

Beautiful

A Devotional

by Tricia Berg

He has made everything beautiful
in its time. He has also set eternity
in the human heart; yet no one can
fathom what God has done from
beginning to end. Ecclesiastes 3:11

What is beautiful?	1
What kind of love is this?	3
What is true strength?	4
How do we escape God's wrath?	5
From where does our strength come?	6
What about the opposition?	7
Who is Emmanuel?	8
How much does God love us?	9
What does this mean for us?	10
How shall we respond?	11
How are we to behave?	12
What does God deserve of us?	13
What kind of gift is fit for a King?	15
What is true beauty and love?	16
What pleases God?	17
Will He really return?	18
Who will suffer God's wrath?	19
What does it mean to be free?	20
Who is the Helper?	21
Is there really only one way?	23
How do people receive salvation?	24
What happened after Jesus died?	24
Do you know Him?	26
Does God know you?	27
Does God really care and know best?	28
What if God seems to ignore my prayers?	29
What does it mean when we call God our Father?	30
What about all of the evil in the world?	31
Aren't Christians closed-minded bigots?	32
If I become a Christian, will my life become easy then?	34
What is the deadline?	34
What if I don't believe in God?	36
Isn't God "love"?	37
What is God like?	37
Who started this rebellion against God?	39
How can we be sure there is only one God?	40
Do Christians worship three "gods"?	41
Is Jesus God?	42
What now?	44
Where is the love?	45
Can't we have both?	46
Does God's Word really have power?	48
What is devotion?	49
Prayer & Invitation	50

What is beautiful?

We usually think of outward appearance when we think of beauty, but to God, beauty is internal. He values a humble spirit inside—loving, unselfish, obedient. But He gave us free will, and the first people, Adam and Eve, used that gift to disobey God. Ever since, we have been under the curse of the sinful nature passed down through all generations, rebelling against Him. God made us for His pleasure, but we are separated from Him by our sin. He is holy and nothing unholy and impure will be tolerated in His presence, but He made a way for us to be purified and “right” with Him. He loves us so much that He sent His one and only begotten Son to live a perfect, sinless life and sacrifice Himself for us. Jesus took our punishment to save us. It’s hard for us to understand, but His blood washes us clean. (REV. 21:27, EPH. 1:7-14)

"FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. FOR GOD DID NOT SEND HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT IN ORDER THAT THE WORLD MIGHT BE SAVED THROUGH HIM. WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM IS NOT CONDEMNED, BUT WHOEVER DOES NOT BELIEVE IS CONDEMNED ALREADY, BECAUSE HE HAS NOT BELIEVED IN THE NAME OF THE ONLY SON OF GOD." JOHN 3:16-18

To God and those of us spared what we deserved, what He did was beautiful, even though Jesus was nearly unrecognizable as a human being. He was disrespected, hit, spit on, pushed and shoved, His beard pulled, mocked, humiliated, punctured with thorns that were deliberately pounded into His head, and then whipped mercilessly—His back no doubt utterly laid wide open. He was then made to carry His own cross on His bloody back, but was unable to continue, having already suffered so much abuse. As if that were not enough injustice against Him, the most gruesome part of the punishment for OUR sins was yet to come. Nailed to the cross and hanging there, He was barely able to breathe—His tongue stuck to the roof of His mouth and His bones were out of joint. He was tortured to death in front of those who loved Him. The excruciating pain of crucifixion was made even worse by the wounds He had already received, but He endured it all for us, as prophesied in the Old Testament.

BUT I AM A WORM AND NOT A MAN, SCORNE
D BY MANKIND AND DESPISED BY THE PEOPLE. ALL WHO SEE ME MOCK ME; THEY MAKE MOUTHS AT ME; THEY WAG THEIR HEADS; "HE TRUSTS IN THE LORD; LET HIM DELIVER HIM; LET HIM RESCUE HIM, FOR HE DELIGHTS IN HIM!" ...MANY BULLS ENCOMPASS ME; STRONG BULLS OF BASHAN SURROUND ME; THEY OPEN WIDE THEIR MOUTHS AT ME, LIKE A RAVENING AND ROARING LION. I AM POU
RED OUT LIKE WATER, AND ALL MY BONES ARE OUT OF JOINT; MY HEART IS LIKE WAX; IT IS MELTED WITHIN MY BREAST; MY STRENGTH IS DRIED UP LIKE A POTSD
HERD, AND MY

TONGUE STICKS TO MY JAWS; YOU LAY ME IN THE DUST OF DEATH. FOR DOGS ENCOMPASS ME; A COMPANY OF EVILDOERS ENCIRCLES ME; THEY HAVE PIERCED MY HANDS AND FEET—I CAN COUNT ALL MY BONES—THEY STARE AND GLOAT OVER ME; THEY DIVIDE MY GARMENTS AMONG THEM, AND FOR MY CLOTHING THEY CAST LOTS. PSALM 22:6-8, 12-18

I GAVE MY BACK TO THOSE WHO STRIKE, AND MY CHEEKS TO THOSE WHO PULL OUT THE BEARD; I HID NOT MY FACE FROM DISGRACE AND SPITTING. BUT THE LORD GOD HELPS ME; THEREFORE I HAVE NOT BEEN DISGRACED; THEREFORE I HAVE SET MY FACE LIKE FLINT, AND I KNOW THAT I SHALL NOT BE PUT TO SHAME. ISAIAH 50:6-7

LOOK, MY SERVANT WILL SUCCEED! HE WILL BE ELEVATED, LIFTED HIGH, AND GREATLY EXALTED—AS MANY WERE ASTONISHED AT THE SIGHT OF YOU—HE WAS SO DISFIGURED HE NO LONGER LOOKED LIKE A MAN; HIS FORM WAS SO MARRED HE NO LONGER LOOKED HUMAN—SO NOW HE WILL STARTLE MANY NATIONS. KINGS WILL BE SHOCKED BY HIS EXALTATION, FOR THEY WILL WITNESS SOMETHING UNANNOUNCED TO THEM, AND THEY WILL UNDERSTAND SOMETHING THEY HAD NOT HEARD ABOUT. ISAIAH 52:13-15

WHO HAS BELIEVED WHAT HE HAS HEARD FROM US? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED? FOR HE GREW UP BEFORE HIM LIKE A YOUNG PLANT, AND LIKE A ROOT OUT OF DRY GROUND; HE HAD NO FORM OR MAJESTY THAT WE SHOULD LOOK AT HIM, AND NO BEAUTY THAT WE SHOULD DESIRE HIM. HE WAS DESPISED AND REJECTED BY MEN; A MAN OF SORROWS, AND ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF; AND AS ONE FROM WHOM MEN HIDE THEIR FACES HE WAS DESPISED, AND WE ESTEEMED HIM NOT. SURELY HE HAS BORNE OUR GRIEFS AND CARRIED OUR SORROWS; YET WE ESTEEMED HIM STRICKEN, SMITTEN BY GOD, AND AFFLICTED. BUT HE WAS PIERCED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS; HE WAS CRUSHED FOR OUR INIQUITIES; UPON HIM WAS THE CHASTISEMENT THAT BROUGHT US PEACE, AND WITH HIS WOUNDS WE ARE HEALED. ISAIAH 53:1-5

ALL WE LIKE SHEEP HAVE GONE ASTRAY; WE HAVE TURNED—EVERY ONE—TO HIS OWN WAY; AND THE LORD HAS LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL. HE WAS OPPRESSED, AND HE WAS AFFLICTED, YET HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH; LIKE A LAMB THAT IS LED TO THE SLAUGHTER, AND LIKE A SHEEP THAT BEFORE ITS SHEARERS IS SILENT, SO HE OPENED NOT HIS MOUTH. BY OPPRESSION AND JUDGMENT HE WAS TAKEN AWAY; AND AS FOR HIS GENERATION, WHO CONSIDERED THAT HE WAS CUT OFF OUT OF THE LAND OF THE LIVING, STRICKEN FOR THE TRANSGRESSION OF MY PEOPLE? AND THEY MADE HIS GRAVE WITH THE WICKED AND WITH A RICH MAN IN HIS DEATH, ALTHOUGH HE HAD DONE NO VIOLENCE, AND THERE WAS NO DECEIT IN HIS MOUTH. YET IT WAS THE WILL OF THE LORD TO CRUSH HIM; HE HAS PUT HIM TO GRIEF; WHEN HIS SOUL MAKES AN OFFERING FOR GUILT, HE SHALL SEE HIS OFFSPRING; HE SHALL PROLONG HIS DAYS; THE WILL OF THE LORD SHALL PROSPER IN HIS HAND. OUT OF THE ANGUISH OF HIS SOUL HE SHALL SEE AND BE SATISFIED; BY HIS KNOWLEDGE SHALL THE RIGHTEOUS ONE, MY SERVANT, MAKE MANY TO BE ACCOUNTED RIGHTEOUS, AND HE SHALL BEAR THEIR INIQUITIES. THEREFORE I WILL DIVIDE HIM A PORTION WITH THE MANY, AND HE SHALL DIVIDE THE SPOIL WITH THE STRONG, BECAUSE HE POURED OUT

HIS SOUL TO DEATH AND WAS NUMBERED WITH THE SINNERS; YET HE BORE THE SIN OF MANY, AND MAKES INTERCESSION FOR THE SINNERS. ISAIAH 53:6-12

He was despised for telling the truth, rejected and falsely accused by those He came to save, abandoned by those closest to Him, scorned by His own creation, surrounded by and at the "mercy" of vicious enemies, and made the object of intense hatred by a frenzied mob of His own people. Ironically, the people chose to have Pilate release a criminal whose name, Barabbas, means "Son of Father" instead of the true Son of Father God. All of these Old Testament prophecies were perfectly fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament (and more): THEN THOSE WHO HAD SEIZED JESUS LED HIM TO CAIAPHAS THE HIGH PRIEST, WHERE THE SCRIBES AND THE ELDERS HAD GATHERED. ...THEN THEY SPIT IN HIS FACE AND STRUCK HIM. AND SOME SLAPPED HIM, SAYING, "PROPHECY TO US, YOU CHRIST! WHO IS IT THAT STRUCK YOU?" MATTHEW 26:57, 67-68

THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE SCRIBES STOOD BY, VEHEMENTLY ACCUSING HIM. AND HEROD WITH HIS SOLDIERS TREATED HIM WITH CONTEMPT AND MOCKED HIM. THEN, ARRAYING HIM IN SPLENDID CLOTHING, HE SENT HIM BACK TO PILATE. LUKE 23:10-11 WHEN THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE OFFICERS SAW HIM, THEY CRIED OUT, "CRUCIFY HIM, CRUCIFY HIM!" PILATE SAID TO THEM, "TAKE HIM YOURSELVES AND CRUCIFY HIM, FOR I FIND NO GUILT IN HIM." JOHN 19:6

THEN PILATE RELEASED FOR THEM BARABBAS, AND HAVING SCOURGED JESUS, DELIVERED HIM TO BE CRUCIFIED. THEN THE SOLDIERS OF THE GOVERNOR TOOK JESUS INTO THE GOVERNOR'S HEADQUARTERS, AND THEY GATHERED THE WHOLE BATTALION BEFORE HIM. AND THEY STRIPPED HIM AND PUT A SCARLET ROBE ON HIM, AND TWISTING TOGETHER A CROWN OF THORNS, THEY PUT IT ON HIS HEAD AND PUT A REED IN HIS RIGHT HAND. AND KNEELING BEFORE HIM, THEY MOCKED HIM, SAYING, "HAIL, KING OF THE JEWS!" AND THEY SPIT ON HIM AND TOOK THE REED AND STRUCK HIM ON THE HEAD. AND WHEN THEY HAD MOCKED HIM, THEY STRIPPED HIM OF THE ROBE AND PUT HIS OWN CLOTHES ON HIM AND LED HIM AWAY TO CRUCIFY HIM. MATTHEW 27:26-31

THERE WERE ALSO MANY WOMEN THERE, LOOKING ON FROM A DISTANCE, WHO HAD FOLLOWED JESUS FROM GALILEE, MINISTERING TO HIM, AMONG WHOM WERE MARY MAGDALENE AND MARY THE MOTHER OF JAMES AND JOSEPH AND THE MOTHER OF THE SONS OF ZEBEDEE. MATTHEW 27:55-56 ...BUT STANDING BY THE CROSS OF JESUS WERE HIS MOTHER AND HIS MOTHER'S SISTER, MARY THE WIFE OF CLOPAS, AND MARY MAGDALENE. WHEN JESUS SAW HIS MOTHER AND THE DISCIPLE WHOM HE LOVED STANDING NEARBY, HE SAID TO HIS MOTHER, "WOMAN, BEHOLD, YOUR SON!" THEN HE SAID TO THE DISCIPLE, "BEHOLD, YOUR MOTHER!" AND FROM THAT HOUR THE DISCIPLE TOOK HER TO HIS OWN HOME. JOHN 19:25-27

What kind of love is this?

Jesus' ordeal actually began in the Garden of Gethsemane. Because He is both God and man, He knew in vivid detail what was about to happen to His very human body before it happened. Gethsemane means "oil press." Jesus suffered so much anguish there from the pressure of knowing what was to come that His sweat was as drops of blood, just as an olive would have the oil pressed out. Despite His request that His disciples remain awake with Him through His ordeal, they repeatedly fell asleep. They had no idea how momentous the time was, or that tomorrow would be nothing at all like yesterday.

"BUT I TELL YOU THAT ELIJAH HAS ALREADY COME, AND THEY DID NOT RECOGNIZE HIM, BUT DID TO HIM WHATEVER THEY PLEASSED. SO ALSO THE SON OF MAN WILL CERTAINLY SUFFER AT THEIR HANDS." MATTHEW 17:12 AND HE STRICTLY CHARGED AND COMMANDED THEM TO TELL THIS TO NO ONE, SAYING, "THE SON OF MAN MUST SUFFER MANY THINGS AND BE REJECTED BY THE ELDERS AND CHIEF PRIESTS AND SCRIBES, AND BE KILLED, AND ON THE THIRD DAY BE RAISED." LUKE 9:21-22 THEN JESUS SAID TO THEM, "YOU WILL ALL FALL AWAY BECAUSE OF ME THIS NIGHT, FOR IT IS WRITTEN, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.'" MATTHEW 26:31

THEN JESUS CAME WITH THEM TO A PLACE CALLED GETHSEMANE, AND HE TOLD THE DISCIPLES, **"SIT HERE WHILE I GO OVER THERE AND PRAY."** TAKING ALONG PETER AND THE TWO SONS OF ZEBEDEE, HE BEGAN TO BE **SORROWFUL AND DEEPLY DISTRESSED.** THEN HE SAID TO THEM, **"MY SOUL IS SWALLOWED UP IN SORROW—TO THE POINT OF DEATH. REMAIN HERE AND STAY AWAKE WITH ME."** GOING A LITTLE FARTHER, HE FELL FACEDOWN AND PRAYED, **"MY FATHER! IF IT IS POSSIBLE, LET THIS CUP PASS FROM ME. YET NOT AS I WILL, BUT AS YOU WILL."** THEN HE CAME TO THE DISCIPLES AND FOUND THEM SLEEPING. HE ASKED PETER, **"SO, COULDN'T YOU STAY AWAKE WITH ME ONE HOUR? STAY AWAKE AND PRAY, SO THAT YOU WON'T ENTER INTO TEMPTATION. THE SPIRIT IS WILLING, BUT THE FLESH IS WEAK."** AGAIN, A SECOND TIME, HE WENT AWAY AND PRAYED, **"MY FATHER, IF THIS CANNOT PASS UNLESS I DRINK IT, YOUR WILL BE DONE."** AND HE CAME AGAIN AND FOUND THEM SLEEPING, BECAUSE THEY COULD NOT KEEP THEIR EYES OPEN. AFTER LEAVING THEM, HE WENT AWAY AGAIN AND PRAYED A THIRD TIME, SAYING THE SAME THING ONCE MORE. THEN HE CAME TO THE DISCIPLES AND SAID TO THEM, **"ARE YOU STILL SLEEPING AND RESTING? LOOK, THE TIME IS NEAR. THE SON OF MAN IS BEING BETRAYED INTO THE HANDS OF SINNERS. GET UP; LET'S GO! SEE, MY BETRAYER IS NEAR."** MATTHEW 26:36-46

AND BEING IN AN **AGONY HE PRAYED MORE EARNESTLY; AND HIS SWEAT BECAME LIKE GREAT DROPS OF BLOOD FALLING DOWN TO THE GROUND.** LUKE 22:44

WHILE HE WAS STILL SPEAKING, JUDAS CAME, ONE OF THE TWELVE, AND WITH HIM **A GREAT CROWD WITH SWORDS AND CLUBS,** FROM THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE ELDERS OF THE PEOPLE. NOW THE BETRAYER HAD

GIVEN THEM A SIGN, SAYING, "THE ONE I WILL KISS IS THE MAN; SEIZE HIM." AND HE CAME UP TO JESUS AT ONCE AND SAID, "GREETINGS, RABBI!" AND HE KISSED HIM. JESUS SAID TO HIM, "FRIEND, DO WHAT YOU CAME TO DO." THEN THEY CAME UP AND LAID HANDS ON JESUS AND SEIZED HIM. AND BEHOLD, ONE OF THOSE WHO WERE WITH JESUS STRETCHED OUT HIS HAND AND DREW HIS SWORD AND STRUCK THE SERVANT OF THE HIGH PRIEST AND CUT OFF HIS EAR. THEN JESUS SAID TO HIM, "PUT YOUR SWORD BACK INTO ITS PLACE. FOR ALL WHO TAKE THE SWORD WILL PERISH BY THE SWORD. DO YOU THINK THAT I CANNOT APPEAL TO MY FATHER, AND HE WILL AT ONCE SEND ME MORE THAN TWELVE LEGIONS OF ANGELS? BUT HOW THEN SHOULD THE SCRIPTURES BE FULFILLED, THAT IT MUST BE SO?" AT THAT HOUR JESUS SAID TO THE CROWDS, "HAVE YOU COME OUT AS AGAINST A ROBBER, WITH SWORDS AND CLUBS TO CAPTURE ME? DAY AFTER DAY I SAT IN THE TEMPLE TEACHING, AND YOU DID NOT SEIZE ME. BUT ALL THIS HAS TAKEN PLACE THAT THE SCRIPTURES OF THE PROPHETS MIGHT BE FULFILLED." THEN ALL THE DISCIPLES LEFT HIM AND FLED. MATTHEW 26:47-56

What is true strength?

When we think of strength, we usually think of someone relying on themselves to achieve something great. God sees it differently. Contrary to human logic, the weakest is the strongest. FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST, THEN, I AM CONTENT WITH WEAKNESSES, INSULTS, HARDSHIPS, PERSECUTIONS, AND CALAMITIES. FOR WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN I AM STRONG. 2 CORINTHIANS 12:10 He is the source of all strength, so the mightiest one is the one who relies fully on Him. The greatest is the one who laid down their own will and accepted His. Jesus knew that His suffering and sacrifice was the ONLY way to save us—that He was the ONLY One who could do it. And through it all, He submitted Himself to the will of His Father, even asking forgiveness for the sins of those continuing to mock and reject Him as He died. We have nothing to compare this kind of cruelty and ignorance to. I can't imagine anyone in this day suffering like that, let alone anyone taunting them in their agony! But Jesus' love and His faithfulness was stronger—He accomplished the purpose for which He came. He finished it once and for all.

AND WHEN THEY CAME TO THE PLACE THAT IS CALLED THE SKULL, THERE THEY CRUCIFIED HIM, AND THE CRIMINALS, ONE ON HIS RIGHT AND ONE ON HIS LEFT. AND JESUS SAID, "FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO." AND THEY CAST LOTS TO DIVIDE HIS GARMENTS. AND THE PEOPLE STOOD BY, WATCHING, BUT THE RULERS SCOFFED AT HIM, SAYING, "HE SAVED OTHERS; LET HIM SAVE HIMSELF, IF HE IS THE CHRIST OF GOD, HIS CHOSEN ONE!" THE SOLDIERS ALSO MOCKED HIM, COMING UP AND OFFERING HIM SOUR WINE AND SAYING, "IF YOU ARE THE KING OF THE JEWS, SAVE YOURSELF!" THERE WAS ALSO AN INSCRIPTION OVER HIM, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." ONE OF THE CRIMINALS WHO WERE HANGED RAILED AT HIM, SAYING, "ARE YOU NOT THE CHRIST? SAVE YOURSELF AND US!" LUKE 23:33-39

WHEN THE SOLDIERS HAD CRUCIFIED JESUS, THEY TOOK HIS GARMENTS AND DIVIDED THEM INTO FOUR PARTS, ONE PART FOR EACH SOLDIER; ALSO HIS TUNIC. BUT THE TUNIC WAS SEAMLESS, WOVEN IN ONE PIECE FROM TOP TO BOTTOM, SO THEY SAID TO ONE ANOTHER, "LET US NOT TEAR IT, BUT CAST LOTS FOR IT TO SEE WHOSE IT SHALL BE." THIS WAS TO FULFILL THE SCRIPTURE WHICH SAYS, "THEY DIVIDED MY GARMENTS AMONG THEM, AND FOR MY CLOTHING THEY CAST LOTS." JOHN 19:23-24

WHEN JESUS HAD RECEIVED THE SOUR WINE, HE SAID, "IT IS FINISHED," AND HE BOWED HIS HEAD AND GAVE UP HIS SPIRIT. JOHN 19:30

How do we escape God's wrath?

Jesus had never sinned, but became sin for our sake. On Him, God's perfect, only begotten Son, the wrath of God was satisfied so that we could be spared eternal punishment in hell for our sins. FOR OUR SAKE HE MADE HIM TO BE SIN WHO KNEW NO SIN, SO THAT IN HIM WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21 Because of His suffering and sacrifice, those who belong to Him, purchased and redeemed by His blood, will never experience that wrath. THERE IS THEREFORE NOW NO CONDEMNATION FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS. ROMANS 8:1

Isn't it hard to take in? What would you call that? The very definition of love? Most definitely beautiful! Now the question is, what kind of love will we show in return? And do we want to be beautiful like our precious Lord and Savior?

HE IS THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS, AND NOT FOR OURS ONLY BUT ALSO FOR THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD. 1 JOHN 2:2 WHOEVER BELIEVES IN THE SON HAS ETERNAL LIFE; WHOEVER DOES NOT OBEY THE SON SHALL NOT SEE LIFE, BUT THE WRATH OF GOD REMAINS ON HIM. JOHN 3:36 FOR GOD HAS NOT DESTINED US FOR WRATH, BUT TO OBTAIN SALVATION THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO DIED FOR US SO THAT WHETHER WE ARE AWAKE OR ASLEEP WE MIGHT LIVE WITH HIM. 1 THESSALONIANS 5:9-10

From where does our strength come?

These days, there is an endless stream of self-help books and motivational speakers. We are encouraged to look inward to find peace and strength. We are told to "believe in ourselves." Jesus knew better. His focus was where it should be—on His Father, the only true source of peace and strength. We are told that we deserve and need to "spoil" ourselves. Jesus got hungry and tired just as we do. During His three-year ministry, He gave of Himself to the point of exhaustion—teaching, healing and casting out demons—sometimes not even

taking a break to eat, but He never complained or “burnt out.” He didn’t quit or take vacation to recharge—instead He went alone to the Mount of Olives, sometimes all night. His strength came from the Holy Spirit and His Father. He didn’t let the cares of this world deter Him from His mission. He knew why He was here and never wavered. ...JESUS, WEARIED AS HE WAS FROM HIS JOURNEY, WAS SITTING BESIDE THE WELL... JOHN 4:6

THEY WENT EACH TO HIS OWN HOUSE, BUT JESUS WENT TO THE MOUNT OF OLIVES. EARLY IN THE MORNING HE CAME AGAIN TO THE TEMPLE. ALL THE PEOPLE CAME TO HIM, AND HE SAT DOWN AND TAUGHT THEM. JOHN 7:53, 8:1-2 AND JESUS SAID TO HIM, "FOXES HAVE HOLES, AND BIRDS OF THE AIR HAVE NESTS, BUT THE SON OF MAN HAS NOWHERE TO LAY HIS HEAD." LUKE 9:58

"AND HE WHO SENT ME IS WITH ME. HE HAS NOT LEFT ME ALONE, FOR I ALWAYS DO THE THINGS THAT ARE PLEASING TO HIM." JOHN 8:29 JESUS SAID TO THEM, "MY FOOD IS TO DO THE WILL OF HIM WHO SENT ME AND TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK." JOHN 4:34

We too need to put all of our focus on God, not caring what the world thinks. Jesus told us to count the cost of following Him. Sadly, there were many who believed in Jesus during the time of His ministry but kept silent because of the cost it would have had in their personal lives. We need to remember what and Who really matters, not allowing ourselves to be distracted by worldly troubles or pleasures. We answer to God, not men, when it comes to doing our Father’s work. Jesus said to fear only the One who could destroy both body and soul. "AND DO NOT FEAR THOSE WHO KILL THE BODY BUT CANNOT KILL THE SOUL. RATHER FEAR HIM WHO CAN DESTROY BOTH SOUL AND BODY IN HELL." MATTHEW 10:28

AND HE SAID TO ALL, "IF ANYONE WOULD COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY AND FOLLOW ME. FOR WHOEVER IS ASHAMED OF ME AND OF MY WORDS, OF HIM WILL THE SON OF MAN BE ASHAMED WHEN HE COMES IN HIS GLORY AND THE GLORY OF THE FATHER AND OF THE HOLY ANGELS." LUKE 9:23, 26

"FOR WHICH OF YOU, DESIRING TO BUILD A TOWER, DOES NOT FIRST SIT DOWN AND COUNT THE COST, WHETHER HE HAS ENOUGH TO COMPLETE IT? ...SO THEREFORE, ANY ONE OF YOU WHO DOES NOT RENOUNCE ALL THAT HE HAS CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE." LUKE 14:28, 33

"AND THESE ARE THE ONES SOWN ON ROCKY GROUND: THE ONES WHO, WHEN THEY HEAR THE WORD, IMMEDIATELY RECEIVE IT WITH JOY. AND THEY HAVE NO ROOT IN THEMSELVES, BUT ENDURE FOR A WHILE; THEN, WHEN TRIBULATION OR PERSECUTION ARISES ON ACCOUNT OF THE WORD, IMMEDIATELY THEY FALL AWAY. AND OTHERS ARE THE ONES SOWN AMONG THORNS. THEY ARE THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD, BUT THE CARES OF THE WORLD AND THE DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES AND THE DESIRES FOR OTHER

THINGS ENTER IN AND CHOKES THE WORD, AND IT PROVES UNFRUITFUL. BUT THOSE THAT WERE SOWN ON THE GOOD SOIL ARE THE ONES WHO HEAR THE WORD AND ACCEPT IT AND BEAR FRUIT, THIRTYFOLD AND SIXTYFOLD AND A HUNDREDFOLD." MARK 4:16-20

NEVERTHELESS, MANY DID BELIEVE IN HIM EVEN AMONG THE RULERS, BUT BECAUSE OF THE PHARISEES THEY DID NOT CONFESS HIM, SO THEY WOULD NOT BE BANNED FROM THE SYNAGOGUE. FOR THEY LOVED PRAISE FROM MEN MORE THAN PRAISE FROM GOD. JOHN 12:42-43

FOR AM I NOW SEEKING THE APPROVAL OF MAN, OR OF GOD? OR AM I TRYING TO PLEASE MAN? IF I WERE STILL TRYING TO PLEASE MAN, I WOULD NOT BE A SERVANT OF CHRIST. GALATIANS 1:10 FOR THE APPEAL WE MAKE DOES NOT SPRING FROM ERROR OR IMPURE MOTIVES, NOR ARE WE TRYING TO TRICK YOU. ...WE ARE NOT TRYING TO PLEASE PEOPLE BUT GOD, WHO TESTS OUR HEARTS. 1 THESSALONIANS 2:3-4

What about the opposition?

Jesus is our example. He was not deterred by criticism, ridicule or attempts to silence Him. He did only good during His entire earthly life, and He faced opposition that would have been so wearying and discouraging to any of us. Yet He was eager to fulfill His mission, on His Father's timing. "...FOR MY TIME HAS NOT YET FULLY COME." JOHN 7:8 "I CAME TO CAST FIRE ON THE EARTH, AND WOULD THAT IT WERE ALREADY KINDLED! I HAVE A BAPTISM TO BE BAPTIZED WITH, AND HOW GREAT IS MY DISTRESS UNTIL IT IS ACCOMPLISHED!" LUKE 12:49-50

AFTER THIS MANY OF HIS DISCIPLES TURNED BACK AND NO LONGER WALKED WITH HIM. SO JESUS SAID TO THE TWELVE, "DO YOU WANT TO GO AWAY AS WELL?" SIMON PETER ANSWERED HIM, "LORD, TO WHOM SHALL WE GO? YOU HAVE THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE, AND WE HAVE BELIEVED, AND HAVE COME TO KNOW, THAT YOU ARE THE HOLY ONE OF GOD." JOHN 6:66-69

THIS WAS WHY THE JEWS WERE SEEKING ALL THE MORE TO KILL HIM, BECAUSE NOT ONLY WAS HE BREAKING THE SABBATH, BUT HE WAS EVEN CALLING GOD HIS OWN FATHER, MAKING HIMSELF EQUAL WITH GOD. JOHN 5:18 AFTER THIS JESUS WENT ABOUT IN GALILEE. HE WOULD NOT GO ABOUT IN JUDEA, BECAUSE THE JEWS WERE SEEKING TO KILL HIM. JOHN 7:1 JESUS ANSWERED THEM, "I HAVE SHOWN YOU MANY GOOD WORKS FROM THE FATHER; FOR WHICH OF THEM ARE YOU GOING TO STONE ME?" JOHN 10:32

GIVE ME NOT UP TO THE WILL OF MY ADVERSARIES; FOR FALSE WITNESSES HAVE RISEN AGAINST ME, AND THEY BREATHE OUT VIOLENCE. PSALM 27:12 NOW THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE WHOLE COUNCIL WERE

SEEKING FALSE TESTIMONY AGAINST JESUS THAT THEY MIGHT PUT HIM TO DEATH, BUT THEY FOUND NONE, THOUGH MANY FALSE WITNESSES CAME FORWARD. MATTHEW 26:59-60

FOR I HEAR THE WHISPERING OF MANY—TERROR ON EVERY SIDE! —AS THEY SCHEME TOGETHER AGAINST ME, AS THEY PLOT TO TAKE MY LIFE. PSALM 31:13 THEN THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE ELDERS OF THE PEOPLE GATHERED IN THE PALACE OF THE HIGH PRIEST, WHOSE NAME WAS CAIAPHAS, AND PLOTTED TOGETHER IN ORDER TO ARREST JESUS BY STEALTH AND KILL HIM. MATTHEW 26:3-4

Even Jesus' own disciples were not able to understand His mission, although He told them in advance. AND PETER TOOK HIM ASIDE AND BEGAN TO REBUKE HIM, SAYING, "FAR BE IT FROM YOU, LORD! THIS SHALL NEVER HAPPEN TO YOU." BUT HE TURNED AND SAID TO PETER, "GET BEHIND ME, SATAN! YOU ARE A HINDRANCE TO ME. FOR YOU ARE NOT SETTING YOUR MIND ON THE THINGS OF GOD, BUT ON THE THINGS OF MAN." MATTHEW 16:22-23

AND TAKING THE TWELVE, HE SAID TO THEM, "SEE, WE ARE GOING UP TO JERUSALEM, AND EVERYTHING THAT IS WRITTEN ABOUT THE SON OF MAN BY THE PROPHETS WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED. FOR HE WILL BE DELIVERED OVER TO THE GENTILES AND WILL BE MOCKED AND SHAMEFULLY TREATED AND SPIT UPON. AND AFTER FLOGGING HIM, THEY WILL KILL HIM, AND ON THE THIRD DAY HE WILL RISE." BUT THEY UNDERSTOOD NONE OF THESE THINGS. THIS SAYING WAS HIDDEN FROM THEM, AND THEY DID NOT GRASP WHAT WAS SAID. LUKE 18:31-34

"NOW IS MY SOUL TROUBLED. AND WHAT SHALL I SAY? 'FATHER, SAVE ME FROM THIS HOUR'? BUT FOR THIS PURPOSE I HAVE COME TO THIS HOUR." JOHN 12:27 SO JESUS SAID TO PETER, "PUT YOUR SWORD INTO ITS SHEATH; SHALL I NOT DRINK THE CUP THAT THE FATHER HAS GIVEN ME?" JOHN 18:11

THEN PILATE SAID TO HIM, "SO YOU ARE A KING?" JESUS ANSWERED, "YOU SAY THAT I AM A KING. FOR THIS PURPOSE I WAS BORN AND FOR THIS PURPOSE I HAVE COME INTO THE WORLD—TO BEAR WITNESS TO THE TRUTH. EVERYONE WHO IS OF THE TRUTH LISTENS TO MY VOICE." JOHN 18:37

Who is Emmanuel?

But let's go back further than the Cross, the Garden or even the start of Jesus' ministry. Have you ever thought about how utterly amazing it is that the Creator of everything that exists, the One who invented and designed the solar system and everything in it, including us, would come to live among us in a lowly body like ours? Wow! Think about it. Could you imagine doing that if it had been possible for you to do? Leave the indescribable glory of heaven, the majesty and honor, and instead to experience pain, hunger, heat and cold, sheer exhaustion and everything we feel in our physical bodies? But the most

unfathomable part is WHY—He came to suffer and DIE for us, knowing that after persevering through all the challenges, rejection, disbelief, disrespect and attacks against Him (who was perfect in all of His ways, always), He would endure everything written above for us undeserving, ungrateful creatures? Again, wow—talk about utterly amazing!

THEREFORE THE LORD HIMSELF WILL GIVE YOU A SIGN. BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE AND BEAR A SON, AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME EMMANUEL. ISAIAH 7: 14 FOR TO US A CHILD IS BORN, TO US A SON IS GIVEN; AND THE GOVERNMENT SHALL BE UPON HIS SHOULDER, AND HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED WONDERFUL COUNSELOR, MIGHTY GOD, EVERLASTING FATHER, PRINCE OF PEACE. OF THE INCREASE OF HIS GOVERNMENT AND OF PEACE THERE WILL BE NO END, ON THE THRONE OF DAVID AND OVER HIS KINGDOM, TO ESTABLISH IT AND TO UPHOLD IT WITH JUSTICE AND WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM THIS TIME FORTH AND FOREVERMORE. THE ZEAL OF THE LORD OF HOSTS WILL DO THIS. ISAIAH 9:6-7

BUT AS HE CONSIDERED THESE THINGS, BEHOLD, AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED TO HIM IN A DREAM, SAYING, "JOSEPH, SON OF DAVID, DO NOT FEAR TO TAKE MARY AS YOUR WIFE, FOR THAT WHICH IS CONCEIVED IN HER IS FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT. SHE WILL BEAR A SON, AND YOU SHALL CALL HIS NAME JESUS, FOR HE WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS." ALL THIS TOOK PLACE TO FULFILL WHAT THE LORD HAD SPOKEN BY THE PROPHET: "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE AND BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME EMMANUEL" (WHICH MEANS, GOD WITH US). MATTHEW 1:20-23

AND THE ANGEL SAID TO HER, "DO NOT BE AFRAID, MARY, FOR YOU HAVE FOUND FAVOR WITH GOD. AND BEHOLD, YOU WILL CONCEIVE IN YOUR WOMB AND BEAR A SON, AND YOU SHALL CALL HIS NAME JESUS. HE WILL BE GREAT AND WILL BE CALLED THE SON OF THE MOST HIGH. AND THE LORD GOD WILL GIVE TO HIM THE THRONE OF HIS FATHER DAVID, AND HE WILL REIGN OVER THE HOUSE OF JACOB FOREVER, AND OF HIS KINGDOM THERE WILL BE NO END." AND MARY SAID TO THE ANGEL, "HOW WILL THIS BE, SINCE I AM A VIRGIN?" AND THE ANGEL ANSWERED HER, "THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL COME UPON YOU, AND THE POWER OF THE MOST HIGH WILL OVERSHADOW YOU; THEREFORE THE CHILD TO BE BORN WILL BE CALLED HOLY—THE SON OF GOD." LUKE 1:30-35

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, AND THE WORD WAS GOD. HE WAS IN THE BEGINNING WITH GOD. JOHN 1: 1-2 "NOW, FATHER, GLORIFY ME IN YOUR OWN PRESENCE WITH THE GLORY THAT I HAD WITH YOU BEFORE THE WORLD EXISTED." JOHN 17:5

NOW AFTER JESUS WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM OF JUDEA IN THE DAYS OF HEROD THE KING, BEHOLD, WISE MEN FROM THE EAST CAME TO JERUSALEM, SAYING, "WHERE IS HE WHO HAS BEEN BORN KING OF THE JEWS? FOR WE SAW HIS STAR WHEN IT ROSE AND HAVE COME TO WORSHIP HIM." ...WHEN THEY SAW THE STAR, THEY REJOICED EXCEEDINGLY WITH GREAT JOY. AND GOING INTO THE HOUSE THEY SAW THE CHILD WITH MARY HIS MOTHER, AND THEY FELL DOWN AND WORSHIPED HIM. MATTHEW 2: 1-2, 10

How much does God love us?

He knows everything about each of us. From the beginning of our lives to the end, He knows it all before it happens. (The Creator of time is not subject to it Himself.) Despite this, He loves us enough to willingly suffer and lay down His life for us. Nothing we could ever do would be unforgivable if we confess it. (Only outright unbelief—rejecting the Holy Spirit—will not be forgiven, but those who are born again are indwelt by Him.) **IF WE SAY WE HAVE NO SIN, WE DECEIVE OURSELVES, AND THE TRUTH IS NOT IN US. IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. 1 JOHN 1:8-9**

"I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD. I KNOW MY OWN AND MY OWN KNOW ME, JUST AS THE FATHER KNOWS ME AND I KNOW THE FATHER; AND I LAY DOWN MY LIFE FOR THE SHEEP." JOHN 10:14-15 "NO ONE TAKES MY LIFE FROM ME, BUT I LAY IT DOWN OF MY OWN ACCORD. I HAVE AUTHORITY TO LAY IT DOWN, AND I HAVE AUTHORITY TO TAKE IT UP AGAIN. THIS CHARGE I HAVE RECEIVED FROM MY FATHER." JOHN 10:18

"GREATER LOVE HAS NO ONE THAN THIS, THAT SOMEONE LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS." JOHN 15:13 IN THIS IS LOVE, NOT THAT WE HAVE LOVED GOD BUT THAT HE LOVED US AND SENT HIS SON TO BE THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS. 1 JOHN 4:10 "...EVEN AS THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY." MATTHEW 20:28

FOR ONE WILL SCARCELY DIE FOR A RIGHTEOUS PERSON—THOUGH PERHAPS FOR A GOOD PERSON ONE WOULD DARE EVEN TO DIE—BUT **GOD SHOWS HIS LOVE FOR US IN THAT WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US. SINCE, THEREFORE, WE HAVE NOW BEEN JUSTIFIED BY HIS BLOOD, MUCH MORE SHALL WE BE SAVED BY HIM FROM THE WRATH OF GOD. ROMANS 5:7-9**

"WHOEVER IS NOT WITH ME IS AGAINST ME, AND WHOEVER DOES NOT GATHER WITH ME SCATTERS. THEREFORE I TELL YOU, EVERY SIN AND BLASPHEMY WILL BE FORGIVEN PEOPLE, BUT THE BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE SPIRIT WILL NOT BE FORGIVEN. AND WHOEVER SPEAKS A WORD AGAINST THE SON OF MAN WILL BE FORGIVEN, BUT WHOEVER SPEAKS AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL NOT BE FORGIVEN, EITHER IN THIS AGE OR IN THE AGE TO COME." MATTHEW 12:30-32

What does this mean for us?

We could never earn His love or repay Him for what He's done for us, and we are SO unworthy! Isn't it astonishing that He would call us His own and be willing to pay such a high price for us? If we belong to Him, we are FREE from being a slave to sin and from our death sentence. **SO YOU ARE NO LONGER A SLAVE, BUT A SON, AND IF**

A SON, THEN AN HEIR THROUGH GOD. GALATIANS 4:7 We are rich—heirs of the Kingdom—no matter what our circumstances in this life! This is cause for great rejoicing!! REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS; AGAIN I WILL SAY, REJOICE. PHILIPPIANS 4:4 Our names are written in His Book in heaven. "...REJOICE THAT YOUR NAMES ARE WRITTEN IN HEAVEN." LUKE 10:20

DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT IF YOU PRESENT YOURSELVES TO ANYONE AS OBEDIENT SLAVES, YOU ARE SLAVES OF THE ONE WHOM YOU OBEY, EITHER OF SIN, WHICH LEADS TO DEATH, OR OF OBEDIENCE, WHICH LEADS TO RIGHTEOUSNESS? BUT THANKS BE TO GOD, THAT YOU WHO WERE ONCE SLAVES OF SIN HAVE BECOME OBEDIENT FROM THE HEART TO THE STANDARD OF TEACHING TO WHICH YOU WERE COMMITTED, AND, HAVING BEEN SET FREE FROM SIN, HAVE BECOME SLAVES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. ROMANS 6:16-18

JESUS ANSWERED THEM, "TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, EVERYONE WHO PRACTICES SIN IS A SLAVE TO SIN. THE SLAVE DOES NOT REMAIN IN THE HOUSE FOREVER; THE SON REMAINS FOREVER. SO IF THE SON SETS YOU FREE, YOU WILL BE FREE INDEED." JOHN 8:34-36

AND SO, FROM THE DAY WE HEARD, WE HAVE NOT CEASED TO PRAY FOR YOU, ASKING THAT YOU MAY BE FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL IN ALL SPIRITUAL WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING, SO AS TO WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE LORD, FULLY PLEASING TO HIM, BEARING FRUIT IN EVERY GOOD WORK AND INCREASING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. MAY YOU BE STRENGTHENED WITH ALL POWER, ACCORDING TO HIS GLORIOUS MIGHT, FOR ALL ENDURANCE AND PATIENCE WITH JOY, GIVING THANKS TO THE FATHER, WHO HAS QUALIFIED YOU TO SHARE IN THE INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS IN LIGHT. COLOSSIANS 1:9-12

He's gone to prepare a place for us and will come back for us. "AND IF I GO AND PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU, I WILL COME AGAIN AND WILL TAKE YOU TO MYSELF, THAT WHERE I AM YOU MAY BE ALSO." JOHN 14:3 We will live with Him forever. FOR THE LORD HIMSELF WILL DESCEND FROM HEAVEN WITH A CRY OF COMMAND, WITH THE VOICE OF AN ARCHANGEL, AND WITH THE SOUND OF THE TRUMPET OF GOD. AND THE DEAD IN CHRIST WILL RISE FIRST. THEN WE WHO ARE ALIVE, WHO ARE LEFT, WILL BE CAUGHT UP TOGETHER WITH THEM IN THE CLOUDS TO MEET THE LORD IN THE AIR, AND SO WE WILL ALWAYS BE WITH THE LORD. 1 THESSALONIANS 4:16-17

"THE ONE WHO CONQUERS WILL BE CLOTHED THUS IN WHITE GARMENTS, AND I WILL NEVER BLOT HIS NAME OUT OF THE BOOK OF LIFE. I WILL CONFESS HIS NAME BEFORE MY FATHER AND BEFORE HIS ANGELS." REVELATION 3:5

BUT, AS IT IS WRITTEN, "WHAT NO EYE HAS SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NOR THE HEART OF MAN IMAGINED, WHAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM"... 1 CORINTHIANS 2:9

How shall we respond?

With all we have in us, that's how! With complete surrender and devotion. Love Him back. Honor, obey and serve. He is worth it. Jesus provided us with an example of how we're to live, what our priorities should be and how to serve God.

John's gospel tells us that Jesus carried His own cross and Matthew, Mark and Luke also tell us that Simon of Cyrene (Simon is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Simeon, meaning "hearing") was compelled to carry Jesus' cross behind Him. We usually assume that was done only because He was unable to carry it any further in His condition at that point, but I think it's also a picture of what WE (those who "have ears to hear") are to do—to carry our cross, following Him in His steps. (1 PET 2:21) AND HE SAID, "HE WHO HAS EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR." MARK 4:9 This life is not about us, it's about Him. Glorifying His name is absolutely the highest, most important, top priority. We will spend eternity worshiping Him, and we can start now by honoring Him with our entire lives.

SO HE DELIVERED HIM OVER TO THEM TO BE CRUCIFIED. SO THEY TOOK JESUS, AND HE WENT OUT, BEARING HIS OWN CROSS, TO THE PLACE CALLED THE PLACE OF A SKULL, WHICH IN ARAMAIC IS CALLED GOLGOTHA. JOHN 19:16-17 AND AS THEY LED HIM AWAY, THEY SEIZED ONE SIMON OF CYRENE, WHO WAS COMING IN FROM THE COUNTRY, AND LAID ON HIM THE CROSS, TO CARRY IT BEHIND JESUS. LUKE 23:26

"SO EVERYONE WHO ACKNOWLEDGES ME BEFORE MEN, I ALSO WILL ACKNOWLEDGE BEFORE MY FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN, BUT WHOEVER DENIES ME BEFORE MEN, I ALSO WILL DENY BEFORE MY FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN. DO NOT THINK THAT I HAVE COME TO BRING PEACE TO THE EARTH. I HAVE NOT COME TO BRING PEACE, BUT A SWORD. FOR I HAVE COME TO SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW. AND A PERSON'S ENEMIES WILL BE THOSE OF HIS OWN HOUSEHOLD. WHOEVER LOVES FATHER OR MOTHER MORE THAN ME IS NOT WORTHY OF ME, AND WHOEVER LOVES SON OR DAUGHTER MORE THAN ME IS NOT WORTHY OF ME. AND WHOEVER DOES NOT TAKE HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME IS NOT WORTHY OF ME." MATTHEW 10:32-38

THEN JESUS TOLD HIS DISCIPLES, "IF ANYONE WOULD COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME. ...FOR WHAT WILL IT PROFIT A MAN IF HE GAINS THE WHOLE WORLD AND FORFEITS HIS SOUL? OR WHAT SHALL A MAN GIVE IN RETURN FOR HIS SOUL? FOR THE SON OF MAN IS GOING TO COME WITH HIS ANGELS IN THE GLORY OF HIS FATHER, AND THEN HE WILL REPAY EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO WHAT HE HAS DONE." MATTHEW 16:24, 26-27, ALSO LUKE 14:25-27

THEREFORE JESUS ALSO, THAT HE MIGHT SANCTIFY THE PEOPLE THROUGH HIS OWN BLOOD, SUFFERED OUTSIDE THE GATE. SO, LET US GO OUT TO HIM OUTSIDE THE CAMP, BEARING HIS REPROACH. FOR HERE WE DO NOT HAVE A LASTING CITY, BUT WE ARE SEEKING THE CITY WHICH IS TO COME. THROUGH HIM THEN, LET US CONTINUALLY OFFER UP A SACRIFICE OF PRAISE TO GOD, THAT IS, THE FRUIT OF LIPS THAT GIVE THANKS TO HIS NAME. AND DO NOT NEGLECT DOING GOOD AND SHARING, FOR WITH SUCH SACRIFICES GOD IS PLEASED. HEBREWS 13:12-16

How are we to behave?

Jesus loves His disciples (believers who love Him and follow in His footsteps). We are called His Body. Men are to love their wives as Jesus loves the Church (all true believers). We are spiritually joined as one with Him in the same way that a husband and wife become physically as one. Because of that, we are meant to be faithful our whole lives and to refrain from any acts of sexual impurity. Our bodies are indwelt by His Spirit—so believers who are sexual immoral (in any way) defile God's temple. Our behavior should reflect our reverence and love for our Savior, but how can we do that when we don't take the time to get to really KNOW Him? NOW is the time.

NOW YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST AND INDIVIDUALLY MEMBERS OF IT. 1 CORINTHIANS 12:27 AND HE PUT ALL THINGS UNDER HIS FEET AND GAVE HIM AS HEAD OVER ALL THINGS TO THE CHURCH, WHICH IS HIS BODY, THE FULLNESS OF HIM WHO FILLS ALL IN ALL. EPHESIANS 1:22-23

HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES, AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR HER, THAT HE MIGHT SANCTIFY HER, HAVING CLEANSED HER BY THE WASHING OF WATER WITH THE WORD, SO THAT HE MIGHT PRESENT THE CHURCH TO HIMSELF IN SPLendor, WITHOUT SPOT OR WRINKLE OR ANY SUCH THING, THAT SHE MIGHT BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLEMISH. IN THE SAME WAY HUSBANDS SHOULD LOVE THEIR WIVES AS THEIR OWN BODIES. HE WHO LOVES HIS WIFE LOVES HIMSELF. FOR NO ONE EVER HATED HIS OWN FLESH, BUT NOURISHES AND CHERISHES IT, JUST AS CHRIST DOES THE CHURCH, BECAUSE WE ARE MEMBERS OF HIS BODY. THIS MYSTERY IS PROFOUND, AND I AM SAYING THAT IT REFERS TO CHRIST AND THE CHURCH. EPHESIANS 5:25-30, 32

LET NOT SIN THEREFORE REIGN IN YOUR MORTAL BODY, TO MAKE YOU OBEY ITS PASSIONS. DO NOT PRESENT YOUR MEMBERS TO SIN AS INSTRUMENTS FOR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT PRESENT YOURSELVES TO GOD AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT FROM DEATH TO LIFE, AND YOUR MEMBERS TO GOD AS INSTRUMENTS FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS. ROMANS 6:12-13 I APPEAL TO YOU THEREFORE, BROTHERS, BY THE MERCIES OF GOD, TO PRESENT YOUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE, HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE TO GOD, WHICH IS YOUR SPIRITUAL WORSHIP. ROMANS 12:1

THE BODY IS NOT MEANT FOR SEXUAL IMMORALITY, BUT FOR THE LORD, AND THE LORD FOR THE BODY. ...BUT HE WHO IS JOINED TO THE LORD BECOMES ONE SPIRIT WITH HIM. FLEE FROM SEXUAL IMMORALITY. EVERY OTHER SIN A PERSON COMMITS IS OUTSIDE THE BODY, BUT THE SEXUALLY IMMORAL PERSON SINS AGAINST HIS OWN BODY. OR DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT YOUR BODY IS A TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHIN YOU, WHOM YOU HAVE FROM GOD? YOU ARE NOT YOUR OWN, FOR YOU WERE BOUGHT WITH A PRICE. SO GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODY. 1 CORINTHIANS 6: 13A, 17-20

AND WALK IN LOVE, AS CHRIST LOVED US AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR US, A FRAGRANT OFFERING AND SACRIFICE TO GOD. BUT SEXUAL IMMORALITY AND ALL IMPURITY OR COVETOUSNESS MUST NOT EVEN BE NAMED AMONG YOU, AS IS PROPER AMONG SAINTS. LET NO ONE DECEIVE YOU WITH EMPTY WORDS, FOR BECAUSE OF THESE THINGS THE WRATH OF GOD COMES UPON THE SONS OF DISOBEDIENCE. EPHESIANS 5:2, 3, 6

BUT THESE, LIKE IRRATIONAL ANIMALS, CREATURES OF INSTINCT, BORN TO BE CAUGHT AND DESTROYED, BLASPHEMING ABOUT MATTERS OF WHICH THEY ARE IGNORANT, WILL ALSO BE DESTROYED IN THEIR DESTRUCTION, SUFFERING WRONG AS THE WAGE FOR THEIR WRONGDOING. THEY COUNT IT PLEASURE TO REVEL IN THE DAYTIME. THEY ARE BLOTS AND BLEMISHES, REVELING IN THEIR DECEPTIONS, WHILE THEY FEAST WITH YOU. THEY HAVE EYES FULL OF ADULTERY, INSATIABLE FOR SIN. THEY ENTICE UNSTEADY SOULS. THEY HAVE HEARTS TRAINED IN GREED. ACCURSED CHILDREN! 2 PETER 2: 12- 14

BROTHERS, JOIN IN IMITATING ME, AND KEEP YOUR EYES ON THOSE WHO WALK ACCORDING TO THE EXAMPLE YOU HAVE IN US. FOR MANY, OF WHOM I HAVE OFTEN TOLD YOU AND NOW TELL YOU EVEN WITH TEARS, WALK AS ENEMIES OF THE CROSS OF CHRIST. THEIR END IS DESTRUCTION, THEIR GOD IS THEIR BELLY, AND THEY GLORY IN THEIR SHAME, WITH MINDS SET ON EARTHLY THINGS. PHILIPPIANS 3:17-19

LET US REJOICE AND EXULT AND GIVE HIM THE GLORY, FOR THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB HAS COME, AND HIS BRIDE HAS MADE HERSELF READY; IT WAS GRANTED HER TO CLOTHE HERSELF WITH FINE LINEN, BRIGHT AND PURE"—FOR THE FINE LINEN IS THE RIGHTEOUS DEEDS OF THE SAINTS. AND THE ANGEL SAID TO ME, "WRITE THIS: BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE INVITED TO THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB." AND HE SAID TO ME, "THESE ARE THE TRUE WORDS OF GOD." REVELATION 19:7-9

What does God deserve of us?

Jesus poured Himself out for us. I AM Poured OUT LIKE WATER... PSALM 22: 14 ...HE Poured OUT HIS SOUL TO DEATH... ISAIAH 53: 12 AND HE TOOK A CUP, AND WHEN HE HAD GIVEN THANKS HE GAVE IT TO THEM, SAYING, "DRINK OF IT, ALL OF YOU, FOR THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE COVENANT, WHICH IS Poured OUT FOR MANY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS." MATTHEW 26:27-28

Jesus was anointed twice with costly ointment in Bethany—His feet six days before the Passover at the house of Simon the Pharisee, and His head two days before the Passover at the house of Simon the Leper. (Bethany means “house of affliction.”) In this, we can see a picture of what is expected of us. We’re to pour out our lives for Him as He did for us, if we really love Him. The Apostle Paul tells us that he did this. **FOR I AM ALREADY BEING POURED OUT AS A DRINK OFFERING, AND THE TIME OF MY DEPARTURE HAS COME. 2 TIMOTHY 4:6** Spikenard (or nard) is a plant that is crushed to make a thick, intensely aromatic ointment. It was kept in an alabaster jar, which Mark tells us was broken to release the fragrance.

BUT THANKS BE TO GOD, WHO IN CHRIST ALWAYS LEADS US IN TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION, AND THROUGH US SPREADS THE FRAGRANCE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM EVERYWHERE. FOR WE ARE THE AROMA OF CHRIST TO GOD AMONG THOSE WHO ARE BEING SAVED AND AMONG THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING, 2 CORINTHIANS 2:14-15

IT WAS NOW TWO DAYS BEFORE THE PASSOVER AND THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD. AND THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE SCRIBES WERE SEEKING HOW TO ARREST HIM BY STEALTH AND KILL HIM, FOR THEY SAID, “NOT DURING THE FEAST, LEST THERE BE AN UPROAR FROM THE PEOPLE.” AND WHILE HE WAS AT BETHANY IN THE HOUSE OF SIMON THE LEPER, AS HE WAS RECLINING AT TABLE, A WOMAN CAME WITH AN ALABASTER FLASK OF OINTMENT OF PURE NARD, VERY COSTLY, AND SHE BROKE THE FLASK AND POURED IT OVER HIS HEAD. THERE WERE SOME WHO SAID TO THEMSELVES INDIGNANTLY, “WHY WAS THE OINTMENT WASTED LIKE THAT? FOR THIS OINTMENT COULD HAVE BEEN SOLD FOR MORE THAN THREE HUNDRED DENARII AND GIVEN TO THE POOR.” AND THEY SCOLDED HER. BUT JESUS SAID, “**LEAVE HER ALONE. WHY DO YOU TROUBLE HER? SHE HAS DONE A BEAUTIFUL THING TO ME. FOR YOU ALWAYS HAVE THE POOR WITH YOU, AND WHENEVER YOU WANT, YOU CAN DO GOOD FOR THEM. BUT YOU WILL NOT ALWAYS HAVE ME. SHE HAS DONE WHAT SHE COULD; SHE HAS ANOINTED MY BODY BEFOREHAND FOR BURIAL. AND TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, WHEREVER THE GOSPEL IS PROCLAIMED IN THE WHOLE WORLD, WHAT SHE HAS DONE WILL BE TOLD IN MEMORY OF HER.**” **MARK 14:1-9** (Also see **MATTHEW 26:3-13**)

Paul explains that a woman’s hair is her glory. (**1 CORINTHIANS 11:14-15**) Using the precious ointment on Jesus’ feet, wiping them with her hair and kissing them, Mary showed that she valued Him above herself and personal glory— she didn’t care what anyone else thought. (This is the same Mary (**JOHN 11:2**) who sat at His feet and, when criticized by her sister, He commended for choosing the better part. **LUKE 10:39-42**) She was in tears over her past sins, which Jesus forgave. **Our prayers of repentance and self-sacrificing acts are like fragrant offerings, pleasing to and greatly valued by God.** (**LUKE 18:9-14, MATT. 12:41-44**) Jesus said what the unnamed woman (who anointed His head) had done would be

told in memory of her. Her actions testified of her love for Him, giving outward evidence to His immeasurable worth in her eyes. Let's fill our "flasks" with "pure nard," break them and pour them out for our precious Savior.

SIX DAYS BEFORE THE PASSOVER, JESUS THEREFORE CAME TO BETHANY, WHERE LAZARUS WAS, WHOM JESUS HAD RAISED FROM THE DEAD. SO THEY GAVE A DINNER FOR HIM THERE. MARTHA SERVED, AND LAZARUS WAS ONE OF THOSE RECLINING WITH HIM AT TABLE. MARY THEREFORE TOOK A POUND OF EXPENSIVE OINTMENT MADE FROM PURE NARD, AND ANOINTED THE FEET OF JESUS AND WIPED HIS FEET WITH HER HAIR. THE HOUSE WAS FILLED WITH THE FRAGRANCE OF THE PERFUME. JOHN 12:1-3 AND HE SAID TO HER, "YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN." LUKE 7:48

BUT WE HAVE THIS TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY, TO SHOW THAT THE SURPASSING POWER BELONGS TO GOD AND NOT TO US. WE ARE HARD PRESSED IN EVERY DIRECTION, BUT NOT CONFINED; PERPLEXED, BUT NOT DRIVEN TO DESPAIR; PERSECUTED, BUT NOT FORSAKEN; STRUCK DOWN, BUT NOT DESTROYED; ALWAYS CARRYING IN THE BODY THE DEATH OF JESUS, SO THAT THE LIFE OF JESUS MAY ALSO BE MANIFESTED IN OUR BODIES. 2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-10

What kind of gift is fit for a King?

Jesus received frankincense, myrrh and gold from the magi. **THEN OPENING THEIR TREASURES, THEY OFFERED HIM GIFTS, GOLD AND FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH. MATTHEW 2:11** These valuable gifts were fit for a King, as well as being prophetically symbolic of His future suffering—frankincense and myrrh are both obtained by wounding the bark so that the fragrant resin “bleeds” from the tree. This is called “striping.” Jesus healed the sickly, doomed state of our lost souls by His stripes. **BUT HE WAS WOUNDED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, HE WAS BRUISED FOR OUR INIQUITIES; THE CHASTISEMENT OF OUR PEACE WAS UPON HIM; AND WITH HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED. ISAIAH 53:5**

Paul was very familiar with this concept through his own suffering for Jesus' sake. **BUT THE LORD SAID TO HIM, "GO, FOR HE IS A CHOSEN INSTRUMENT OF MINE TO CARRY MY NAME BEFORE THE GENTILES AND KINGS AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. FOR I WILL SHOW HIM HOW MUCH HE MUST SUFFER FOR THE SAKE OF MY NAME." ACTS 9:15-16** FROM NOW ON LET NO ONE CAUSE ME TROUBLE, FOR I BEAR ON MY BODY THE MARKS OF JESUS. **GALATIANS 6:17 [PAUL SAID] FIVE TIMES I RECEIVED AT THE HANDS OF THE JEWS THE FORTY LASHES LESS ONE. THREE TIMES I WAS BEATEN WITH RODS. ONCE I WAS STONED. 2 CORINTHIANS 11:24-25**

Jesus promised great reward in heaven for suffering for His sake, and Paul exhorted us to rejoice in suffering for Christ and to count it as a privilege. **"BLESSED**

ARE YOU WHEN OTHERS REVILE YOU AND PERSECUTE YOU AND FALSELY UTTER ALL KINDS OF EVIL AGAINST YOU ON MY ACCOUNT. REJOICE AND BE GLAD, FOR YOUR REWARD IS GREAT IN HEAVEN, FOR SO THEY PERSECUTED THE PROPHETS WHO WERE BEFORE YOU." MATTHEW 5:10-11

FOR IT HAS BEEN GRANTED TO YOU THAT FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST YOU SHOULD NOT ONLY BELIEVE IN HIM BUT ALSO SUFFER FOR HIS SAKE, ENGAGED IN THE SAME CONFLICT THAT YOU SAW I HAD AND NOW HEAR THAT I STILL HAVE. PHILIPPIANS 1:29-30 SHARE IN SUFFERING AS A GOOD SOLDIER OF CHRIST JESUS. NO SOLDIER GETS ENTANGLED IN CIVILIAN PURSUITS, SINCE HIS AIM IS TO PLEASE THE ONE WHO ENLISTED HIM. 2 TIMOTHY 2:3-4

BUT RECALL THE FORMER DAYS WHEN, AFTER YOU WERE ENLIGHTENED, YOU ENDURED A HARD STRUGGLE WITH SUFFERINGS, SOMETIMES BEING PUBLICLY EXPOSED TO REPROACH AND AFFLICTION, AND SOMETIMES BEING PARTNERS WITH THOSE SO TREATED. FOR YOU HAD COMPASSION ON THOSE IN PRISON, AND YOU JOYFULLY ACCEPTED THE PLUNDERING OF YOUR PROPERTY, SINCE YOU KNEW THAT YOU YOURSELVES HAD A BETTER POSSESSION AND AN ABIDING ONE. THEREFORE DO NOT THROW AWAY YOUR CONFIDENCE, WHICH HAS A GREAT REWARD. FOR YOU HAVE NEED OF ENDURANCE, SO THAT WHEN YOU HAVE DONE THE WILL OF GOD YOU MAY RECEIVE WHAT IS PROMISED. HEBREWS 10:32-36 THEREFORE JESUS ALSO, THAT HE MIGHT SANCTIFY THE PEOPLE THROUGH HIS OWN BLOOD, SUFFERED OUTSIDE THE GATE. SO, LET US GO OUT TO HIM OUTSIDE THE CAMP, BEARING HIS REPROACH. HEBREWS 13:12-13

Peter reminded us that suffering is the norm for us when we follow our Lord's example. However, our strength comes from Him, and He gave His life for us. If we love Him, then we will seek His glory and honor in all we do. The apostles and other disciples couldn't grasp the plan of redemption or the full power of God until after Jesus' resurrection. Then, they proclaimed the Gospel boldly and fearlessly for the rest of their lives.

RESIST THE DEVIL, FIRM IN YOUR FAITH, KNOWING THAT THE SAME KINDS OF SUFFERING ARE BEING EXPERIENCED BY YOUR BROTHERHOOD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. AND AFTER YOU HAVE SUFFERED A LITTLE WHILE, THE GOD OF ALL GRACE, WHO HAS CALLED YOU TO HIS ETERNAL GLORY IN CHRIST, WILL HIMSELF RESTORE, CONFIRM, STRENGTHEN, AND ESTABLISH YOU. 1 PETER 5:9-10

IN THIS YOU REJOICE, THOUGH NOW FOR A LITTLE WHILE, IF NECESSARY, YOU HAVE BEEN GRIEVED BY VARIOUS TRIALS, SO THAT THE TESTED GENUINENESS OF YOUR FAITH—MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD THAT PERISHES THOUGH IT IS TESTED BY FIRE—MAY BE FOUND TO RESULT IN PRAISE AND GLORY AND HONOR AT THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST. THOUGH YOU HAVE NOT SEEN HIM, YOU LOVE HIM. THOUGH YOU DO NOT NOW SEE HIM, YOU BELIEVE IN HIM AND REJOICE WITH JOY THAT IS INEXPRESSIBLE AND FILLED WITH GLORY, OBTAINING THE OUTCOME OF YOUR FAITH, THE SALVATION OF YOUR SOULS. 1 PETER 1:6-9

FOR WHAT CREDIT IS IT IF, WHEN YOU SIN AND ARE BEATEN FOR IT, YOU ENDURE? BUT IF WHEN YOU DO GOOD AND SUFFER FOR IT YOU ENDURE, THIS IS A GRACIOUS THING IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. FOR TO THIS YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED, BECAUSE CHRIST ALSO SUFFERED FOR YOU, LEAVING YOU AN EXAMPLE, SO THAT YOU MIGHT FOLLOW IN HIS STEPS. HE COMMITTED NO SIN, NEITHER WAS DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH. WHEN HE WAS REVILED, HE DID NOT REVILE IN RETURN; WHEN HE SUFFERED, HE DID NOT THREATEN, BUT CONTINUED ENTRUSTING HIMSELF TO HIM WHO JUDGES JUSTLY. 1 PETER 2:20-23

What is true beauty and love?

Beauty in God's eyes goes way beyond skin deep. What's on the surface does not interest Him at all. He designed us and is not impressed in the least with what we've done with our appearance. He knows what's deep inside, even our very thoughts. YOU KNOW WHEN I SIT DOWN AND WHEN I RISE UP; YOU DISCERN MY THOUGHTS FROM AFAR. PSALM 139:2 He's looking for obedience out of love, trust and respect. If He only wanted obedience, then He wouldn't have given us free will. He wants us. A beautiful heart to Him is one that is broken, repentant ("circumcised" - ROM. 2:29) – completely reliant on Him for everything. If we truly understand who He is, what He is like, all that He has done, continually does and is going to do, we will not only want to give him our whole heart, but we will be utterly awestruck that He would care for us as He does (and He does).

AND THOSE WHO KNOW YOUR NAME PUT THEIR TRUST IN YOU, FOR YOU, O LORD, HAVE NOT FORSAKEN THOSE WHO SEEK YOU. PSALM 9:10 TRUST IN THE LORD, AND DO GOOD; DWELL IN THE LAND AND BEFRIEND FAITHFULNESS. PSALM 37:3 BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO MAKES THE LORD HIS TRUST, WHO DOES NOT TURN TO THE PROUD, TO THOSE WHO GO ASTRAY AFTER A LIE! PSALM 40:4

AND THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL CIRCUMCISE YOUR HEART AND THE HEART OF YOUR OFFSPRING, SO THAT YOU WILL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, THAT YOU MAY LIVE. DEUTERONOMY 30:6

THE KING IS NOT SAVED BY HIS GREAT ARMY; A WARRIOR IS NOT DELIVERED BY HIS GREAT STRENGTH. THE WAR HORSE IS A FALSE HOPE FOR SALVATION, AND BY ITS GREAT MIGHT IT CANNOT RESCUE. BEHOLD, THE EYE OF THE LORD IS ON THOSE WHO FEAR HIM, ON THOSE WHO HOPE IN HIS STEADFAST LOVE, THAT HE MAY DELIVER THEIR SOUL FROM DEATH AND KEEP THEM ALIVE IN FAMINE. PSALM 33:16-19

What pleases God?

God is not interested in mere lip service, but true devotion backed up with actions and behavior. He doesn't need anything from us—everything we have we got from Him—He already owns it all AND us. We can't fool Him by pretending to love Him and yet doing whatever we wish, with no care whatsoever for what He said pleases Him. **RELIGION THAT IS PURE AND UNDEFILED BEFORE GOD, THE FATHER, IS THIS: TO VISIT ORPHANS AND WIDOWS IN THEIR AFFLICTION, AND TO KEEP ONESELF UNSTAINED FROM THE WORLD.**

JAMES 1:27 God hates hypocrisy, pride, prejudice and partiality. (Rom. 2:1-11, Jam. 2:1, Prov. 16:18, 1 Cor. 5:6, Prov. 21:4)

ALL THESE THINGS MY HAND HAS MADE, AND SO ALL THESE THINGS CAME TO BE, DECLARES THE LORD. BUT THIS IS THE ONE TO WHOM I WILL LOOK: HE WHO IS HUMBLE AND CONTRITE IN SPIRIT AND TREMBLES AT MY WORD. ISAIAH 66:2

FOR THUS SAYS THE ONE WHO IS HIGH AND LIFTED UP, WHO INHABITS ETERNITY, WHOSE NAME IS HOLY: "I DWELL IN THE HIGH AND HOLY PLACE, AND ALSO WITH HIM WHO IS OF A CONTRITE AND LOWLY SPIRIT, TO REVIVE THE SPIRIT OF THE LOWLY, AND TO REVIVE THE HEART OF THE CONTRITE. ISAIAH 57:15 THE SACRIFICES OF GOD ARE A BROKEN SPIRIT; A BROKEN AND CONTRITE HEART, O GOD, YOU WILL NOT DESPISE. PSALM 51:17 FOR I DESIRE STEADFAST LOVE AND NOT SACRIFICE, THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD RATHER THAN BURNT OFFERINGS. HOSEA 6:6

WASH YOURSELVES; MAKE YOURSELVES CLEAN; REMOVE THE EVIL OF YOUR DEEDS FROM BEFORE MY EYES; CEASE TO DO EVIL, LEARN TO DO GOOD; SEEK JUSTICE, CORRECT OPPRESSION; BRING JUSTICE TO THE FATHERLESS, PLEAD THE WIDOW'S CAUSE. ISAIAH 1:16-17

THEN THE LORD SAID, "BECAUSE THIS PEOPLE DRAW NEAR WITH THEIR WORDS AND HONOR ME WITH THEIR LIP SERVICE, BUT THEY REMOVE THEIR HEARTS FAR FROM ME, AND THEIR REVERENCE FOR ME CONSISTS OF TRADITION LEARNED BY ROTE, THEREFORE BEHOLD, I WILL ONCE AGAIN DEAL MARVELOUSLY WITH THIS PEOPLE... ISAIAH 29:13-14 "YOU HYPOCRITES! WELL DID ISAIAH PROPHECY OF YOU, WHEN HE SAID: "THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR FROM ME; IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE COMMANDMENTS OF MEN." MATTHEW 15:7-9

"WHEN HE HAD WASHED THEIR FEET AND PUT ON HIS OUTER GARMENTS AND RESUMED HIS PLACE, HE SAID TO THEM, "DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I HAVE DONE TO YOU? YOU CALL ME TEACHER AND LORD, AND YOU ARE RIGHT, FOR SO I AM. IF I THEN, YOUR LORD AND TEACHER, HAVE WASHED YOUR FEET, YOU ALSO OUGHT TO WASH ONE ANOTHER'S FEET. FOR I HAVE GIVEN YOU AN EXAMPLE, THAT YOU ALSO SHOULD DO JUST AS I HAVE DONE TO YOU. TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, A SERVANT IS NOT

GREATER THAN HIS MASTER, NOR IS A MESSENGER GREATER THAN THE ONE WHO SENT HIM. IF YOU KNOW THESE THINGS, BLESSED ARE YOU IF YOU DO THEM." JOHN 13:12-17

May we always remember the price of our freedom to our beloved Savior, and may "the cross" never become a phrase that we are so used to hearing that we are desensitized to what it actually entailed! Remember, Jesus had never done anything wrong EVER, and He came to earth to be born and live a perfect life on OUR behalf, or His sacrifice would have meant nothing. Only He could take that penalty for us. He could have put an end to the horror of it at any time, but love for His Father and for US held Him there. (Also see **HEBREWS 12:1-4**.)

AND YOU, WHO WERE DEAD IN YOUR TRESPASSES AND THE UNCIRCUMCISION OF YOUR FLESH [SINFUL NATURE], GOD MADE ALIVE TOGETHER WITH HIM, HAVING FORGIVEN US ALL OUR TRESPASSES, BY CANCELING THE RECORD OF DEBT THAT STOOD AGAINST US WITH ITS LEGAL DEMANDS. THIS HE SET ASIDE, NAILING IT TO THE CROSS. HE DISARMED THE RULERS AND AUTHORITIES AND PUT THEM TO OPEN SHAME, BY TRIUMPHING OVER THEM IN HIM. COLOSSIANS 2:13-15

Will He really return?

God is patient and long-suffering. **BUT YOU, O LORD, ARE A GOD MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS, SLOW TO ANGER AND ABOUNDING IN STEADFAST LOVE AND FAITHFULNESS. PSALM 86:15** He keeps His promises. All of the events that are written in His Word will happen, exactly as He said, on His own schedule. (**HAB. 2:3**) The worst time of tribulation on the earth that has ever been or ever will be is coming, but those who are His will be spared from God's wrath, just as Noah and Lot were saved out of the world-wide flood and fire from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah. It's not for the faithful, for those who are IN Jesus. We have been made white as snow, our sins washed away by the blood Jesus shed for us. We are clothed in His perfect righteousness. **BUT PUT ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND MAKE NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH, TO GRATIFY ITS DESIRES. ROMANS 13:14**

...BUT AS IT IS, HE HAS APPEARED ONCE FOR ALL AT THE END OF THE AGES TO PUT AWAY SIN BY THE SACRIFICE OF HIMSELF. AND JUST AS IT IS APPOINTED FOR MAN TO DIE ONCE, AND AFTER THAT COMES JUDGMENT, SO CHRIST, HAVING BEEN OFFERED ONCE TO BEAR THE SINS OF MANY, WILL APPEAR A SECOND TIME, NOT TO DEAL WITH SIN BUT TO SAVE THOSE WHO ARE EAGERLY WAITING FOR HIM. HEBREWS 9:26-28

FOR, "YET A LITTLE WHILE, AND THE COMING ONE WILL COME AND WILL NOT DELAY; BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH, AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM."

BUT WE ARE NOT OF THOSE WHO SHRINK BACK AND ARE DESTROYED, BUT OF THOSE WHO HAVE FAITH AND PRESERVE THEIR SOULS. HEBREWS 10:37-39

"BECAUSE YOU HAVE KEPT MY WORD ABOUT PATIENT ENDURANCE, I WILL KEEP YOU FROM THE HOUR OF TRIAL THAT IS COMING ON THE WHOLE WORLD, TO TRY THOSE WHO DWELL ON THE EARTH. I AM COMING SOON. HOLD FAST WHAT YOU HAVE, SO THAT NO ONE MAY SEIZE YOUR CROWN."

REVELATION 3:10-11

"COME NOW, LET US REASON TOGETHER, SAYS THE LORD: THOUGH YOUR SINS ARE LIKE SCARLET, THEY SHALL BE AS WHITE AS SNOW; THOUGH THEY ARE RED LIKE CRIMSON, THEY SHALL BECOME LIKE WOOL."

ISAIAH 1:18

IF WE SAY WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM WHILE WE WALK IN DARKNESS, WE LIE AND DO NOT PRACTICE THE TRUTH. BUT IF WE WALK IN THE LIGHT, AS HE IS IN THE LIGHT, WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER, AND THE BLOOD OF JESUS HIS SON CLEANSSES US FROM ALL SIN. 1 JOHN 1:6-7

I WILL GREATLY REJOICE IN THE LORD; MY SOUL SHALL EXULT IN MY GOD, FOR HE HAS CLOTHED ME WITH THE GARMENTS OF SALVATION; HE HAS COVERED ME WITH THE ROBE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, AS A BRIDEGROOM DECKS HIMSELF LIKE A PRIEST WITH A BEAUTIFUL HEADDRESS, AND AS A BRIDE ADORNS HERSELF WITH HER JEWELS. ISAIAH 61:10

Who will suffer God's wrath?

The coming wrath is for the wicked, rebellious ones who would rather serve themselves (which is really serving Satan, the "ruler of this world" - 2 Cor. 4:4, John 14:30-31) than to humble themselves beneath the Lordship of God's only Son, the only Savior and Way. They refuse to admit they are sinners in need of redemption. They love what God hates and hate what He loves. They prefer their own version of "truth" and will not acknowledge His sovereignty. Sadly, they are so arrogant that they think their opinion actually changes things—that by not bowing to Him, then He won't have any power over them. That is a grave error with unbelievably horrific consequences.

There is coming a time when a great delusion will fall on the whole world and people will worship a being claiming to be "god," taking a mark identifying themselves as belonging to him (in order to buy and sell, and thus, survive). For this they will receive eternal punishment from God, but before that sentence begins, they WILL bow to Jesus, the Son of God, the Lord of lords and King of kings. THEREFORE GOD ALSO HAS HIGHLY EXALTED HIM AND GIVEN HIM THE NAME WHICH IS ABOVE EVERY NAME, THAT AT THE NAME OF JESUS EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, OF THOSE IN HEAVEN, AND OF

THOSE ON EARTH, AND OF THOSE UNDER THE EARTH, AND THAT EVERY TONGUE WILL CONFESS THAT JESUS CHRIST IS LORD, TO THE GLORY OF GOD THE FATHER. PHILIPPIANS 2:9-11 FROM HIS MOUTH COMES A SHARP SWORD WITH WHICH TO STRIKE DOWN THE NATIONS, AND HE WILL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON. HE WILL TREAD THE WINEPRESS OF THE FURY OF THE WRATH OF GOD THE ALMIGHTY. REVELATION 19:15

“JUST AS THE WEEDS ARE GATHERED AND BURNED WITH FIRE, SO WILL IT BE AT THE END OF THE AGE. THE SON OF MAN WILL SEND HIS ANGELS, AND THEY WILL GATHER OUT OF HIS KINGDOM ALL CAUSES OF SIN AND ALL LAW-BREAKERS, AND THROW THEM INTO THE FIERY FURNACE. IN THAT PLACE THERE WILL BE WEEPING AND GNASHING OF TEETH. THEN THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE LIKE THE SUN IN THE KINGDOM OF THEIR FATHER. HE WHO HAS EARS, LET HIM HEAR. ...“AGAIN, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A NET THAT WAS THROWN INTO THE SEA AND GATHERED FISH OF EVERY KIND. WHEN IT WAS FULL, MEN DREW IT ASHORE AND SAT DOWN AND SORTED THE GOOD INTO CONTAINERS BUT THREW AWAY THE BAD. SO IT WILL BE AT THE END OF THE AGE. THE ANGELS WILL COME OUT AND SEPARATE THE EVIL FROM THE RIGHTEOUS AND THROW THEM INTO THE FIERY FURNACE. IN THAT PLACE THERE WILL BE WEEPING AND GNASHING OF TEETH.” MATTHEW 13:40-43, 47-50

FOR IT WAS NOT DAVID WHO ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, BUT HE HIMSELF SAYS: “THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, ‘SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.’” THEREFORE LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL KNOW FOR CERTAIN THAT GOD HAS MADE HIM BOTH LORD AND CHRIST—THIS JESUS WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED. ACTS 2:34-36

HOW MUCH WORSE PUNISHMENT, DO YOU THINK, WILL BE DESERVED BY THE ONE WHO HAS TRAMPLED UNDERFOOT THE SON OF GOD, AND HAS PROFANED THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT BY WHICH HE WAS SANCTIFIED, AND HAS OUTRAGED THE SPIRIT OF GRACE? FOR WE KNOW HIM WHO SAID, “VENGEANCE IS MINE; I WILL REPAY.” AND AGAIN, “THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.” IT IS A FEARFUL THING TO FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE LIVING GOD. HEBREWS 10: 29-31

THEN THE KINGS OF THE EARTH AND THE GREAT ONES AND THE GENERALS AND THE RICH AND THE POWERFUL, AND EVERYONE, SLAVE AND FREE, HID THEMSELVES IN THE CAVES AND AMONG THE ROCKS OF THE MOUNTAINS, CALLING TO THE MOUNTAINS AND ROCKS, “FALL ON US AND HIDE US FROM THE FACE OF HIM WHO IS SEATED ON THE THRONE, AND FROM THE WRATH OF THE LAMB, FOR THE GREAT DAY OF THEIR WRATH HAS COME, AND WHO CAN STAND?” REVELATION 6: 15-17

What does it mean to be free?

God expects us who have been adopted as His dear children to be longsuffering and faithful, just as He is. He doesn't change, ever, and His promises are all sure things—worth the cost of laying aside our old ways and following His

instead. We are free from enslavement to the letter of the Law (Rom. 7:4-6), but we're not meant to use that freedom to indulge ourselves. The Scriptures are like a mirror for us so that we can see how God wants us to behave and what our attitude should be. We've all heard the saying "it's the thought that counts," right? But sometimes there just isn't any thought to count, is there? That's sad—let's read our Bibles, to KNOW Him. Be sure not to skip Paul's teachings about the Body of Christ (the church).

WHEN CHRIST WHO IS YOUR LIFE APPEARS, THEN YOU ALSO WILL APPEAR WITH HIM IN GLORY. PUT TO DEATH THEREFORE WHAT IS EARTHLY IN YOU: SEXUAL IMMORALITY, IMPURITY, PASSION, EVIL DESIRE, AND COVETOUSNESS, WHICH IS IDOLATRY. ON ACCOUNT OF THESE THE WRATH OF GOD IS COMING. IN THESE YOU TOO ONCE WALKED, WHEN YOU WERE LIVING IN THEM. BUT NOW YOU MUST PUT THEM ALL AWAY: ANGER, WRATH, MALICE, SLANDER, AND OBSCENE TALK FROM YOUR MOUTH. DO NOT LIE TO ONE ANOTHER, SEEING THAT YOU HAVE PUT OFF THE OLD SELF WITH ITS PRACTICES AND HAVE PUT ON THE NEW SELF, WHICH IS BEING RENEWED IN KNOWLEDGE AFTER THE IMAGE OF ITS CREATOR. COLOSSIANS 3:4-10

FOR FREEDOM CHRIST HAS SET US FREE; STAND FIRM THEREFORE, AND DO NOT SUBMIT AGAIN TO A YOKE OF SLAVERY. FOR YOU WERE CALLED TO FREEDOM, BROTHERS. ONLY DO NOT USE YOUR FREEDOM AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE FLESH, BUT THROUGH LOVE SERVE ONE ANOTHER. GALATIANS 5:1, 13

BUT BE DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT HEARERS ONLY, DECEIVING YOURSELVES. FOR IF ANYONE IS A HEARER OF THE WORD AND NOT A DOER, HE IS LIKE A MAN WHO LOOKS INTENTLY AT HIS NATURAL FACE IN A MIRROR. FOR HE LOOKS AT HIMSELF AND GOES AWAY AND AT ONCE FORGETS WHAT HE WAS LIKE. JAMES 1:22-24

Who is the Helper?

The disciples were very sad when Jesus said He was returning to the Father, but Jesus promised to send them the Helper. In **JOHN 14:20-26**, Jesus explained that the Holy Spirit would come to indwell believers. The disciples knew and loved Jesus, having been with Him since the start of His ministry. **"BUT BECAUSE I HAVE SAID THESE THINGS TO YOU, SORROW HAS FILLED YOUR HEART. NEVERTHELESS, I TELL YOU THE TRUTH: IT IS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE THAT I GO AWAY, FOR IF I DO NOT GO AWAY, THE HELPER WILL NOT COME TO YOU. BUT IF I GO, I WILL SEND HIM TO YOU."** **JOHN 16:6-7**

We can know Him, too, even though we have never seen Him. (**JOHN 20:29**) We are sealed with the Holy Spirit when we first come to salvation. **IN HIM YOU ALSO, WHEN**

YOU HEARD THE WORD OF TRUTH, THE GOSPEL OF YOUR SALVATION, AND BELIEVED IN HIM, WERE SEALED WITH THE PROMISED HOLY SPIRIT, WHO IS THE GUARANTEE OF OUR INHERITANCE UNTIL WE ACQUIRE POSSESSION OF IT, TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY. ...AND DO NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD, BY WHOM YOU WERE SEALED FOR THE DAY OF REDEMPTION. EPHESIANS 1; 13-14, 4:40

When Jesus was placed in the tomb with the huge stone rolled in front of it, the authorities sent soldiers to seal and guard it so that the body couldn't be stolen. This could be seen as a foreshadow of our being sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption. Jesus rose again as the firstfruits of the dead and He will raise us who are sealed by the Holy Spirit as well. We (His Body) cannot be stolen, just as the body of Jesus was not stolen, but rose from the dead. ...WHO BY GOD'S POWER ARE BEING GUARDED THROUGH FAITH FOR A SALVATION READY TO BE REVEALED IN THE LAST TIME. 1 PETER 1:5

IF IN CHRIST WE HAVE HOPE IN THIS LIFE ONLY, WE ARE OF ALL PEOPLE MOST TO BE PITIED. BUT IN FACT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP. FOR AS BY A MAN CAME DEATH, BY A MAN HAS COME ALSO THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD. FOR AS IN ADAM ALL DIE, SO ALSO IN CHRIST SHALL ALL BE MADE ALIVE. BUT EACH IN HIS OWN ORDER: CHRIST THE FIRSTFRUITS, THEN AT HIS COMING THOSE WHO BELONG TO CHRIST. 1 CORINTHIANS 15:19-23

But throwing out something that we don't consider valuable is different from having it stolen. (HEB. 12:14-17, REV. 3:11) Dying to self and walking in our NEW life ("carrying our cross") is a choice, just as whether to accept the gift of salvation by believing. The baptism referred to below is of the Spirit, who alone saves (JOHN 6:63) and provides proof that we are God's (2 COR. 5:5), but being water baptized symbolizes it as the believer "drowns" their old self and "rises" into Christ and His resurrection as a new creation.

WHAT SHALL WE SAY THEN? ARE WE TO CONTINUE IN SIN THAT GRACE MAY ABOUND? BY NO MEANS! HOW CAN WE WHO DIED TO SIN STILL LIVE IN IT? DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT ALL OF US WHO HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST JESUS WERE BAPTIZED INTO HIS DEATH? WE WERE BURIED THEREFORE WITH HIM BY BAPTISM INTO DEATH, IN ORDER THAT, JUST AS CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD BY THE GLORY OF THE FATHER, WE TOO MIGHT WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE. FOR IF WE HAVE BEEN UNITED WITH HIM IN A DEATH LIKE HIS, WE SHALL CERTAINLY BE UNITED WITH HIM IN A RESURRECTION LIKE HIS. WE KNOW THAT OUR OLD SELF WAS CRUCIFIED WITH HIM IN ORDER THAT THE BODY OF SIN MIGHT BE BROUGHT TO NOTHING, SO THAT WE WOULD NO LONGER BE ENSLAVED TO SIN. FOR ONE WHO HAS DIED HAS BEEN SET FREE FROM SIN. NOW IF WE HAVE DIED WITH CHRIST, WE BELIEVE THAT WE WILL ALSO LIVE WITH HIM. WE KNOW THAT CHRIST, BEING RAISED FROM THE DEAD, WILL NEVER DIE AGAIN; DEATH NO LONGER HAS DOMINION OVER HIM. FOR THE DEATH HE DIED HE DIED TO SIN, ONCE FOR ALL, BUT THE LIFE HE LIVES

HE LIVES TO GOD. SO YOU ALSO MUST CONSIDER YOURSELVES DEAD TO SIN AND ALIVE TO GOD IN CHRIST JESUS. ROMANS 6:1-11

God gives us all good gifts, including faith, love, hope, wisdom, strength to persevere and resist temptation, discernment, guidance, talents, physical blessings and more. EVERY GOOD GIFT AND EVERY PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, COMING DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF LIGHTS WITH WHOM THERE IS NO VARIATION OR SHADOW DUE TO CHANGE. OF HIS OWN WILL HE BROUGHT US FORTH BY THE WORD OF TRUTH, THAT WE SHOULD BE A KIND OF FIRSTFRUITS OF HIS CREATURES. JAMES 1:17-18

NOW THERE ARE VARIETIES OF GIFTS, BUT THE SAME SPIRIT; AND THERE ARE VARIETIES OF SERVICE, BUT THE SAME LORD; AND THERE ARE VARIETIES OF ACTIVITIES, BUT IT IS THE SAME GOD WHO EMPOWERS THEM ALL IN EVERYONE. TO EACH IS GIVEN THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT FOR THE COMMON GOOD. ...ALL THESE ARE EMPOWERED BY ONE AND THE SAME SPIRIT, WHO APPORTIONS TO EACH ONE INDIVIDUALLY AS HE WILLS. ... BUT AS IT IS, GOD ARRANGED THE MEMBERS IN THE BODY, EACH ONE OF THEM, AS HE CHOSE. 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7, 11, 18

HAVING GIFTS THAT DIFFER ACCORDING TO THE GRACE GIVEN TO US, LET US USE THEM: IF PROPHECY, IN PROPORTION TO OUR FAITH; IF SERVICE, IN OUR SERVING; THE ONE WHO TEACHES, IN HIS TEACHING; THE ONE WHO EXHORTS, IN HIS EXHORTATION; THE ONE WHO CONTRIBUTES, IN GENEROSITY; THE ONE WHO LEADS, WITH ZEAL; THE ONE WHO DOES ACTS OF MERCY, WITH CHEERFULNESS. LET LOVE BE GENUINE. ABHOR WHAT IS EVIL; HOLD FAST TO WHAT IS GOOD. LOVE ONE ANOTHER WITH BROTHERLY AFFECTION. OUTDO ONE ANOTHER IN SHOWING HONOR. DO NOT BE SLOTHFUL IN ZEAL, BE FERVENT IN SPIRIT, SERVE THE LORD. REJOICE IN HOPE, BE PATIENT IN TRIBULATION, BE CONSTANT IN PRAYER. CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEEDS OF THE SAINTS AND SEEK TO SHOW HOSPITALITY. BLESS THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU; BLESS AND DO NOT CURSE THEM. REJOICE WITH THOSE WHO REJOICE, WEEP WITH THOSE WHO WEEP. LIVE IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER. DO NOT BE HAUGHTY, BUT ASSOCIATE WITH THE LOWLY. NEVER BE WISE IN YOUR OWN SIGHT. REPAY NO ONE EVIL FOR EVIL, BUT GIVE THOUGHT TO DO WHAT IS HONORABLE IN THE SIGHT OF ALL. IF POSSIBLE, SO FAR AS IT DEPENDS ON YOU, LIVE PEACEABLY WITH ALL. BELOVED, NEVER AVENGE YOURSELVES, BUT LEAVE IT TO THE WRATH OF GOD, FOR IT IS WRITTEN, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY, SAYS THE LORD." TO THE CONTRARY, "IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM; IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM SOMETHING TO DRINK; FOR BY SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." DO NOT BE OVERCOME BY EVIL, BUT OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD. ROMANS 12:6-21

BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, SELF-CONTROL; AGAINST SUCH THINGS THERE IS NO LAW. AND THOSE WHO BELONG TO CHRIST JESUS HAVE CRUCIFIED THE FLESH WITH ITS PASSIONS AND DESIRES. GALATIANS 5:22-24
NO TEMPTATION HAS OVERTAKEN YOU THAT IS NOT COMMON TO MAN. GOD IS FAITHFUL, AND HE WILL NOT LET YOU BE TEMPTED BEYOND YOUR ABILITY, BUT WITH THE TEMPTATION HE WILL ALSO PROVIDE

THE WAY OF ESCAPE, THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO ENDURE IT. 1 COR. 10:13 LET NO ONE SAY WHEN HE IS TEMPTED, "I AM BEING TEMPTED BY GOD," FOR GOD CANNOT BE TEMPTED WITH EVIL, AND HE HIMSELF TEMPTS NO ONE. JAMES 1:13

"ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN YOU. AS THE BRANCH CANNOT BEAR FRUIT BY ITSELF, UNLESS IT ABIDES IN THE VINE, NEITHER CAN YOU, UNLESS YOU ABIDE IN ME. I AM THE VINE; YOU ARE THE BRANCHES. WHOEVER ABIDES IN ME AND I IN HIM, HE IT IS THAT BEARS MUCH FRUIT, FOR APART FROM ME YOU CAN DO NOTHING. IF ANYONE DOES NOT ABIDE IN ME HE IS THROWN AWAY LIKE A BRANCH AND WITHERS; AND THE BRANCHES ARE GATHERED, THROWN INTO THE FIRE, AND BURNED. IF YOU ABIDE IN ME, AND MY WORDS ABIDE IN YOU, ASK WHATEVER YOU WISH, AND IT WILL BE DONE FOR YOU. BY THIS MY FATHER IS GLORIFIED, THAT YOU BEAR MUCH FRUIT AND SO PROVE TO BE MY DISCIPLES. AS THE FATHER HAS LOVED ME, SO HAVE I LOVED YOU. ABIDE IN MY LOVE. IF YOU KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS, YOU WILL ABIDE IN MY LOVE, JUST AS I HAVE KEPT MY FATHER'S COMMANDMENTS AND ABIDE IN HIS LOVE." JOHN 15:4-10

Is there really only one way?

If you haven't accepted Jesus as your Savior and Lord, it's imperative that you understand that He is the only way to be saved. "ENTER BY THE NARROW GATE. FOR THE GATE IS WIDE AND THE WAY IS EASY THAT LEADS TO DESTRUCTION, AND THOSE WHO ENTER BY IT ARE MANY. FOR THE GATE IS NARROW AND THE WAY IS HARD THAT LEADS TO LIFE, AND THOSE WHO FIND IT ARE FEW." MATTHEW 7:13-14 JESUS SAID TO HIM, "I AM THE WAY, AND THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME." JOHN 14:6 "TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, WHOEVER BELIEVES HAS ETERNAL LIFE. I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE. YOUR FATHERS ATE THE MANNA IN THE WILDERNESS, AND THEY DIED. THIS IS THE BREAD THAT COMES DOWN FROM HEAVEN, SO THAT ONE MAY EAT OF IT AND NOT DIE." JOHN 6:47-50

NO ONE WHO DENIES THE SON HAS THE FATHER. WHOEVER CONFESSES THE SON HAS THE FATHER ALSO. 1 JOHN 2:23 AND THIS IS THE TESTIMONY, THAT GOD GAVE US ETERNAL LIFE, AND THIS LIFE IS IN HIS SON. WHOEVER HAS THE SON HAS LIFE; WHOEVER DOES NOT HAVE THE SON OF GOD DOES NOT HAVE LIFE. I WRITE THESE THINGS TO YOU WHO BELIEVE IN THE NAME OF THE SON OF GOD THAT YOU MAY KNOW THAT YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. 1 JOHN 5:11-13 AND THERE IS SALVATION IN NO ONE ELSE, FOR THERE IS NO OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN GIVEN AMONG MEN BY WHICH WE MUST BE SAVED. ACTS 4:12

Now you know. Let's none of us try to "outsmart" God on this by choosing our own way over His (which is utterly offensive). Learning about our Creator and His plan for us is way too important to put off. THERE IS A WAY THAT SEEMS RIGHT TO A MAN, BUT IN THE END IT LEADS TO DEATH. PROVERBS 16:25 God is longsuffering, patient and loves us all. He has given us an unspeakable gift in His precious, Holy Son. Not only would

it be unwise to reject that gift, but it is also unthinkable to accept it and then go on living the same as before—in sin, selfishly.

KISS THE SON, LEST HE BE ANGRY, AND YOU PERISH IN THE WAY, FOR HIS WRATH IS QUICKLY KINDLED. BLESSED ARE ALL WHO TAKE REFUGE IN HIM. PSALM 2: 12

How do people receive salvation?

The thief on the cross next to Jesus gave us a really good example. Even though it was last minute (not recommended), he did understand and receive salvation. He first declared his belief in God and admitted that he was a sinner, deserving of the punishment of death. **FOR THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH, BUT THE FREE GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD. ROMANS 6:23** Next, he recognized that Jesus was the Son of God, sinless and dying on the cross. (Jesus' "crime" was claiming to be the Son of God, so when the thief proclaimed the innocence of Jesus, he recognized His deity.) Then he showed that he understood Jesus is Lord and that he will rise from the dead by asking Him to remember him when He comes into His kingdom. Only a lord has a kingdom, and needless to say, he must be alive. The thief believed in his heart and confessed with his mouth. Jesus responded by assuring him that he was saved.

...BUT THE OTHER [THIEF] REBUKED HIM, SAYING, "DO YOU NOT FEAR GOD, SINCE YOU ARE UNDER THE SAME SENTENCE OF CONDEMNATION? AND WE INDEED JUSTLY, FOR WE ARE RECEIVING THE DUE REWARD OF OUR DEEDS; BUT THIS MAN HAS DONE NOTHING WRONG." AND HE SAID, "JESUS, REMEMBER ME WHEN YOU COME INTO YOUR KINGDOM." AND HE SAID TO HIM, "TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE." LUKE 23:39B-43

IF YOU CONFESS WITH YOUR MOUTH THAT JESUS IS LORD AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, YOU WILL BE SAVED. FOR WITH THE HEART ONE BELIEVES AND IS JUSTIFIED, AND WITH THE MOUTH ONE CONFESSES AND IS SAVED. FOR THE SCRIPTURE SAYS, "EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE PUT TO SHAME." ROMANS 10:9-11

What happened after Jesus died?

When Jesus finished His perfect work on the cross and died, the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The veil (which was extremely tall and thick—**God** caused it to be torn, not men) separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place where only the high priest was allowed to come before God once a year. Jesus fulfilled the Law and removed the barrier between God and

mankind by His perfect sacrifice. (HEB. 9, 10:19-23) He was placed in a sealed, guarded tomb, and rose from the dead on the third day, just as He said He would. Unfortunately, people were bribed to spread rumors denying the truth, so that many Jews did not believe. He ascended to heaven forty days later. Ten days after that, on Pentecost (50 days after the resurrection/fulfillment of Firstfruits - LEV. 23:9-22), a large group of gathered believers (likely 120 - ACTS 1:15) were baptized with the Holy Spirit all at one time, and 3,000 new believers were baptized with water in one day. (ACTS 2:1-47)

AND AT THE NINTH HOUR [3PM] JESUS CRIED WITH A LOUD VOICE, "ELOI, ELOI, LEMA SABACHTHANI?" WHICH MEANS, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" ...AND JESUS UTTERED A LOUD CRY [IT IS FINISHED, JOHN 19:30] AND BREATHED HIS LAST. AND THE CURTAIN OF THE TEMPLE WAS TORN IN TWO, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM. MARK 15:34, 37-38

WHEN IT WAS EVENING, THERE CAME A RICH MAN FROM ARIMATHEA, NAMED JOSEPH, WHO ALSO WAS A DISCIPLE OF JESUS. HE WENT TO PILATE AND ASKED FOR THE BODY OF JESUS. THEN PILATE ORDERED IT TO BE GIVEN TO HIM. AND JOSEPH TOOK THE BODY AND WRAPPED IT IN A CLEAN LINEN SHROUD AND LAID IT IN HIS OWN NEW TOMB, WHICH HE HAD CUT IN THE ROCK. AND HE ROLLED A GREAT STONE TO THE ENTRANCE OF THE TOMB AND WENT AWAY. MARY MAGDALENE AND THE OTHER MARY WERE THERE, SITTING OPPOSITE THE TOMB. THE NEXT DAY, THAT IS, AFTER THE DAY OF PREPARATION, THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND THE PHARISEES GATHERED BEFORE PILATE AND SAID, "SIR, WE REMEMBER HOW THAT IMPOSTOR SAID, WHILE HE WAS STILL ALIVE, 'AFTER THREE DAYS I WILL RISE.' THEREFORE ORDER THE TOMB TO BE MADE SECURE UNTIL THE THIRD DAY, LEST HIS DISCIPLES GO AND STEAL HIM AWAY AND TELL THE PEOPLE, 'HE HAS RISEN FROM THE DEAD,' AND THE LAST FRAUD WILL BE WORSE THAN THE FIRST." PILATE SAID TO THEM, "YOU HAVE A GUARD OF SOLDIERS. GO, MAKE IT AS SECURE AS YOU CAN." SO THEY WENT AND MADE THE TOMB SECURE BY SEALING THE STONE AND SETTING A GUARD. MATTHEW 27:57-66

NOW AFTER THE SABBATH, TOWARD THE DAWN OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK [SUNDAY], MARY MAGDALENE AND THE OTHER MARY WENT TO SEE THE TOMB. AND BEHOLD, THERE WAS A GREAT EARTHQUAKE, FOR AN ANGEL OF THE LORD DESCENDED FROM HEAVEN AND CAME AND ROLLED BACK THE STONE AND SAT ON IT. HIS APPEARANCE WAS LIKE LIGHTNING, AND HIS CLOTHING WHITE AS SNOW. AND FOR FEAR OF HIM THE GUARDS TREMBLED AND BECAME LIKE DEAD MEN. BUT THE ANGEL SAID TO THE WOMEN, "DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR I KNOW THAT YOU SEEK JESUS WHO WAS CRUCIFIED. HE IS NOT HERE, FOR HE HAS RISEN, AS HE SAID. COME, SEE THE PLACE WHERE HE LAY." MATTHEW 28:1-6

AND BEHOLD, JESUS MET THEM AND SAID, "GREETINGS!" AND THEY CAME UP AND TOOK HOLD OF HIS FEET AND WORSHIPED HIM. THEN JESUS SAID TO THEM, "DO NOT BE AFRAID; GO AND TELL MY BROTHERS TO GO TO GALILEE, AND THERE THEY WILL SEE ME." WHILE THEY WERE GOING, BEHOLD, SOME OF THE GUARD WENT INTO THE CITY AND TOLD THE CHIEF PRIESTS ALL THAT HAD TAKEN PLACE. AND WHEN THEY

HAD ASSEMBLED WITH THE ELDERS AND TAKEN COUNSEL, THEY GAVE A SUFFICIENT SUM OF MONEY TO THE SOLDIERS AND SAID, "TELL PEOPLE, 'HIS DISCIPLES CAME BY NIGHT AND STOLE HIM AWAY WHILE WE WERE ASLEEP.' AND IF THIS COMES TO THE GOVERNOR'S EARS, WE WILL SATISFY HIM AND KEEP YOU OUT OF TROUBLE." SO THEY TOOK THE MONEY AND DID AS THEY WERE DIRECTED. AND THIS STORY HAS BEEN SPREAD AMONG THE JEWS TO THIS DAY. MATTHEW 28:9-15

HE PRESENTED HIMSELF ALIVE TO THEM AFTER HIS SUFFERING BY MANY PROOFS, APPEARING TO THEM DURING FORTY DAYS AND SPEAKING ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD. ACTS 1:4 ...AND WHEN HE HAD SAID THESE THINGS, AS THEY WERE LOOKING ON, HE WAS LIFTED UP, AND A CLOUD TOOK HIM OUT OF THEIR SIGHT. AND WHILE THEY WERE GAZING INTO HEAVEN AS HE WENT, BEHOLD, TWO MEN STOOD BY THEM IN WHITE ROBES, AND SAID, "MEN OF GALILEE, WHY DO YOU STAND LOOKING INTO HEAVEN? THIS JESUS, WHO WAS TAKEN UP FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN, WILL COME IN THE SAME WAY AS YOU SAW HIM GO INTO HEAVEN." ACTS 1:4, 9-11

WHEN THE DAY OF PENTECOST ARRIVED, THEY WERE ALL TOGETHER IN ONE PLACE. AND SUDDENLY THERE CAME FROM HEAVEN A SOUND LIKE A MIGHTY RUSHING WIND, AND IT FILLED THE ENTIRE HOUSE WHERE THEY WERE SITTING. AND DIVIDED TONGUES AS OF FIRE APPEARED TO THEM AND RESTED ON EACH ONE OF THEM. AND THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BEGAN TO SPEAK IN OTHER TONGUES AS THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM UTTERANCE. NOW THERE WERE DWELLING IN JERUSALEM JEWS, DEVOUT MEN FROM EVERY NATION UNDER HEAVEN. AND AT THIS SOUND THE MULTITUDE CAME TOGETHER, AND THEY WERE BEWILDERED, BECAUSE EACH ONE WAS HEARING THEM SPEAK IN HIS OWN LANGUAGE. AND THEY WERE AMAZED AND ASTONISHED, SAYING, "ARE NOT ALL THESE WHO ARE SPEAKING GALILEANS? AND HOW IS IT THAT WE HEAR, EACH OF US IN HIS OWN NATIVE LANGUAGE?" ACTS 2:1-8

Do you know Him?

If you don't know God or perhaps you thought you did, but after examining yourself and maybe not finding any fruits of the Spirit, you're not sure—then cry out to Him! He hears you. He knows who you are and everything about you and loves you anyway. Ask Him sincerely to reveal Himself to you. Seek Him in the Holy Bible. He is perfectly able to reach each of us and teach us about Himself without a "special version" of the Bible, and without mixing in any unbiblical practices with our faith. He desires everyone to be saved. For those of us who do know Him, let's ask Him to reveal any ways that our "walk" is not pleasing to Him. His Spirit inside of us convicts, corrects and disciplines—our job is to yield to Him, continually seeking His will to be done in all things. **BUT THE HELPER, THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM THE FATHER WILL SEND IN MY NAME, HE WILL TEACH YOU ALL THINGS AND BRING TO YOUR REMEMBRANCE ALL THAT I HAVE SAID TO YOU. JOHN 14:26**

FOR I FEAR THAT PERHAPS WHEN I COME I MAY FIND YOU NOT AS I WISH, AND THAT YOU MAY FIND ME NOT AS YOU WISH—THAT PERHAPS THERE MAY BE QUARRELING, JEALOUSY, ANGER, HOSTILITY, SLANDER, GOSSIP, CONCEIT, AND DISORDER. I FEAR THAT WHEN I COME AGAIN MY GOD MAY HUMBLE ME BEFORE YOU, AND I MAY HAVE TO MOURN OVER MANY OF THOSE WHO SINNED EARLIER AND HAVE NOT REPENTED OF THE IMPURITY, SEXUAL IMMORALITY, AND SENSUALITY THAT THEY HAVE PRACTICED. THIS IS THE THIRD TIME I AM COMING TO YOU... I WARNED THOSE WHO SINNED BEFORE AND ALL THE OTHERS... IF I COME AGAIN I WILL NOT SPARE THEM. ...EXAMINE YOURSELVES, TO SEE WHETHER YOU ARE IN THE FAITH. TEST YOURSELVES. OR DO YOU NOT REALIZE THIS ABOUT YOURSELVES, THAT JESUS CHRIST IS IN YOU?—UNLESS INDEED YOU FAIL TO MEET THE TEST! 2 CORINTHIANS 12:20-21, 13:1-2, 5

THIS IS GOOD, AND IT IS PLEASING IN THE SIGHT OF GOD OUR SAVIOR, WHO DESIRES ALL PEOPLE TO BE SAVED AND TO COME TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH. 1 TIMOTHY 2:3-4

Does God know you?

The price is already paid for our sins so that we can be forgiven and be with God forever, but we MUST be born again (which means His Spirit has regenerated our spirits). Then we are truly “known” by God and adopted as His children! We are born into our earthly family the first time and born into God’s family the second time. We all die once (except those alive at the time the Lord returns), but there is a “second death” for those whose names are NOT in the Book of Life. The second death results in eternal punishment of the rebellious and wicked. JESUS ANSWERED HIM, "TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS ONE IS BORN AGAIN HE CANNOT SEE THE KINGDOM OF GOD." JOHN 3:3

"WHOEVER HAS MY COMMANDMENTS AND KEEPS THEM, HE IT IS WHO LOVES ME. AND HE WHO LOVES ME WILL BE LOVED BY MY FATHER, AND I WILL LOVE HIM AND MANIFEST MYSELF TO HIM." JUDAS (NOT ISCARIOT) SAID TO HIM, "LORD, HOW IS IT THAT YOU WILL MANIFEST YOURSELF TO US, AND NOT TO THE WORLD?" JESUS ANSWERED HIM, "IF ANYONE LOVES ME, HE WILL KEEP MY WORD, AND MY FATHER WILL LOVE HIM, AND WE WILL COME TO HIM AND MAKE OUR HOME WITH HIM." JOHN 14:21-23

SEE WHAT KIND OF LOVE THE FATHER HAS GIVEN TO US, THAT WE SHOULD BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD; AND SO WE ARE. THE REASON WHY THE WORLD DOES NOT KNOW US IS THAT IT DID NOT KNOW HIM. 1 JOHN 3:1 THE SPIRIT HIMSELF TESTIFIES WITH OUR SPIRIT THAT WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD, AND IF CHILDREN, HEIRS ALSO, HEIRS OF GOD AND FELLOW HEIRS WITH CHRIST, IF INDEED WE SUFFER WITH HIM SO THAT WE MAY ALSO BE GLORIFIED WITH HIM. FOR I CONSIDER THAT THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT TIME ARE NOT WORTH COMPARING WITH THE GLORY THAT IS TO BE REVEALED TO US. ROMANS 8:16-18

WHOEVER MAKES A PRACTICE OF SINNING IS OF THE DEVIL, FOR THE DEVIL HAS BEEN SINNING FROM THE BEGINNING. THE REASON THE SON OF GOD APPEARED WAS TO DESTROY THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL. NO ONE BORN OF GOD MAKES A PRACTICE OF SINNING, FOR GOD'S SEED ABIDES IN HIM, AND HE CANNOT KEEP ON SINNING BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN BORN OF GOD. BY THIS IT IS EVIDENT WHO ARE THE CHILDREN OF GOD, AND WHO ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DEVIL: WHOEVER DOES NOT PRACTICE RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NOT OF GOD, NOR IS THE ONE WHO DOES NOT LOVE HIS BROTHER. 1 JOHN 3:8-10

FOR THIS IS THE LOVE OF GOD, THAT WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS. AND HIS COMMANDMENTS ARE NOT BURDENSOME. FOR EVERYONE WHO HAS BEEN BORN OF GOD OVERCOMES THE WORLD. AND THIS IS THE VICTORY THAT HAS OVERCOME THE WORLD—OUR FAITH. WHO IS IT THAT OVERCOMES THE WORLD EXCEPT THE ONE WHO BELIEVES THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD? 1 JOHN 5:3-5

"LATER THE OTHER VIRGINS ALSO CAME, SAYING, 'LORD, LORD, OPEN UP FOR US.' BUT HE ANSWERED, 'TRULY I SAY TO YOU, I DO NOT KNOW YOU.'" MATTHEW 25:11-12 WHEN THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE HAS LOCKED THE DOOR, IT WILL BE TOO LATE. YOU WILL STAND OUTSIDE KNOCKING AND PLEADING, 'LORD, OPEN THE DOOR FOR US!' BUT HE WILL REPLY, 'I DON'T KNOW YOU OR WHERE YOU COME FROM.' THEN YOU WILL SAY, 'WE ATE AND DRANK WITH YOU, AND YOU TAUGHT IN OUR STREETS.' BUT HE WILL REPLY, 'I DON'T KNOW YOU OR WHERE YOU COME FROM. AWAY FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS!" LUKE 13:25-27

HE WHO HAS AN EAR, LET HIM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES. THE ONE WHO CONQUERS WILL NOT BE HURT BY THE SECOND DEATH. REVELATION 2:11 THEN DEATH AND HADES WERE THROWN INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE. THIS IS THE SECOND DEATH, THE LAKE OF FIRE. REVELATION 20:14

SEEK THE LORD WHILE HE MAY BE FOUND; CALL UPON HIM WHILE HE IS NEAR; LET THE WICKED FORSAKE HIS WAY, AND THE UNRIGHTEOUS MAN HIS THOUGHTS; LET HIM RETURN TO THE LORD, THAT HE MAY HAVE COMPASSION ON HIM, AND TO OUR GOD, FOR HE WILL ABUNDANTLY PARDON. ISAIAH 55:6-7

Does God really care and know best?

Perhaps you or someone you know has “given God a try” and been disappointed. Just remember, His ways are not like ours. FOR MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS, NOR ARE YOUR WAYS MY WAYS," DECLARES THE LORD. "FOR JUST AS THE HEAVENS ARE HIGHER THAN THE EARTH, SO ARE MY WAYS HIGHER THAN YOUR WAYS, AND MY THOUGHTS THAN YOUR THOUGHTS. ISAIAH 55:8-9 He knows absolutely everything and He is all good. There is no evil whatsoever in Him. (PSALM 5:4) Did you know that before he created it, there was no such thing as time? (Time will end—we keep track of time

by the moon and the sun, which God created, **GENESIS 1:16-19**, and which will no longer exist when the new heavens and earth are created.) What is written about the future has as good as already happened as far as He is concerned. So He can actually know for a certainty everything there is to know, even before it happens, because He's not constricted by time. So if He says "no" or "not yet," then we can be sure that it's for the best, because He loves us. Also, when bad things happen (even death), we just don't know what worse things could have happened but we were spared.

THE RIGHTEOUS MAN PERISHES, AND NO ONE LAYS IT TO HEART; DEVOUT MEN ARE TAKEN AWAY, WHILE NO ONE UNDERSTANDS. FOR THE RIGHTEOUS MAN IS TAKEN AWAY FROM CALAMITY; HE ENTERS INTO PEACE; THEY REST IN THEIR BEDS WHO WALK IN THEIR UPRIGHTNESS. ISAIAH 57:1-2

AND WE KNOW THAT FOR THOSE WHO LOVE GOD ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD, FOR THOSE WHO ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE. ROMANS 8:28 FOR WE WALK BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:7 NOW FAITH IS THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR, THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN. HEBREWS 11:1 OH, THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES AND WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD! HOW UNSEARCHABLE ARE HIS JUDGMENTS AND HOW INSCRUTABLE HIS WAYS! "FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO HAS BEEN HIS COUNSELOR?" "OR WHO HAS GIVEN A GIFT TO HIM THAT HE MIGHT BE REPAID?" FOR FROM HIM AND THROUGH HIM AND TO HIM ARE ALL THINGS. TO HIM BE GLORY FOREVER. AMEN. ROMANS 11:33-36

THE SUN SHALL BE NO MORE YOUR LIGHT BY DAY, NOR FOR BRIGHTNESS SHALL THE MOON GIVE YOU LIGHT; BUT THE LORD WILL BE YOUR EVERLASTING LIGHT, AND YOUR GOD WILL BE YOUR GLORY. YOUR SUN SHALL NO MORE GO DOWN, NOR YOUR MOON WITHDRAW ITSELF; FOR THE LORD WILL BE YOUR EVERLASTING LIGHT, AND YOUR DAYS OF MOURNING SHALL BE ENDED. ISAIAH 60:19-20 AND NIGHT WILL BE NO MORE. THEY WILL NEED NO LIGHT OF LAMP OR SUN, FOR THE LORD GOD WILL BE THEIR LIGHT, AND THEY WILL REIGN FOREVER AND EVER. REVELATION 22:5

Or maybe some think God is mean and doesn't care about them, or that He doesn't even exist because they never seem to get their way. He doesn't want us asking for blessings constantly without any desire for a relationship with Him. (Psa. 37:4) Do we like that when others do it to us? No, we hate that! It's called using others. A true friend lays down his life for you, just as Jesus did for us. We are to desire to know and please Him first, and then blessings will be bestowed on us. **BUT SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND ALL THESE THINGS WILL BE ADDED TO YOU. MATTHEW 6:33 "THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. GREATER LOVE HAS NO ONE THAN THIS, THAT SOMEONE LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS. YOU ARE MY FRIENDS IF YOU DO WHAT I COMMAND YOU."** JOHN 15:12-14

AND WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE HIM, FOR WHOEVER WOULD DRAW NEAR TO GOD MUST BELIEVE THAT HE EXISTS AND THAT HE REWARDS THOSE WHO SEEK HIM. HEBREWS 11:6

What if God seems to ignore my prayers?

Sometimes the answer is “no” or “wait” (and we prove our faith is genuine by trusting), but there’s also the possibility that we might not have repented of our sin, causing God to not answer or even listen to our prayers: sin. We have the Bible to tell us what He expects of us and we are not being honest if we claim that we have nothing to repent of. **IF WE SAY WE HAVE NOT SINNED, WE MAKE HIM A LIAR, AND HIS WORD IS NOT IN US.** 1 JOHN 1:10 The first and most important sin we repent of is unbelief. We don’t earn our salvation, that work was finished by Jesus, but God is holy and we are to be holy as well. It’s His power inside of us that enables us to overcome the world’s temptations. (Gal. 5:24-25) **AS OBEDIENT CHILDREN, DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THE PASSIONS OF YOUR FORMER IGNORANCE, BUT AS HE WHO CALLED YOU IS HOLY, YOU ALSO BE HOLY IN ALL YOUR CONDUCT, SINCE IT IS WRITTEN, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."** 1 PETER 1:14-16

FOR THE GRACE OF GOD HAS APPEARED, BRINGING SALVATION FOR ALL PEOPLE, TRAINING US TO RENOUNCE UNGODLINESS AND WORLDLY PASSIONS, AND TO LIVE SELF-CONTROLLED, UPRIGHT, AND GODLY LIVES IN THE PRESENT AGE, WAITING FOR OUR BLESSED HOPE, THE APPEARING OF THE GLORY OF OUR GREAT GOD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST, WHO GAVE HIMSELF FOR US TO REDEEM US FROM ALL LAWLESSNESS AND TO PURIFY FOR HIMSELF A PEOPLE FOR HIS OWN POSSESSION WHO ARE ZEALOUS FOR GOOD WORKS. DECLARE THESE THINGS; EXHORT AND REBUKE WITH ALL AUTHORITY. LET NO ONE DISREGARD YOU. TITUS 2:11-15

DO NOT BE DECEIVED: GOD IS NOT MOCKED, FOR **WHATEVER ONE SOWS, THAT WILL HE ALSO REAP.** FOR THE ONE WHO SOWS TO HIS **OWN FLESH WILL** FROM THE FLESH REAP CORRUPTION, BUT THE ONE WHO SOWS TO THE **SPIRIT WILL** FROM THE SPIRIT REAP ETERNAL LIFE. GALATIANS 6:7-8 YOU DESIRE AND DO NOT HAVE, SO YOU MURDER. YOU COVET AND CANNOT OBTAIN, SO YOU FIGHT AND QUARREL. YOU DO NOT HAVE, BECAUSE YOU DO NOT ASK. **YOU ASK AND DO NOT RECEIVE, BECAUSE YOU ASK WRONGLY, TO SPEND IT ON YOUR PASSIONS.** JAMES 4:2-3

“LISTEN! THE LORD’S ARM IS NOT TOO WEAK TO SAVE YOU, NOR IS HIS EAR TOO DEAF TO HEAR YOU CALL. **IT’S YOUR SINS THAT HAVE CUT YOU OFF FROM GOD.** BECAUSE OF YOUR SINS, HE HAS TURNED AWAY AND WILL NOT LISTEN ANYMORE.” ISAIAH 59:1-2 AND THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME TO ME: “SON OF MAN, THESE MEN HAVE TAKEN THEIR IDOLS INTO THEIR HEARTS, AND SET THE STUMBLING BLOCK

OF THEIR INIQUITY BEFORE THEIR FACES. SHOULD I INDEED LET MYSELF BE CONSULTED BY THEM?
EZEKIEL 14:2-3

THIS MESSAGE FROM THE LORD CAME TO ZECHARIAH AGAIN: "THIS IS WHAT THE LORD OF HOSTS SAYS: 'ADMINISTER TRUE JUSTICE, AND SHOW GRACIOUS LOVE AND MERCY TOWARD EACH OTHER. YOU ARE NOT TO WRONG THE WIDOW, ORPHANS, THE FOREIGNER, OR THE POOR, AND YOU ARE NOT TO PLAN EVIL AGAINST EACH OTHER. BUT THEY REFUSED TO PAY ATTENTION, TURNED THEIR BACKS, AND STOPPED LISTENING. THEY MADE THEIR HEARTS HARD LIKE A DIAMOND, TO KEEP FROM OBEYING THE LAW AND THE MESSAGES THAT THE LORD OF HOSTS SENT BY HIS SPIRIT THROUGH THE FORMER PROPHETS. THEREFORE, JUST AS WHEN I CRIED OUT AND THEY WOULD NOT LISTEN, SO ALSO THEY WILL CRY OUT, AND I WILL NOT LISTEN,' SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS. ZECHARIAH 7:8-13

What does it mean when we call God our Father?

We try our best to be good parents, but God is THE parent of all of us who belong to Jesus. We try and fail at times, but He always does what is right. He is always teaching, always guiding us. If we "get away" with sin, it should make us wonder whether or not we truly belong to Him. He will deal with His own according to His own methods and schedule. If we are pleased by doing sinful things more than by pleasing our Savior who died for us, what does that say about us?

JESUS SAID TO THEM, "IF GOD WERE YOUR FATHER, YOU WOULD LOVE ME, FOR I CAME FROM GOD AND I AM HERE. I CAME NOT OF MY OWN ACCORD, BUT HE SENT ME." JOHN 8:42 "THOSE WHOM I LOVE, I REPROVE AND DISCIPLINE, SO BE ZEALOUS AND REPENT. BEHOLD, I STAND AT THE DOOR AND KNOCK. IF ANYONE HEARS MY VOICE AND OPENS THE DOOR, I WILL COME IN TO HIM AND EAT WITH HIM, AND HE WITH ME." REVELATION 3:19-20

..."MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR BE WEARY WHEN REPROVED BY HIM. FOR THE LORD DISCIPLINES THE ONE HE LOVES, AND CHASTISES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." IF YOU ARE LEFT WITHOUT DISCIPLINE, IN WHICH ALL HAVE PARTICIPATED, THEN YOU ARE ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN AND NOT SONS. HEBREWS 12:5-6, 8

THEREFORE, MY BELOVED, AS YOU HAVE ALWAYS OBEYED, SO NOW, NOT ONLY AS IN MY PRESENCE BUT MUCH MORE IN MY ABSENCE, WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING, FOR IT IS GOD WHO WORKS IN YOU, BOTH TO WILL AND TO DO HIS GOOD PLEASURE. PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

BELOVED, IF OUR HEART DOES NOT CONDEMN US, WE HAVE CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD; AND WHATEVER WE ASK WE RECEIVE FROM HIM, BECAUSE WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS AND DO WHAT PLEASES HIM. AND THIS IS HIS COMMANDMENT, THAT WE BELIEVE IN THE NAME OF HIS SON JESUS CHRIST AND LOVE

ONE ANOTHER, JUST AS HE HAS COMMANDED US. WHOEVER KEEPS HIS COMMANDMENTS ABIDES IN GOD, AND GOD IN HIM. AND BY THIS WE KNOW THAT HE ABIDES IN US, BY THE SPIRIT WHOM HE HAS GIVEN US. 1 JOHN 3:21-24

We all stumble or slip at times, but we get back up, confess it to God and ask for His help to live in a way that pleases Him. (2 COR. 5:9-10, EPH. 5:10-12, COL. 1:10, 1 THESS. 4:1-8) If we continually bear in mind what our sin cost Jesus, then it should help us to think before every word or action on how it will reflect on Him, whether it will honor Him and (hopefully not) misrepresent His character to others. We are not responsible for how people treat us, but we are responsible for how we react. God sees when we are tried and tempted, and He rewards faithfulness. He will defend our name and take vengeance if and when it is due, but we're to be as gentle as lambs like Jesus was. "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." MATTHEW 11:29 I think we can all agree this is easier to say than do—simple, but not easy—but Jesus is worth the effort!

VINDICATE ME, O GOD, AND DEFEND MY CAUSE AGAINST AN UNGODLY PEOPLE, FROM THE DECEITFUL AND UNJUST MAN DELIVER ME! PSALM 43:1 WHEN A PERSON'S WAYS PLEASE THE LORD, HE MAKES EVEN THEIR ENEMIES TO BE AT PEACE WITH THEM. PROVERBS 16:7

"YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.' BUT I SAY TO YOU, DO NOT RESIST THE ONE WHO IS EVIL. BUT IF ANYONE SLAPS YOU ON THE RIGHT CHEEK, TURN TO HIM THE OTHER ALSO. AND IF ANYONE WOULD SUE YOU AND TAKE YOUR TUNIC, LET HIM HAVE YOUR CLOAK AS WELL. AND IF ANYONE FORCES YOU TO GO ONE MILE, GO WITH HIM TWO MILES. GIVE TO THE ONE WHO BEGS FROM YOU, AND DO NOT REFUSE THE ONE WHO WOULD BORROW FROM YOU. YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AND HATE YOUR ENEMY.' BUT I SAY TO YOU, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU, SO THAT YOU MAY BE SONS OF YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN. FOR HE MAKES HIS SUN RISE ON THE EVIL AND ON THE GOOD, AND SENDS RAIN ON THE JUST AND ON THE UNJUST. FOR IF YOU LOVE THOSE WHO LOVE YOU, WHAT REWARD DO YOU HAVE? DO NOT EVEN THE TAX COLLECTORS DO THE SAME? AND IF YOU GREET ONLY YOUR BROTHERS, WHAT MORE ARE YOU DOING THAN OTHERS? DO NOT EVEN THE GENTILES DO THE SAME? YOU THEREFORE MUST BE PERFECT, AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT." MATTHEW 5:38-48

"THEN THE RIGHTEOUS WILL ANSWER HIM, SAYING, 'LORD, WHEN DID WE SEE YOU HUNGRY AND FEED YOU, OR THIRSTY AND GIVE YOU DRINK? AND WHEN DID WE SEE YOU A STRANGER AND WELCOME YOU, OR NAKED AND CLOTHE YOU? AND WHEN DID WE SEE YOU SICK OR IN PRISON AND VISIT YOU?' AND THE KING WILL ANSWER THEM, 'TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, AS YOU DID IT TO ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE MY BROTHERS, YOU DID IT TO ME.'" MATTHEW 25:37-40 "TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, WHOEVER

RECEIVES THE ONE I SEND RECEIVES ME, AND WHOEVER RECEIVES ME RECEIVES THE ONE WHO SENT ME."

JOHN 13:20

What about all of the evil in the world?

Another reason often heard from people who are angry with God is that there is so much evil in the world. There is a very simple reason for that—sin. But then people ask, why do bad things happen to nice people? The answer is free will. God allows us to rebel against Him. How would our love for Him be proven genuine if He forced us to obey Him? That would be fake—like robots, whereas all forms of falsehood are against God's very nature. Even the angels have free will, as Satan proved all the way back in the Garden of Eden.

The problem with free will is that we like it fine when it means we can do as we please, but not so much when others do as they please (and it affects us). People tend to be selfish and greedy by nature. To see what God says about how we should react to the sin of others, read **PSALMS 37 & 73**. In short, those passages say that we should never envy or be discouraged by ungodly people seeming to get away with sin because they will receive their full punishment from God in the end, but we will receive our reward for faithfully persevering to the end, for His name's sake.

FOR **THE EVILDOERS SHALL BE CUT OFF, BUT THOSE WHO WAIT FOR THE LORD SHALL INHERIT THE LAND.** IN JUST A LITTLE WHILE, THE WICKED WILL BE NO MORE; THOUGH YOU LOOK CAREFULLY AT HIS PLACE, HE WILL NOT BE THERE. BUT THE MEEK SHALL INHERIT THE LAND AND DELIGHT THEMSELVES IN ABUNDANT PEACE. PSALM 37:9-11

Aren't Christians closed-minded bigots?

These days, judging people for any reason is frowned upon, unless it's for being a Christian—then it's okay. Name-calling is considered bullying except when calling a Christian a hater, phobic or whatever. Tolerance is insisted upon, except for tolerating the unpopular beliefs and views of Christians. In defense of the world, there have been many acts done and words said in the name of Christianity that were anything but Christian. That is an unfortunate fact of life, but true believers are not in control of the behavior of misguided people claiming to be disciples of Jesus.

Without a doubt there has also been a problem with hypocrisy. People claiming to be Christians (only God truly knows) have picked out specific sins that upset them most and made them out to be unforgivable, all the while excusing their own as “not as bad.” This is unbiblical, but we need to keep in mind that God has not changed with the times. He still detests ALL sin. He never said not to judge at all, but to judge rightly. **“DO NOT JUDGE BY APPEARANCES, BUT JUDGE WITH RIGHT JUDGMENT.” JOHN 7:24** We're supposed to help bring believers back from straying. (Jam. 5:19-20, Gal. 6:1, Jude 1:23) We'll all in the same boat—we're all sinners in need of salvation. **ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD. ROMANS 3:23**

"JUDGE NOT, THAT YOU BE NOT JUDGED. FOR WITH THE JUDGMENT YOU PRONOUNCE YOU WILL BE JUDGED, AND WITH THE MEASURE YOU USE IT WILL BE MEASURED TO YOU. WHY DO YOU SEE THE SPECK THAT IS IN YOUR BROTHER'S EYE, BUT DO NOT NOTICE THE LOG THAT IS IN YOUR OWN EYE? OR HOW CAN YOU SAY TO YOUR BROTHER, 'LET ME TAKE THE SPECK OUT OF YOUR EYE,' WHEN THERE IS THE LOG IN YOUR OWN EYE? YOU HYPOCRITE, FIRST TAKE THE LOG OUT OF YOUR OWN EYE, AND THEN YOU WILL SEE CLEARLY TO TAKE THE SPECK OUT OF YOUR BROTHER'S EYE." MATTHEW 7:1-5

THEREFORE YOU HAVE NO EXCUSE, O MAN, EVERY ONE OF YOU WHO JUDGES. FOR IN PASSING JUDGMENT ON ANOTHER YOU CONDEMN YOURSELF, BECAUSE YOU, THE JUDGE, PRACTICE THE VERY SAME THINGS. WE KNOW THAT THE JUDGMENT OF GOD RIGHTLY FALLS ON THOSE WHO PRACTICE SUCH THINGS. DO YOU SUPPOSE, O MAN—YOU WHO JUDGE THOSE WHO PRACTICE SUCH THINGS AND YET DO THEM YOURSELF—THAT YOU WILL ESCAPE THE JUDGMENT OF GOD? OR DO YOU PRESUME ON THE RICHES OF HIS KINDNESS AND FORBEARANCE AND PATIENCE, NOT KNOWING THAT GOD'S KINDNESS IS MEANT TO LEAD YOU TO REPENTANCE? BUT BECAUSE OF YOUR HARD AND IMPENITENT HEART YOU ARE STORING UP WRATH FOR YOURSELF ON THE DAY OF WRATH WHEN GOD'S RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT WILL BE REVEALED. ROMANS 2:1-5

People resent anyone acting self-righteous, but bear in mind that there is a difference between righteous and self-righteous. Righteousness means being made right with God, which can only be done by accepting Jesus as our Savior. From then on, we are set apart for God, meant to pursue holiness as children of God. Again, this requires the power of the Holy Spirit, our Helper. When someone is self-righteous, they are trying to earn their own way and usually they end up being legalistic—whereas Jesus sets us free from working, but we want to live in a way that pleases Him out of love, respect and gratitude. We don't want to “roll in the mud” in the pristine white garment He provided to us at the cost of His precious blood. **(2 PET. 2:18-22, REV. 3:4, 1 THESS. 5:19-21, GAL. 5:19-24, ROM. 13:14)**

HE ALSO TOLD THIS PARABLE TO SOME WHO TRUSTED IN THEMSELVES THAT THEY WERE RIGHTEOUS, AND TREATED OTHERS WITH CONTEMPT: "TWO MEN WENT UP INTO THE TEMPLE TO PRAY, ONE A PHARISEE AND THE OTHER A TAX COLLECTOR. THE PHARISEE, STANDING BY HIMSELF, PRAYED THUS: 'GOD, I THANK YOU THAT I AM NOT LIKE OTHER MEN, EXTORTIONERS, UNJUST, ADULTERERS, OR EVEN LIKE THIS TAX COLLECTOR. I FAST TWICE A WEEK; I GIVE TITHES OF ALL THAT I GET.' BUT THE TAX COLLECTOR, STANDING FAR OFF, WOULD NOT EVEN LIFT UP HIS EYES TO HEAVEN, BUT BEAT HIS BREST, SAYING, 'GOD, BE MERCIFUL TO ME, A SINNER!' I TELL YOU, THIS MAN WENT DOWN TO HIS HOUSE JUSTIFIED, RATHER THAN THE OTHER. FOR EVERYONE WHO EXALTS HIMSELF WILL BE HUMBLD, BUT THE ONE WHO HUMBLD HIMSELF WILL BE EXALTD." LUKE 18:9-14

AS OBEDIENT CHILDREN, DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THE PASSIONS OF YOUR FORMER IGNORANCE, BUT AS HE WHO CALLED YOU IS HOLY, YOU ALSO BE HOLY IN ALL YOUR CONDUCT, SINCE IT IS WRITTEN, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." AND IF YOU CALL ON HIM AS FATHER WHO JUDGES IMPARTIALLY ACCORDING TO EACH ONE'S DEEDS, CONDUCT YOURSELVES WITH FEAR THROUGHOUT THE TIME OF YOUR EXILE, KNOWING THAT YOU WERE RANSOMED FROM THE FUTILE WAYS INHERITED FROM YOUR FOREFATHERS, NOT WITH PERISHABLE THINGS SUCH AS SILVER OR GOLD, BUT WITH THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST, LIKE THAT OF A LAMB WITHOUT BLEMISH OR SPOT. HE WAS FOREKNOWN BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD BUT WAS MADE MANIFEST IN THE LAST TIMES FOR THE SAKE OF YOU WHO THROUGH HIM ARE BELIEVERS IN GOD, WHO RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD AND GAVE HIM GLORY, SO THAT YOUR FAITH AND HOPE ARE IN GOD. HAVING PURIFIED YOUR SOULS BY YOUR OBEDIENCE TO THE TRUTH FOR A SINCERE BROTHERLY LOVE, LOVE ONE ANOTHER EARNESTLY FROM A PURE HEART, SINCE YOU HAVE BEEN BORN AGAIN, NOT OF PERISHABLE SEED BUT OF IMPERISHABLE, THROUGH THE LIVING AND ABIDING WORD OF GOD. 1 PETER 1:14-23

I AM SPEAKING IN HUMAN TERMS, BECAUSE OF YOUR NATURAL LIMITATIONS. FOR JUST AS YOU ONCE PRESENTED YOUR MEMBERS AS SLAVES TO IMPURITY AND TO LAWLESSNESS LEADING TO MORE LAWLESSNESS, SO NOW PRESENT YOUR MEMBERS AS SLAVES TO RIGHTEOUSNESS LEADING TO SANCTIFICATION. FOR WHEN YOU WERE SLAVES OF SIN, YOU WERE FREE IN REGARD TO RIGHTEOUSNESS. BUT WHAT FRUIT WERE YOU GETTING AT THAT TIME FROM THE THINGS OF WHICH YOU ARE NOW ASHAMED? FOR THE END OF THOSE THINGS IS DEATH. BUT NOW THAT YOU HAVE BEEN SET FREE FROM SIN AND HAVE BECOME SLAVES OF GOD, THE FRUIT YOU GET LEADS TO SANCTIFICATION AND ITS END, ETERNAL LIFE. ROMANS 6:19-22

The "god" of this fallen world does not like the message of freedom from sin and prefers one of freedom to sin. AND EVEN IF OUR GOSPEL IS VEILED, IT IS VEILED TO THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING. IN THEIR CASE THE GOD OF THIS WORLD HAS BLINDED THE MINDS OF THE UNBELIEVERS, TO KEEP THEM FROM SEEING THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF CHRIST, WHO IS THE IMAGE OF GOD. 2 CORINTHIANS 4:3-4 Satan wants us to remain in bondage. He uses all sorts of tricks, like calling good evil and evil good. AND NO WONDER, FOR EVEN SATAN DISGUISES HIMSELF AS AN ANGEL OF LIGHT. SO IT IS NO SURPRISE IF HIS SERVANTS, ALSO, DISGUISE

THEMSELVES AS SERVANTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. **THEIR END WILL CORRESPOND TO THEIR DEEDS.** 2 CORINTHIANS 11:14-15 Furthermore, he packages his lies as “progress,” making it sound as though there’s something wrong with us if we don’t buy them. Satan wants Christians to look bad and be silenced, but we’re to resist him, submit to God and stand firm in our faith, continuing to speak the truth in love to the lost. (JAM. 4:7, EPH. 4:15-16, EPH. 6:10-20, PHIL. 1:27-28) **"FOR THE SON OF MAN CAME TO SEEK AND TO SAVE THE LOST."** LUKE 19:10

BUT YOU MUST REMEMBER, BELOVED, THE PREDICTIONS OF THE APOSTLES OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. THEY SAID TO YOU, "IN THE END TIME THERE WILL BE SCOFFERS, FOLLOWING THEIR OWN UNGODLY PASSIONS." IT IS THESE WHO CAUSE DIVISIONS, WORLDLY PEOPLE, DEVOID OF THE SPIRIT. BUT YOU, BELOVED, BUILDING YOURSELVES UP IN YOUR MOST HOLY FAITH AND PRAYING IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, KEEP YOURSELVES IN THE LOVE OF GOD, WAITING FOR THE MERCY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST THAT LEADS TO ETERNAL LIFE. AND HAVE MERCY ON THOSE WHO DOUBT; SAVE OTHERS BY SNATCHING THEM OUT OF THE FIRE; TO OTHERS SHOW MERCY WITH FEAR, HATING EVEN THE GARMENT STAINED BY THE FLESH. JUDE 1:17-23

If I become a Christian, will my life be easy then?

As much as we would all like for this to happen, no. It will be better, but not necessarily easier. However, our definition of “good” and our priorities should change so that no matter what happens, we’ll have peace, contentment and joy in knowing we are loved by God and will spend eternity with Him. We can be sure that the devil will try to attack our new life. He doesn’t like losing. (2 TIM. 3:12-13, JOHN 15:18-21, 1 JOHN 3:11-18) The way that we rely on God through trials and temptations is an opportunity to prove our faith in Him and love for Him as genuine. When others see the change in our ways and attitudes, then we might get a chance to share God’s love and message of salvation with them. There’s nothing more important in this life than knowing where we will spend eternity and, once we know, sharing that joy with others, to the glory of God.

NOT THAT I AM SPEAKING OF BEING IN NEED, FOR I HAVE LEARNED IN WHATEVER SITUATION I AM TO BE CONTENT. I KNOW HOW TO BE BROUGHT LOW, AND I KNOW HOW TO ABOUND. IN ANY AND EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE, I HAVE LEARNED THE SECRET OF FACING PLENTY AND HUNGER, ABUNDANCE AND NEED. I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH HIM WHO STRENGTHENS ME. PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13 HIS DELIGHT IS NOT IN THE STRENGTH OF THE HORSE, NOR HIS PLEASURE IN THE LEGS OF A MAN, BUT THE LORD TAKES PLEASURE IN THOSE WHO FEAR HIM, IN THOSE WHO HOPE IN HIS STEADFAST LOVE. PSALM 147:10-11 (The “hope” in His steadfast love is NOT that He will fail to notice if we don’t love

or respect Him enough to obey.) THE CRUCIBLE IS FOR REFINING SILVER AND THE FURNACE IS FOR GOLD, LIKEWISE THE LORD TESTS HEARTS. PROVERBS 27:3

What is the deadline?

It's not too late to repent until we're dead or Jesus returns (but only God knows the date of either of those events). But make no mistake—He is returning for those who are His. Be ready! Anticipate and long for His return, walk as He walked, be about His business of boldly proclaiming the Gospel and shining His light on this dark world, patiently endure suffering for His sake, put Him first and be proud of His finished work of pure love for us on the cross, not ashamed of Him (or He will be ashamed of us). (2 COR. 10:17, 2TIM. 2:12, MARK 8:38, LUKE 12:8-9) The faithful (and God knows the heart and actions of all) will be spared the wrath of God to come on the entire world. (This doesn't mean we will never have any problems, but when we do, God will work out everything for good. ROMANS 8:28)

NOW THERE IS IN STORE FOR ME THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, WHICH THE LORD, THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE, WILL AWARD TO ME ON THAT DAY—AND NOT ONLY TO ME, BUT ALSO TO ALL WHO HAVE LONGED FOR HIS APPEARING. 2 TIMOTHY 4:8 "THEREFORE, STAY AWAKE, FOR YOU DO NOT KNOW ON WHAT DAY YOUR LORD IS COMING." MATTHEW 24:42 IF HE COMES IN THE SECOND WATCH, OR IN THE THIRD, AND FINDS THEM AWAKE, BLESSED ARE THOSE SERVANTS! LUKE 12:38

AND BY THIS WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE COME TO KNOW HIM, IF WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS. WHOEVER SAYS "I KNOW HIM" BUT DOES NOT KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS IS A LIAR, AND THE TRUTH IS NOT IN HIM, BUT WHOEVER KEEPS HIS WORD, IN HIM TRULY THE LOVE OF GOD IS PERFECTED. BY THIS WE MAY KNOW THAT WE ARE IN HIM: WHOEVER SAYS HE ABIDES IN HIM OUGHT TO WALK IN THE SAME WAY IN WHICH HE WALKED. 1 JOHN 2:3-6

BUT GOD'S FIRM FOUNDATION STANDS, BEARING THIS SEAL: "THE LORD KNOWS THOSE WHO ARE HIS," AND, "LET EVERYONE WHO NAMES THE NAME OF THE LORD TURN FROM EVIL." 2 TIMOTHY 2:19 FOR IF WE GO ON SINNING DELIBERATELY AFTER RECEIVING THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH, THERE NO LONGER REMAINS A SACRIFICE FOR SINS, BUT A FEARFUL EXPECTATION OF JUDGMENT, AND A FURY OF FIRE THAT WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES. HEBREWS 10:26-27

THIS IS NOW THE SECOND LETTER THAT I AM WRITING TO YOU, BELOVED. IN BOTH OF THEM I AM STIRRING UP YOUR SINCERE MIND BY WAY OF REMINDER, THAT YOU SHOULD REMEMBER THE PREDICTIONS OF THE HOLY PROPHETS AND THE COMMANDMENT OF THE LORD AND SAVIOR THROUGH YOUR APOSTLES, KNOWING THIS FIRST OF ALL, THAT SCOFFERS WILL COME IN THE LAST DAYS WITH SCOFFING, FOLLOWING THEIR OWN SINFUL DESIRES. THEY WILL SAY, "WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS

COMING? FOR EVER SINCE THE FATHERS FELL ASLEEP, ALL THINGS ARE CONTINUING AS THEY WERE FROM THE BEGINNING OF CREATION." FOR THEY DELIBERATELY OVERLOOK THIS FACT, THAT THE HEAVENS EXISTED LONG AGO, AND THE EARTH WAS FORMED OUT OF WATER AND THROUGH WATER BY THE WORD OF GOD, AND THAT BY MEANS OF THESE THE WORLD THAT THEN EXISTED WAS DELUGED WITH WATER AND PERISHED. BUT BY THE SAME WORD THE HEAVENS AND EARTH THAT NOW EXIST ARE STORED UP FOR FIRE, BEING KEPT UNTIL THE DAY OF JUDGMENT AND DESTRUCTION OF THE UNGODLY.

BUT DO NOT OVERLOOK THIS ONE FACT, BELOVED, THAT WITH THE LORD ONE DAY IS AS A THOUSAND YEARS, AND A THOUSAND YEARS AS ONE DAY. THE LORD IS NOT SLOW TO FULFILL HIS PROMISE AS SOME COUNT SLOWNESS, BUT IS PATIENT TOWARD YOU, NOT WISHING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH, BUT THAT ALL SHOULD REACH REPENTANCE. BUT THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL COME LIKE A THIEF, AND THEN THE HEAVENS WILL PASS AWAY WITH A ROAR, AND THE HEAVENLY BODIES WILL BE BURNED UP AND DISSOLVED, AND THE EARTH AND THE WORKS THAT ARE DONE ON IT WILL BE EXPOSED. SINCE ALL THESE THINGS ARE THUS TO BE DISSOLVED, WHAT SORT OF PEOPLE OUGHT YOU TO BE IN LIVES OF HOLINESS AND GODLINESS, WAITING FOR AND HASTENING THE COMING OF THE DAY OF GOD, BECAUSE OF WHICH THE HEAVENS WILL BE SET ON FIRE AND DISSOLVED, AND THE HEAVENLY BODIES WILL MELT AS THEY BURN! BUT ACCORDING TO HIS PROMISE WE ARE WAITING FOR NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH IN WHICH RIGHTEOUSNESS DWELLS.

THEREFORE, BELOVED, SINCE YOU ARE WAITING FOR THESE, BE DILIGENT TO BE FOUND BY HIM WITHOUT SPOT OR BLEMISH, AND AT PEACE. AND COUNT THE PATIENCE OF OUR LORD AS SALVATION, JUST AS OUR BELOVED BROTHER PAUL ALSO WROTE TO YOU ACCORDING TO THE WISDOM GIVEN HIM, AS HE DOES IN ALL HIS LETTERS WHEN HE SPEAKS IN THEM OF THESE MATTERS. THERE ARE SOME THINGS IN THEM THAT ARE HARD TO UNDERSTAND, WHICH THE IGNORANT AND UNSTABLE TWIST TO THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION, AS THEY DO THE OTHER SCRIPTURES. YOU THEREFORE, BELOVED, KNOWING THIS BEFOREHAND, TAKE CARE THAT YOU ARE NOT CARRIED AWAY WITH THE ERROR OF LAWLESS PEOPLE AND LOSE YOUR OWN STEADFASTNESS. BUT GROW IN THE GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST. TO HIM BE THE GLORY BOTH NOW AND TO THE DAY OF ETERNITY. AMEN. 2 PETER 3

What if I don't believe in God?

Everyone knows that God exists. He wrote the knowledge of Himself everywhere. We all know that a book does not write itself and neither does a house build itself. (FOR EVERY HOUSE IS BUILT BY SOMEONE, BUT THE BUILDER OF ALL THINGS IS GOD.) HEBREWS 3:4 If we claim to believe that this entire world and everything in it came from nothing on its own with no Creator, then we deceive ourselves. We will EACH answer to God—blaming scientists or others for leading us astray will not excuse us. No one can force us to believe their lies. (HEBREWS 4:12-13, ROMANS 2:6-11)

People who deny God's existence simply don't want to submit to Him—which isn't a problem if there "is" no God.

FOR THE WRATH OF GOD IS REVEALED FROM HEAVEN AGAINST ALL UNGODLINESS AND UNRIGHTEOUSNESS OF MEN, WHO BY THEIR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS SUPPRESS THE TRUTH. FOR **WHAT CAN BE KNOWN ABOUT GOD IS PLAIN TO THEM**, BECAUSE GOD HAS SHOWN IT TO THEM. FOR HIS INVISIBLE ATTRIBUTES, NAMELY, **HIS ETERNAL POWER AND DIVINE NATURE, HAVE BEEN CLEARLY PERCEIVED, EVER SINCE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD, IN THE THINGS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE. SO THEY ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE.** FOR ALTHOUGH THEY KNEW GOD, THEY DID NOT HONOR HIM AS GOD OR GIVE THANKS TO HIM, BUT THEY BECAME FUTILE IN THEIR THINKING, AND **THEIR FOOLISH HEARTS WERE DARKENED.** ROMANS 1:18-21

THE HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD, AND THE SKY ABOVE PROCLAIMS HIS HANDIWORK. DAY TO DAY POURS OUT SPEECH, AND NIGHT TO NIGHT REVEALS KNOWLEDGE. THERE IS NO SPEECH, NOR ARE THERE WORDS, WHOSE VOICE IS NOT HEARD. THEIR VOICE GOES OUT THROUGH ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE END OF THE WORLD. PSALM 19:1-4A

SINCE THEREFORE IT REMAINS FOR SOME TO ENTER IT, AND THOSE WHO FORMERLY RECEIVED THE GOOD NEWS FAILED TO ENTER BECAUSE OF DISOBEDIENCE, AGAIN HE APPOINTS A CERTAIN DAY, "TODAY," SAYING THROUGH DAVID SO LONG AFTERWARD, IN THE WORDS ALREADY QUOTED, **"TODAY, IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS."** HEBREWS 4:6-7 FOR **WE MUST ALL APPEAR BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST,** SO THAT EACH ONE MAY RECEIVE WHAT IS DUE FOR WHAT HE HAS DONE IN THE BODY, WHETHER GOOD OR EVIL. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:10

Isn't God "love"?

How could God punish anyone, ever, if He "is" love? **ANYONE WHO DOES NOT LOVE DOES NOT KNOW GOD, BECAUSE GOD IS LOVE.** 1 JOHN 4:8 Yes, that is right, He is—but He is God and we are not. Love has been defined very clearly by Him for us. He has given us everything we have in life, including the One and only Way to salvation. How could anyone know about Jesus and claim not to be loved by God? What more could He do to show us? He rightly expects us to show our love in return by our appreciating His gifts and obeying Him. Context is everything. The very next verse after the "God is love" verse tells about Him giving His only begotten Son. **IN THIS THE LOVE OF GOD WAS MADE MANIFEST AMONG US, THAT GOD SENT HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON INTO THE WORLD, SO THAT WE MIGHT LIVE THROUGH HIM.** 1 JOHN 4:9

NOW WHEN ALL THE PEOPLE WERE BAPTIZED, AND WHEN JESUS ALSO HAD BEEN BAPTIZED AND WAS PRAYING, THE HEAVENS WERE OPENED, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT DESCENDED ON HIM IN BODILY FORM, LIKE

A DOVE; AND A VOICE CAME FROM HEAVEN, "YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON; WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED." LUKE 3:21-22

Abraham understood the sovereignty of God and trusted Him. When he was instructed to sacrifice his son, that was a picture of what God Himself was going to do for us. Isaac even carried his own wood as Jesus carried His own cross. (GENESIS 22:6) Isaac was never in any danger, but rather it was a (one-time only) test for Abraham, who passed. GOD SAID, "TAKE YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON ISAAC, WHOM YOU LOVE, AND GO TO THE LAND OF MORIAH, AND OFFER HIM THERE AS A BURNT OFFERING ON ONE OF THE MOUNTAINS OF WHICH I SHALL TELL YOU." GENESIS 22:2

...TO THE ONE WHO SHARES THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM, WHO IS THE FATHER OF US ALL, AS IT IS WRITTEN, "I HAVE MADE YOU THE FATHER OF MANY NATIONS"—IN THE PRESENCE OF THE GOD IN WHOM HE BELIEVED, WHO GIVES LIFE TO THE DEAD AND CALLS INTO EXISTENCE THINGS THAT DO NOT EXIST. ROMANS 4:16B-17

What is God like?

Any artist will tell you that they put their heart and soul into what they "create." This includes artisans of all kinds—painters, sculptors, musicians, composers, authors, etc. So it is with God (except that He really creates whereas we only use what He gave us and copy Him). We can see his BEAUTIFUL character by what He made—the amazing variety, the perfect symmetry, the intricacy and fine balance of His designs, from the vastness of the scope to the finest detail. God has shown us what He is like. Everything He made was good and even very good, when it was finished. AND GOD SAW EVERYTHING THAT HE HAD MADE, AND BEHOLD, IT WAS VERY GOOD. AND THERE WAS EVENING AND THERE WAS MORNING, THE SIXTH DAY. GENESIS 1:31

Despite the passing of thousands of years and the introduction of sin and decay long ago, His creation still displays how wonderful its Creator is. And despite new age teachings (which are not new at all), God is NOT "the universe" any more than we "are" something we have made. All we have to do is look around us at what He made (if we can see past the obstructions made by men). We need microscopes and telescopes to see much of it, yet we'll never truly understand and fully appreciate everything.

HE HAS DELIVERED US FROM THE DOMAIN OF DARKNESS AND TRANSFERRED US TO THE KINGDOM OF HIS BELOVED SON, IN WHOM WE HAVE REDEMPTION, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS. HE IS THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD, THE FIRSTBORN OF ALL CREATION. FOR BY HIM ALL THINGS WERE CREATED, IN HEAVEN

AND ON EARTH, VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE, WHETHER THRONES OR DOMINIONS OR RULERS OR AUTHORITIES—ALL THINGS WERE CREATED THROUGH HIM AND FOR HIM. AND HE IS BEFORE ALL THINGS, AND IN HIM ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER. AND HE IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY, THE CHURCH. HE IS THE BEGINNING, THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD, THAT IN EVERYTHING HE MIGHT BE PREMINENT. FOR IN HIM ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD WAS PLEASED TO DWELL, AND THROUGH HIM TO RECONCILE TO HIMSELF ALL THINGS, WHETHER ON EARTH OR IN HEAVEN, MAKING PEACE BY THE BLOOD OF HIS CROSS. COLOSSIANS 1:13-20

Have you ever given someone a gift and they didn't even bother to acknowledge it, let alone thank you and tell you if they liked it or not? Didn't it rob you of your joy in giving that gift? Imagine how God feels when we do that very same thing to Him! We constantly take the credit for things He has done, fail to be thankful for all of the blessings He gives to us, and we even complain incessantly. Not only is it shameful of us to treat our God that way, but it makes us look bad to the world—as if our Father doesn't take care of us, or He didn't teach us how to act any better than that. We are cheating God out of His joy. It's a bad habit that has to stop! FOR THIS IS THE WILL OF GOD, THAT BY DOING GOOD YOU SHOULD PUT TO SILENCE THE IGNORANCE OF FOOLISH PEOPLE. 1 PETER 2:15 LET THERE BE NO FILTHINESS NOR FOOLISH TALK NOR CRUDE JOKING, WHICH ARE OUT OF PLACE, BUT INSTEAD LET THERE BE THANKSGIVING. EPHESIANS 5:4 (ALSO SEE 1 COR. 10:6-12.)

MAY YOU BE STRENGTHENED WITH ALL POWER, ACCORDING TO HIS GLORIOUS MIGHT, FOR ALL ENDURANCE AND PATIENCE WITH JOY, GIVING THANKS TO THE FATHER, WHO HAS QUALIFIED YOU TO SHARE IN THE INHERITANCE OF THE SAINTS IN LIGHT. ...AND LET THE PEACE OF CHRIST RULE IN YOUR HEARTS, TO WHICH INDEED YOU WERE CALLED IN ONE BODY. AND BE THANKFUL. LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY, TEACHING AND ADMONISHING ONE ANOTHER IN ALL WISDOM, SINGING PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS, WITH THANKFULNESS IN YOUR HEARTS TO GOD. AND WHATEVER YOU DO, IN WORD OR DEED, DO EVERYTHING IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS, GIVING THANKS TO GOD THE FATHER THROUGH HIM. ...WHATEVER YOU DO, WORK HEARTILY, AS FOR THE LORD AND NOT FOR MEN, KNOWING THAT FROM THE LORD YOU WILL RECEIVE THE INHERITANCE AS YOUR REWARD. YOU ARE SERVING THE LORD CHRIST. COLOSSIANS 1:11-12, 3:15-17, 23-24

SO LET NO ONE BOAST IN MEN. FOR ALL THINGS ARE YOURS, WHETHER PAUL OR APOLLOS OR CEPHAS OR THE WORLD OR LIFE OR DEATH OR THE PRESENT OR THE FUTURE—ALL ARE YOURS, AND YOU ARE CHRIST'S, AND CHRIST IS GOD'S. 1 CORINTHIANS 3:21-23

God recorded for us in the Scriptures everything that we need to know—how it all came to be and even what is going to happen before it comes to pass. ALL SCRIPTURE IS BREATHED OUT BY GOD... 2 TIMOTHY 3:16 AND NOW I HAVE TOLD YOU BEFORE IT TAKES PLACE, SO THAT WHEN IT DOES TAKE PLACE YOU MAY BELIEVE. JOHN 14:29 He reveals

Himself through His Holy Word—His character, His values, His nature. He tells us why we are here and what He desires of us—how to please Him and what He hates. **(PROVERBS 6:16-19)** God's children are meant to be lights in this dark world, showing what He is like. **(MATT. 5:14-16, EPH. 5:5-16, JOHN 3:19-21)** **DO ALL THINGS WITHOUT GRUMBLING OR DISPUTING, THAT YOU MAY BE BLAMELESS AND INNOCENT, CHILDREN OF GOD WITHOUT BLEMISH IN THE MIDST OF A CROOKED AND TWISTED GENERATION, AMONG WHOM YOU SHINE AS LIGHTS IN THE WORLD... PHILIPPIANS 2:14-15**

Who started this rebellion against God?

Satan, who tries to imitate what God does, but in a very opposite way. God gives free will; Satan wants absolute control of every detail. God seals His own with the Holy Spirit, who cannot be seen—Satan will cause a physical mark to be put on those who make the mistake of worshiping him. He wants to be God, but obviously having NO chance of success, he set out to bring low the crown of God's creation. **(1 COR. 11:7)** Man was created in God's image, and so Satan has been attacking us out of hate for God ever since the beginning. **SO GOD CREATED MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE, IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE CREATED HIM; MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM. GENESIS 1:27**

"HOW YOU ARE FALLEN FROM HEAVEN, O SHINING STAR, SON OF THE MORNING! YOU HAVE BEEN THROWN DOWN TO THE EARTH, YOU WHO DESTROYED THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD. FOR YOU SAID TO YOURSELF, 'I WILL ASCEND TO HEAVEN AND SET MY THRONE ABOVE GOD'S STARS. I WILL PRESIDE ON THE MOUNTAIN OF THE GODS FAR AWAY IN THE NORTH. I WILL CLIMB TO THE HIGHEST HEAVENS AND BE LIKE THE MOST HIGH.' INSTEAD, YOU WILL BE BROUGHT DOWN TO THE PLACE OF THE DEAD, DOWN TO ITS LOWEST DEPTHS. **ISAIAH 14:12-14**

Satan's favorite method of attack is lying. It has worked well for Him for thousands of years. Make no mistake, he is the one behind the big bang and evolution theories, abortion, the breakdown and redefinition of marriage, and the doubts cast upon gender identity and roles. These are all part of his offensive weapons against God. He doesn't want us to realize who we really are—extremely valuable in God's sight. He knows that human life will seem to have far less value to us if we think we came to be by accident and are no better than animals. And he doesn't want us to realize his attacks are orchestrated, not just an "inevitable change of the times."

..."DID GOD REALLY SAY?"... GENESIS 3:1 BUT THE SERPENT SAID TO THE WOMAN, "YOU WILL NOT SURELY DIE. FOR GOD KNOWS THAT WHEN YOU EAT OF IT YOUR EYES WILL BE OPENED, AND YOU WILL BE LIKE GOD..." GENESIS 3:3-5

"WHY DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT I SAY? IT IS BECAUSE YOU CANNOT BEAR TO HEAR MY WORD. YOU ARE OF YOUR FATHER THE DEVIL, AND YOUR WILL IS TO DO YOUR FATHER'S DESIRES. HE WAS A MURDERER FROM THE BEGINNING, AND DOES NOT STAND IN THE TRUTH, BECAUSE THERE IS NO TRUTH IN HIM. WHEN HE LIES, HE SPEAKS OUT OF HIS OWN CHARACTER, FOR HE IS A LIAR AND THE FATHER OF LIES." JOHN 8:43-33

FOR WE DO NOT WRESTLE AGAINST FLESH AND BLOOD, BUT AGAINST THE RULERS, AGAINST THE AUTHORITIES, AGAINST THE COSMIC POWERS OVER THIS PRESENT DARKNESS, AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL FORCES OF EVIL IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES. EPHESIANS 6:12

Eve was deceived, but she was still kicked out of the Garden of Eden, along with Adam, who was led astray by Eve. They both should have known better, but they made excuses just like people do to this very day. THE MAN SAID, "THE WOMAN WHOM YOU GAVE TO BE WITH ME, SHE GAVE ME FRUIT OF THE TREE, AND I ATE." THEN THE LORD GOD SAID TO THE WOMAN, "WHAT IS THIS THAT YOU HAVE DONE?" THE WOMAN SAID, "THE SERPENT DECEIVED ME, AND I ATE." GENESIS 3:12-13 HE DROVE OUT THE MAN, AND AT THE EAST OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN HE PLACED THE CHERUBIM AND A FLAMING SWORD THAT TURNED EVERY WAY TO GUARD THE WAY TO THE TREE OF LIFE. GENESIS 3:24 Those who are redeemed by the Lord will be permitted to eat from that tree in the future. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO WASH THEIR ROBES, SO THAT THEY MAY HAVE THE RIGHT TO THE TREE OF LIFE AND THAT THEY MAY ENTER THE CITY BY THE GATES. REVELATION 22:14

Our sinful nature rebels against Him and yet He is patient, kind, long-suffering and slow to anger. God's power is absolute, but He doesn't use it the way people do. Our use of power is tainted by sin—oppressing, abusing, deceiving and taking advantage of others. His power is matched by His infinite and perfect love and wisdom.

"YET EVEN NOW," DECLARES THE LORD, "RETURN TO ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH FASTING, WITH WEEPING, AND WITH MOURNING; AND REND YOUR HEARTS AND NOT YOUR GARMENTS." RETURN TO THE LORD YOUR GOD, FOR HE IS GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL, SLOW TO ANGER, AND ABOUNDING IN STEADFAST LOVE; AND HE RELENTS OVER DISASTER. JOEL 2:12-13

How can we be sure there is only one God?

His very name, "I AM," YHVH in Hebrew, usually pronounced either Yahweh (Yah-way) or Yahuah (Yah-hoo-ah), abbreviated as Yah, declares that He is the ONLY God, and that there never has been and never will be any other. If you don't think you've heard of God being called Yah before, you probably didn't realize that Hallelujah means Praise Yah. The KJV actually uses it in **PSA. 68:4**. Names ending in "ah" in Hebrew usually mean to, by, from or of God—such as Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah. Names ending in "as" in Greek are the same way. e.g. Zechariah/Zacharias. Sadly, the Hebrew has been replaced in our modern Bibles with "the LORD," but God gave us His name and did not tell us not to try to pronounce it—that is a tradition of men (most of whom still reject Jesus as Messiah). However, we are not to take His name in vain. (**EXO. 3:15, 33:19, ISA. 42:8, JER. 16:21, EXO. 20:7**) God has existed forever—before He invented time for us to live by—and will exist after time ceases to be kept—for eternity. We can know by His name "I AM" that He will never change. **JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY AND TODAY AND FOREVER. HEBREWS 13:8**

God has always been holy and perfect, and always will be. When we see ourselves and our situation from the perspective of His greatness, it truly does fill us with awe that He could love us and want us to be with Him forever. It is incredibly humbling, and knowing the pain we have caused Him inspires tears of true repentance, gratefulness for forgiveness, mercy and grace, and an overwhelming desire to worship the only One who is worthy of all praise, glory and honor: our beloved, cherished and adored Maker, Redeemer, Lord, King and Sovereign God.

"BEFORE ME NO GOD WAS FORMED, NOR SHALL THERE BE ANY AFTER ME. I, I AM THE LORD, AND BESIDES ME THERE IS NO SAVIOR." ISAIAH 43:11 "TURN TO ME AND BE SAVED, ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH! FOR I AM GOD, AND THERE IS NO OTHER." ISAIAH 45:22

TO YOU, LORD, BELONGS THE GREATNESS, AND THE VALOR, AND THE SPLENDOR, AND THE ENDURANCE, AND THE MAJESTY BECAUSE ALL THAT IS IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH IS YOURS. TO YOU BELONGS THE KINGDOM, LORD, AND YOU ARE EXALTED AS HEAD OVER ALL. 1 CHRONICLES 29:11

THEY LIFT UP THEIR VOICES, THEY SING FOR JOY; OVER THE MAJESTY OF THE LORD THEY SHOUT FROM THE WEST. THEREFORE IN THE EAST GIVE GLORY TO THE LORD; IN THE COASTLANDS OF THE SEA, GIVE GLORY TO THE NAME OF THE LORD, THE GOD OF ISRAEL. FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH WE HEAR SONGS OF PRAISE, OF GLORY TO THE RIGHTEOUS ONE. ISAIAH 24:14-16A

Do Christians worship “three gods”?

No. When we refer to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are acknowledging how our God refers to Himself. (The word “Trinity” is not in the Bible, but neither are many other doctrinally sound terms.) The Hebrew word “God” in Gen. 1:26 and many other instances is plural: “Elohim,” even though God is ONE. Jesus accepted worship during His ministry. (MATT. 14:33, 28:9, 17, LUKE 24:52, JOHN 9:38) Lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God. (ACTS 5:3-4) The Father is in the Son and they are in us believers. (JOHN 14:15-21, JOHN 17:20-26) Here are just a few of the many other helpful Bible references:

"GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU. AND BEHOLD, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, TO THE END OF THE AGE." MATTHEW 28:19-20 "BUT THE HELPER, THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM THE FATHER WILL SEND IN MY [JESUS'] NAME, HE WILL TEACH YOU ALL THINGS, AND BRING TO YOUR REMEMBRANCE ALL THAT I SAID TO YOU." JOHN 14:26

THEREFORE HAVING BEEN EXALTED TO THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, AND HAVING RECEIVED FROM THE FATHER THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, HE [JESUS] HAS Poured FORTH THIS WHICH YOU BOTH SEE AND HEAR. ACTS 2:33 YOU KNOW OF JESUS OF NAZARETH, HOW GOD ANOINTED HIM WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND WITH POWER, AND HOW HE WENT ABOUT DOING GOOD AND HEALING ALL WHO WERE OPPRESSED BY THE DEVIL, FOR GOD WAS WITH HIM. ACTS 10:38

THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE LOVE OF GOD, AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, BE WITH YOU ALL. 2 CORINTHIANS 13:14 HOW MUCH MORE WILL THE BLOOD OF CHRIST, WHO THROUGH THE ETERNAL SPIRIT OFFERED HIMSELF WITHOUT BLEMISH TO GOD, CLEANSE YOUR CONSCIENCE FROM DEAD WORKS TO SERVE THE LIVING GOD? HEBREWS 9:14 ACCORDING TO THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD THE FATHER, BY THE SANCTIFYING WORK OF THE SPIRIT, TO OBEY JESUS CHRIST AND BE SPRINKLED WITH HIS BLOOD: MAY GRACE AND PEACE BE YOURS IN THE FULLEST MEASURE. 1 PETER 1:2

Is Jesus God?

Many people say that Jesus never “claimed to be God.” They say He was a good man and a prophet and nothing more. That is simply not true. Jesus was criticized for healing on the Sabbath, to which He replied that He is Lord of the Sabbath. (LEV. 19:30, MATTHEW 12, MARK 3, LUKE 6, LUKE 13, LUKE 14, JOHN 5, JOHN 7) He was given authority from the Father to forgive sins. (MATTHEW 9, MARK 2, LUKE 5)

The “crime” with which He was convicted was the “blasphemy” of claiming to be God’s Son. Those who refused to believe were not interested in the truth, but only in condemning Him and retaining their power over the people. (MATTHEW 23, MARK 2:27-28, LUKE 6, LUKE 13:10-17) He is the Word who was with God and was God before the beginning of the world. (JOHN 1:1-2, JOHN 17:5) In Him, the fullness of God dwells. (COLOSSIANS 1:19-23, COLOSSIANS 2:9-10) He is the Alpha and Omega. (REVELATION 1) He accepted worship; He is one with the Father. When people mistakenly worshiped anyone other than God in the Bible, they were chastised. (ACTS 10:25-26, ACTS 14, REVELATION 22:8-9) No one was ever chastised for worshiping Jesus. (See previous page for verse references.) However, those who worship the beast and take his mark in the hour of trial coming on the whole world will be punished in the Lake of Fire eternally. (REVELATION 19:20)

“I AM THE ONE WHO BEARS WITNESS ABOUT MYSELF, AND THE FATHER WHO SENT ME BEARS WITNESS ABOUT ME.” THEY SAID TO HIM THEREFORE, “WHERE IS YOUR FATHER?” JESUS ANSWERED, “YOU KNOW NEITHER ME NOR MY FATHER. IF YOU KNEW ME, YOU WOULD KNOW MY FATHER ALSO.” JOHN 8:18-19

JESUS SAID TO THEM, “IF GOD WERE YOUR FATHER, YOU WOULD LOVE ME, FOR I CAME FROM GOD AND I AM HERE. I CAME NOT OF MY OWN ACCORD, BUT HE SENT ME.” JOHN 8:42 JESUS ANSWERED, “IF I GLORIFY MYSELF, MY GLORY IS NOTHING. IT IS MY FATHER WHO GLORIFIES ME, OF WHOM YOU SAY, ‘HE IS OUR GOD.’ BUT YOU HAVE NOT KNOWN HIM. I KNOW HIM. IF I WERE TO SAY THAT I DO NOT KNOW HIM, I WOULD BE A LIAR LIKE YOU, BUT I DO KNOW HIM AND I KEEP HIS WORD. YOUR FATHER ABRAHAM REJOICED THAT HE WOULD SEE MY DAY. HE SAW IT AND WAS GLAD.” SO THE JEWS SAID TO HIM, “YOU ARE NOT YET FIFTY YEARS OLD, AND HAVE YOU SEEN ABRAHAM?” JESUS SAID TO THEM, “TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM.” SO THEY PICKED UP STONES TO THROW AT HIM, BUT JESUS HID HIMSELF AND WENT OUT OF THE TEMPLE. JOHN 8:54-59

AND WHEN JESUS WAS BAPTIZED, IMMEDIATELY HE WENT UP FROM THE WATER, AND BEHOLD, THE HEAVENS WERE OPENED TO HIM, AND HE SAW THE SPIRIT OF GOD DESCENDING LIKE A DOVE AND COMING TO REST ON HIM; AND BEHOLD, A VOICE FROM HEAVEN SAID, “THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, WITH WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED.” MATTHEW 3:16-17

HE WAS STILL SPEAKING WHEN, BEHOLD, A BRIGHT CLOUD OVERSHADOWED THEM, AND A VOICE FROM THE CLOUD SAID, “THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, WITH WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED; LISTEN TO HIM!” MATTHEW 17:5

FOR WE DID NOT FOLLOW CLEVERLY DEvised MYTHS WHEN WE MADE KNOWN TO YOU THE POWER AND COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, BUT WE WERE EYEWITNESSES OF HIS MAJESTY. FOR WHEN HE RECEIVED HONOR AND GLORY FROM GOD THE FATHER, AND THE VOICE WAS BORNE TO HIM BY THE

MAJESTIC GLORY, "THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, WITH WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED," WE OURSELVES HEARD THIS VERY VOICE BORNE FROM HEAVEN, FOR WE WERE WITH HIM ON THE HOLY MOUNTAIN. AND WE HAVE THE PROPHETIC WORD MORE FULLY CONFIRMED, TO WHICH YOU WILL DO WELL TO PAY ATTENTION AS TO A LAMP SHINING IN A DARK PLACE, UNTIL THE DAY DAWNS AND THE MORNING STAR RISES IN YOUR HEARTS, KNOWING THIS FIRST OF ALL, THAT NO PROPHECY OF SCRIPTURE COMES FROM SOMEONE'S OWN INTERPRETATION. FOR NO PROPHECY WAS EVER PRODUCED BY THE WILL OF MAN, BUT MEN SPOKE FROM GOD AS THEY WERE CARRIED ALONG BY THE HOLY SPIRIT. 2 PETER 1:16-21

SO THE JEWS GATHERED AROUND HIM AND SAID TO HIM, "HOW LONG WILL YOU KEEP US IN SUSPENSE? IF YOU ARE THE CHRIST, TELL US PLAINLY." JESUS ANSWERED THEM, "I TOLD YOU, AND YOU DO NOT BELIEVE. THE WORKS THAT I DO IN MY FATHER'S NAME BEAR WITNESS ABOUT ME, BUT YOU DO NOT BELIEVE BECAUSE YOU ARE NOT AMONG MY SHEEP. MY SHEEP HEAR MY VOICE, AND I KNOW THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME. I GIVE THEM ETERNAL LIFE, AND THEY WILL NEVER PERISH, AND NO ONE WILL SNATCH THEM OUT OF MY HAND. MY FATHER, WHO HAS GIVEN THEM TO ME, IS GREATER THAN ALL, AND NO ONE IS ABLE TO SNATCH THEM OUT OF THE FATHER'S HAND. I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE." THE JEWS PICKED UP STONES AGAIN TO STONE HIM. JESUS ANSWERED THEM, "I HAVE SHOWN YOU MANY GOOD WORKS FROM THE FATHER; FOR WHICH OF THEM ARE YOU GOING TO STONE ME?" THE JEWS ANSWERED HIM, "IT IS NOT FOR A GOOD WORK THAT WE ARE GOING TO STONE YOU BUT FOR BLASPHEMY, BECAUSE YOU, BEING A MAN, MAKE YOURSELF GOD." JESUS ANSWERED THEM, "IS IT NOT WRITTEN IN YOUR LAW, 'I SAID, YOU ARE GODS'? IF HE CALLED THEM GODS TO WHOM THE WORD OF GOD CAME—AND SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN—DO YOU SAY OF HIM WHOM THE FATHER CONSECRATED AND SENT INTO THE WORLD, 'YOU ARE BLASPHEMING,' BECAUSE I SAID, 'I AM THE SON OF GOD'? IF I AM NOT DOING THE WORKS OF MY FATHER, THEN DO NOT BELIEVE ME; BUT IF I DO THEM, EVEN THOUGH YOU DO NOT BELIEVE ME, BELIEVE THE WORKS, THAT YOU MAY KNOW AND UNDERSTAND THAT THE FATHER IS IN ME AND I AM IN THE FATHER." AGAIN THEY SOUGHT TO ARREST HIM, BUT HE ESCAPED FROM THEIR HANDS. JOHN 10:24-39

JESUS SAID TO HIM, "I AM THE WAY, AND THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME. IF YOU HAD KNOWN ME, YOU WOULD HAVE KNOWN MY FATHER ALSO. FROM NOW ON YOU DO KNOW HIM AND HAVE SEEN HIM." PHILIP SAID TO HIM, "LORD, SHOW US THE FATHER, AND IT IS ENOUGH FOR US." JESUS SAID TO HIM, "HAVE I BEEN WITH YOU SO LONG, AND YOU STILL DO NOT KNOW ME, PHILIP? WHOEVER HAS SEEN ME HAS SEEN THE FATHER. HOW CAN YOU SAY, 'SHOW US THE FATHER'? DO YOU NOT BELIEVE THAT I AM IN THE FATHER AND THE FATHER IS IN ME? THE WORDS THAT I SAY TO YOU I DO NOT SPEAK ON MY OWN AUTHORITY, BUT THE FATHER WHO DWELLS IN ME DOES HIS WORKS. BELIEVE ME THAT I AM IN THE FATHER AND THE FATHER IS IN ME, OR ELSE BELIEVE ON ACCOUNT OF THE WORKS THEMSELVES." JOHN 14:6-11 "IN THAT DAY YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM IN MY FATHER, AND YOU IN ME, AND I IN YOU." JOHN 14:20

AND THE HIGH PRIEST STOOD UP AND SAID, "HAVE YOU NO ANSWER TO MAKE? WHAT IS IT THAT THESE MEN TESTIFY AGAINST YOU?" BUT JESUS REMAINED SILENT. AND THE HIGH PRIEST SAID TO HIM, "I ADJURE

YOU BY THE LIVING GOD, TELL US IF YOU ARE THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD." JESUS SAID TO HIM, "YOU HAVE SAID SO. BUT I TELL YOU, FROM NOW ON YOU WILL SEE THE SON OF MAN SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER AND COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." THEN THE HIGH PRIEST TORE HIS ROBES AND SAID, "HE HAS UTTERED BLASPHEMY. WHAT FURTHER WITNESSES DO WE NEED? YOU HAVE NOW HEARD HIS BLASPHEMY. WHAT IS YOUR JUDGMENT?" THEY ANSWERED, "HE DESERVES DEATH." MATTHEW 26:62-66 (ALSO MARK 14:61-64)

THEN HE LED THEM OUT AS FAR AS BETHANY, AND LIFTING UP HIS HANDS HE BLESSED THEM. WHILE HE BLESSED THEM, HE PARTED FROM THEM AND WAS CARRIED UP INTO HEAVEN. AND THEY WORSHIPED HIM AND RETURNED TO JERUSALEM WITH GREAT JOY, AND WERE CONTINUALLY IN THE TEMPLE BLESSING GOD. LUKE 24:50-53

WHEN THE CENTURION AND THOSE WITH HIM, WHO WERE GUARDING JESUS, SAW THE EARTHQUAKE AND THE THINGS THAT HAD HAPPENED, THEY WERE TERRIFIED AND SAID, "THIS MAN REALLY WAS GOD'S SON!" MATTHEW 27:54

NOW WHEN THE CENTURION SAW WHAT HAD TAKEN PLACE, HE PRAISED GOD, SAYING, "CERTAINLY THIS MAN WAS INNOCENT!" AND ALL THE CROWDS THAT HAD ASSEMBLED FOR THIS SPECTACLE, WHEN THEY SAW WHAT HAD TAKEN PLACE, RETURNED HOME BEATING THEIR BREASTS. LUKE 23:47-48

What now?

If only each of our willing hearts would cleave to our Lord's heart and that our most intense desire would be to please Him, so that when He returns for us, whether it is for those who have passed away before us and all of us still living, or just our own time to go, that we'll be ready. "YOU TOO, BE READY; FOR THE SON OF MAN IS COMING AT AN HOUR THAT YOU DO NOT EXPECT." LUKE 12:40 Let's not let a day go by without thanking and praising God for all that He has done for us, for making us His dear children, and for the promise He made that He will take us to be with Him forever. "FOR THIS IS THE WILL OF MY FATHER, THAT EVERYONE WHO LOOKS ON THE SON AND BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD HAVE ETERNAL LIFE, AND I WILL RAISE HIM UP ON THE LAST DAY." JOHN 6:40

Here is the way I look at it. If this life is all about Him, and it is, then ALL IS WELL, ALL THE TIME. Why? Because He never changes, never fails or forgets, never loses control or becomes less worthy. He knows what He is doing—we can trust Him. When we keep our focus on Him instead of ourselves, there is never any reason to worry or despair. He is able. He never expects anything from us without providing us with everything needed, including strength and wisdom. Whatever

happens, He either caused or allowed, and He has a good plan for it (for those of us who love Him and are called according to His purpose). **(ROMANS 8:28)**

Many people have stumbled over the grief caused by the passing of their loved ones, but our family and friends have always been meant to be temporary blessings from above. They don't really "belong" to us and were never to have been placed above our relationship with God. Those who truly belong to Him can never be shaken from His grasp **(JOHN 10:28-29, ROMANS 8:38-39)**. When this short life is over, that is the beginning of the best part, which lasts forever.

Do you have stress, worry, anxiety and fear? Wouldn't it be great to have all of that taken away, to be replaced with peace? Only God can do that. He is a solid rock—faithful and steadfast. **GOD ALONE IS MY ROCK AND MY SALVATION, MY FORTRESS; I SHALL NOT BE SHAKEN. PSALM 62:6 CAST YOUR BURDEN UPON THE LORD AND HE WILL SUSTAIN YOU; HE WILL NEVER ALLOW THE RIGHTEOUS TO BE SHAKEN. PSALM 55:22 THEREFORE HUMBLE YOURSELVES UNDER THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD, THAT HE MAY EXALT YOU AT THE PROPER TIME, CASTING ALL YOUR ANXIETY ON HIM, BECAUSE HE CARES FOR YOU. 1 PETER 5:6-7**

"PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU; MY PEACE I GIVE TO YOU. NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES DO I GIVE TO YOU. LET NOT YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED, NEITHER LET THEM BE AFRAID." JOHN 14:27

Where is the love?

When I started writing this, it was in response to how it grieves my heart when people don't comprehend and appreciate the true cost of their salvation to Jesus. He deserves so much more from us—as we have just seen the Bible teaches. Once I "woke up" and realized this for myself, I was very distressed at the lack of love I had shown Him in nearly 20 years since I had come to know the Lord as my Savior. This message from Jesus to the Church in Ephesus got to me in particular: **"BUT I HAVE THIS AGAINST YOU, THAT YOU HAVE LEFT YOUR FIRST LOVE. THEREFORE REMEMBER FROM WHERE YOU HAVE FALLEN, AND REPENT AND DO THE DEEDS YOU DID AT FIRST; OR ELSE I AM COMING TO YOU AND WILL REMOVE YOUR LAMPSTAND OUT OF ITS PLACE—UNLESS YOU REPENT."** REVELATION 2:4-5

I made a list of what I did when I first became a believer. It was sad how many things on that list had fallen by the wayside. Even my prayers were long on worry and short on trust. As I sought to know and do God's will and to please Him, I came to understand two things had been missing from my Christian walk: knowing God well enough to genuinely love and trust Him, and submission to the Holy

Spirit. We can't love and trust anyone we don't know very well. (We have already covered how to know Him—the Scriptures.) And without the Spirit, no one could believe in God or love Him at all, let alone understand the Word and His will and have a desire to do it. Without His ministry, there is no hope whatsoever of victory. Jesus overcame. We need to rely fully on Him in order to triumph over our old self that loves the world and pleasing itself instead of God.

DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD, BUT BE TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWAL OF YOUR MIND, THAT BY TESTING YOU MAY DISCERN WHAT IS GOD'S GOOD, PLEASING AND PERFECT WILL. ROMANS 12:2 THEREFORE, IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST, HE IS A NEW CREATION. THE OLD HAS PASSED AWAY; BEHOLD, THE NEW HAS COME. 2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

HIM WE PROCLAIM, WARNING EVERYONE AND TEACHING EVERYONE WITH ALL WISDOM, THAT WE MAY PRESENT EVERYONE MATURE IN CHRIST. FOR THIS I TOIL, STRUGGLING WITH ALL HIS ENERGY THAT HE POWERFULLY WORKS WITHIN ME. COLOSSIANS 1:28-29

I had bought into the world's idea of "my rights" and the American "dream," among other things. That is not the example that Jesus, in whose steps we are to walk, set for us. He was meek and humble—He told us that the greatest in the kingdom is the least—the one who serves. **"THE GREATEST AMONG YOU SHALL BE YOUR SERVANT. WHOEVER EXALTS HIMSELF WILL BE HUMBLED, AND WHOEVER HUMBLER HIMSELF WILL BE EXALTED."** MATTHEW 23:11-12 It's one thing to listen to a sermon and know these things in your head, but an altogether different thing to actually do them. I realize now that there is only one "right" that is important: **BUT TO ALL WHO DID RECEIVE HIM, WHO BELIEVED IN HIS NAME, HE GAVE THE RIGHT TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD, WHO WERE BORN, NOT OF BLOOD NOR OF THE WILL OF THE FLESH NOR OF THE WILL OF MAN, BUT OF GOD. JOHN 1:12-13**

Giving up all of the rights to our life is exactly what we do when we become followers of Jesus, His disciples. (We weren't told to go and make believers, but rather obedient disciples **(MATTHEW 28:19-20)**—only God can give the gift of faith. **EPHESIANS 2:8-9**) That is why Jesus said to count the cost before following Him. **(LUKE 14:25-33)** Paul said: **I HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST. IT IS NO LONGER I WHO LIVE, BUT CHRIST WHO LIVES IN ME. AND THE LIFE I NOW LIVE IN THE FLESH I LIVE BY FAITH IN THE SON OF GOD, WHO LOVED ME AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME. GALATIANS 2:20** Our hope is in the next world, not this one. **(1 CORINTHIANS 15:19, 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18, COLOSSIANS 3, MATTHEW 16:24-27)**

Can't we have both?

No. The Bible is very firm on this. You can't have one foot in and one out of your old worldly life. (Matt. 6:24) Our society exalts pride and appearance, but God values humility and looks at the heart. (1SAM. 16:7) We are not meant to blend in with the world and go along with the flow, but that is exactly what is happening among Christians in our country. We have not only accepted the world's lax morals and practices, but we criticize each other if someone tries to live in a holy manner, saying they're being judgmental, legalistic or trying to earn their way to heaven. (GAL. 5:13-16) But we were meant to be set apart for God and to be unified in spirit, by His Spirit. When we behave the same as unbelievers or argue amongst ourselves, God is not glorified. (1 TIM. 6:20-21) How can the world see how wonderful He is if we don't show them?

I THEREFORE, A PRISONER FOR THE LORD, URGE YOU TO WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE CALLING TO WHICH YOU HAVE BEEN CALLED, WITH ALL HUMILITY AND GENTLENESS, WITH PATIENCE, BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE, EAGER TO MAINTAIN THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE BOND OF PEACE. EPHESIANS 4: 1-3 NOW THIS I SAY AND TESTIFY IN THE LORD, THAT YOU MUST NO LONGER WALK AS THE GENTILES DO, IN THE FUTILITY OF THEIR MINDS. THEY ARE DARKENED IN THEIR UNDERSTANDING, ALIENATED FROM THE LIFE OF GOD BECAUSE OF THE IGNORANCE THAT IS IN THEM, DUE TO THEIR HARDNESS OF HEART. THEY HAVE BECOME CALLOUS AND HAVE GIVEN THEMSELVES UP TO SENSUALITY, GREEDY TO PRACTICE EVERY KIND OF IMPURITY. BUT THAT IS NOT THE WAY YOU LEARNED CHRIST!—ASSUMING THAT YOU HAVE HEARD ABOUT HIM AND WERE TAUGHT IN HIM, AS THE TRUTH IS IN JESUS, TO PUT OFF YOUR OLD SELF, WHICH BELONGS TO YOUR FORMER MANNER OF LIFE AND IS CORRUPT THROUGH DECEITFUL DESIRES, AND TO BE RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MINDS, AND TO PUT ON THE NEW SELF, CREATED AFTER THE LIKENESS OF GOD IN TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HOLINESS. EPHESIANS 4:17-24

THEREFORE BE VERY CAREFUL HOW YOU LIVE—NOT AS UNWISE BUT AS WISE, TAKING ADVANTAGE OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL. FOR THIS REASON DO NOT BE FOOLISH, BUT BE WISE BY UNDERSTANDING WHAT THE LORD'S WILL IS. EPHESIANS 5: 15- 17

DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD OR THE THINGS IN THE WORLD. IF ANYONE LOVES THE WORLD, THE LOVE OF THE FATHER IS NOT IN HIM. FOR ALL THAT IS IN THE WORLD—THE DESIRES OF THE FLESH AND THE DESIRES OF THE EYES AND PRIDE OF LIFE—IS NOT FROM THE FATHER BUT IS FROM THE WORLD. AND THE WORLD IS PASSING AWAY ALONG WITH ITS DESIRES, BUT WHOEVER DOES THE WILL OF GOD ABIDES FOREVER. 1 JOHN 2: 15- 17 YOU ADULTEROUS PEOPLE! DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD IS ENMITY WITH GOD? THEREFORE WHOEVER WISHES TO BE A FRIEND OF THE WORLD MAKES HIMSELF AN ENEMY OF GOD. JAMES 4:4

FINALLY, BROTHERS, WHATEVER IS TRUE, WHATEVER IS HONORABLE, WHATEVER IS JUST, WHATEVER IS PURE, WHATEVER IS LOVELY, WHATEVER IS COMMENDABLE, IF THERE IS ANY EXCELLENCE, IF THERE IS ANYTHING WORTHY OF PRAISE, THINK ABOUT THESE THINGS. PHILIPPIANS 4:8

There are warnings in the Scriptures about the dangers of wealth such as we have in this country. We are flooded with messages that we need certain things (LOTS of them) to be happy—that appearances are high priority. Any rich person will tell you that you can't buy what is truly important—for starters: happiness, love, health. Christians know that the greatest gift of all, salvation, is free.

AND JESUS LOOKED AROUND AND SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES, "HOW DIFFICULT IT WILL BE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE WEALTH TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD!" AND THE DISCIPLES WERE AMAZED AT HIS WORDS. BUT JESUS SAID TO THEM AGAIN, "CHILDREN, HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD! IT IS EASIER FOR A CAMEL TO GO THROUGH THE EYE OF A NEEDLE THAN FOR A RICH PERSON TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD." AND THEY WERE EXCEEDINGLY ASTONISHED, AND SAID TO HIM, "THEN WHO CAN BE SAVED?" JESUS LOOKED AT THEM AND SAID, "WITH MAN IT IS IMPOSSIBLE, BUT NOT WITH GOD. FOR ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE WITH GOD." PETER BEGAN TO SAY TO HIM, "SEE, WE HAVE LEFT EVERYTHING AND FOLLOWED YOU." JESUS SAID, "TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, THERE IS NO ONE WHO HAS LEFT HOUSE OR BROTHERS OR SISTERS OR MOTHER OR FATHER OR CHILDREN OR LANDS, FOR MY SAKE AND FOR THE GOSPEL, WHO WILL NOT RECEIVE A HUNDREDFOLD NOW IN THIS TIME, HOUSES AND BROTHERS AND SISTERS AND MOTHERS AND CHILDREN AND LANDS, WITH PERSECUTIONS, AND IN THE AGE TO COME ETERNAL LIFE." MARK 10:23-30

"I KNOW YOUR WORKS: YOU ARE NEITHER COLD NOR HOT. WOULD THAT YOU WERE EITHER COLD OR HOT! SO, BECAUSE YOU ARE LUKEWARM, AND NEITHER HOT NOR COLD, I WILL SPIT YOU OUT OF MY MOUTH. FOR YOU SAY, I AM RICH, I HAVE PROSPERED, AND I NEED NOTHING, NOT REALIZING THAT YOU ARE WRETCHED, PITIABLE, POOR, BLIND, AND NAKED. I COUNSEL YOU TO BUY FROM ME GOLD REFINED BY FIRE, SO THAT YOU MAY BE RICH, AND WHITE GARMENTS SO THAT YOU MAY CLOTHE YOURSELF AND THE SHAME OF YOUR NAKEDNESS MAY NOT BE SEEN, AND SALVE TO ANOINT YOUR EYES, SO THAT YOU MAY SEE." REVELATION 3:15-18

BUT GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT IS GREAT GAIN, FOR WE BROUGHT NOTHING INTO THE WORLD, AND WE CANNOT TAKE ANYTHING OUT OF THE WORLD. BUT IF WE HAVE FOOD AND CLOTHING, WITH THESE WE WILL BE CONTENT. BUT THOSE WHO DESIRE TO BE RICH FALL INTO TEMPTATION, INTO A SNARE, INTO MANY SENSELESS AND HARMFUL DESIRES THAT PLUNGE PEOPLE INTO RUIN AND DESTRUCTION. FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY IS A ROOT OF ALL KINDS OF EVILS. IT IS THROUGH THIS CRAVING THAT SOME HAVE WANDERED AWAY FROM THE FAITH AND PIERCED THEMSELVES WITH MANY PANGS. BUT AS FOR YOU, O MAN OF GOD, FLEE THESE THINGS. PURSUE RIGHTEOUSNESS, GODLINESS, FAITH, LOVE, STEADFASTNESS, GENTLENESS. ...AS FOR THE RICH IN THIS PRESENT AGE, CHARGE THEM NOT TO BE HAUGHTY, NOR TO SET THEIR HOPES ON THE UNCERTAINTY OF RICHES, BUT ON GOD, WHO RICHLY PROVIDES US WITH

EVERYTHING TO ENJOY. THEY ARE TO DO GOOD, TO BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS, TO BE GENEROUS AND READY TO SHARE, THUS STORING UP TREASURE FOR THEMSELVES AS A GOOD FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE, SO THAT THEY MAY TAKE HOLD OF THAT WHICH IS TRULY LIFE. 1 TIMOTHY 6:11, 17-19

Paul scolded the believers of the Corinth church due to their filing lawsuits in civil court against one another. He told them it would be preferable to take financial loss than to treat fellow believers that way—and worse yet, they even dealt dishonestly with others themselves.

I SAY THIS TO YOUR SHAME. CAN IT BE THAT THERE IS NO ONE AMONG YOU WISE ENOUGH TO SETTLE A DISPUTE BETWEEN THE BROTHERS, BUT BROTHER GOES TO LAW AGAINST BROTHER, AND THAT BEFORE UNBELIEVERS? TO HAVE LAWSUITS AT ALL WITH ONE ANOTHER IS ALREADY A DEFEAT FOR YOU. WHY NOT RATHER SUFFER WRONG? WHY NOT RATHER BE DEFRAUDED? BUT YOU YOURSELVES WRONG AND DEFRAUD—EVEN YOUR OWN BROTHERS! 1 CORINTHIANS 6:5-8

Does God's Word really have power?

This booklet is filled to the brim with Bible verses. Why? Because the Word builds faith. SO FAITH COMES FROM HEARING, AND HEARING THROUGH THE WORD OF CHRIST. ROMANS 10:17 Polls have found that this generation reads the Bible less than any previous generation, despite having more opportunity than ever before. If we don't know what it says, then how can we follow it? People have become satisfied with little snippets of Scripture and the interpretation of so-called teachers with an agenda (usually including people-pleasing and profit-making). They don't recognize when a verse has been cut short or twisted in order to force the meaning to fit a particular (unbiblical) viewpoint. NOW THESE JEWS WERE MORE NOBLE THAN THOSE IN THESSALONICA; THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL EAGERNESS, EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES DAILY TO SEE IF THESE THINGS WERE SO. ACTS 17:11 The Scriptures are not multiple choice—we don't "pick" what we like and discard the rest. "Conflicts" must be resolved in view of the whole counsel of God, not ignoring anything that might offend us. (Note: Some will say that we believers today are still under the OT law, but that is not what the Bible teaches and is a topic to discuss elsewhere in depth. Acts 15:10, 19-29, Gal. 3:23-4:11, 5:18, Col. 2:8-23, Rom. 7:4-6, 14:14, Jam. 2:12)

THEREFORE I TESTIFY TO YOU THIS DAY THAT I AM INNOCENT OF THE BLOOD OF ALL, FOR I DID NOT SHRINK FROM DECLARING TO YOU THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD. PAY CAREFUL ATTENTION TO YOURSELVES AND TO ALL THE FLOCK, IN WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS MADE YOU OVERSEERS, TO CARE FOR THE CHURCH OF GOD, WHICH HE OBTAINED WITH HIS OWN BLOOD. I KNOW THAT AFTER MY

DEPARTURE FIERCE WOLVES WILL COME IN AMONG YOU, NOT SPARING THE FLOCK; AND FROM AMONG YOUR OWN SELVES WILL ARISE MEN SPEAKING TWISTED THINGS, TO DRAW AWAY THE DISCIPLES AFTER THEM. THEREFORE BE ALERT, REMEMBERING THAT FOR THREE YEARS I DID NOT CEASE NIGHT OR DAY TO ADMONISH EVERY ONE WITH TEARS. ACTS 20:26-31

"FOR AS THE RAIN AND THE SNOW COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND DO NOT RETURN THERE BUT WATER THE EARTH, MAKING IT BRING FORTH AND SPROUT, GIVING SEED TO THE SOWER AND BREAD TO THE EATER, SO SHALL MY WORD BE THAT GOES OUT FROM MY MOUTH; IT SHALL NOT RETURN TO ME EMPTY, BUT IT SHALL ACCOMPLISH THAT WHICH I PURPOSE, AND SHALL SUCCEED IN THE THING FOR WHICH I SENT IT." ISAIAH 55: 10-11

It's popular today to say we're "spiritual not religious," but that could mean anything. Don't be ashamed of Jesus—He's perfect exactly as He IS. Many of us are uncomfortable with passages that don't sound "loving" to us, but we need the whole Bible to get a true picture of the God we worship (or we have made Him into our own version of Him instead of the Truth—John 14:6). He gave us many warnings that we can't heed if we don't know about them. We need to get into the Word. It's the key to eternal life as well as protection from the evil one. **BE SOBER-MINDED; BE WATCHFUL. YOUR ADVERSARY THE DEVIL PROWLs AROUND LIKE A ROARING LION, SEEKING SOMEONE TO DEVOUR.** 1 PETER 5:8 (ALSO SEE 2 TIMOTHY 3: 12-17, 2 PETER 3: 14-18)

PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD, THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND AGAINST THE SCHEMES OF THE DEVIL. ... THEREFORE TAKE UP THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD, THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND YOUR GROUND IN THE EVIL DAY, AND HAVING DONE ALL, TO STAND. EPHESIANS 6: 11, 13

LET US HOLD FAST THE CONFESSION OF OUR HOPE WITHOUT WAVERING, FOR HE WHO PROMISED IS FAITHFUL. AND LET US CONSIDER HOW TO STIR UP ONE ANOTHER TO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS, NOT NEGLECTING TO MEET TOGETHER, AS IS THE HABIT OF SOME, BUT ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER, AND ALL THE MORE AS YOU SEE THE DAY DRAWING NEAR. HEBREWS 10:23-25

What is devotion?

As the writing of this booklet went along, it became my worship, praise and prayer—a work of love for my Redeemer and King: a devotional hoping to inspire devotion in others and an important reminder to myself.

de·vo·tion (noun): 1) love, loyalty, or enthusiasm for a person, activity, or cause. Synonyms: faithfulness, fidelity, constancy, commitment, allegiance, dedication, fondness, admiration, affection, care; 2) worship. Synonyms: devoutness,

reverence, godliness, holiness, sanctity; 3) prayer: solemn request or expression of thanks to God.

NEVERTHELESS, I AM CONTINUALLY WITH YOU; YOU HOLD MY RIGHT HAND. YOU GUIDE ME WITH YOUR COUNSEL, AND AFTERWARD YOU WILL RECEIVE ME TO GLORY. WHOM HAVE I IN HEAVEN BUT YOU? AND THERE IS NOTHING ON EARTH THAT I DESIRE BESIDES YOU. PSALM 73:23-25

"JUST SO, I TELL YOU, THERE WILL BE MORE JOY IN HEAVEN OVER ONE SINNER WHO REPENTS THAN OVER NINETY-NINE RIGHTEOUS PERSONS WHO NEED NO REPENTANCE." LUKE 15:7 JESUS SAID TO HER, "EVERYONE WHO DRINKS OF THIS WATER WILL BE THIRSTY AGAIN, BUT WHOEVER DRINKS OF THE WATER THAT I WILL GIVE HIM WILL NEVER BE THIRSTY AGAIN. THE WATER THAT I WILL GIVE HIM WILL BECOME IN HIM A SPRING OF WATER WELLING UP TO ETERNAL LIFE." JOHN 4:13

If you are already a member of the Body of Christ, then please join me in inviting others. God doesn't want anyone to perish and neither should we. We need to share the gospel with as many people as we can, live our lives in such a way by the power of the Holy Spirit as to be a good example of what God's children are like, and let Him do the rest—because only He can. My prayer is that everyone who reads this will desire to truly know the one, true God (to know Him is to love Him—we can't truly love anyone we don't even know), that we would all realize our personal value lies not in our appearance or circumstances, but in His infinite greatness and unchanging love for us; that we will freely offer Him our whole hearts, souls and minds; that we would surrender our flawed, selfish will to His perfect, good and pleasing will, so that He can do wonderful things through us, by His power; that we will humble ourselves and rely on His strength and wisdom, and put our trust in Him alone, keeping our focus on Him so that His light will shine on this dark world, unmasking lies and chasing away the deception, waking up the slumbering believers and those still dead in their sins so that we can all be ready for His return; that we will become more and more like Jesus: tireless, selfless, wholly devoted, holy and set apart, wise, loving, filled with peace, grace and mercy no matter what happens; that we remember that it's all about Him, and He is worthy, and never changes, fails or makes mistakes. In Jesus' holy, precious, wonderful name, Amen.

FOR THOSE WHO LIVE ACCORDING TO THE FLESH SET THEIR MINDS ON THE THINGS OF THE FLESH, BUT THOSE WHO LIVE ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT SET THEIR MINDS ON THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT. FOR TO SET THE MIND ON THE FLESH IS DEATH, BUT TO SET THE MIND ON THE SPIRIT IS LIFE AND PEACE. FOR THE MIND THAT IS SET ON THE FLESH IS HOSTILE TO GOD, FOR IT DOES NOT SUBMIT TO GOD'S LAW; INDEED, IT CANNOT. THOSE WHO ARE IN THE FLESH CANNOT PLEASE GOD. YOU, HOWEVER, ARE NOT IN THE

FLESH BUT IN THE SPIRIT, IF IN FACT THE SPIRIT OF GOD DWELLS IN YOU. ANYONE WHO DOES NOT HAVE THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST DOES NOT BELONG TO HIM. ROMANS 8:5-9

"I, JESUS, HAVE SENT MY ANGEL TO TESTIFY TO YOU ABOUT THESE THINGS FOR THE CHURCHES. I AM THE ROOT AND THE DESCENDANT OF DAVID, THE BRIGHT MORNING STAR." ...THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE SAY, "COME." AND LET THE ONE WHO HEARS SAY, "COME." AND LET THE ONE WHO IS THIRSTY COME; LET THE ONE WHO DESIRES TAKE THE WATER OF LIFE WITHOUT PRICE. HE WHO TESTIFIES TO THESE THINGS SAYS, "SURELY I AM COMING SOON." AMEN. COME, LORD JESUS! REVELATION 22:16-17, 20

You are invited to drink the water of eternal life.

©Tricia Berg March 2016, last updated December 2022, 60pp If you have been blessed by this article, you are free to share but do not claim as your own or sell, and do not make modifications and attribute them to me. You can download free pdf devotional articles from my blog: <https://layoutfortoday.com/day/today/wp/> (The most recent articles are at the bottom of the page after you click on the "free pdf downloads" link near the top left of the page.)

You can also read this article at my other blog:

<https://acertainday.com/day/clothe/wp/2018/07/26/beautiful/>

There, the Bible verses should conveniently pop up when you hover over the cites.