people His entire life, this is how He was repaid. Imagine if those whom you loved the most treated you this way. How would you feel if your goodness and generosity was repaid with evil and hate?

He loved those who arrested Him more than we could ever love anyone. Can you see His eyes as this was taking place? His loving gaze is filled with hurt. As He sweats blood, He gently extends His hands to those who bind them up and lead Him away.

Imagine how He felt. The sting of betrayal. The hurt as He watches His disciples flee. The shame of being treated like an animal.

This was the darkest of nights as love beyond compare would be violated so shamefully. For His entire time on Earth, He knew this hour would come, yet part of Him did not want it to arrive. (See Matthew 26:39.) He would often tell His disciples that the hour would be approaching: "Jesus began to tell them that the Son of Man must suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but three days later he would rise from the dead" (Mark 8:31).

How often this moment was on His mind. He tried to explain how painful it was to His friends, but they did not understand. See His face as He is led away. He set His own will aside in the Garden of Gethsemane, and now He walked into that dark valley as a criminal ready to die.

He loved all mankind, yet these men did not come in peace bearing gifts. Instead, they arrived with swords and clubs. How insulting to Him. How wrong it was. Although this was His Father's plan, it was still painful to embrace.

If you have fallen in love with Jesus, the thought of this injustice stabs at your heart. The King of Kings is treated like the scum of the Earth, and His disciples left Him alone to deal with the situation by himself. Those He came to save were now taking Him prisoner.

Can you picture those angry guards anxiously waiting to get their hands on Him? Can you envision how they grabbed Him, pushed Him around, and roughed Him up? This was the body prepared by His Father to become the sacrifice for all mankind. "Therefore, *when He came into the world*, He says, '...but a body You have prepared for Me'" (Hebrews 10:5 NKJV). The time had arrived for Him to surrender His own body into the hands of wicked men.

May He trust you to feel His pain. Christ desires that you know what He endured. He longs for you to cry, "Thank You, Jesus. You are wonderful and I love you."

## IMPRISONING JESUS TODAY

Jesus is still being persecuted. He is being persecuted and bound all over the world. The Bible tells us that when Saul of Tarsus was torturing Christians, the Lord appeared to him. This conversion experience changed Saul into the Apostle Paul.

When the Messiah revealed himself on that dusty road, He did not ask, "Why are you persecuting my people?" He said, "Why are you persecuting *me*?" (Acts 9:4 NKJV). When the message of Jesus is opposed, Christ himself is resisted. To keep His name out is to keep Him out.

## PRISONER

Jesus is the message. It is a living message, because He is alive. When His Name is mentioned, He arrives. When His bride is assaulted, He takes it as a direct attack on himself.

Should it be any other way? If someone violated your family, would not you take it personally? Would there be any difference if they attacked you? Of course not. Husband, if your wife was harassed, would not you see it as a personal assault? God is no different regarding His family.

## LOVE UNDER ATTACK

Now, more than ever, the beautiful message of His love is under attack, and there are those who want the name of Jesus to disappear forever. This is an attempt to imprison Him again. These men and women who are engaged in this battle do not realize they are not fighting a people or religion, but God himself.

Two thousand years ago, the people who hated this Prisoner thought they had defeated Him when they took Him captive. Little did they know that His love always overcomes all efforts to oppose Him. When the love of Christ is presented to an individual, it is beyond compare.

When one of the Roman soldiers who crucified Him faced this fact, he eventually admitted, "This man truly was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54). God's amazing love and power captured this soldier's soul.

Perhaps you have opposed Jesus most of your life. You are like one of those angry soldiers trying to arrest Him. You are not the first, and you will not be the last to fall into His loving arms. His love for you is greater than your hate for Him.

## THE LOWEST OF PITS

I have had the privilege of visiting Israel, the land that Jesus walked. I will never forget going down a dark staircase that led to a pit under the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, who demanded that Christ be put to death. I can still see the incredible depth of this dungeon.



Prisoners would be lowered through a hole at the top about fifteen feet to the bottom. I could not believe how dark it was in this pit, which would make a prisoner feel all alone and completely cut off from the rest of the world. This dungeon was where our Savior spent the night after He was arrested in Gethsemane.

Many believe that He was lowered and possibly dropped through that hole by a rope which was fastened to His body. Today, a Scripture is displayed in that dungeon for all to read. These words capture Jesus' loneliness when He was bound, lowered into the pit, and kept away from those He loved:

*“You have laid me in the lowest pit. In darkness, in the depths. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and You have afflicted me with all Your waves... You have put away my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an abomination to them; I am shut up, and I cannot get out.”*  
(Psalm 88:6-8 NKJV).

## GREED

What led to the arrest of Christ? What tied His hands? What lay in the hearts of those who were involved in His apprehension? What was Judas' motive in handing Jesus over?

We find one answer in the spiritual realm when satan entered the heart of this disciple. (See Luke 22:3.) Judas was a thief and would pilfer money from the offerings given to the ministry of Jesus. He openly disagreed with the Lord as to how the money should be used in God's work. (See John 12:5-6.)

Judas' greed ultimately led him to betray the Son of God for thirty pieces of silver. Judas shared in the ministry of God himself, yet he was willing to sell Jesus out for monetary gain. The love of money and the power of greed are incredibly underestimated. Even today, these ungodly attitudes will immediately quench the Lord's power in our

lives. It can short-circuit healing and will keep us from fulfilling our destinies. Greed ties Jesus' hands.

## JEALOUSY

Obviously, the religious leaders of the day felt threatened and were extremely jealous of the Lord. As the Pharisees discussed ways to stop Him, they told each other, "Look, the world has gone after Him" (John 12:19 NKJV). They could not stand the fact that this man from Galilee was attracting such huge crowds. They spread lies about Him and even accused Him of being a sinner.

Jealousy and envy were the motives behind His arrest and imprisonment. Jesus said, "This is your moment, the time when the power of darkness reigns" (Luke 22:53). When jealousy rears its ugly head, darkness gains even more strength. The Scripture explains what happens when jealousy and envy are released: "For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice" (James 3:16 NIV). Where jealousy and fighting exist, the devil is waiting at the door.

We are headed down the wrong road when we start envying others. How much do we want others to succeed? How much do we desire the church down the street to grow? How much do we want the ministry of someone else to be effective for Jesus' name? Do we really pray for the best for those around us? Are we threatened by the success of others? Jealousy certainly limits the power of the Lord in our lives.

## HYPOCRISY

Hypocrisy also played a role in imprisoning Jesus. Judas walked up to the Master in the Garden of Gethsemane and kissed Him, while his heart was full of the devil. Judas' actions in his culture meant that everything was well, while inside he was plotting against the Lord.

Jesus' response was, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48). The biggest problem for Christ was with the so-called religious leaders and teachers. Christ liked spending time with

genuine and sincere people. He openly opposed hypocrisy; acting one way in front of people and another way in private. Whenever going through the motions replaces sincere love for God, His power is inhibited in our lives.

When Judas came to the Lord, did he want to love Him or hurt Him? Did he come to help Jesus, or was he earning his thirty pieces of silver? God is not concerned about how often we attend church or Bible studies; He is looking at our motives. Whatever we do should be pleasing to Him. Hypocrisy still limits Jesus' work, even today.

## OFFENSE

The religious leaders who were behind the arrest of Jesus were deeply offended by Him, and their hatred was obvious to all. They despised His words and fought against everything He did. They criticized those who dined with Him. They nitpicked how His disciples ate and were furious whenever He healed the sick, especially when He did it on the Sabbath. They knew His miracles verified who He said He was.

Two thousand years later, things have not changed. Offense still ties His hands. When you carry animosity in your heart toward God or anyone else, you limit Him from working in your life.

Do you feel like Jesus has offended you? Are you upset with Him in any way? Do you hold Him responsible for the bad things that have happened in your life? People often blame God when people die unexpectedly or "before their time," and then their hearts become hardened. This also ties His hands today.

When Christ returned to His hometown of Nazareth, He went to help and heal them, to pour out His love. Yet, the Scripture records, "they were deeply offended and refused to believe in him" (Mark 6:3). In other words, they were resentful. "Who does He think He is to come here and tell us this stuff? We have known Him for years. He is just a carpenter's son!"

How did this tie His hands? "He could do no mighty work there" (Mark 6:5 NKJV). What a tragic loss! Imagine what joy they could

have experienced as He healed and saved lives. Offense is an attitude that imprisons Jesus' power today.

## HE WANTS TO BE FREE

More than ever, Jesus desires to be free to work on your behalf. He longs to regain His place in our churches and personal lives. Even if you do not particularly like attending church, He still wants to help you with your brokenness and pain.

If we think our ideas, programs, and methods are the answer, here are some questions. Are there fewer sick people in churches today? Are there less divorces and broken families? Are there fewer suicides? Is there a decline in addiction to porn and other perverse issues?

Drugs are running wild, even in youth groups and among church members. God desires to change all this, but the problem is that His hands are restricted by the same attitudes that bound His hands back then. He is just as able to work today because He has not lost power.

*I am often asked, "Why do miracles not happen now as they did in the days when the early Christians lived?" One reason is because we have strengthened our own hands and tied the Lord's hands. We depend more on our own abilities than we do on God's ability.* He has been doing great things throughout eternity, but we think we know better. If the nail-scarred hands of Christ were free again and ours were bound to His, awesome things would happen. Anything would be possible!

## A CLEAR EXAMPLE

Imagine if your child had a fatal illness that was about to kill him or her—but you had medicine in your pocket that would cure the disease. All the child would need was to swallow the pill, and then he or she would live. It would take less than a second. The sickness that caused so much pain and agony could be easily cured.

But suppose the doctors had their own opinions and ideas, and wanted nothing to do with your solution. They keep treating patients with the same old procedures that do not work. They brag about being

the experts in their field, so they are not interested in hearing an answer from an “uninformed” person who had not attended their schools. Yet, your child desperately needs help, and you love your child much more than the doctors do. This is your own flesh and blood.

Instead of permitting you to give your child the pill, the doctors tie you up and lock you in a room. You cannot reach into your pocket, but you can feel the anguish your child is going through. You know more suffering is ahead, and unless you do something, death is certain.

Jealousy, tradition, “old” methods, and greed are the reasons the doctors do not want you to give your child this life-saving medicine. They have never tried it before, so they do not want any part of it. Plus, they will not receive the credit if you solve the problem. They will not receive the praise that they have come to enjoy.

You cry out and ask people to untie you, but nobody listens. You beg for someone to cut you loose so you can give your child the medicine, but no one wants to set you free. Even though your child is suffering beyond description, your pleas fall on deaf ears.

You are so close to your child, but so helpless. The only assistance you are allowed to give is what the doctors permit. Even though the physicians’ efforts are not working, and your help would be a breakthrough for the entire medical world, they want to shut you up. Your solution would be an embarrassment to those in power because they would have to admit their inabilities and weaknesses.

Now do you understand how Jesus feels when we tie His hands and do not allow Him do what He wants? Pastors, let Jesus be free again in your church. Remember, it is His church, not yours. Father and mother, let Jesus be free in the lives of your children. Untie the hands of Christ in your homes. Let Him be who He has always been, the one who loves and wants to take care of you. He is the one who can do anything at any time for His children.

## “THERE MUST BE MORE”

Years ago, a couple of Bible student-ministers and I got together in a local restaurant in Southern California to talk about the Lord’s work.

One of the ministers expressed how he had given himself completely to Jesus, but felt like something was missing. Although he was very active in outreach ministry and was attending a respected Bible school, he was not satisfied.

I knew instantly that this was an encounter planned by God. With an open, honest heart, this young man shared with me, “There must be more to this walk with the Lord. There has to be a deeper place. There must be more to church!”

I could sense the Holy Spirit touching his heart in this crowded and noisy Mexican restaurant. He was dissatisfied because the church services where he was attending were rigid and predictable. As he studied the Bible at school and read about all the exciting things that those around Jesus experienced, it created a deep hunger inside him. Then when he attended church, it was like a dead ritual. He desperately longed to have what he was reading about.

In frustration, he asked, “What’s the deal? What has happened to our churches today, where we aren’t experiencing God’s reality? Can we really live the way the Bible promised? Why aren’t we?”

As I reflect on his questions, the one answer that stands out is that *Jesus is not free* to do what He wants to do. His hands are tied to our plans, traditions, and agendas. As a result, God’s people are suffering.

After the meeting in the restaurant, I said goodbye to the young minister and his friend. They would not let me leave. They said, “Please pray for us before you go.”

I prayed for them and asked Jesus to give them what they were searching for. I asked Him to enter their lives and empower them with the Holy Spirit. Today this man is a youth pastor who shares the love of Jesus with the world. He sees the reality of Christ every day and personally experiences the supernatural power of God in his life and ministry. It is amazing how God will use us when we surrender to Him!

What if church services got flipped upside down and our agendas went out the back door? Some worship Jesus for exactly thirty minutes. What if God desires more on that particular Sunday? Is the clock more important than the Holy Spirit? Would it be the end of the world if we worshipped the Lord for five extra minutes?

What if we did not make announcements and prayed for the brokenhearted instead? What if we did not end “on time” because the pastor was sharing a life-changing truth from Scripture, which meant that folks would be a half hour late to the lunch? Would the delay be worth it?

What if Jesus wanted to heal the sick in our services and save the lost? Would it be worth the scrutiny of a few people? If you were stricken with cancer or some other terrible disease, would not it be worth missing a meal and allowing the Spirit of God to have His way? After all, Jesus paid for His church with His own blood, yet we still feel He should follow our plan. This role reversal is tragic, and is the reason why our churches are powerless.

Yet, this Prisoner remains a gentleman, never forcing His will upon us as He is continually limited by our plans. How it must grieve His heart to watch us suffer as we repeatedly reject His help.

Be free again, dear Jesus! Take all we are. Have your way in our lives.

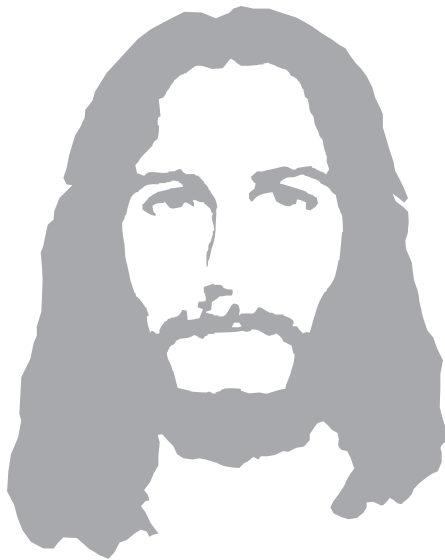
Let God be God, and all things will be made right. Let His beautiful hands work on your behalf. They may be nail-scarred, but they are strong and loving.

*Dear Jesus,*

*You are the one they bound and put in prison. You became a prisoner for me, and for that I want to love You more. I pray You will never feel imprisoned in my life ever again. I never want You to feel dishonored as You did so long ago. I am sorry for my greed, jealousy, and offense—and for being a hypocrite at times. Please forgive me. I want Your hands to be free in my life. Amen.*







## CHAPTER 14

# *Sufferer*

*That I might know Him and the power of His resurrection,  
and the fellowship of His sufferings.*

—PHILIPPIANS 3:10 NKJV

**J**ESUS LONGS to take you into His heart of hearts. May the Holy Spirit prepare you to receive Him in this gentle and lovely way.

I hope that you will read this chapter slowly and with a prayerful heart. Take your time as the Lord guides your steps on this treasured path. You will now meet Jesus the Sufferer.

Just for a moment, close your eyes and ask Him to help you find Him as never before. God wants the sufferings of Christ to become real to you. Allow me to share a prayer that I heard every Good Friday

## SUFFERER

growing up. I have yet to hear anything like it with regards to His suffering. Now that I have a personal relationship with Him, the power of these words moves me to tears:

*Today He who hung the Earth upon the waters is hung upon a Cross.*

*He who is King of the angels is arrayed in a crown of thorns.*

*He who wraps the heaven in clouds is wrapped in the purple of mockery.*

*He who in the Jordan set Adam free (speaking of baptism) receives blows upon His face.*

*The Bridegroom of the Church is transfixed with nails.  
The Son of the virgin is pierced with a spear.*

*We venerate Your passion, O Christ.*

*Show us also Your glorious resurrection.*

Another prayer carries the painful truth of His sufferings:

*Each member of Your holy flesh endured dishonor for our sake: Your head the thorns; Your face the spittings; Your cheeks the blows; Your mouth the taste of gall mixed with vinegar; Your ears the impious blasphemies; Your back the scourge and Your hand the reed; Your whole body the stretching on the Cross; Your joints the nails and Your side the lance. You suffered for our sake, and freed us from passions. You stooped down to us in Your love for humankind, and raised us up. All powerful Savior, have mercy on us.*

Once you allow what Christ endured to come alive in you by the Spirit, your heart will be pierced. This breaking makes room for Him to enter in a sacred way—and you will know a love that will consume you.

Now is not the time to abandon Him. This is when He longs for you to be near Him on this holy journey. Stay close to this Sufferer. He wants you to walk through this moment with your hand in His. He depends on His bride in this hour.

Perhaps you have read of Jesus' agony, but I pray you will be saturated with the awareness of His suffering as you read these words—that it will become more evident to you than the air you breathe.

I grew up celebrating Christian holidays with grand traditions. I still treasure them today. Yet, I was only aware of a portion of what Christ suffered. I had heard the story, but it meant little to me. It was more history than actual appreciation or experience.

It was not until I read the Bible at the age of eleven that His intense suffering became so personal. I was shocked at what I read. I pray you will be too, and that its truth will never wear off as long as you live.

## LOVE WANTS ALL

The knowledge of Christ's suffering leads to love. He deserves our love whether He is walking the shores of the Sea of Galilee or when He is hanging on a Cross covered in blood. Jeanne Guyon said, "Love wants the rejected man of Calvary as much as it desires the glorified Christ of the mount of the Transfiguration." Real love desires Jesus any way you can have Him—and this love wants all of Him. He wants to show you exactly what He endured. Let us walk together with the Son of God down this holy path of His suffering.

## AGONY IN THE GARDEN

Jesus was about to be taken prisoner and tortured beyond belief. The weight of the sin of the world was about to be placed on His shoulders. He had nowhere to turn, nowhere to run. Yet this was the

moment for which He was born.

In this Garden, He sought the only person He could ever turn to for thirty-three years—His Father. The Bible tells us that He would often awaken before the sun came up just to pray. He depended on every word the Father spoke. At times He spent all night in prayer.

I believe He did this not only for instruction, but also for companionship. Christ knew that the Father and the Spirit were the only ones who really understood Him. As He stated, “No one truly knows the Son except the Father, and no one truly knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27).

The Father was the one person He could share everything with. The thought of bearing the sins of the world was overwhelming, so He fell on His face in this dark Garden to pour out His heart. The enormous burden of mankind was crushing on Him. The sins of every human to ever live, past, present, and future, was going to be placed on Him alone. Not just the sins people commit outwardly, but the sins of thought and impure motives would be placed on God’s sacrificial Lamb.

Isaiah prophesied, “Yet the Lord laid on Him the sins of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). Can you grasp what this holy God must have felt? Before this time, sin was completely unknown to Him. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV). What was happening in the Garden was dreadful, and He knew it would only intensify if He continued with the Father’s plan.

### “TAKE THIS CUP”

It was in this place that the destiny of the world would be saved or lost. Jesus, being as much a man as He was God, had to make a choice, even though part of Him did not want to suffer what was ahead. He looked up to Heaven and cried, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me” (Mark 14:36 NKJV).

Never had anyone been assigned such a gruesome task or been given such responsibility. He looked to His friends for help and asked them to pray, but they fell asleep instead. “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death” (Matthew 26:38). To say it another way, “I am in such distress, I feel like I could die. I need you now.”

The Son of Man was left all alone to make this decision. After asking His Father to take this cup of suffering away, He added, “Yet I want your will to be done, not mine” (Mark 14:36). *The Garden is a place of trust and obedience where you choose to follow God, even if it is going to hurt you or you do not understand.*

Eternity depended on the surrendered will of the Savior. All would be won or lost in this moment. This was the beginning of His victory over Satan. If He had refused and said “no,” the Cross and its work would have never taken place. That means you and I would have no hope and be lost forever. You would never have had the opportunity to read these words because this author would have nothing to write about.

Christ knew what was ahead and willingly accepted His suffering:

- He knew a crown of thorns was being prepared for Him.
- He knew a whip was in His immediate future.
- He knew beatings beyond description were going to come.
- He knew spikes would be driven in His hands and feet on the rugged Cross.

However, what Jesus dreaded most was being cut off from His Father. Still, He said “yes” to this rejection, and He did it for you. Please, never again doubt His intense love for you.

## BETRAYAL

After the Lord had finished praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas led those who came to arrest Jesus directly to Him. Judas betrayed Him in the hour of His greatest trial. How disgraceful for one of His disciples to contribute to His terrible sufferings. Jesus knows what betrayal feels like more than anyone. If you have been deceived by someone close to you, remember that the Lord experienced exactly what you are going through.

When they arrested Christ that night, they led Him to the home of the high priest where a so-called hearing was going to take place. Imagine the sense of abandonment having to walk with strangers to your own trial. Instead of the facts being presented, He was falsely accused and ridiculed.

The high priest asked, "Are you the Christ, the Son of God?"

Jesus answered, "I am."

This sent His enemies over the edge and they immediately demanded His death. Sadly, this was not all they desired. They wanted torture and shame for the Son of God. They spit on Him, beat Him, and mocked Him saying, "Prophecy to us, you Messiah!" (Matthew 26:67).

Can you see this wonderful Lamb covered in human spit mingled with blood and being beaten? His face became disfigured and swollen. Just one punch can cause bruising and swelling for days. Hear the prophetic words which were coming straight from His heart:

*I offered my back to those who beat me and my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard. I did not hide my face from mockery and spitting. Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face like a stone, determined to do his will. And I know that I will not be put to shame (Isaiah 50:6-7).*

His beard was plucked from His face while He was being beaten. The King of kings was now covered in the saliva of men. Have you ever

been spat upon? Nothing could be more humiliating. It was His choice to endure this treatment.

By this time His face had changed so much that He looked like a different person. The taunting and mocking exceeds the bounds of decency. The eternal God now became a punching bag for men. Remember, our sin caused all of this. This was all for you.

## FROM PLACE TO PLACE

After a night of torture, Jesus was taken to the dark, cold dungeon of the high priest. After being so shamefully beaten, the Lord had to lay on a dirty, stone floor with his open wounds.

The next morning, Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate, who was a high ranking official in the Roman Empire. If you were going to appear before such a figure of authority, how would you dress? Would you want to look respectable? Jesus was not given the chance.

Imagine His appearance. His face bloodied, bruised, and disfigured. Parts of His beard were missing. His eyes were probably swollen shut and His vision at best was blurred. The Psalmist wrote, “My eye wastes away because of affliction” (Psalm 88:9 NKJV).

It was His decision to stand before His accusers looking this way. Because He chose to become a spectacle of shame, we will shine with glory in Heaven. He traded His beauty for our disgrace that we may receive His beauty.

After Pilate found Him innocent, he sent Him to King Herod for questioning, who was in Jerusalem for the Passover. Little did they realize they were examining the true Passover Lamb.

When Herod met Jesus, he wanted to see Him perform a miracle. Instead of helping Christ in His pain, he thought, *I want to see Him do something amazing to amuse me.* This way of thinking is all too common today. Very few truly care about the feelings of Christ. They only want Him for what He can do for their gratification and entertainment.

To add insult to injury, Herod and his soldiers mocked Him even more. As if the Beloved had not been ridiculed enough, they put a robe on Him and sent Him back to Pilate.

## THE WOUNDS ON HIS BACK

After Jesus was paraded around in disrespect, He appeared once more before Pontius Pilate. Even though the religious leaders demanded death by crucifixion, Pilate admitted, “I find nothing wrong with this man” (Luke 23:4). Yet, the pressure from the angry mob was unrelenting. Jesus would be sentenced to scourging and death.

Christ was whipped with a weapon that was designed to inflict the most pain and damage possible. The whip had several strips capped with metal and sharp bones attached. The weapon was designed to cause deep bruising and could rip away skin. The Roman soldiers in charge of scourging took great pride in their ability to inflict pain.

Jesus was fastened to a pole as He willingly offered His body to be ripped to pieces. “I offered my body to those who would beat me” (Isaiah 50:6). The angels watched in horror as humans torturing the one they worshiped. They were ready to come to His aid, but Jesus never called for their help.

It was not necessary to fasten Him to that pole because He would have held onto it all by Himself. His love for you would have held Him there. As the whips dug in and His blood covered Him, your healing was purchased. “By His stripes, we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5 NKJV).

The great price paid for your healing! All alone without His clothing, exposed and vulnerable, He chose this pain. Jesus, you deserve our love more than anyone. You alone!

## THE CROWN AND ROBE

After Christ was scourged and brutally tortured, the entire garrison of Roman soldiers came to Him. This may have been fifty to several hundred men. By now He was covered in blood, much of His skin was gone, and His bones were exposed. The Old Testament prophecies, “I can count all my bones” (Psalm 22:17 NKJV).

But the soldiers wanted Him to inflict more pain. They took a strip of large thorns, fashioned a crown, and put it on His head. Then they



took a reed and pounded the crown like they were hammering nails. The King of Heaven traded His heavenly crown for a crown of thorns.

Jesus, you did not deserve such treatment. We are shocked and amazed by your great love. Words are weak. Please hear our hearts and know that we love you!

With the crucifixion at hand, He was offered no time to stop and gather strength. The soldiers were unrelenting in their desire to hurt Him as much as possible. The garrison continued to spit, which was enough to cover His entire body. Then they placed a purple robe on Him and mockingly announced, “Hail, King of the Jews.”

*This is the Jesus I love. Never once did He retaliate or try to stop them. He not only traded His crown, but He exchanged a robe that once filled the Temple of Heaven for a robe of shame that would be covered in His blood.*

## “HERE IS THE MAN”

After this, Jesus stood before the crowd again. Pilate proclaimed, “Here is the Man.” How disgraceful for the Lord to stand in such shame.

By this time, He was not recognizable. His precious body had been mutilated. He stood before His accusers in great pain—protruding bones and torn muscles for all to see. “But many were amazed when they saw him. His face was so disfigured he seemed hardly human, and from his appearance, one would scarcely know he was a man” (Isaiah 52:14).

Allow your heart to go to this place of pain where you behold the man of sorrows who has been brutalized by man and crushed by God for all to see and mock. When you find this place in your heart, gaze upon Him and remain there as long as He desires for you to stay. It was the tragedy of the ages, and He did it all for you.

See Him in His humility and shame. Oh, that Jesus would give you a glimpse of this spectacle that He became. Broken and beaten for all to look upon in shock.

Do not run away, my friend. Simply stay and tell Him you love Him. How many times should you tell Him of your love? No number

can do justice. Every mentioning brings joy to His heart. Express this to Him as often as you feel He deserves to hear you. This is the place where you must return again and again. Search for Him in this way and you will surely find Him.

Remember, this was the same Jesus:

- Who the Holy Spirit came upon as a dove in the River Jordan.
- Who walked on water and calmed the storm.
- Who fed thousands by multiplying food.
- Whose very presence would cause demons to scream and come out of people.
- Whose robe once shone as white as the sun on the mount of the Transfiguration.

He stood before the soldiers, religious leaders, and the crowd as a beaten, silent Sufferer, who looked upon Him as a curse.

### “CRUCIFY HIM!”

May the suffering Christ be honored and glorified! It is time to proclaim it with boldness again. I beg you, speak of this Jesus and watch the masses love Him once more. Even though the Lord had suffered so much up to this point, the religious leaders were not willing to show any mercy. When asked what to do with Him, they shouted, “Crucify Him!” The governor reluctantly ordered that He be crucified outside the city.

He carried the Cross up the dusty road to His death. The agony of carrying this heavy, rugged tree on a body whose skin had been shredded away is beyond comprehension. However, so much more was taking place than could be seen in the physical realm. He had to suffer the anguish of being turned into a curse. “For it is written in the Scriptures, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree’” (Galatians 3:13).

The “tree” is the Cross. During New Testament times, the cross was a stigma where rebellious lawbreakers were put to death. When He was condemned to die on the Cross, He was branded as a criminal who deserved to die. People viewed Him as a villain—as a disgrace who was being judged by God. And they were right! He was being judged by God. The Bible declares, “But it was the Lord’s good plan to crush him and cause him grief” (Isaiah 53:10).

He carried this altar of death through Jerusalem, the city of God which He dearly loved. Onlookers lined the streets as Jesus trudged by with the Cross on His back. This was not a secret walk in the dark. It was during the day, for all to see. Still, He moved forward, step by step. The very thought of struggling with all your strength to reach a place that will ultimately cause even worse suffering is appalling.

When His holy body became too exhausted to go on, a man named Simon carried the Cross the rest of the way. I have walked up the hill which many scholars believe is Golgotha. It is very steep and would be even more difficult if you were under such a heavy weight.

*In fact, all of us should have been carrying that Cross. That was our mountain to climb in pain. We deserved the judgment, but Jesus took our place.*

## NAILED TO A CROSS

The crucifixion was designed to cause an excruciating, slow death that would last for hours. He could have died in a less painful way. Instead, He chose a death that was lengthy and filled with agony.

As they placed His body on the Cross, they could have just tied Him there, but they drove spikes His hands instead. These were the hands that had embraced little children and healed thousands of people. These same hands wrote in the dirt as He restored the woman caught in adultery. And now these hands were being nailed to a tree.

Even after He was raised from the dead, He still kept those nail scars. He did that for a reason—so you and I would never forget what He had done.

Then they drove spikes into His feet. These feet had climbed mountains to pray and walked on dusty roads to save, heal, and deliver. These feet had been washed with the tears and hair of a forgiven woman. (See Luke 7:38.) Now, they were secured to a wooden Cross with spikes.

## CUT OFF FROM THE FATHER

While hanging on the Cross, the Father turned His head away from His Son. At that moment, Jesus cried, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me!” (Matthew 27:46).

This was the saddest of pleas from the Lord, as He cried out to His Father in desperation. For the first time in eternity, Jesus was cut off from the love of His life. He became our sin—the very sins that broke His heart. The entire sins of the world were poured out on Him at that time.

Imagine if your earthly father turned his back on you in your worst moment of suffering. When you needed his support the most, he could not even look at you. That would be such a painful rejection for any child. This is exactly what happened to the Son.

Why would the Father do this? It was because He could not look upon sin. “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness” (Habakkuk 1:13 NKJV). Christ became our sin and the Father had to turn His face. Our evil hearts caused the Beloved to be forsaken.

The Son needed His Father. Of course, His Father wanted to help. What loving father would not? But our sin was too great and this was the price. The Father’s heart surely broke as His Son was crying out to Him, as He was left alone to die. Jesus was hung in disgrace, naked for all to see.

The Scripture says, “So the Son of Man must be lifted up” (John 3:14). The Savior was lifted up on the Cross in front of the crowd. His shame was in public, on the top of a mountain. His suffering could be seen from far away and from every side.

Listen to the heart of Christ as prophesied in the Psalms:

*But I am a worm and not a man. I am scorned and despised by all! Everyone who sees me mocks me. They sneer and shake their heads, saying, "Is this the one who relies on the Lord? Then let the Lord save him! If the Lord loves him so much, let the Lord rescue him!" (Psalm 22:6-8).*

What an honor that He would allow us to hear this pain in such a holy moment. May we never forget your suffering, Lord Jesus. Let us forget everything else, but never forget your pain.

## A THRONE FOR A CROSS

The next few verses from this Psalm reveal more of the torment Christ was feeling:

*Like lions they open their jaws against me, roaring and tearing into their prey. My life is poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, melting within me. My strength has dried up like sun-baked clay. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead. My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs; an evil gang closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones. My enemies stare at me and gloat. They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing (Psalm 22:13-18).*

*He exchanged His heavenly throne for a Cross to which He was nailed. The Master once sat in the majesty of Heaven, but now He is extended on a tree of shame.*

Finally, the anguish came to an end as the price for all sin had been paid. He uttered three words that only He could have spoken: "It is fin-

ished!” (John 19:30). This wonderful cry of declaration meant that the ultimate sacrifice for man had been paid in full. Jesus had completed His assignment, giving His all for you.

## TRUE LOVE REMAINS

One of the most painful aspects of His death was the fact that those whom He had loved so dearly did nothing to ease His pain. “Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for someone to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, I found none” (Psalm 69:20 NKJV). Out of the twelve disciples and the thousands He healed, only a few stayed with Him until the end. True love stays with Christ whether He is popular or hated. Love pursues regardless of danger. Would you have stayed with Him?

Even today Jesus still suffers. I did not realize this until I was thirty years old—eighteen years after I had asked Him into my heart. It was during my visit to the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary in Arizona that the Spirit of God revealed this to me. This revelation lifted me to a new level in my relationship with the Lord.

Hebrews 13:8 tells us that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” Another passage says, “I am the Lord, and I do not change” (Malachi 3:6). These two verses inform us that we serve a Master who always remains the same. His feelings are not like ours, which are constantly up and down. Time does not change Him. He is our Rock—solid and constant.

Scripture describes Him as “a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3 NKJV). Because He cannot change, He is still a man of sorrows. Jesus grieves over our sin and the suffering of people around our world. If He felt this way about matters while He walked the Earth, He feels the same at this very moment.

## THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

The term “the fellowship of His sufferings” may sound like a contradiction, but the Holy Spirit is here to teach us. This simply means to

become one with and experience the sufferings of Christ.

It is a meaningful journey that can only begin by the invitation of the Lord. As your hunger intensifies, know that He is calling you to go deeper in this relationship with Him. Do not be afraid. He is gentle and loving. He will ease you into His heart at a pace He knows you can be trusted with and can handle.

I am not saying that you will be martyred, though many Christians have been killed for the cause of Christ. Nor will you necessarily be beaten, flogged, or tortured for proclaiming the gospel, though this still happens all over the world. In order to experience Jesus in a new way, you must know Him in both His beauty and His pain.

Even though you may not be literally crucified on a cross, you must in some way feel His rejection and pain. Perhaps you have not been wrongfully charged in a trial as the Lord was, but you must know what it is like to be falsely accused. You might not have to wear a crown of thorns, but you must be humiliated in front of people if you are going to know what He went through.

Whether it means giving up certain things or even being labeled as crazy, we should all desire to know the sufferings that the Son of God felt. I have been lied about and attacked by people close to me. It was hard for me to understand because I felt as though I had done nothing to deserve such treatment. Then I realized that these experiences were an answer to my own prayer. I had asked Jesus to reveal Himself to me as the Sufferer.

## JESUS WEEPS

What causes Jesus to suffer today? The same things that caused Him pain while He lived on Earth. One of the most moving portions of Scripture is when He was standing on the slope of the Mount of Olives with His death soon approaching. He looked over Jerusalem and tears began streaming down His cheeks. “But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep” (Luke 19:41).

The reason the Lord shed tears was because the people He loved rejected Him. He felt compassion for them, yet knew the destruction

that was ahead for that city. Tragedy awaits any heart that rejects Christ when He offers himself.

God loves you so much that He is in anguish at the very thought of your future without Him—whether it is the suffering on Earth, or the eternal punishment in hell that awaits all who reject His love. May the Lord allow us to experience His heartache when His message of love is rejected.

As painful as it is when we are mistreated, it is Jesus' suffering that we must concern ourselves with instead of ours. Our suffering is minuscule when compared to His pain. As lovers, His pain should overshadow ours. The Apostle Paul was not interested in just hearing of His sufferings. He wanted to know and experience the fellowship of His sufferings.

Jesus said this about Paul: "I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:16 NKJV). Just think, a portion of Paul's calling was to suffer for the Lord. What if part of God's plan for your life was to be persecuted for the sake of Christ?

We rarely hear this teaching anymore, but we find it throughout the Bible:

***“God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way” (Matthew 5:10-12).***

How does one find peace in the midst of such pain? *Through love, and love alone.* Once a believer reaches this place of love for God, he or she will rejoice in suffering and will even welcome it if Jesus is glorified. When the apostles were beaten, they were “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41 NKJV).



Love is the power of God. Love is the fuel of the Cross.

## BE THERE FOR HIM

What a moment when God shares His feelings with us. Let us not be like the disciples and fall asleep when He needs us most. May we always be there for Him!

As our love for Him begins to grow, His pain will become our pain. Lovers of the Lord will suffer in this world. In fact, He promised we would. When such a time comes, run to Christ and find the treasure of Jesus in your agony. If this is what it takes to reveal the true nature of Christ to our hearts, it is well worth it.

Love says, “If my Jesus is suffering in His heart, I want to feel the same. If He is grieving, let me grieve. It is Him I want and nothing else.”

One example of a person experiencing the sufferings of Jesus is Simon of Cyrene. As he walked through Jerusalem, little did he realize a detour was ahead. It is the last thing he planned to do that day. As the Lord was carrying His Cross, He could not go any further because of exhaustion. The soldiers ordered Simon to step in and carry it for Him.

He knew that the Cross was a curse, and now Simon had to embrace this symbol of shame. He had committed no crime. This was not his Cross to bear, or so he thought. But when he picked up that heavy crossbeam, he had no idea he was helping the God of the universe, or that he was easing the pain of the Lord.

A powerful truth is hidden here. You can never truly minister to Jesus until you know the sorrow He carries. We must all comfort the Lord as Simon did, by feeling the weight of His Cross and suffering. What Simon thought was a curse was the greatest blessing of his life. We still talk about him today.

Not only did he ease the Master’s pain, he was privileged to partake in something truly precious. By this time, Jesus’ blood from His back had been smeared on the Cross. When Simon lifted it on his own back, the blood of the Lamb would now be on him—the holy blood of God that brings forgiveness. The blood that still washes the sinner today.

The blood that Heaven honors and adores. When you help the Lord carry the weight of His burden for the world, you will experience His grace.

On the road to His death, not one of His disciples assisted Him. A stranger had to help bear His pain. I pray that we never force Him to look to strangers instead of you and me.

## A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

Is the story of Simon one you can identify with? Perhaps you had a plan for your life and a schedule you wanted to keep. Maybe you were on your way to a particular place like Simon was that day. To your surprise, your plans were changed and you were forced to carry a burden that you did not want to bear.

Perhaps it was taking care of a sick loved one or helping a poor person financially. Maybe you had to let someone in your home who needed a place to stay for the night. This is Simon's story. He did not know that the greatest privilege of his life was helping the Savior of the world.

How do you help the Master? Find His pain. The pain of Jesus can be found all around you:

- It is in your sin.
- It is in the lives of the hungry.
- It is in the persecution of His people.
- It is where He is mocked.
- It is in an idle church that does not pray.

In the words of Mother Teresa, referring to the people she helped, "Each one is Jesus in disguise." Find the burden He carries and lift it from Him.

How? Be there for Him. Embrace the Cross and cling to it with joy. Do not feel forced to carry it, but run to it with open arms. That

is where Jesus is. You will find Christ in every life that carries a cross for Him.

## A MAN'S LAST REQUEST

The Apostle Paul was a true saint of God. He gave his life to Christ because the Lord revealed himself to him. On the road to Damascus, God literally knocked him to the ground and blinded him with His glory. (See Acts 9.)

Paul planted churches, healed the sick, raised the dead, and wrote over half of the New Testament under the direction of the Holy Spirit. He traveled to Europe and the Middle East, and was the pioneer of spreading the gospel in these lands. He was stoned and beaten, went hungry and was imprisoned, yet God sent an earthquake to open his jail cell. He was bitten by a viper and simply shook it off with no side effects. He cast demons out of people and the spirits actually knew him by name. (See Acts 19:15.)

Even after all these accomplishments, Paul was not satisfied and wanted to know more about Jesus. He came full circle while he was imprisoned in Rome. He reached the place where he declared: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."

After all he had attained, he simply wanted to know Jesus and experience Him. In effect he said, "Guys, I have done it all. I have achieved what no other has, but what I really want is Christ."

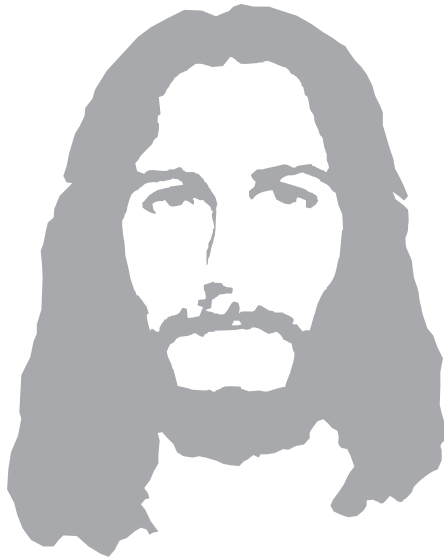
Paul wanted Christ's power and His pain. That is the secret. Love wants Him, regardless of the cost. Knowing Jesus intimately would become the apostle's food and strength for life. As Paul died to himself, the Lord would live with resurrection life through him. It is better to suffer at the side of Jesus than to be in paradise without Him. If it takes suffering to be aware of Him, then so be it.

Christ lives on this road. Few desire to walk it, but those who do will find the Beloved.

*Dear Jesus,*

## SUFFERER

*Precious Sufferer, I am so sorry that you had to suffer as You did. I know it was for my own good, but I am sorry You were hurt so badly. Thanks for every second of Your shame and agony. I know that my sin sent You to the Cross. May Your suffering come alive to me and may I remember it every day of my life. I know You suffer today, but I do not want to be a reason for Your broken heart. Trust me to be there for You when You are hurting. Allow me to know You. Let Your joy be my joy and let Your pain be my pain. I love You with all my heart. My "thank you" is giving my life to You. In Your name, Amen.*



## CHAPTER 15

# *Savior*

*May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior give you  
grace and peace.*

—TITUS 1:4

**WHAT IS** your greatest need in life? Is it good health? Money? A job? A loving family? And what would God consider to be your most important necessity? What we think is important probably is not the same as what God says.

Two thousand years ago, what did God do to answer our problems? Did He send a doctor to give us a physical exam? Did He send a psychiatrist to analyze our emotions, or give us prescription drugs to help

our moods? A bag of money for us to enjoy? A philosopher to explain why we are here? A self-help formula so we could fix ourselves?

He sent none of those things. Read the Scripture at the top of this chapter and you will see who God sent. He gave us the person of His Son, and not a system or idea. As people who sin daily, our greatest need is a Savior—a someone, not a something.

## HE IS SALVATION

Only a Savior can save. Even though salvation is essential, get your mind off of the process of being “saved” and begin to focus on the actual person of the Savior.

I have met well-intentioned people who could quote many Scriptures from memory. I was amazed at their ability to memorize passages from the Bible. However, I noticed that they rarely led people to Christ and the love of God seemed to be missing when they spoke.

Of course, I fully believe in knowing God’s Word and the doctrines of Christianity. I study the Bible daily and would not know what to do without Scripture. It is the lifeline of our soul. Today more than ever we must know what the Bible teaches.

At first I could not figure out what was missing in these people who were ineffective sharing the Lord with others. Jesus explains it by saying, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39-40 NIV). Jesus is letting us know, “You can read as much of the Bible as you want, but if you do not find me in it, you are wasting your time.”

Jesus Christ is the living Word and if it were not for Him, there would be no Scripture. He did not just show up in the pages of the New Testament. If you will look carefully, you will find Jesus in all sixty-six books from Genesis to Revelation. This is why the Bible says, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14 NKJV).

If you do not experience Jesus every time you read God’s Word, you miss the entire substance of the Bible. You can spend your whole

life reading that precious book, but if you refuse to accept Christ the person, you will not be any closer to Heaven.

I pray you will put into practice what I learned years ago. Every time you read God's Word, ask Jesus to meet with you and speak to you. Ask the Holy Spirit to let you experience the Master's loving presence. As a result, you will not be reading just another book. Instead, you will be experiencing the heart of the Bible—Jesus.

## WHOM ARE YOU PRAYING TO?

I believe in leading people in a prayer to confess their sins and receive Jesus as their Lord. He is the risen Son of God who died to set them free. I do this in virtually every service where I minister. I also believe in giving men, women, and children the opportunity to confess Him publicly. I have seen millions around the world make this wonderful decision through "altar calls."

Unfortunately, many come forward out of religious duty and not because they want to genuinely know Christ. When they leave the altar, they are just as much on their way to hell as they were before. Many millions have prayed "the sinner's prayer" to receive Jesus into their hearts, but they continue living in sin as if they did not mean what they prayed. If you have not surrendered your heart to Jesus, the act of coming to an altar is only a religious tradition. You cannot bypass the person of Jesus Christ to reach Heaven.

As much as I believe in the validity of the "sinner's prayer," we must remember that God did not send a piece of paper from Heaven with a prayer on it to secure our salvation. Instead, He sent His Son as the Savior. If you remove a personal encounter with Him from that prayer, it is powerless.

Far too often people feel the goal is to have the sinner repeat a prayer and then everything will be fine. But the prayer will not be answered unless the person accepts Jesus by faith. "But as many as *received* Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12 NKJV). The actual person of Jesus Christ must be received, not a tradition and method. And not

just any Christ, the real Jesus. You must receive the Jesus of the Bible—Jesus of Nazareth.

When trying to minister to someone who needs Him as Savior, Jesus should be the goal and topic of the conversation. You will find that no one in Scripture prayed a word-for-word sinner's prayer, yet countless people were born again. The disciples never prayed this way, yet they received salvation.

Did they respond to an altar call as we know it? Of course not. Why were they saved? Because they came to the Lord, turned from their sin, fell in love with Him, and followed Christ. It was all about Him!

Friend, do not be concerned about reciting religious words, but rather remember whom you are praying to. Instead of running to an altar, understand whom are you running to. It is not a pastor or counselor, but the Savior.

Early in my ministry I learned that I do not lead people to Heaven. I lead them to Jesus and then He gets them to Heaven. Pay close attention to this verse: "My eyes have seen your salvation" (Luke 2:30 NIV). When Mary and Joseph took baby Jesus to the Temple to be dedicated, those words came from Simeon, who prophesied through the Holy Spirit about the Christ child. He looked at this person and knew he had seen Salvation Himself. When you find Him, you have found salvation.

### "IT'S WHO HE IS"

The Son knows how to save. It is what He came to do. In fact, the name Jesus means "the Lord saves." His name alone lets the world know exactly who can redeem them. Salvation is who He is, not just something He does. *Jesus is salvation. When you receive Him, redemption is your natural reward.*

*Salvation has eyes of fire and hair like wool. Salvation has a heart that feels for you and words that cut to the spirit. Salvation cries and laughs. My friend, it is a person named Jesus.*



Too many waste their time trying to find salvation in their church activities, going through religious rituals, or even memorizing Scriptures. I love the Church, but it cannot save me. Only the Savior can. If you want salvation, look to Him.

If you are thirsty, you will run to the faucet to get water. It is so simple. If you want eternal life, do not look anywhere else but to the one who is Life. You do not need to tell the apple tree to grow apples, or tell a firefighter to fight fires. It is what they do. You just need to know where to go for help.

If you find the Lord and surrender to Him, salvation is yours. He is ready and waiting to give peace and rest to your tired soul. He is pleading, “Come to me” (Matthew 11:28). What a beautiful invitation from this loving Savior.

## ABUNDANT LIFE

Some people define salvation as “to be saved from hell and on your way to heaven.” This is only partially true. According to God’s Word, to experience salvation means to be free from your sin and not just to be forgiven of it.

When you are “made new,” He sets you free from the weight and bondage of your past. When you experience true salvation, you do not have to be addicted to anything or anyone but Him. Christ not only suffered and died for our sin, but also to give us a healthy life as we prepare for eternity. “By his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5 NKJV).

When He is your Savior, you do not need to abandon hope because of a negative report from the doctor. He has the final say! He has also freed you from the fear of death. Sin was what gave death its power. With Jesus as your Savior, you are no longer under that authority. “And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death” (Romans 8:2).

The Son of God has rescued you from emotional scars. Jesus said that you can know His peace that He graciously gives to you: “My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27).

## LAMB OF GOD

Two thousand years ago, a bold servant of God named John the Baptist was about to introduce his cousin Jesus as the Lamb of God. John had been waiting for this moment. He knew sooner or later that the Lord would show up on the banks of the Jordan River.

Finally, John laid his eyes on the one whom all humanity will bow their knees to one day. Out of John's mouth flowed some of the most moving words ever spoken. He said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). His introduction still rings true today. John announced His primary mission—to be a sacrificial Lamb for the world.

## A SACRED TRADITION

My hometown of Tarpon Springs, Florida, is a fishing village on the Gulf of Mexico with the highest percentage of Greek-Americans of any city in the United States. I have fond memories as a boy growing up in a huge family and knowing practically everyone.

My grandmother's house was where all the action took place. Her home was surrounded by family who lived on all sides of her. I had aunts, uncles, great uncles, and cousins all living within a couple of blocks. We called everyone "Thea" or "Theo," which means aunt or uncle, even if they are not related. I remember the "manavi," who was the man who sold veggies and food in a truck that would come by. It is how we often bought our groceries. It was a wonderful way to be raised and I miss those days, which have largely disappeared as society has changed.

On holidays my grandmother's house would be packed with friends and family. Everyone could smell the wonderful aromas coming from the kitchen all day long. Easter was one of the most special holidays because of the traditions. We ate lamb every Easter at one o'clock in the morning. I love lamb, especially the way my mother and grandmother prepared it—and I really looked forward to staying up late. What kid

does not like being allowed to be up all night long? Although I enjoyed the traditions, I did not understand the significance of them.

For months before Easter, one could walk down the streets of this little town and hear the sound of lambs. Many of the neighbors raised sheep in their backyards. I was used to seeing them, but it never crossed my mind that these harmless little animals would end up on our plate some day.

## BORN TO DIE

Every year, before the women prepared the meal, the man of the house would cut the throat of the lamb and prepare it as the Israelites did for the Passover. The lamb had been raised for one purpose—to die. The reason these lambs were in the backyards was not because they were pets, but so they could be killed for the benefit of the family.

What I have just described is a picture of Christ and how He came to give His life for you and me. His mission was to die for the sins of the world. The primary reason God sent His Son to Earth was to be the final sacrifice. “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isaiah 53:7 NIV).

Killing a lamb is much different than trying to kill a bear. Lambs are silent in their death, while bears will put up a loud, huge fight. Jesus went to His death like a lamb to the slaughter. He never fought against the plan of the Father. In silence He faced His suffering. Pilate was shocked that He would not even speak up to defend Himself. (See John 19:10.)

The silence of God’s Son is one of the most remarkable things about Him. Like a silent lamb about to be killed, He allowed himself to be slandered without saying anything in His own defense.

## THE PASSOVER LAMB

God gave Moses some specific instructions regarding the preparation

of the Passover lamb. (See Exodus 12.) The entire event was symbolic of what would happen to Christ during His sufferings.

- The lamb had to be a male and was to be slaughtered on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight. Christ was killed on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight.
- They had to smear the blood of the lamb on the top and two sides of the door frame—which would form the sign of the cross and represent Jesus' blood.
- The Israelites were to eat the meat of the lamb—which speaks of accepting and becoming one with Christ in Holy Communion and spirit.
- The lamb was to be cooked over an open fire—symbolic of Jesus' public death as He would be suspended between Heaven and hell to make a way.
- The fire would soon cause the lamb to blacken—which speaks of Jesus becoming our sin on the cross.
- They were to eat it with bitter herbs—which symbolizes the suffering of Christ. These herbs smell wonderful from a distance, but can be bitter to the taste when eaten. It is easier to admire the Lord from a distance than to truly follow Him.
- This ritual was a slow process, just as Christ died slowly and suffered much.

- The bread was to be made without yeast—which speaks of Jesus’ sinless life, as yeast is referred to as sin in Scripture. (See Mark 8:15.)
- The lamb had to be inspected and could have no blemish—just as the Son of God was inspected by the high priest, Pilate and Herod. They could find no fault in Him.
- They could not break any of the lamb’s bones—and Jesus had no bone broken to fulfill His role as the Passover Lamb (See Exodus 12:46, John 19:36).

All of these things point to Jesus, the Lamb of God. He became the sacrificial Lamb for all time. “Christ, our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

## BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

Perhaps you are thinking, *I like where I am. I have a wonderful job, I make good money, and I feel great. I am living my dream.*

Be honest with yourself and God. You have done things that you are ashamed of. You are doing things behind closed doors that you wish you could stop. You say things you know are not right. If you were to allow this holy God to inspect every detail of your life, He would see things that would embarrass you. The fact is, He already sees every aspect of your life—and even reads your thoughts.

This is why you need Heaven’s sacrifice to redeem you. Sin is the breaking of God’s perfect law, and is the root of the suffering of mankind. God’s laws are incredibly specific as to what we should and should not do. They are so detailed and meticulous that no person has ever been able to live a perfect life and not sin, except for Jesus. He is the only one in history to have lived a sinless life.

The Bible tells us, “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Romans 3:23). “All” means all—including you and me. If we were all to stand before God without the Passover Lamb, the verdict would be “Guilty!” The sentence would be an existence separated from God for all eternity.

This eternal destiny is far more frightening than anyone could imagine. Jesus described hell as a place “where [the] worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:43-44 NKJV). In this “outer darkness...there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12 NKJV). A rich man in the Bible went to hell and shouted, “Father Abraham, have some pity! Send Lazarus over here to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue. I am in anguish in these flames” (Luke 16:24 NKJV). The lake of fire is the eternal home for all who reject the Savior. (See Revelation 10:14.) What a horrifying thought!

But you do not have to spend eternity in everlasting punishment. You can have the guarantee of eternity in Heaven with Jesus, which is His greatest desire for you.

## WHAT HE DOES BEST

The following passage speaks of the Father’s great love as He patiently waits for you to give Jesus your heart: “The Lord is not really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent” (2 Peter 3:9).

He desires to be your Savior more than you want Him to save you. Do you think that you have sinned too much to be forgiven? Are you burdened with the darkness of your past? Receive these words of the Savior because they are for you: “Healthy people do not need a doctor—sick people do” (Matthew 9:12).

The so-called “religious bunch” had a problem with Him. He was eating with the known sinners of the day, the ones everyone had labeled as filthy and unreachable. However, to the Seeker of the lost, they were the joy of His heart.

Perhaps people in church have stared at you because of the way you look, or what you have done. Jesus will stare at you too, except His stare is one of love that will pull you into His arms. He is the opposite of religion and tradition. The more you have sinned, the more the Lord's grace will step in. He cries, "For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners" (Matthew 9:13).

If you consider yourself to be a broken-down, hopeless sinner, you are now at the place where God can save you. You understand that only He can cleanse you. God wants you to come to Him just as you are, and He will take care of your sin.

## FORGIVER

The Lord is so willing to forgive. "He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10 NIV). He loves to wipe our sins away. In order for Him to be our Savior, He must forgive our sin. If not, it would be impossible for us to stand before God. Scripture declares, "He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12).

As you examine the life of Christ, you will discover that He went out of His way to show compassion and forgiveness. He forgave those who others hated and wanted to kill. On one occasion, some religious leaders brought to Him a woman caught in the act of adultery. They wanted to see how Jesus would react to this woman's sin. They had proof that she was guilty. The men wanted to stone her because of her behavior, which the Law backed up.

The Lord looked at her accusers and said, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7 NKJV). One by one, the accusers left the scene and soon the woman was alone with the Master. Jesus' love surpassed the Law because love is a higher law. *His love* is the key to forgiveness and mercy. Guilt disappears when someone comes to Him with the right heart. When the accusers leave, accusation goes with them.

Now the adulteress stood alone with the Son of God. What a wonderful place to be. Her tarnished past was erased, and she was restored by the only one who can give a person a new start. With a heart full of love and eyes that melt the soul, Christ asked her, “Where are your accusers? Did not even one of them condemn you?” She answered, “No one, Lord.” Then He replied, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more” (John 8:10, 11 NKJV).

The Lord was ready and waiting to forgive her. He did not approve of her past life, but He forgave her sin and gave her a new path to follow. What an example of His great mercy.

## THE POWER OF THE CROSS

Think for a moment about the two thieves hanging on the crosses next to Christ. Both of them were guilty and were looked upon as a curse. One of the criminals mocked Jesus. The other man said, “We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man [Jesus] has not done anything wrong” (Luke 23:41). Then he turned in the direction that everyone should turn—to the Son of God. The thief said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

When you examine this man’s words you will find a precious truth. The thief admitted his sin by saying, “We deserve to die for our crimes.” He then confessed that Jesus was the holy Lamb of God. He admitted that the Master had not done anything wrong. Finally, he acknowledged that He was King by saying, “Remember me in Your Kingdom.”

In the midst of His own suffering, Jesus forgave this criminal. He promised the thief, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). When any person approaches the Lord with such an honest and humble heart, it does not matter what has happened in the past. It is never too late for change. This thief would soon close his eyes in death, but they would open to see the Son of God in Paradise!



## THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENT OF YOUR LIFE

Regardless of how you have hurt Jesus and others, He will pardon you. He promises to forget the sins of our past. (See Hebrews 8:12.) “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins” (Isaiah 43:25 NKJV).

Who else would you rather be saved by? Who else is so loving and patient? Who else has the name, “the Lord Saves”? Will not you let Him save you now? Have you not waited long enough?

Whether you have never asked Him to save you, or you have been His for years, you can always experience His saving grace. Jesus never stops being our Savior.

If you have never come to Him in humility, like the woman caught in the act of adultery, now is your moment. He is eagerly waiting to rescue you. If you will humble yourself and admit you need Him, you will find the greatest love of your life. He will never again mention your sins, and He will forever hold you in His arms. You will be “married” to the Lord and no one will ever be able to take Him from you.

To say no would be the greatest tragedy of your life. You are not refusing a system or prayer. *You are refusing a person, the very one who suffered and died for you.* For you to reject Christ means you are turning your back on everything you have read in this book. It means you want your sin more than His sacrifice.

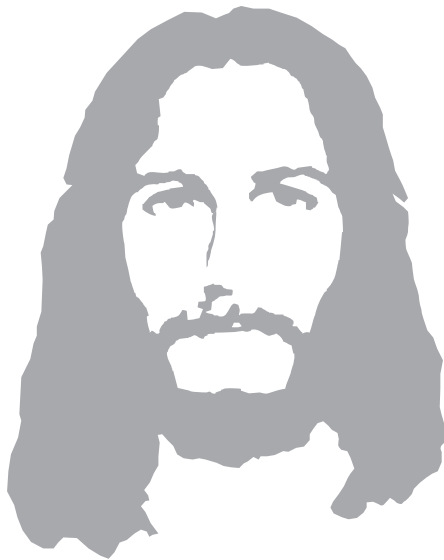
Please, seize this moment as it may never come your way again. Hear His invitation: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30 NKJV).

God is speaking to your heart right now. His arms are open wide and He is longing to hear you say yes. Please reward His suffering by giving Him your life. The Savior is waiting for you.

## SAVIOR

*Father,*

*I have sinned against You. I am sorry. I repent of my evil ways. I want to be saved. Thank You for sending Your Son to the Earth to suffer and die on a Cross for me. Thank You for raising Him from the dead. Jesus, be my Savior. Please forgive my sin. I come to You because only You can save me. Wash me clean with Your blood. You are the Son of God. I love You and will follow You forever. I will never turn back. Amen.*



## CHAPTER 16

# *Baptizer*

*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.*

—LUKE 3:16 NKJV

**A**S I mentioned previously, no human ever introduced Christ like John the Baptist did. He announced, this is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29 NKJV)

Man’s greatest need was the Lamb of God to pay for our sin with His life. However, we cannot ignore the second portion of John’s introduction, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16 NKJV).

Here we see that the Son not only descended from Heaven to save you from your sin, but He came to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. If you are going to live free from sin after you are saved, you need His divine power. He knew that if you were going to truly follow Him, you would need the same unction He had while He walked the Earth. After all, to follow Jesus means to live as He lived.

God would never send you on this mission without equipping you. He told His disciples, “I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49 NIV). The last thing He wanted was for His disciples to attempt to spread the message of His love without the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit. He knew if they were going to represent Him properly, they would need this awesome Helper.

## JESUS, THE PERFECT EXAMPLE

The very mention of the name “Holy Spirit” causes some people to set up a barrier. Even though this book does not focus on the person of the Holy Spirit, we must remember that the Trinity works perfectly together and is always united. What you are reading now could never have been written without the Holy Spirit helping me.

No believer can effectively lead someone to Christ without the Spirit. It is the Spirit of God alone who makes Jesus real to our hearts. Also, do not let the word “baptism” scare you away. It comes from a Greek word that simply means to submerge, overwhelm, or dip. The Lord promised to submerge your entire being in the Holy Spirit and fire.

Even though He is the Son of God, He still waited for the Holy Ghost to descend on Him before He began His earthly ministry. (See John 1:32.) If He did not think this experience was so necessary, why would He wait thirty years to reunite with the Holy Spirit and then begin His work on Earth?

If anyone could have depended only on mere knowledge and wisdom to do God’s work, it was Jesus. This is the same person who has no beginning and no end. He designed every speck of the universe. He

caused the scholars to marvel when He spoke in the Temple at the age of twelve.

Regardless of your denomination or religious background, it is wrong to think you can survive without something that the Son of God depended on himself. Even after His Resurrection, He relied on the Holy Spirit to teach the disciples. “Until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen” (Acts 1:2 NKJV). *If the perfect, resurrected and victorious Christ depended on the Holy Spirit’s power to simply teach a Bible study, how much more do we as frail humans need the Spirit to represent Jesus to the world?* It takes the utmost of arrogance to believe that we can replace the Holy Spirit with our methods, intellect and ideas.

Jesus is the ultimate pattern for us to follow. “The Son radiates God’s own glory and expresses the very character of God” (Hebrews 1:3). He is God’s will in a body—the perfect representation of the Father living in human form. To discover God’s will, simply look at the life of Christ. If the Son of God needed the baptism of the Holy Spirit, every believer does.

## A BEAUTIFUL EXPERIENCE

This book is not intended to discuss doctrinal details and theological debates, which have often caused great division among Christians. Again, our greatest role model should be Jesus. The way the gifts operate, and in what order, we will leave others to discuss.

What we need to understand, however, is that no denomination owns the Baptizer. This experience is not set aside exclusively for the Pentecostals or Charismatics. It is for everyone who has been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. I have seen Greek Orthodox priests, Lutherans, Baptists, Catholics, and many others receive and operate in the same power that God promises to give all His children.

Regardless of what some have made this experience, *if we just use the Master’s life as our example we will find it is beautiful and holy.* Do not worry about what you may have seen or heard, just look at Him.

Many people have made a mockery of this priceless gift which is called “the promise of the Father.” (See Acts 1:4.)

Anything that He promises is something to be excited about. The last thing you want is something manufactured by man. If you desire a genuine experience, Christ is the answer. Think of what took place after this wonderful power came on Him when He was baptized in the Jordan River. He lived a life of demonstration, commitment, and obedience, and changed people’s lives for eternity. Do not you want the same?

## A DIFFERENT MAN

Consider what happened to Peter after he received God’s power. (See Acts 2.) He went from denying Jesus due to fear of being arrested, to preaching the message of Christ to thousands. On the day of Pentecost, the same people Peter was afraid of were now listening attentively to a fisherman who suddenly was bold enough to put his life on the line for the Lord.

Perhaps you are timid about speaking up for the Savior. You are afraid of what others might think. Take a long look at what happened to Peter. Do you want to be bold like him? What did he do to get it? Did he rush off for more theological schooling during those ten days after Jesus ascended back to Heaven? What happened that changed his character so quickly? Peter experienced what John the Baptist had promised: Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Peter received this gift in the upper room as the Holy Spirit descended in flames on each head of the 120 who were gathered. (See Acts 2:4.) Thousands met the Lord as Savior through one message preached by Peter. (See Acts 2:41.) *The true result of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a life that leads people to Jesus.* What could be more wonderful than men and women coming to know the love of God?

Let down your defenses and weigh everything in light of the Bible. Even the Lord himself received and depended on the power of the Holy Spirit. He never did a single miracle until after the Holy Spirit descended on Him. And the fearful disciples also needed this power

before they could take the gospel into the world. Since His promises are eternal, it is still needed today.

Open your heart and realize that if we are truly going to know Jesus and live like Him, we must follow His pattern by living a life of power in the Spirit.

## A HARSH REALITY

After being a pastor for two years, God led me on a journey that was beyond difficult. It was a path that tested the foundation of the faith that I had been preaching. There is something about being a pastor that no other experience can provide. You become one with the congregation. Their joy becomes your joy, and their suffering becomes your suffering.

I have always had faith in God's ability to touch the lives of the people. Prior to entering the pastorate, I had the honor of traveling around the world with my father-in-law and had seen things that could not be explained with natural reasoning. I have witnessed more miracles than I can count.

Over time, members in our church began to face some difficult and even dire circumstances. As a young pastor in my mid-twenties, these events took me off guard. I did not come into this position with a desire to see more pain and suffering. My heart was to see a vibrant church that loved the Lord and would take the community and nation by storm. However, as is often the case, God's process is far different from our own plans.

The first blow to my spirit was when a dear friend of mine, George Hauffer, passed away. He and I enjoyed having some great conversations. He loved to talk about the game of golf with me, a subject we spent hours discussing. George had kidney problems and was in his mid-eighties. It humbled me to pastor this older, mature believer.

One day I visited him in the hospital and prayed that the Lord would heal his body. However, the healing did not come and George went to be with Jesus. I was honored to lead his funeral service.

His passing away seemed to start the domino effect in our congregation. In just a short period of time, several people started suffering with cancer, while others were disabled by sicknesses. We earnestly prayed for God to intervene in their situations, but few of them were healed.

## A LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Watching these people die greatly discouraged me. Attendance at the church started shrinking. Our worship services had no momentum or excitement. The “it” factor was missing. Staff meetings were also a challenge. We had all the bells and whistles, but we were not seeing what God promised.

Very few people were coming to know Christ, which was the most difficult thing to deal with. I desperately wanted to see lives changed through the redeeming work of Jesus. If it were not for my wife’s encouragement on Sunday afternoons, I do not know what I would have done. I was a broken and discouraged young man, but at least I was honest with myself.

These experiences caused me to take a painful look in the mirror and evaluate my life against the truth of God’s Word. I finally asked myself a hard question, *Am I really living out God’s promises? Do I really have what I think I have?* I had to put everything in my walk as a believer under the microscope.

With a broken and humble spirit, I admitted to the Lord, *I am not living the way you promised. I need you to do what you did for me as a twelve-year-old and let the hand of the Baptizer touch me again.*

I became acutely aware of my inability and weakness. Coming to this place in life is a must. This is what God was trying to show me. I had only been this hungry and aware of my inadequacies one other time in my life, which had happened years before. When I was a boy, I had spent hours on my knees crying out for the power of the Holy Spirit. Back then, I tried everything and every way to receive this power. It was not until I focused on Jesus alone that the fire of the Spirit came upon my young life.



I could take you to the exact place where it happened in Orlando, Florida. My future father-in-law was preaching on this precious gift of the Spirit. At the same altar in which the Savior became real to me, He also became my Baptizer. His awesome power consumed me and I felt an amazing surge of electricity go through my body for hours. I was one of the last to leave the church that night as I was in awe of the reality and strength of God Almighty.

Remembering this incredible touch from Jesus caused me to know what was real and what was not. What I was not going to do was merely play a role or live a lie because I now had the title of “pastor.” I needed the real deal!

As difficult and painful as this experience was, I desperately needed it if God was going to spiritually restore my life again. We all need a fresh touch from the Baptizer every day of our existence. I knew in my heart that brokenness was the key. Since I had reached such a low point, the Lord could now step in. Once we hit rock bottom, He comes to save us.

This began a time of intense prayer and seeking Jesus for over a year. Sometimes I spent hours alone in my office or bedroom crying out to God. I had to have Him. My moment was close and I could feel it in my bones.

## THE BAPTIZER TOUCHES ME AGAIN

A friend invited me to visit with a pastor in Connecticut who was seeing miracles take place in his church services. He was a Lutheran minister who had served in the U.S. Navy for years. After meeting with him, I learned that he had received more theological education than most of the clergy I knew. We played golf together, and as we walked the fairways he shared how he had been miraculously healed after being paralyzed by a stroke. His left leg had been paralyzed and he had to wear a brace for the lifeless limb.

Then one evening in Baltimore, Maryland, as he sang songs of worship at a large healing service, he felt power surge through his body. In an instant, his leg was completely healed. He was able to walk normally

again, as if he had never suffered a stroke. I still play golf with him and he shows no signs of any problem. In fact, I have trouble keeping up with him.

After he shared this story with me, he invited me to the service he was holding that night. I told him I would be there, and I knew something was already happening inside me. My faith in the Lord skyrocketed and I sensed that He was up to something.

The church was located in a quaint neighborhood. I walked into the building and observed the wooden pews and huge cross hanging over the altar. About seventy people were seated in the sanctuary, and I had planned to sit by myself and worship God privately. I had no plans of ministering that evening.

My friend who was with me whispered, "Have you ever felt like something is about to happen to you?" I had that same feeling. Here I was in a small sanctuary in Connecticut, far away from my home in Orange County, California. Would the Lord bring me to the opposite side of the nation just to make an impact on my life?

A young man picked up a guitar and began to sing songs of love to the Lord. I closed my eyes and sang along with him. After a few seconds, I felt the overwhelming presence of God. I can assure you that what was happening to me was more real than anything in this world. A great fear came over me as this holy Christ drew close to my heart.

Immediately my hands began to burn and throb. They were sweating and turned beet red. I did not have a clue what was happening in that service because my full attention was on Jesus. This burning sensation became so intense that it swept through my body and moved to my heart. Words are inadequate in trying to describe what was happening to me. Could this be the moment I had been waiting for so long?

Nothing else in the world mattered. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I felt His great power and tender love, both at the same time! I was so taken aback by this that I was afraid to move, open my eyes, or even breathe. I was afraid that I might do something to offend Him, which would stop this precious moment. His great holiness and power caused me to remain absolutely still. But what was more important than what

I was feeling was knowing that I had God's attention. I knew that He had turned His face towards me and that meant everything to me.

The heat continued to increase as it moved through my entire body. I can assure you that this description does not do the experience proper justice. It was so genuine—more real than you could ever imagine. This was a turning point in my life that dramatically changed me. Jesus the Baptizer was baptizing me in the Holy Spirit and fire again!

## A RENEWED LOVE

Why was God doing this to me? This experience was for more than my own personal feelings. I knew that I had this divine encounter so that others would come to know Him. With tears in my eyes, I prayed this child-like prayer: “Jesus, if this is a new start, and if this is your awesome power coming upon me, please tell this pastor to turn the service over to me.”

Looking back, that prayer was bolder than I realized. I opened my eyes and the pastor was standing right in front of me. He said, “If God has given you something to say, go ahead and take the service.”

Despite my prayer, I was shocked. This Lutheran pastor, who I had known less than a day, was turning the service over to me. The power of God was still moving through my body with amazing intensity. I had nothing prepared; no notes, no sermon. All I had was the hand of this incredible God resting on me, and a renewed love for Him burning in my heart.

At that moment, I was not a Pentecostal, Charismatic, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, or anything else. I was simply a lover of Jesus who had been consumed by the Holy Spirit's power. I preached the only message that would come out of my mouth. I preached Jesus!

My sermon was not a topical “how to” seminar. God gave me a word from above that was ignited with passion and power. It was the only message He would allow me to speak. I talked about Christ with a fresh authority and a new love. My words felt like bricks that were heavy enough to crush the hardest heart.

Later, many people reported to the pastor that they had encountered God's power and were overwhelmed by the presence of the Lord. Not only were the lives of others changed that night, so was mine!

## THE HEARTBEAT OF MY LIFE

What I had attempted to do in my own strength for years, was now being done the way God wanted all along. He said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8 NKJV). Scripture also declares, "'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6 NKJV).

*It is that simple. The evidence that someone has been touched by the Baptizer is they are addicted to Jesus!* He promised, "I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me" (John 15:26). Those touched by the Spirit talk about His life and all He has done for them, about His death on a Cross and His Resurrection. They demonstrate His heart, power, and miracle-working abilities today.

This is what happened to me. Jesus became my reward and my destination. He was all I wanted—and my fervor was contagious. This book is a direct result of this renewed love for the Lord. It started with a spirit of brokenness and desperation, and the reward was Christ himself. It was that touch along with the impact of some of God's great servants that helped mold my life. He has become more real than ever and His feelings are my number one priority. Jesus is my ministry.

I have made many mistakes on my journey. I began by seeking His power. That was my first mistake. I should have been seeking Him, the source of all power. We should want Him for who He is, not for what He can do for us. Second, I wanted this power for results in the ministry. I wanted growth, signs, wonders, miracles, and salvations by the thousands.

These are not bad in themselves, but the question was why did I want them? Did I desire them for myself and the people of the church, or for Christ's sake and the reward of His suffering?

As a result of me changing, the people in our church were also transformed and they too became radically in love with the Son of the living God. They still talk about it today and have told me, “This is where Jesus became real to me.” None of this would have been possible if the Holy Spirit’s fire had not touched my life.

## JESUS FIRST

I pray that by now you are saying, “This is my moment! I want the power of God to change my life. I am ready for this blessed experience. But how do I receive this wonderful gift?”

I met the Baptizer when He became my only pursuit. All the results I sought were for the sole desire of the Lord receiving love, and what He so rightly deserved for dying for me. The secret is not chasing “it.” You must first find the person, and then you will find the experience.

Jesus wants you to know Him more than He wants you to have His power. Make the Bridegroom your heart’s objective and He will gladly empower you. You must die to yourself and your selfish desires if you truly want to know the power of the Holy Spirit. He cannot fill you until you are first empty of self!

Examine your motives. Why do you want the power of God? Is it only for you, or for His name’s sake and joy?

## YOUR BAPTIZER

Millions of people still do not know Christ and this breaks His heart. Like the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine for the one lost sheep, He is still aching over the people who have left the fold or have never met Him. This power will give you what is necessary to bring wayward souls to a God who loves them. If this is why you are hungry for this precious gift, it will be yours.

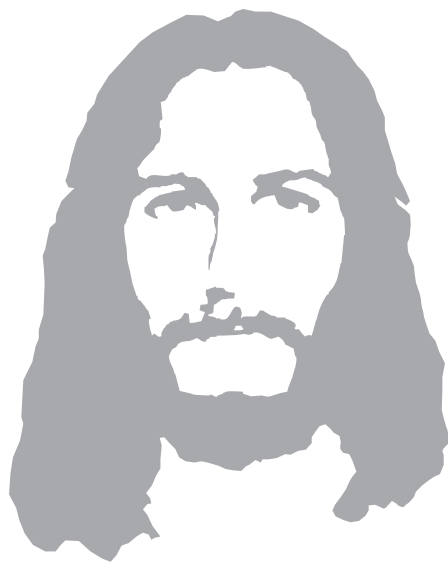
In the previous chapter, you were given the opportunity to meet Him as Savior. I pray you did so. If not, let me give you this second chance. The promise of the Spirit is only for those who are followers of Jesus. Say yes and give Him every ounce of your being.

## BAPTIZER

If you have given Christ your entire life and have asked Him to be your Lord and Savior, He wants to baptize you with His power. Child of God, with love and faith in your heart, simply ask the Father and come to His Son, the Baptizer.

*Dear Jesus,*

*Lord, I come to You empty and in need. Father, I have tried my ways for so long and I am still not living the life You have planned for me. I want to live like Jesus. I desire to bring people to You. Master, I cannot do this unless You touch me and baptize me with the Holy Spirit. I want You to receive the reward of the Cross. Please use me. Here I am. I surrender all to You. Lord Jesus, baptize me in the Holy Spirit and fire. In Your name I pray, Amen.*



## EPILOGUE

# JUST LOVE HIM

**WHAT A** holy and wonderful path you have just begun! You have discovered Jesus and what a treasure He is. Whether you have known Him for years or have just asked Him into your heart, He is always “new.”

I pray that you feel cleansed, refreshed, and are burning with love for your Husband. Enjoy the beauty of this newfound love. The world has nothing that can match it.

What now? How do you stay close to Christ? He feels so near to you in this moment, and this can be your experience forever. He is “a very present” Lord.

Please understand that life will have its peaks and valleys. You will experience great times of calm and raging storms. You may have more abundance in some years than others. Your family life will be peaceful some days and stressful the next. But remember that Jesus Christ is

## EPILOGUE

constant and remains the same. He will never fail you and is in your life to stay.

As long as the Lord is in your boat, the storm cannot harm you. Keep your eyes on Him. Make Christ your prized possession. Do nothing but love Him because nothing else is needed.

When you are confused and hurt, just love Him.

When worry comes your way, just love Him.

When your world seems to cave in around you, just love Him.

When sin causes you to fall, get back up and love Him.

It is so simple. Please, never make it more complicated than “love.” In your darkest moments, whisper His name and He will be there. Just say, “Jesus, I love you.”



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**MICHAEL KOULIANOS** is the founder of Jesus Image, an international ministry consisting of :

– JESUS EVENTS, nationwide events where thousands gather to worship, hear the Gospel, and encounter God.

– JESUS SCHOOL, a high level, focused ministry school with a mission to raise up a company of Jesus People.

– JESUS IMAGE CHURCH, a family of believers in Orlando, who burn for the Presence of Jesus Himself.

Michael is also part of “The Send” collaboration, a group of leaders hosting stadium gatherings around the world. They are committed to activating believers in evangelism and mobilizing missionaries worldwide. He has authored several books, including Jesus365 and Holy Spirit: the One Who Makes Jesus Real.

