



An Open  
**INVITATION**

Jewell R. Powell

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# Preface

I woke up one morning and heard a loud inner voice say, “RECALIBRATE.” Then I heard a soft inner voice say, “Change the way you think and what you do.” Amos 7:7–8 came to mind. The prophet Amos said, “Thus He showed me [a vision], and behold, the Lord was standing by a vertical wall with a plumb line in His hand [to determine if the wall was straight or if it needed to be destroyed]. The Lord said to me, ‘Amos, what do you see?’ And I said, ‘A plumb line.’ Then the Lord said, ‘Behold, I am setting a plumb line [as a standard] among My people Israel [showing the defectiveness of the nation, requiring judgment]. I shall not spare them any longer. [The door of mercy is shut.]” (AMP). After reading this passage, I kept hearing the word *door*. I believe the Lord is saying that the door of mercy will eventually be shut. I was quickly reminded of the foolish virgins who knocked on the door after it was shut, and they could not get in. Even though this passage was a word for Israel, I am convinced it is for us all (His church). I have been a churchgoing believer since I was five years old, and God has been slowly recalibrating me. I know He wants to recalibrate you as well. Let me say that this is an urgent message and is not to be taken lightly.

Recalibrate means “to change the way you do or think about something.”<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word for “calibrate” means “to check or adjust by comparison with a standard.”<sup>2</sup> I strongly believe that God is telling us, His people, that we need to recalibrate—we need to go back to His original standard. We are to live our lives in agreement with the Bible, which He has set in place and laid out for His church to live by. As Christians (followers of Christ/believers), we have moved away from the original intent of His Word, His ways, and His plans for us. He wants to put us back on track. Therefore, each chapter is based on the acronym RECALIBRATE, which will describe God’s original intent for mankind and show us His ways and how we are to live according to the protocols of the Kingdom of God. The Scripture passage below is the basis for this book. We need to go back to the basics (recalibrate) regarding the Kingdom of God.

For you should already be professors instructing others by now; but instead, you need to be taught from the beginning the basics of God’s prophetic oracles! You’re like children [the Greek word *nepios* means “still unfit to bear arms”—that is, unprepared for battle] still needing milk and not yet

ready to digest solid food. For every spiritual infant who lives on milk is not yet pierced by the revelation of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, whose spiritual senses perceive heavenly matters. And they have been adequately trained by what they've experienced to emerge with understanding of the difference between what is truly excellent and what is evil and harmful. (Heb. 5:12–14 TPT)

To help us on this journey to recalibrate, God told me to look at a hidden mystery within the Jewish wedding tradition during biblical times. There were three parts to the wedding: (1) the arranged marriage, (2) the betrothal/engagement, and (3) the wedding/marriage. We in Western culture (the West) understand stages 2 and 3, but only to a certain point. Marriage in those times—and still within the Jewish culture—was very serious! Let's take a look at each stage.

Stage 1—The arranged marriage (*shiddukchim*). This is where the father of the bride (*kallah*) and the father of the bridegroom (*khatan*) agreed to their children getting married. This could happen when the children were very young because of political reasons or later in life. The son could ask for a specific woman, but he had to get approval from his father, and his father had to speak with the father of the bride on his behalf. Or a servant (*shadkhan*) of the bridegroom's father could search for a bride.

Stage 2—The betrothal/engagement (*erusin*). Both fathers arranged the terms of the marital covenant (*ketubah*). The father of the bride negotiated a suitable arrangement to make sure she would be taken care of and to obtain an acceptable price (*mohar*) for her (because she was a loss for her family). Once the terms were finalized, the father and son went to the bride's house and knocked on the door. If she opened the door, she had accepted the terms. The bridegroom provided the bride with gifts (*mattan*) as a promise of his return. She went through a public cleansing (immersion in water) called a *mikvah*, and the two families shared a meal and wine together. The bridegroom went back to his father's house to prepare a home for his bride (*huppah*). This stage usually lasted a year, but neither the bride nor the bridegroom knew the day or the hour of the wedding, because it was up to the father of the bridegroom to determine such things. During this time, the bride learned about the bridegroom and how to please him (through a messenger), and she prepared her wedding garments in preparation for the wedding day. In this stage, the bride and bridegroom were legally bound to each other but had not had the official wedding and had not consummated the marriage.

Stage 3—The wedding/marriage (*nissuin*). The bridegroom’s father gave his son approval to get his bride. The bridegroom, his groomsmen, and others set out (usually in the middle of the night), blasting the shofar to announce the bridegroom’s coming. The bride, her bridesmaids, and others awakened to the sound of the shofar and prepared their lamps so they could see where they were going. The bride was lifted up in an *aperion* (similar to a carriage) and taken to her new home. There the bride and bridegroom finalized their vows and ate and drank wine with their guests. They consummated their marriage for seven days. Then they celebrated a marriage feast with their guests.

This description of the ancient Jewish wedding tradition will be broken down further as we go through each chapter, and I will show how the tradition correlates with the acronym RECALIBRATE. My heart is that when you read this book, you will come to know (*yada*: “to know intimately in the deepest way”) the Bridegroom Jesus and that the Word of Truth will transform your life. My prayer is taken from Ephesians 3:14–21:

For this reason [grasping the greatness of this plan by which Jews and Gentiles are joined together in Christ] I bow my knees [in reverence] before the Father [of our Lord Jesus Christ], from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name [God—the first and ultimate Father]. May He grant you out of the riches of His glory, to be strengthened and spiritually energized with power through His Spirit in your inner self, [indwelling your innermost being and personality], so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through your faith. And may you, having been [deeply] rooted and [securely] grounded in love, be fully capable of comprehending with all the saints (God’s people) the width and length and height and depth of His love [fully experiencing that amazing, endless love]; and [that you may come] to know [practically, through personal experience] the love of Christ which far surpasses [mere] knowledge [without experience], that you may be filled up [throughout your being] to all the fullness of God [so that you may have the richest experience of God’s presence in your lives, completely filled and flooded with God Himself]. Now to Him who is able to [carry out His purpose and] do superabundantly more than all that we dare ask or think [infinitely beyond our greatest prayers, hopes, or dreams], according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen. (AMP)



# Introduction

My husband, Lewis, and I unexpectedly received a special invitation in the mail to a 2012 Christmas party at the White House. We were so excited that we had been personally invited to such a prestigious affair. I think we RSVP'd the same day. Anyone and everyone would have loved to have been invited. We had never been to the White House, and to be invited by the first black president of the United States was such an honor. What had we done to be bestowed such an honor? We didn't know what to expect, but we were in such full anticipation of whatever the day would hold.

Right after RSVP'ing, I started planning for the day. I searched around trying to find a hairdresser who could do my hair that morning because I wanted it to be perfect. I searched the closet to see if I had anything close to presentable to wear to such a festive occasion. Of course, I didn't (just my excuse to go buy a new outfit, shoes, purse, etc.)! We wanted to wear our very best outfits so as to present ourselves as worthy to attend. We told everyone we knew, "We're going to the White House!" Lewis and I kept wondering if we would have the privilege of meeting the president or the first lady. The invitation didn't say if they would be attending. What would we say if we actually had an opportunity to meet them? How would we respond? So many questions went through our minds as we anticipated the upcoming day.

As we entered the massive, white building, we were so thrilled and pretty much acted like children—very giggly. The security guards gave us a ticket with a number on it. Why would they give us a ticket? Did it mean we would possibly get to meet the forty-fourth president of the United States? As we walked in, people were caroling beautiful, angelic songs. Waiters and waitresses handed us drinks and hors d'oeuvres. Then we were pretty much left to ourselves to tour the many rooms in the White House. Words cannot express what it was like to be in the same rooms that former presidents and their wives had been in. I remember standing in the middle of each room just to soak in the atmosphere and the history. All the rooms were beautifully decorated, and each room was based on a color (i.e., the red room or the blue room) or represented a time in history (i.e., what Jackie Kennedy did to the room).

Next it was time to feast. There were enormous rectangle tables with all types of food and desserts. Although we were too excited to eat, we ate a little just so we could say, “We had lunch at the White House.”

All of a sudden, our number was called. As we walked toward a room that we hadn’t visited before, we knew at that moment that we were going to meet the president. Lewis asked, “How do I look?” I fixed him up, and then I asked him, “How do I look?” I wanted to go to the bathroom to freshen my makeup, but I didn’t want to get out of line or possibly miss my opportunity to meet the president, so I stayed in place. As we entered the room, we could see the president shaking hands and talking with people. But there was a bonus. The first lady was there as well! We were going to meet them both. With every step we moved closer to them, our anticipation grew.

I still didn’t know what I was going to say. Lewis was first, and he was taking a long time because he wanted to tell the president a story so that he would never forget meeting him. As I was walking toward the president, I couldn’t think of a word to say. What do you say to someone who will be a historical figure? As I was shaking his hand, the only thing that came out of my mouth was “We love you,” and he said, “We love you too.” At the time I was with the president, Lewis was greeting the first lady. He told me later, “I couldn’t say a word to her. I just stood there with my mouth open in awe.” He told me that she said, “It’s okay.” As I walked up to her, she said, “You are so beautiful.” And I said, “No, you are so beautiful. We love you,” and then we exited the room.

Words cannot express the honor we felt to have met and to have been in the presence of the president and the first lady. We could have stayed another hour, walking around, eating the spectacular array of food and desserts, and enjoying the festivities at the White House, but once we met them, we were good. What could be more exciting after that?

As we left the White House, Lewis was acting like a little boy who wanted to run around in excitement because he had just received the best gift he had ever desired, which was to meet the first black president. But I said, “Okay, babe, we need to keep our cool. We are adults. People are watching.” But when we got into the car and no one could see or hear us, we started screaming and laughing—like children who had just seen their favorite celebrity. We were in such awe. We called everyone we could think of to tell them we had met the president and the first lady. What a great experience!

Let's look at a similar story line. Imagine you receive a special invitation. It is to the most prestigious party you could ever be invited to. This party is for anyone who wants to attend, but you must respond to the invitation. Remember those parties that you wanted to be invited to but only the cool or popular kids were invited? Well, this party is for everyone, no matter what your ethnicity is, no matter if you're poor or rich, not smart or smart, a geek or a cool person. As a matter of fact, if you are considered powerless, lowly, or insignificant, you are indeed a special guest at this special dinner party. You don't have to get a fresh haircut or buy a new outfit. This party is come as you are, and it's free. All you have to do is RSVP.

After reading the invitation, you notice that the person who sent it forgot to put who it is from, the date, and the time. So you ask around to see if any of your friends received this special invitation. Everyone received one, but no one knows who it came from. You are now wondering and questioning, Who is this special party for? Is it for the president or maybe a king from another nation? Is the party in honor of a famous celebrity? Could it be for the pope? You heard he was coming to town. You know it has to be someone special, a high-ranking official or celebrity, because the location can hold over 120 million people.

Continue imagining. It is a Wednesday evening. You are at home watching your favorite television show when you hear a special broadcast message that says, "All who were invited to attend the special celebration must be at the location in a few hours at 12 midnight." What? Twelve a.m. Do you say, "Oh, I can't go because I have to work the next morning and I can't get time off"? Or "That is too late"? Or "I don't have enough time to prepare"? Do you not accept because you don't think you are worthy of such an invitation or because you don't have anything to wear or money to get there? Or do you make sure you get there at 11 p.m. so you can get in and get one of the best seats in the house? Are you concerned with what you should wear or how you will look? Or are you excited and anticipating who you will see?

Again, this is not just a random invitation to attend an event. You received a formal, personal invitation with your name on it, as if the person who invited you knows you personally. You have to make a decision regarding whether you will accept the invitation extended to you. In this story, I will assume you make the decision to go (if for no other reason than you are curious to see who the party is for). Although the invitation said, "Come as you are," do you at least take a bath, put on clean clothes, brush your teeth, and comb your hair? Bottom line: Do you prepare in advance before leaving to attend?

As you approach the gate, you can hear singing and people having a good time. Before you even give the guards your invitation, they call you out by name and greet you with such joy and love. They tell you, “We’ve been waiting for you!” Millions of people are already there. You walk into such a glorious atmosphere with singing, dancing, and all types of instruments playing. Even though you don’t recognize the song, you start to sing along. Butlers serve you drinks and food, and they all know you by name and are so happy to see you. This is a massive celebration. You have never seen such large tables. The desserts, like bread pudding and strawberry shortcake, are in gigantic glass vases. As you walk around gazing at everyone and everything, you realize that you have never experienced anything like this before—the atmosphere is heavenly.

You hear a trumpet announcing that the guest of honor has arrived. Everyone stands at attention, and the usher moves you along quite fast to get you in place to meet the guest of honor. The usher brings you to the front, which you think is strange because there are so many people and it appears to be full. You feel emotions you have never felt before. There is such a presence that is unexplainable, and you know that something great is about to happen.

The honored guest is walking through the doors. People announce, “The King is here! The King is here!” You look around trying to see Him, asking yourself, “What King? From where? Who is this King?” There is so much going on. The guards, butlers, ushers, singers, and guests are admiring Him. Some are crying, some are bowing, some are off to the side standing in awe, some are worshipping Him. You can’t see His face, but there is such splendor, unlike anything you have ever seen before. You are in such awe and anticipation.

As He moves closer to the front, you can see Him, and you start to cry. As He passes you, you cry out, “Holy, holy, holy!” He stands in the front to speak. Even though there are over 120 million people present (the place is packed to capacity), He doesn’t need a microphone. His booming bass-baritone voice says, “I love you. I love you all.” As He turns to walk away, the entire crowd—including you—cries out, “No, don’t leave. Stay. Please stay and tell us more.” You wonder why your insides are screaming, “Don’t leave me like this. Don’t leave me. I need more. I want more.” He says in His booming voice, “My dearly beloved, I appreciate your faithfulness. I appreciate your worship. I appreciate all that you have done thus far for the Kingdom. But I want more of you. There is so much more than what you know. Come, be My bride. Connect with Me in a deeper way. Spend more time with Me. There is so much more.”

And then He looks directly at you and says, “Will you accept My invitation? Will you live with Me for eternity? Will you lay down your life so I become your all in all?” Then He and everyone else vanishes right before your eyes. You realize that the personal invitation was just that—personal.

What would you do after that moment? Is that a life-changing moment or just a moment in time? Would you do anything different? Or was that enough for you? Please understand that accepting the invitation (salvation) is only the beginning of being a child of God. God says, “I long for you. I long for fellowship with each and every one of you. I am right here with you. Press in, press in. People will know and see the difference between those who are connected, those who are plugged in to Me, and those who are not. Church should not be the only place where you connect with Me; it should be a place where you get fed.”

As we know, church is two days a week in most cases, and that is good because it keeps you connected to others and builds your faith. The other five days you are to spend time with the Father: reading the Word, singing praise and worship songs, journaling during quiet times to hear from the Father, and studying and listening to sermons to learn how to move from being a child of God to sonship (a mature son or daughter).

You may not have an experience like I did at the 2012 White House Christmas party; however, we all have an opportunity to meet the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, an opportunity that will be life changing. Instead of desiring a moment in time with whom you deem important, it is time to spend a lifetime in the presence of the Lord. The invitation is an open invitation and is there for anyone who accepts and enters into a new, life-changing experience with our heavenly Father. I am honored to have met the president and his wife, but nothing, I mean nothing, compares to God’s invitation. I wanted to tell everyone that I had met the president, I even showed people the picture I took with the president, but now I want to tell everyone that I have met the most beautiful King and that I want you to meet Him and get to know Him as well. Get to know your Bridegroom King!

# 1

## **R = Relationship with the Father**

### *Know the Ways and Love of the Father*

Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment.”

Matthew 22:37–39 NKJV

The first thing that God is looking to recalibrate is our relationship with Him so that we know Him intimately (*yada*) and we know His love for us. Yes, we may go to church and sing praises to Him. But because we don't truly know Him or the love He has for us, we honor Him with our mouths while our hearts are far from Him. As the Lord said to Israel, “This nation approaches [Me only] with their words and honors Me [only] with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me is a tradition that is learned by rote [without any regard for its meaning]” (Isa. 29:13 AMP). The Passion Translation says, “Their worship is nothing more than man-made rules.”

God is looking for more than lip service; He wants our hearts. In the world, people pursue love; however, in the Kingdom, love pursues you. And because this great love is chasing after you, your only response should be to love in return. So the question should never be “Does God love me?” The question should be “Do I love God?”

### **Love's Pursuit**

I have had a recurring dream for over twenty plus years. I kept asking God what it meant since it was about my first love. He finally revealed that it was a metaphor. I represented God in the dream, and the young man represented mankind. So as you read this story, if you substitute

“God” for “I” and “you” for “he/him,” you will see what God was trying to show me—His pursuit of me. God is always in pursuit of you as well. He is always pursuing us because of His deep love for us.

The dream is about my first love. When I first saw him, I thought, *Wow, I want him.* I couldn't pinpoint what made him stand out from the others I had met before; there was just something about him. I pursued him. I had to have him. You would think I was stalking him. I finally won him over, and we started a relationship.

In the beginning, everything was great! We enjoyed spending lots of time together. We talked every day, getting to know each other, and we went everywhere together. But after a while, we stopped seeing each other so much. Things didn't feel like they had when we had first started dating, and the relationship seemed one-sided to me. It seemed as though he didn't love me as much as I loved him. I wanted more from him—more of his time, more of his love. The pursuit was exciting for both of us at first, but then something happened—he pulled back a little.

I was devastated over the breakup because I loved him so much and I just wanted us to be closer. I guess he doubted my love and wanted more from me. As long as I was giving and pursuing, he was good. But once I allowed him the opportunity to give and pursue, he thought I didn't love him.

We saw each other every now and then in passing. I started thinking maybe he just wanted to sow his wild oats and have fun—thinking there was something or someone better. Of course when he called me again after a while, I wanted him back so desperately. So I tried to pursue him again. But it appeared he didn't want to have anything to do with me. How could he not even speak to me when we had such a great relationship in the past? Did he ever really love me? I still loved him so very much. I would try to talk to him, but he wouldn't pay me any attention. This went on for quite some time. It seemed like forever. I was pursuing him, the one I loved, but he didn't love or want me. One day he finally spoke to me, and I was excited that he at least acknowledged me. Why was I putting in so much effort to get him back? Others were attracted to me, and I to them, but I didn't want them. I wanted him!

One night I was in my room crying as if I were having a heart attack. You know that achy-breaky feeling. Can you imagine loving someone so much and they don't love you back? You know you have been good to them. You have blessed them and loved them like no other, but

they have taken advantage of your love and cast you aside. My heart longed for him. I didn't realize how much I truly loved him. All I could concentrate on was getting him back.

How crazy is it to continue to pursue someone who doesn't appear to love you? But I continued my quest because I was still in love with him. Why was he treating me like that? He then sat down next to me, and all of a sudden he looked at me and said, "What's up, my love?" And he gently kissed me as he laid his head on my shoulder. Can you imagine the love of your life kissing you again for the first time? I knew I had his heart again, and he definitely had mine.

All I kept thinking was that the more time we spent together, the more he would get to know me and the more he would know how much I really loved him. I made a decision that no matter what I was doing, if he called, I would drop everything. I didn't want to push myself on him, so I decided to be patient and let him be in control. Although he probably knew how much I wanted to spend time with him, he took his time.

I called him every now and again to see how he was doing. Those moments were special to me because he had ignored me for so long. We went out once a week. He was definitely testing my love; sometimes he would go weeks without calling. After months of dating again, we were finally committed to each other again. Finally, all my pursuing had paid off. We were together again—in love, spending time together. I kept thinking, *This time will be different because he should realize how much I love him.*

But after a couple months, we got into the same rut (like the relationship wasn't going anywhere), and it didn't feel like he was in love anymore. We both wanted intimacy, to feel wanted and appreciated. He felt he wasn't getting that from me, but in hindsight, he wasn't giving it either. So he decided to break up with me again. What he should have realized was that even though I was pursuing him, I was not going to push myself on anyone. He had to pursue me as well. Even though I may not have shown love the way he desired, it didn't mean I didn't love him. All I can remember is being heartbroken again, and I cried because I loved him dearly. He had my heart and didn't really know it.

For some of us, when we first meet the Lord, we love Him desperately with all our heart. We go to church and tell people how wonderful Father God is and how He has blessed us, but the relationship is based on how we feel at the time. When He shows us grace and answers our prayers, He is good. When we are at our weakest, in our most challenging times, we wonder where He is and seek solace elsewhere. We question Him. Why don't we feel His love? Our love



for Him is based on what He does or does not do for us and our feelings at the moment. We want the blessings, but we don't want the challenges. We want the relationship on our terms, not on His terms. We want a surface relationship in which we don't have to invest a lot of time or effort into reading the Bible, singing worship songs to Him, or praying. We try to incorporate Him into our busy schedule instead of giving Him first place. We ignore His gentle ways when He is trying to get our attention, and we sum up our relationship as "He loves me, He loves me not" instead of having a deep knowing in our hearts that HE LOVES ME.

God pursues us all the time, but we don't want Him as much as He wants us. What takes believers off course—so that they backslide? Did someone from the church offend you? Did someone you esteemed fall from grace and shatter your faith? Did a sin in your life take over? Or did God just not seem to be within your reach or to care for you? He is gentle and He is always in pursuit of us, but He waits for us to press in and pursue Him as well. Sometimes He hides Himself so that we will seek after Him with our whole heart (Jer. 29:13).

If you are saying within your heart, "I know there has to be more," guess what—there is. But it takes some doing on your part. Going to church and hearing the Word are only the start of a great relationship with the Father. Speak with Him for hours (in prayer), spend time in His very presence (reading the Bible, praising and worshiping), and intimately get to know Him (through fasting). These are just a few ways to deepen your relationship with Him. Whatever you do, don't do it just to get something from Him. Spend time with Him and give of yourself to Him. He actually longs for that from you.

## **A Father's Love**

I want to start off with a story about a father's unconditional love for his son. Click here: <https://youtu.be/BaZwpD1Paag>. (Note: The entire story is found on YouTube under Dick & Rick Hoyt 2/5/07 6:39.) Just imagine. If a natural man can love like that, how much more does our heavenly Father love us. I definitely believe we are called in this season—the Great Commission—to truly know God as a Father who is passionately in love with us and to exhibit His love and speak of His love to those who don't know Him. The *Merriam-Webster* definition of the word *know* is "to perceive directly; to have understanding of [knowing oneself]; to recognize the nature of: discern; to be acquainted or familiar with; to have experience of; to be aware of the truth."<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word for "know" is *yada*, which means "to know intimately in

the deepest way.”<sup>2</sup> God wants us to know Him intimately in the deepest way through having a personal relationship with Him and to know (*yada*) the truth of His love for us.

In 2003, I learned a valuable lesson in my marriage. My husband and I were separated, and I heard the Lord say, “You are trying to love him without having a true love for Me.” Matthew 22:37–39 tells us to “‘love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘love your neighbor as yourself’” (NLT). See, you have to go up (vertically) before you can go out (horizontally). My husband and I reconciled because I focused on the first and greatest commandment. I was able to love, forgive, not get offended, and so on because when I focused on the first commandment, the second commandment became automatic.

In recalibrating our relationship with the Father, we must know that rituals do not take the place of relationship. Checking off the box on Sunday that we went to church does not take the place of establishing a true, intimate relationship with God. Step-by-step concepts that we follow do not either. God is looking for, desiring, and wanting an intimate relationship with all His children. God wants us to experience His love, to deeply know His love. The Bible tells us that our love (not His love) can grow cold (Matt. 24:12 TPT), especially if we aren’t in constant relationship with Him. We can’t just go to church; we must daily walk and talk with Him. The same is true of most relationships. Your spouse or children or parents may know you love them, but if you are not spending time with them, the relationship is superficial and not intimate.

God wants you to know that He is absolutely, positively, passionately, undoubtedly in love with you. He wants you to be so sure—so confident in His love. In order to get through the trials and testing of your faith, you have to know (*yada*: “to know intimately in the deepest way”) in your very core that you are loved by God. Even through famines, earthquakes, and pandemics, you have to know (intimately) what is the height, depth, width, and length of His love. Does God love you when you sin? Yes. Does God love you when something bad happens? Yes. Does God love you? Yes. I hear the Lord saying, “Who told you that I don’t love you? Who told you that you have to perform for My love? Who told you that your sins are greater than My love for you? Don’t you understand that nothing, I mean nothing, can change My love for you!” The apostle Paul wrote:

So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn’t hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our [sinful] condition and exposing himself to the worst

by sending his own Son [Jesus], is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen [you]? Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture. . . . None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us. (Rom. 8:31–39 MSG)

I saw a CNN commercial that said a lie becomes the truth if you believe it. I am writing the truth to denounce the lies you've been told and have believed about Abba Father and His Son Jesus. Receive His unconditional love. Take a posture to receive His love. Open your heart and let Him in. Papa God wants you, He desires you, you are His treasured one. He is passionately in love with you. Open up and receive His love. Click here to listen to a song about His love for you: <https://youtu.be/5L4FbKbyIeA>.

I heard someone say that “to love God is costly but simple. It isn't automatic, and you have to be intentional.” I believe that! So instead of trying to fit prayer or spending time with God into your busy schedule, schedule your workday and other activities around your set time with God. I have learned to appreciate and stop to value the moments when God pulls on my heart to spend time with Him. I have learned to treasure those *selah* moments even in the midst of my busyness. Sometimes I wake up at 3 a.m. just to be in His presence and read His Word (that's the costly part 😊).

Orphans don't feel like they belong or are loved. John 14:18 says, “I promise that I will never leave you helpless or abandon you as orphans—I will come back to you!” (TPT). If you feel like God doesn't love you, you have an orphan mentality. Just because you go through challenges and have disappointments doesn't mean that God doesn't love you. Martha and Mary knew that Jesus still loved them even in the midst of their sorrow over the death of their brother, Lazarus. Jesus said, “And everything I've taught you is so that the peace which is in me will be in you and will give you great confidence as you rest in me. For in this unbelieving world [the earth] you will experience trouble and sorrows, but you must be courageous, for I have

conquered the world!” (John 16:33 TPT). We shouldn’t blame God for the troubles, trials, and tribulations we go through. That is what we get when living in this world. However, when we know that God loves us and cares about everything that is going on with us, we can have a peace during those difficult times. He says He will perfect those things that concern us (see Ps. 138:8).

When we find ourselves facing life challenges, two things are happening. One, God is using the opportunity to do a work in us since He is always trying to mature us so that we walk in His character (“The fruit of the Spirit is love joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” [Gal. 5:22–23 ESV]); and two, we are learning who He is and His nature. God is multifaceted. Do not put Him in a box. When you are in need of a healer, He is Jehovah Rapha. When you need help with finances, call on Jehovah Jireh, your provider. He wants you to know Him in ways you never thought possible

<https://www.moneywisesteward.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Names-of-God-8x10-Printable.pdf>.



When we become disappointed, we blame God, but we don’t think about whether what we wanted was our will or His will to begin with. The dictionary states that disappointment is “sadness or displeasure caused by the nonfulfillment of one’s hopes or expectations.” I see disappointment/sadness in the following way:

God's Word/Promise + Our Expectations/Our Will = Sadness/Disappointment

However, we can find pleasure/joy/success when we submit to God's will:

God's Word/Promise + Our Obedience/His Will = Pleasure/Joy/Success

We have to get out of the mentality that God should give us anything and everything we ask for, especially if we are doing what we think is “good.” That is foolishness. Most of us don't even treat our own children that way because we don't want them to become spoiled and bratty. The world operates that way—we are rewarded based on what we do or don't do. But the Kingdom of God doesn't operate like that! It actually operates based on faith, obedience, righteousness, and discipline. And furthermore, most of the time it operates on mercy, which means we don't get what we deserve because of the wrong things we have done, and grace, which means we get what we don't deserve, forgiveness. Let's take a praise break right here and thank God for His grace and mercy! We should not try to change God to conform to our thoughts and ways based on our circumstances. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). He is a good God even in bad situations and circumstances.

## **Fear of the Lord**

God often told people in the Bible to “fear not.” This was God saying, “I don't want you to be afraid.” This is not the type of fear we are discussing here. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever” (Ps. 111:10). This fear is a reverence, a respect we should have for the Lord. If we have a respect for God, that is a start, because then it should lead us into wanting to know His ways and follow His commandments. The flip side of the fear of the Lord is not reverencing God. When we don't fear God, we lack respect for Him. Having no fear of or reverence for God leads to eternal separation from God, which we should fear, because it leads to a life that ends in destruction (Luke 23:40). Anything or anyone who threatens us to fear is not from God. “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7 NKJV).

The children of Israel heard the audible voice of the Lord and saw God's glory and were so afraid that they wanted Moses to be the mediator between them and God. God said to them, “Oh

that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear [and worship Me with awe-filled reverence and profound respect] and keep all My commandments always, so that it may go well with them and with their children forever!” (Deut. 5:29 AMP). God wanted them to have a heart toward Him out of respect and not because they were told to. You should fear God only because He is the one “who holds your entire life—body and soul—in his hands” (Matt. 10:28 MSG).

Again, there is a reverent fear we should have because of who God is. We should not take Him for granted because He is a holy God and we are accountable to His ways. I remember the Lord telling me that the fear of Him is honoring Him. When I was growing up, I had a healthy fear of my mom. She was not a mean mother, but when she gave me a look or said my entire name, I knew I had done something wrong. The same is true with the Lord. If we sin or do something that is not honorable to Him, we should have a healthy fear (reverence) of getting in trouble or being corrected, but our relationship with God should never be based on that fear. Just as a mother’s love corrects us, so does God’s. He loves those whom He corrects (Heb. 12:6).

## **To Know God**

Thus says the Lord, “Let not the one who is wise and skillful boast in his insight; let not the one who is mighty and powerful boast in his strength; let not the one who is rich boast in his [temporal satisfactions and earthly] abundance; but let the one who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me [and acknowledges Me and honors Me as God and recognizes without any doubt], that I am the Lord who practices lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on the earth, for in these things I delight,” says the Lord. (Jer. 9:23–24 AMP)

The world boasts about wisdom, strength, power, and wealth, but God’s way is polar opposite. To truly know God is to know that He delights in being kind, just, and righteous. He is a holy God, a God of lovingkindness (gentle and steadfast love and mercy, which He extends freely to His people), justice (not just punishment but a way of reconciling relationships), and righteousness (His ways, His character, His holiness, His standards), and He wants us to live in this world with those same characteristics. Below are descriptions of just some of God’s characteristics.

## *Love*

What is love? First John 4:8 tells us, “God is love.” But depending on who you ask, you will probably get a different answer. Most people can’t fully describe love or will give you their own definition of what they think it means. I thought love was based on how someone made me feel. Love makes you feel alive, free, and good inside, but love also hurts and disappoints. Sometimes love makes you feel lonely or sad. Some people may believe you have to work for love. Sometimes you may feel that you don’t deserve love. Or perhaps you’ve never really experienced it so you don’t know what it truly means. When I googled “love,” the first website defined it as “an intense feeling of deep affection.” Dictionary.com states that it is “a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person; a feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection, as for a parent, child, or friend; sexual passion or desire.”<sup>3</sup> The definitions we know and the way we were taught make us believe that love is a feeling and that it is based on how others treat us. Therefore, when I feel it, I am in love, and when I don’t feel it, I am not in love. However, as I have learned, and I am sure you have as well, love can’t be defined by a dictionary, it can’t be defined by how others treat us, it can’t be defined by our own definitions. Love that most of us know and have experienced is conditional. But love should be accepting and giving. Love should come easily, and it should be given freely through words and deeds.

Since God is love, our very existence was made from *agape* (unconditional, pure, self-sacrificing, the highest form of) love: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:27). We became love when God breathed His very existence into us (2:7). All our lives we search for love because we were made *from love to love*. Adam wasn’t seeking love, but God didn’t want Adam to be alone (2:18). We are always looking for love, thinking it must come through a person. Then we are disappointed, hurt, sad, and lonely, and we fall out of love because we no longer feel it or we put conditions on it. We have put God into that same box. We have brought Him down to our thinking instead of renewing our minds to see Him for who He truly is—LOVE. We have been bamboozled into thinking He loves us the same way others do, that His love is conditional based on what we do or don’t do. When I go to church, He loves me, but when I sin, He doesn’t love me. If I don’t feel His love, then he must be mad at me. When He doesn’t give me what I want, He is mean and I can’t trust Him.

Again, the first and greatest commandment is to “love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” The second is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37–39 NLT). It is not until we connect to the Source of love that we will know and experience a love like we have never known and experienced before. We have to go up (vertically) to receive and experience His *agape* love. Until we do, we will never know that love and we definitely can’t give it away. God teaches us how to love. This world is in need of God’s love. We (His children) are an extension of Him on the earth, and people are waiting for His love. They are waiting for the manifestation of the sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8:19).

The Bible gives us a clear definition of what love looks like—that is our plumb line.

Love endures with patience and serenity, love is kind and thoughtful, and is not jealous or envious; love does not brag and is not proud or arrogant. It is not rude; it is not self-seeking, it is not provoked [nor overly sensitive and easily angered]; it does not take into account a wrong endured. It does not rejoice at injustice, but rejoices with the truth [when right and truth prevail]. Love bears all things [regardless of what comes], believes all things [looking for the best in each one], hopes all things [remaining steadfast during difficult times], endures all things [without weakening]. (1 Cor. 13:4–7 AMP)

### ***Justice/Righteousness***

Growing up, I read two things in the Bible that made it hard for me to want to really know God. First, I kept reading that He will destroy . . . wipe out . . . kill . . . Second, I read about the fear of the Lord. As an immature believer, I couldn’t understand why God would destroy people He loved. Why would I serve Him if He was going to destroy me? And why did I need to fear Him? If He is a loving God, shouldn’t I just love Him? When you read the Bible without asking Holy Spirit to interpret it as you are reading, you may come up with some crazy ideas just like I did.

*Justice* is a term used for what is right or “as it should be.” Justice is another of God’s attributes. Justice and righteousness are often used synonymously in the Bible. There are several types of justice we can talk about, but I will discuss only two: retributive (based on punishment for wrongdoing) and restorative (which tries to restore relationships to “rightness”). Most of the time the Bible uses the word *justice* to refer to restorative justice, by which those who are unrightfully hurt or wronged are restored and given back what was taken from them. This is the



type of justice most people teach about. However, there is a retributive (justice) side to God, by which He corrects those He loves.

For the Lord disciplines and corrects those whom He loves, and He punishes every son whom He receives and welcomes [to His heart]. You must submit to [correction for the purpose of] discipline; God is dealing with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? Now if you are exempt from correction and without discipline, in which all [of God's children] share, then you are illegitimate children and not sons [at all]. Moreover, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we submitted and respected them [for training us]; shall we not much more willingly submit to the Father of spirits, and live [by learning from His discipline]? For our earthly fathers disciplined us for only a short time as seemed best to them; but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. For the time being no discipline brings joy, but seems sad and painful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness [right standing with God and a lifestyle and attitude that seeks conformity to God's will and purpose]. (Heb. 12:6–11 AMP)

I was taught that God is good and there is no evil in Him, which is true according to Psalm 92:15. So why did He destroy (punish) the earth in times past? Remember when He flooded the earth and all the people died except Noah and his family? But now I understand that the earth was full of sin and that a holy God must judge sin—it is His nature. Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God (Gen. 6:9). Thank the Lord for His covenant (rainbow) that He will never again flood the earth. But remember that He is still a righteous, retributive judge who is holy and hates sin.

I saw a traffic sign recently that stated, “Obey the Law, Fools Break Rules.” Let's discuss the first part. In the United States, we have laws that we have to adhere to. If we break a law, we have to go before a judge to determine if we are innocent or guilty. One of the most sacred principles in the American criminal justice system is that a defendant is innocent until proven guilty (presumption of innocence). In other words, the prosecution must prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the defendant is guilty of the crime. The trial is a process in which the facts of the case are presented to a jury, and they decide if the defendant is guilty or not guilty. During the trial, the prosecutor uses witnesses and evidence to prove to the jury that the defendant committed the crime. The jury is responsible for weighing the facts of the case, while the judge determines if the facts presented go against the laws. Typically, the jury judges guilt or

innocence, but the actual penalty is set by the judge based on laws already established and/or a confession of guilt. The bottom line is that God is a righteous judge and that penalty (punishment) is based on His truth/laws (Ps. 89:14), not man's law.

Now for the second part. According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*, a fool is "a morally undesirable individual who despises wisdom and discipline."<sup>4</sup> What does the Bible say about fools? First and foremost, it states that a fool says in his heart, "There is no God" (Ps. 14:1 NLT). And it states that "the [reverent] fear of the Lord [that is, worshipping Him and regarding Him as truly awesome] is the beginning and the preeminent part of knowledge [its starting point and its essence]; but arrogant fools despise [skillful and godly] wisdom and instruction and self-discipline" (Prov. 1:7 AMP). A fool is a person who violates God's laws or sins or disregards God's will. Therefore, breaking a rule or law could be considered sin. Judgment is based on truth (of God's Word), not facts according to the world's standards.

While I was reading Esther, the Lord showed me that His laws cannot be changed. King Ahasuerus gave Haman permission to enact a law that would allow all the Jews to be killed on the king's behalf. Esther's request to her husband was that he change that law. He stated that even though he was a king, once a law was set, it was set, and not even a king could reverse it. The same is true with God's laws (His standards, His commandments). No king or president or ruler can change God's laws. Therefore, when God judges, He is judging what is happening in a nation against His laws. This is especially true within the United States. Our forefathers established this nation as "one nation under God," which means that the US is in covenant with God and we should adhere to His laws above our own common laws and practices.

Both righteousness and justice describe who God is. His righteousness is His justice because God's character and nature always lead Him to do what is right in His sight. This is why His children and their welfare are always on His mind. The entire reason for what is going on in the spiritual world is that He wants to bring back His children into alignment with His original plan, which is to reign with Him forever and in right fellowship with Him. The first part of that plan was Jesus's death and resurrection, which allow us to experience fellowship with God. We are righteous because Jesus made us righteous. "Death once held us in its grip, and by the blunder of one man (Adam), death reigned as king over humanity. But now, how much more are we held in the grip of grace and continue reigning as kings in life, enjoying our regal freedom

through the gift of perfect righteousness in the one and only Jesus, the Messiah!” (Rom. 5:17 TPT). Are we sinless? No, but we are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

### ***Holiness***

There are two main meanings of holiness. The first indicates a moral and spiritual purity, supremely reflected in God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son and intended for all believers committed to an intimate relationship with Christ. Second, it is a concept whereby people, places, and objects are sanctified or set apart for specific purposes in relation to service of God and Christ.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 3:6) is the only one and true living God (Jer. 10:10; John 17:3). He is the supreme being and Creator of heaven and earth (Ps. 146:6). He is all-powerful (omnipotent) (Jer. 32:17; Rev. 19:6), all-knowing (omniscient) (Ps. 139:7–10), and all-good (omnibenevolent) (Luke 18:19). Even Jesus declared in Mark 10:18 that there is only one who is good, and that is God. There are no other gods like Him (Exod. 15:11).

Because He is a holy God (Lev. 20:26), His people should be as well. First Peter 1:15–16 states, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” Any person, place (i.e., nation, church building), or thing (i.e., offering, day) that is set aside for God’s specific purpose is called holy. God called the nation of Israel a holy nation (Exod. 19:6). Those of us who accept the invitation to receive Him as Lord are called to live a holy, sanctified life set apart from the world (Rom. 12:1–2). (I will discuss this further in a later chapter.)

I named just a few attributes of God, but there are so many more—such as His compassion, strength, truth, faithfulness, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Those I explained are the main ones we have missed hearing about over the years.

### **Trust God**

God knows everything about you. He knows your very thoughts, your cares and concerns, your dreams. He knows what is going on in the world. Remember that even during the time of Esther, He was working behind the scenes to help the Jews by allowing Esther to be in a unique position to help her own people. God knew Paul was persecuting Christians, and yet He turned his life around to use him as a holy vessel unto God to bring the good news of grace. God knows that evil and sin exist in this world, and He is working behind the scenes to totally annihilate them.

We have to learn to trust God and His sovereign plans (Prov. 3:5–16), that He is in control and has not forgotten His people. His justice will prevail because He hates injustice. His holy actions are always just and fair, even when we don't think so. Even in the midst of all the troubles the Israelites (Jews) and the early Christians went through, He was working everything out for their good according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). He is doing the same for us today, to give us an expected end (Jer. 29:11). That expected end is a hope and a future to reign with Him and His Son Jesus for eternity.

As stated earlier, the first stage of an ancient Jewish wedding involved the father choosing a suitable bride for his son or sending a servant to find a suitable wife for him. Your heavenly Father has chosen you (yes, even men) as a bride (*kallah*) for His Son Jesus. “[In His love] He chose us [actually picked us out for Himself as His own] in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy (consecrated and set apart for Him) and blameless in His sight, even above reproach, before Him in love” (Eph. 1:4 AMPC).

Will you accept the invitation to become betrothed to His Son? Hold on. Before you make that decision, you need to know what that entails.

## 2

# E = Engaged to the Son

## *Jesus as Our Bridegroom King*

You were bought with a price [you were actually purchased with the precious blood of Jesus and made His own]. So then, honor and glorify God with your body.

1 Corinthians 6:20 AMP

In this chapter, we turn to recalibrating our thoughts concerning Jesus. Most of us know that He died for our sins (Rom. 5:8) and that when we accept Him as Savior, we are saved (10:9). However, His role is not just to be our Savior, through whom we only obtain salvation. He is also our Bridegroom—we are now betrothed (engaged) to Him.

In the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, once the bridegroom's father found a suitable bride for his son, they would go to the father of the bride to negotiate a bridal price (*mohar*) based on her worth. The price was negotiated between the fathers and could take the form of money (Ruth 4:9), spoils (2 Sam. 3:14), gifts (Gen. 24:22), or service (29:20). In Jesus's case, it was his very life/blood (1 Pet. 1:18–19). Paying a price for a bride places a great value on her. “Who could ever find a wife like this one—she is a woman of strength and mighty valor! She is full of wealth and wisdom. The price paid for her is greater than many jewels” (Prov. 31:10 TPT). We are so very valuable to Jesus, for His blood paid for us. Click here to listen to a song from FreshStart Worship about Jesus: <https://youtu.be/MX-O1GbBQOO>.

In 2 Corinthians 11:2, the apostle Paul speaks as a matchmaker (*shadkhan*): “You need to know that God's passion is burning inside me for you, because, like a loving father, I have pledged your hand in marriage to Christ, your true bridegroom. I've also promised that I would present his fiancée to him as a pure virgin bride” (TPT). For over two thousand years, an

arranged marriage has been in place for the King's Son (Jesus). The initial invitation was sent out to special guests (Jews) who didn't accept it, so now the invitation has been sent to those of non-Jewish descent (Gentiles). In Hebrew, the bridegroom (*khatan*) is one who enters into covenant or one who joins himself to someone. This second stage of the ancient Jewish wedding tradition is called *erusin*, and it means to be betrothed (engaged).

## The Marriage Contract

In the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, the contract (*ketubah*) not only spelled out what the bridegroom would pay for his bride but also contained his plans regarding her. It also explained what the bride's roles and responsibilities would be. The Old Testament—mainly the Torah—was the contract (covenant) that God made with the children of Israel (Jews). (Read Exod. 19:3–6.) We (Gentiles) and Jews who accept Jesus as Savior have a better contract (covenant) (which we will discuss in more depth in chapter 3).

Here in the United States, the contract is similar to a prenuptial agreement, which outlines each party's responsibilities and property rights for the duration of the marriage. Most of us don't have that type of agreement, which is why we really don't see the significance of this ancient Jewish tradition.

The *ketubah* listed the terms and conditions of what the bridegroom would do for the bride and also the bride's roles and responsibilities. To accept Jesus as your Bridegroom is to know Him and to know what He is expecting and looking for in a bride.

Some of the things our Bridegroom promises to us, His bride, are these:

1. He will provide everything we need: food, clothing, shelter (Matt. 6:25–34).
2. He will give us everything that pertains to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3–4).
3. He will provide an eternal life with Him (no divorce on His part) (John 17:3).
4. He will give us rest with Him (Matt. 11:28–30).
5. He will give us life to the fullest (John 10:10).
6. He will give us peace (John 14:27).
7. He will give us His everlasting love (Deut. 7:9; 1 John 4:16).

Of course, there are so many more precious promises in the Bible; these are just a few.

As the bride of Christ, we cannot just accept the promises of what the Bridegroom gives while not living up to the entire contract. In this case, the contract is already written, and we have to believe by faith that it has our best interest in mind. We can't rewrite the terms and conditions; we already agreed to them when we said yes to Jesus. Therefore, we too, as the bride, have responsibilities to live by. Here are some of the things we promise our Bridegroom according to the contract (the Bible):

1. To love Him and keep the commandments (1 John 2:3–6).
2. To divorce the world and evil desires (1 Pet. 2:11).
3. To be His alone (set apart/holy) (1 Pet. 1:15–19).
4. To be obedient to the truth of God's Word (1 Pet. 1:22–23; 1 John 3:24).
5. To live a righteous life in Him (1 John 2:29; 3:7–10).
6. To be a disciple (John 15:8).
7. To be conformed into His image (Rom. 8:29).

Again, this is a partial list. Some of these responsibilities will be discussed in later chapters.

To know what's in the *ketubah*, we must read and understand what we are committing to and what is promised to us. When a *ketubah* was written, the bride had to read it and agree to it (read Exod. 19:7–9) because if she broke it, her actions were punishable by law. The bridegroom and his father would go to the bride's home and knock on the door. If she opened the door, that was a sign of her agreement. She was saying, "Yes, I will be your bride." Jesus says, "Behold, I'm standing at the door, knocking. If your heart is open to hear my voice and you open the door within, I will come in to you and feast with you, and you will feast with me" (Rev. 3:20 TPT). The footnote under this Scripture passage states, "The Aramaic can be translated 'I have been standing at the door, knocking.'" Jesus and His Father are knocking on the door of your heart, inviting you to be His bride (read Songs of Sol. 5:2). Your yes is when you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord according to Romans 10:9–10.

Right now, if you are being led to say yes, then pray:

*Jesus, I know You are knocking on the door of my heart. Right now I receive You as my Lord and Savior, and I say, "Yes, come in." I repent of all that has happened in the*

*past. I denounce anything that has separated me from Your love, and from this moment forward, I am Yours. In Jesus's name, amen.*

Saying yes at the betrothal stage was serious because, in Jewish tradition, at this stage, you were married (even if you hadn't consummated the marriage). Once the bride agreed to what was written in the *ketabuh*, if she broke the agreement, a written decree of divorce was necessary.

## **Divorce**

Again, in the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, when a woman accepted a marriage proposal, she was considered married. Unlike in our Western tradition, acceptance was legally binding, and a divorce was required to nullify it. This is why the Bible tells us that Joseph, who was espoused to Mary, was thinking of quietly divorcing her (Matt. 1:19). The engagement usually lasted for a year before the actual wedding took place. Some of us have been engaged to Christ for years and may be getting a little weary waiting for our Bridegroom. I tell you that now is not the time to grow weary in well doing (Gal. 6:9). Always be preparing for the Bridegroom, always be on the lookout, because you don't know when He is returning. And in case no one told you—He is returning!

A contract (covenant) can be conditional—based on what a person does or doesn't do—or it can be unconditional—no matter what a person does, it is eternal. John 14:15 states, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (ESV). This is conditional; it is based on something we are to do. But God's love is unconditional and not based on what we do. "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10 NIV). God never breaks covenant with us, but we can break covenant with our God. If we break or turn away from God's law (His Word), we have broken covenant. The beauty of the new marriage contract with God and the Lord Jesus Christ is that if we ever break it, all we have to do is repent. "But as it is, Christ has acquired a [priestly] ministry which is more excellent [than the old Levitical priestly ministry], for He is the Mediator (Arbiter) of a better covenant [uniting God and man], which has been enacted and rests on better promises" (Heb. 8:6 AMP).

A broken marriage contract is what we call a divorce. The Jewish people divorced God—*God did NOT divorce them.*



Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jer. 31:31–33 NKJV)

When we accept Jesus, we are supposed to separate from (divorce) the world, as the following Scripture passages explain. This is possible only by the leading of Holy Spirit, which will be discussed in a later chapter. I hope the following Scriptures speak to your heart.

My divinely loved friends, since you are resident aliens and foreigners in this world, I appeal to you to divorce yourselves from the evil desires that wage war within you. (1 Pet. 2:11 TPT)

Don't become partners with those who reject God. How can you make a partnership out of right and wrong? That's not partnership; that's war. Is light best friends with dark? Does Christ go strolling with the Devil? Do trust and mistrust hold hands? Who would think of setting up pagan idols in God's holy temple? But that is exactly what we are, each of us a temple in whom God lives. God himself put it this way: "I'll live in them, move into them; I'll be their God and they'll be my people. So leave the corruption and compromise; leave it for good," says God. "Don't link up with those who will pollute you. I want you all for myself. I'll be a Father to you; you'll be sons and daughters to me." The Word of the Master, God. (2 Cor. 6:17 MSG)

"So come out from among unbelievers and be separate," says the Lord, "and do not touch what is unclean; and I will graciously receive you and welcome you [with favor]." (2 Cor. 6:17 AMP)

No one can serve two masters [gods—my addition]; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [money, possessions, fame, status, or whatever is valued more than the Lord]. (Matt. 6:24 AMP)

Don't set the affections of your heart on this world or in loving the things of the world. The love of the Father and the love of the world are incompatible. For all that the world can offer us—the gratification of our flesh, the allurements of the things of the world, and the obsession with status and importance—none of these things come from the Father but from the world. This world and its desires are in the process of passing away, but those who love to do the will of God live forever. (1 John 2:15–17 TPT)

The truth is if we don't divorce ourselves from the world, then we have broken covenant with (divorced) God. "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life [his blessed life in the kingdom of God]? Or what would a man give as an exchange for his [blessed] life [in the kingdom of God]?" (Matt. 16:26 AMPC). (More on this in a later chapter.)

## **A Holy Communion**

After the bride gave her consent, both families had a feast with wine. The bride and the bridegroom drank from the same cup of wine (called the *birkat erusin*) as a sign that they would do life together—this sealed the marriage covenant. This is symbolic of the Last Supper Jesus had with His disciples (Matt. 26:17–30; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–39; John 13:1–17:26) before His departure. He was telling them that He was leaving them but was coming back. He was sealing the new covenant not just for the Jews but for us (Gentiles) as well. "After supper he gave them another glass of wine, saying, 'This wine is the token of God's new agreement to save you—an agreement sealed with the blood I shall pour out to purchase back your souls'" (Luke 22:20 TLB). "For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come" (22:18). (Note: This speaks to His return, which is the third stage—the wedding.)

Just as the bridegroom would then leave to prepare a home for his bride, so our Bridegroom has left to go and prepare a home for us: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:1–3 NIV). The greatest promise we can hold on to is that our Bridegroom is coming back for us. At this time in history, Jesus is preparing a place for us. He is coming back for His bride.

I knew Communion is a time of reflection and rededication. I knew it is what we are supposed to do until Christ returns, but I never really saw it as a true "communion" with my Bridegroom (not Savior). It is a time to remember His faithfulness to us and to recommit our faithfulness to Him while waiting for Him to return. When we break the contract in any way (not living according to the Bible), we should take Communion to rededicate our lives to our Bridegroom. Guess what? You don't have to wait until you go to church; you can do it in the comfort of your own home because you have a personal relationship with Him.

## Jesus, Our Bridegroom

As I said earlier, we have to rethink our relationship with Jesus. He is not just our Savior; He is also our Bridegroom. If you think being saved—just saying yes to Jesus—is all you need to do, it's not. It is just the beginning. He wants all of you—to be a part of your everyday life. I pray that you didn't accept Him just for what He can do for you according to the marriage covenant (Bible) but because of His love for you and your love for Him. If your affections and daily activities are more geared toward riches, success, honor, and purpose, then you are not truly engaged to the Bridegroom.

I pursued the American Dream and found some success. My focus was on making money and buying nice things. I started and failed at so many businesses. I was very active in the church, tithing and doing everything I was taught biblically. The truth is I was a good Christian without Christ. I was wondering why I still wasn't feeling fulfilled. It was because I was trying to do life in this world with Christ on the sideline, seeking Him only when I needed a favor, an answer to a prayer request. He did bless me in some areas but only because of His goodness, grace, faithfulness, and mercy. As I started spending more time with Him and less time focusing on other things (television, social media, partying, etc.), I stopped desiring those other things. In the beginning, I spent one hour a night with Him. Then it was two hours a night. I spent less and less time doing things that don't really matter and more and more time reading the Word, praying, and worshiping Him. Now, it is all about Jesus. I am now doing life with Him.

Like most little girls, including myself, we start to imagine ourselves as a bride, and our entire life is about finding our soulmate, the one our heart longs for. It is interesting that we all (men and women) were created this way. We were made to connect with and find our true love. Jesus is our true love, and until we connect with Him, we will look for the connection in all the wrong places: people, success, money, substances, and so on. Jesus's death and resurrection gave us the connection we long for, and once we accept Him, we are connected to a deep, divine love we have never experienced or known before.

Our affections should be first for Him, and then He will give us the desires of our hearts. Matthew 6:33 says, "So above all, constantly chase after [pursue—my addition] the realm of God's kingdom and the righteousness that proceeds from Him. Then all these less important things will be given to you abundantly" (TPT). His death was not only to reconcile us to God the Father but also to give us a more abundant life on earth (John 10:10).

Again, once you say yes to the Bridegroom Christ, you are betrothed. All those who say yes, whether a man or a woman, are now not only saved but also engaged. As an engaged person (follower of Christ), your main focus is to prepare for the Bridegroom's return. According to the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, the bridegroom would leave for a period of time. The bride and the bridegroom had no idea when the bridegroom would come for his bride; only the father of the bridegroom knew. It is the same for us spiritually. Only God the Father knows. "But the exact day and hour? No one knows that, not even heaven's angels, not even the Son. Only the Father. So keep a sharp lookout, for you don't know the timetable. It's like a man who takes a trip, leaving home and putting his servants in charge, each assigned a task, and commanding the gatekeeper to stand watch. So stay at your post, watching. You have no idea when the homeowner is returning, whether evening, midnight, cockcrow, or morning. You don't want him showing up unannounced, with you asleep on the job. I say it to you, and I'm saying it to all: Stay at your post. Keep watch" (Mark 13:34 MSG).

The beauty is that until He returns for us, we get to live this life in Christ more abundantly while we are still here. But we do not live according to the world's standards, and we do not simply do what we want. We live this earthly life in the spirit of holiness the way God intended. Adam gave up this splendid life with God, but Jesus gave it back to us. We have heard for years that we are living in the last of the last days (which I believe we are). And everyone is trying to figure out the big question "When?" Although the Bible tells us to know the season and times, we should not be so focused on when Christ is going to return that we do not prepare for His return. This is a "time of engagement."

What if you got engaged on December 25 and decided the wedding would be May 23 of the following year. You and your fiancé are so excited and can't wait until May 23. Every month you get more excited and tell everyone that you are getting married on May 23. Then on May 23, you wake up and say, "This is my wedding day"; however, there is no dress, no ring, no preacher, no honeymoon plans. No invitations were even sent. As a result, there is no wedding. You were so focused on the day of the wedding that you never planned or prepared for the wedding. The same lesson applies regarding Jesus's return. It is not so much about trying to figure out when He is coming back as it is about preparing for that day (Matt. 24:44).

## **It Is Finished**

In the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, after the contract was sealed and the ceremony of the second stage (*erusin*) was complete, the bride stayed at home while the bridegroom went back to his father's home to prepare a home for his bride. In the Western tradition, an engagement is initiated with an engagement ring and sometimes an engagement party to announce the engagement. The bride then starts preparing for the wedding. She looks for a venue and a dress. She prepares the invitations and picks out the flowers. The goal in both traditions is for the bride to prepare for the wedding day.

The bride of Christ waits for His glorious return. In the waiting, the bride prepares for the wedding. How does she prepare? She clothes herself in righteousness. She beautifies herself with the spirit of holiness. And she keeps her light lit so that she is always ready for His coming. We are the light of the world, a lamp that should not be hidden. A wise (prudent) bride does the internal and external work according to the covenant terms and lives always in anticipation of Christ's coming. The foolish bride doesn't believe He will come soon because she has been waiting for and hearing of His coming for so long; therefore, she is not preparing herself for His return.

As Christians, we are to prepare ourselves so as to present ourselves in the most beautiful way for our Bridegroom. Our Bridegroom is in heaven preparing a place for us, and when He comes back to get us, we are to be a glorious people (church) who have prepared ourselves for Him. Christ died so that He could reconcile the church to Himself as a bride in all her beauty. He died so that the church (His body) could be holy and without fault, with no evil or sin.

Just think about those in the armed forces who are preparing for war. They don't know when a terrorist is going to attack, but they are preparing for it so that at any time, they are ready. And what happens if they are not ready? Read Matthew 24:42–48. The Bible calls a person an evil servant who says in their heart, "My master is taking his time [he will not return for a long while]" (Matt. 24:48 AMP). We are in the army of the Lord. We are a warrior bride, and we should be preparing for the return of King Jesus.

Jesus's last words on the cross before He died were "It is finished" (John 19:30). The Passion Translation states, "When he had sipped the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished, my bride!' Then he bowed his head and surrendered his spirit to God." The Hebrew root *ka'lal*, which means "to complete, make perfect, or finish,"<sup>1</sup> is the same root of the word for bride: *kallah*.

Therefore, “finished,” which means a debt is paid in full, communicates a beautiful truth. Not only did Jesus pay our debt of sin and complete the work of salvation, but the new covenant (contract) He presented before His bride was also signed and sealed. His death made it possible for Him both to purchase His bride and to go prepare a place for her. No, Jesus doesn’t have to do anything else. He did it all, but now we have to not only trust in His love but also live a life in Him on earth until He comes back.

Take a moment right here to partake of Communion with your Bridegroom. Get a cracker or a piece of bread and some juice. Repent of your sins, thank Him for His promises and faithfulness to you, and rededicate yourself to Him. Soak in this song while taking Communion:  
<https://youtu.be/Xx1MjhzKcYw>.

# 3

## C = Covenant of Marriage

### *Our Marital Responsibilities as a Bride*

This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will imprint my laws upon their heart, and on their mind I will inscribe them [producing an inward change].

Hebrews 10:16 AMP

In this chapter, we focus on recalibrating our lives according to the Word of God. We are no longer bound to the old covenant; we have a new covenant that gives life and helps us to live a new life in Christ. When we do (act, perform, execute) the Word, it trains us in righteousness (to live right before God), it sanctifies us (makes us holy), it purifies us (cleanses us), and it transforms us (changes us inwardly). The Word shows us who we are and what we can do in Christ. We cannot be hearers only of the Word; we must be doers of the Word (James 1:22–25). His Word should be imprinted on our hearts and our minds; a renewed mind produces a new person.

Again, according to the *ketubah*, the bride had responsibilities. We discussed some of them in chapter 2. In this chapter, we will mainly discuss how she trained to become the bride. The bride entered into a state (*kiddushin*) in which she was sanctified (set apart/holy) just for her bridegroom. *Kadosh* is a Hebrew word for “holy.” As Christ’s bride, we are to move to an elevated state—a state of holiness while we wait for our Bridegroom to return.

In the Western world, we mainly prepare for our wedding day externally, by picking out invitations, buying a wedding dress and accessories, finding a place to honeymoon, and so on. We also want to look our best on the outside. Usually during the *ketubah* signing, there was a

veiling (*bedeken*). This was when the bridegroom looked at the bride and then put a veil over her face, signifying that his love for her was because of her inner beauty. As Christians, we are to prepare for our Bridegroom internally (spiritually). “Let your true beauty come from your inner personality, not a focus on the external. For lasting beauty comes from a gentle and peaceful spirit, which is precious in God’s sight and is much more important than the outward adornment of elaborate hair, jewelry, and fine clothes” (1 Pet. 3:3 TPT).

So how do we prepare internally as we wait for our Bridegroom’s return? We develop a relationship with Him and strive to become more like Him. John 1:1 tells us, “In the beginning [before all time] was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God Himself” (AMP). So what better way to get to know (*yada*) Him than through praying and reading His Word; what better way to become like Him than through obeying His Word; what better way to thank Him for what He has done than through praising Him; what better way to train ourselves than through fasting. These things and more allow a transforming process to start, because what we give our attention to, we become. Please note that we are being religious if we do these things at church only. They become relational when we do these things daily because of our love for Him. You can’t develop a deeper relationship with someone if you don’t spend time with them. Below are some Scripture passages that speak to why we should do these things.

“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17 ESV). Prayer is spending time with the Lord. In prayer, we not only talk to Him but also listen to what He has to say. We do not merely ask Him for things; this is a time when we also seek to know what is on His heart.

“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” (Col. 3:16 ESV). Singing to (praising) the Lord is thanking the Lord for what He has done. Worshiping Him is acknowledging who He is and giving Him access to live through us. Dancing before Him is honoring Him.

“God has transmitted his very substance into every Scripture, for it is God-breathed. It will empower you by its instruction and correction, giving you the strength to take the right direction and lead you deeper into the path of godliness. Then you will be God’s servant, fully mature and perfectly prepared to fulfill any assignment God gives you” (2 Tim. 3:16–17 TPT). The Word gives us instructions on how to live a new life in



Christ. He didn't die just to save us but to help us live a life predestined before time, for we were made in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26).

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Josh. 1:8 ESV). Yes, knowing the Word is great, but it has no power if we do not let it transform us. When facing difficulties and challenges, do you back away or back down, or do you move forward, knowing that “I can do all things through Christ” (Phil. 4:13)? To grow as a person and, more importantly, in Christ, we have to not only *use* the Word to overcome (i.e., addictions, offenses, challenges, tribulations, etc.) but also *do* the Word to become.

“But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days” (Luke 5:35). We should fast while Jesus is not with us here on the earth. Fasting helps to rid the flesh of things that may have a hold on us (i.e., television, drugs, alcohol, caffeine, etc.).

There are many Christian activities: water baptism, tithing, Communion, going to church, studying the Bible, serving in the church, volunteering to help the poor, and many more. These are wonderful things we should definitely do, but there are other disciplines we should do as well (i.e., journaling, confessing, meditating on Scripture to build our faith, practicing His presence, fellowshiping with others who believe, reading Christian books, taking Bible classes to grow in faith, and speaking in tongues to build our inner man [for those who believe]). These disciplines help the transformation process. Remember, the bride's main focus is on the internal things that prepare her for the Bridegroom's return. This is a time to focus inwardly. We don't just practice these things but have a heart that allows what we are learning and experiencing to change us inwardly. James 1:22–24 says, “But prove yourselves doers of the word [actively and continually obeying God's precepts], and not merely listeners [who hear the word but fail to internalize its meaning], deluding yourselves [by unsound reasoning contrary to the truth]. For if anyone only listens to the word without obeying it, he is like a man who looks very carefully at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he immediately forgets what he looked like” (AMP).

As you read the Word, make it personal. Ask the Lord what He wants to reveal to you as you are reading it. You can even sing it. According to Jonathan Petersen, “The Bible itself teaches us how we’re to approach God’s Word. It uses such vocabulary as ‘meditate’ (Psalm 1:2; Joshua 1:8), ‘reflect’ (2 Timothy 2:7), ‘look intently’ (James 1:25), ‘dwell’ (Colossians 3:16), ‘ponder’ (Psalm 119:95), ‘consider’ (Jeremiah 2:31), and even ‘eat’ (Jeremiah 15:16).”<sup>1</sup> Meditating on Scripture is a form of spiritual engagement.

Let’s take a *selah* moment to mediate on God’s Word:

You’re only truly happy when you walk in total integrity,  
walking in the light of God’s word.  
What joy overwhelms everyone who keeps the ways of God,  
those who seek him as their heart’s passion!  
They’ll never do what’s wrong  
but will always choose the paths of the Lord.  
God has prescribed the right way to live:  
obeying his laws with all our hearts.  
How I long for my life to bring you glory  
as I follow each and every one of your holy precepts!  
Then I’ll never be ashamed,  
for I take strength from all your commandments.  
I will give my thanks to you from a heart of love and truth.  
And every time I learn more of your righteous judgments,  
I will be faithful to all that your word reveals—  
so don’t ever give up on me! (Ps. 119:1–8 TPT)

To learn more about scriptural engagement, click here:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/scripture-engagement/main/practices>.

*Father, let Your Word penetrate my heart that I may not sin against You. Holy Spirit, help me to live a life that is pleasing and brings glory to God. I pray that I will know from experience a love so deep that nothing can separate me from You, my true love, my Lord. Amen.*

## Training in Righteousness

In 2 Timothy 4, Paul is teaching Timothy about living and training others in righteousness.

Be quick to abstain from senseless traditions and legends, but instead be engaged in the training of truth that brings righteousness. For athletic training only benefits you for a short season, but righteousness brings lasting benefit in everything; for righteousness contains the promise of life, for time [this earthly life—my addition] and eternity. Faithful is the Word, and everyone should accept him! . . . Simply be the example they need to see by being faithful and true in all that you do. Speak the truth and live a life of purity and authentic love as you remain strong in your faith. So until I come, be diligent in devouring the Word of God, be faithful in prayer, and in teaching the believers. Make all of this your constant meditation and make it real with your life so everyone can see that you are moving forward. Give careful attention to your spiritual life and every cherished truth you teach, for living what you preach will then release even more abundant life inside you and to all those who listen to you. (vv. 7–9, 12–16)

A bride's life is revealed by how she lives. The world calls Christians hypocrites because they don't see a difference between non-Christians and Christians. Now I have to admit that when you start out as a babe in Christ, there may not be much fruit (the character of God), but people should see it over time. No one starts out as a mature believer. Growing in Christ is a process that happens over time. Training in righteousness is a daily effort that leads to transformation, but only with the help of Holy Spirit.

For example, perhaps God shows you a character flaw (e.g., lying) or an act that is not pleasing to Him (e.g., sex outside of marriage). You personally want deliverance from it as well. You ask Holy Spirit for help, and when that training/testing is presented to you, you ask Holy Spirit to help you—and God always provides a way of escape (a way out). However, it is up to you whether you continue to do it or stop doing it (turn away from it). After failing many attempts in the beginning, you start to notice that you are succeeding, and then you find it easier to turn away from or stop doing the act more and more. This is basically leading to the death of self, your flesh.

## Put on the New Self

The reason you have to put to death the self (flesh) is so that you can put on the new self (spirit). This is what is called regeneration, and it is a radical change. Christians use the term “born again” based on the standpoint that once you give your life to Christ, you are born again. However, that is just the beginning. Being born again is a rebirth. You move from living life according to the dictates of your flesh (which is sinful in nature and you were born with) to living a new life (which is spiritual and holy), which you live by the Spirit of God. The result is a transformed life that is being “made alive” (regenerated) by Christ. Jesus told Nicodemus that a person must be born again to see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). The Word of God teaches us how to live the born-again life.

Paul tells us throughout his Epistles what to take off and what to put on. In Ephesians 4:22–32, he tells us that

regarding your previous way of life, you put off your old self [completely discard your former nature], which is being corrupted through deceitful desires, and be continually renewed in the spirit of your mind [having a fresh, untarnished mental and spiritual attitude], and put on the new self [the regenerated and renewed nature], created in God’s image, [godlike] in the righteousness and holiness of the truth [living in a way that expresses to God your gratitude for your salvation].

Therefore, rejecting all falsehood [whether lying, defrauding, telling half-truths, spreading rumors, any such as these], speak truth each one with his neighbor, for we are all parts of one another [and we are all parts of the body of Christ]. Be angry [at sin—at immorality, at injustice, at ungodly behavior], yet do not sin; do not let your anger [cause you shame, nor allow it to] last until the sun goes down. And do not give the devil an opportunity [to lead you into sin by holding a grudge, or nurturing anger, or harboring resentment, or cultivating bitterness]. The thief [who has become a believer] must no longer steal, but instead he must work hard [making an honest living], producing that which is good with his own hands, so that he will have something to share with those in need. Do not let unwholesome [foul, profane, worthless, vulgar] words ever come out of your mouth, but only such speech as is good for building up others, according to the need and the occasion, so that it will be a blessing to those who hear [you speak]. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God [but seek to please Him], by whom you were sealed and marked [branded as God’s own] for the day of redemption [the final deliverance from the consequences of sin]. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor [perpetual animosity (strong dislike/hatred), resentment, strife, fault-finding] and slander be put away from you, along with every kind of malice [all

spitefulness, verbal abuse, malevolence (mean)]. Be kind and helpful to one another, tender-hearted [compassionate, understanding], forgiving one another [readily and freely], just as God in Christ also forgave you. (AMP)

In Colossians 3:5–10, 12–17, he tells us,

So put to death and deprive of power the evil longings of your earthly body [with its sensual, self-centered instincts] immorality, impurity, sinful passion, evil desire, and greed, which is [a kind of] idolatry [because it replaces your devotion to God]. Because of these [sinful] things the [divine] wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience [those who fail to listen and who routinely and obstinately disregard God's precepts], and in these [sinful things] you also once walked, when you were habitually living in them [without the knowledge of Christ]. But now rid yourselves [completely] of all these things: anger, rage, malice, slander, and obscene (abusive, filthy, vulgar) language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, for you have stripped off the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new [spiritual] self who is being continually renewed in true knowledge in the image of Him who created the new self. . . . So, as God's own chosen people, who are holy [set apart, sanctified for His purpose] and well-beloved [by God Himself], put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience [which has the power to endure whatever injustice or unpleasantness comes, with good temper]; bearing graciously with one another, and willingly forgiving each other if one has a cause for complaint against another; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so should you forgive. Beyond all these things put on and wrap yourselves in [unselfish] love, which is the perfect bond of unity [for everything is bound together in agreement when each one seeks the best for others]. Let the peace of Christ [the inner calm of one who walks daily with Him] be the controlling factor in your hearts [deciding and settling questions that arise]. To this peace indeed you were called as members in one body [of believers]. And be thankful [to God always]. Let the [spoken] word of Christ have its home within you [dwelling in your heart and mind—permeating every aspect of your being] as you teach [spiritual things] and admonish and train one another with all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do [no matter what it is] in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus [and in dependence on Him], giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (AMP)

Hence, the saints are said to partake of the divine nature, which is not partaking of Christ's essence but His image (2 Pet. 1:1). Herein is the saints' holiness, when they are lively pictures of

God. They bear the image of God's meekness, mercifulness, heavenliness; they are of the same judgment with God, of the same disposition; they love what He loves and hates what He hates.

Believers have to take off the old and put on the new self. Take a couple of minutes and ask God one thing He desires for you to take off and one thing He desires for you to put on. For example, perhaps there is an addiction, sin, or idol that He wants to free you from and a character trait such as self-control, humility, or patience that He wants to help you put on. Once you hear what He is saying, pray for His help and remain conscientious so He can continue to guide you until you walk in freedom and bear fruit.

“As God's obedient children, never again shape your lives by the desires that you followed when you didn't know better. Instead, shape your lives to become like the Holy One who called you. For Scripture says: ‘You are to be holy, because I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:14–16 TPT). The footnote in the Passion Translation states, “Everything about God is holy. True holiness includes justice, mercy, truth, and righteousness. To be holy is to be absolutely devoted to God in all that we do, demonstrating who He is to the world.” Holiness surrounds God's throne, and we are seated with Him in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). The Hebraic concept of holiness is “set apart”—that is, we are a people set apart for God. Grace has imbedded holiness into our lives, yet we are to make right choices and to yield to Christ and to God's Word as Holy Spirit lives in us. Holiness is not outward actions we put on but how we live our lives before a holy God. Christ is our holiness (1 Cor. 1:30). As the bride of Christ, we are to live holy lives, set apart, to give glory to God. This is a life of discipline, focus, and attention to matters of righteous living.

## **The Mystery of Marriage**

Ephesians 5:22–33 gives us a snapshot of a husband and a wife and how they are to treat each other:

For wives, this means being supportive to your husbands like you are tenderly devoted to our Lord, for the husband provides leadership for the wife, just as Christ provides leadership for his church, as the Savior and Reviver of the body. In the same way the church is devoted to Christ, let the wives be devoted to their husbands in everything.

And to the husbands, you are to demonstrate love for your wives with the same tender devotion that Christ demonstrated to us, his bride [church]. For he died for us, sacrificing himself to make us holy and pure, cleansing us through the showering of the pure water of the Word of God. All that he

does in us is designed to make us a mature church for his pleasure, until we become a source of praise to him—glorious and radiant [The Greek word for “radiance” (*endoxos*) can also mean “gorgeous,” “honorable,” “esteemed,” “splendid,” “infused with glory.”], beautiful and holy, without fault or flaw.

Husbands have the obligation of loving and caring for their wives the same way they love and care for their own bodies, for to love your wife is to love your own self. No one abuses his own body, but pampers it—serving and satisfying its needs. That is exactly what Christ does for his church! He serves and satisfies us as members of his body.

For this reason, a man is to leave his father and his mother and lovingly hold to his wife, since the two have become joined as one flesh (one person) [we too are to become one with Christ—my addition]. Marriage is the beautiful design of the Almighty, a great and sacred mystery—meant to be a vivid example of Christ and his church. So every married man should be gracious to his wife just as he is gracious to himself. And every wife should be tenderly devoted to her husband. (TPT)

This passage describes the mystery of marriage—the same tender devotion that Christ demonstrated to us, His bride. Jesus is our Husband. Our earthly marriages should reflect the spiritual marriage covenant we have with Christ. How many of us can say that marriage is hard? I have left my husband numerous times, but God always showed me not to forsake the covenant with my husband because He would never forsake His covenant with me. It is ironic how I thought I was so mature as a believer, but my husband has demonstrated Christ love in our marriage for over twenty-five years—not once has he left me, nor has his love for me diminished even in my craziness. I thank the Lord for Lewis, and I thank the Lord for being my great Husband. I have experienced such *agape* (unconditional) love from both of my husbands.

Some of you might be divorced or single. It is okay because you have a Husband who will never leave you. His love is unconditional, His arms are always open, His ears are always attentive to your voice, His heart is always full of compassion toward you, and His desires for you are great.

# 4

## **A = Authority to Reign**

### *The Power to Reign with Him*

Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 16:18–19

As children of God and the bride of Christ, we need to recalibrate our thinking regarding our position in Him. We have been given the keys of the Kingdom. We are heirs to the throne. We sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. We are co-heirs with Jesus. We are a royal priesthood. The rest of the Scripture passage quoted above states, “Whatever you bind [forbid, declare to be improper and unlawful] on earth will have [already] been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose [permit, declare lawful] on earth will have [already] been loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:19 AMP). We are not beggars or paupers; we are children of the King, and we reign (do life) from above. Therefore, reposition yourself.

In ancient Jewish times, once the bride gave her consent to the marriage, the bridegroom gave her gifts (*mattan*), something of value before he left her. The gifts were given to help her remember that the bridegroom was coming back for her. The dowry (bride price) was different from these gifts. The dowry was paid to the family because of her value to the family. Jesus is our dowry. His death is the price He paid for us. Jesus has already extended His love toward us and asked us for our hand in marriage—to become one with Him. (Men, please don’t bring this down to a natural level where you feel uncomfortable with thinking of yourself as a bride, because if you do, you will miss the spiritual connection to Jesus.) Since we already agreed to



the new covenant terms (*ketubah*) and said yes to Jesus, we are, by Jewish tradition, officially married. In our case, we are married to a King, and not just any king, but King Jesus.

## **He's Put a Ring on It**

When you say, "Yes, Jesus," all that belongs to Him also belongs to you.

Through our union with Christ we too have been claimed by God as his own inheritance. Before we were even born, he gave us our destiny; that we would fulfill the plan of God who always accomplishes every purpose and plan in his heart. . . . And because of him, when you who are not Jews [you and me—my addition] heard the revelation of truth, you believed in the wonderful news of salvation. Now we have been stamped with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. He is given to us like an engagement ring is given to a bride, as the first installment of what's coming! He is our hope-promise of a future inheritance which seals us until we have all of redemption's promises and experience complete freedom—all for the supreme glory and honor of God! (Eph. 1:11, 13–14 TPT)

The giving of a ring is significant. When Pharaoh designated Joseph as his minister of finance, he handed him the royal ring (Gen. 41:42). When King Ahasuerus gave Haman his royal signet ring, Haman used it to put into law that all the Jewish people would be killed on a certain date. When Esther, the king's wife, asked the king to reverse the law, he said he couldn't because the law was sealed with his signet ring. However, the king then gave Mordecai the power to issue a new law by handing over his royal signet ring (Esther 3:10; 8:2). And remember, when the prodigal son left his father and took all his inheritance and then returned with a repentant heart, his father restored him with a ring (Luke 15:22).

A ring is symbolic of authority and honor. We, the bride of Christ, have been given the power and authority to manage and steward the earth until our Bridegroom (Jesus) returns.

## **The Gifts of God**

In the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, the gifts given to the bride had to be of great value to the bridegroom (they had to cost him something) so that she would know for sure that he was coming back for her. Holy Spirit is the greatest gift our Bridegroom could give us, for Holy Spirit helps us live a life full of power in Him. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go

unto my Father” (John 14:12). When a bride accepted the gifts, she received all that her bridegroom had to offer. In the same way, we receive everything our Bridegroom has to offer. “Every spiritual [given by the Holy Spirit—AMPC] blessing in the heavenly realm has already been lavished upon us as a love gift from our wonderful heavenly Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus—all because he sees us wrapped into Christ. This is why we celebrate him with all our hearts!” (Eph. 1:3 TPT). Our lives as Christians, after we receive Holy Spirit, should drastically change. We are changed from natural (human) beings into new creatures in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17) as we live a powerful life in the Spirit.

Before Jesus left, He told His disciples, “Listen carefully: I am sending the Promise [The Aramaic reads “the kingdom” or “rule.” The Father’s promise was the coming of Holy Spirit, who would live in them and empower them.] of My Father upon you; but you are to remain in the city [of Jerusalem] until you are clothed (fully equipped) with power from on high” (Luke 24:49 AMP). In Acts 2, we read, “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it *filled* all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all *filled* with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (vv. 1–4, emphasis added). The Passion Translation footnote states that “they were all filled and equipped with the Holy Spirit and were inspired to speak in tongues—empowered by the Spirit to speak in languages they had never learned!” (v. 4). Two Greek words are used here for “filled.” The first is *pleroo* (v. 2), which means “filled inwardly.” The second is *pletho* (v. 4), which means “filled outwardly” or “furnished and equipped.” This was the anointing of the Spirit. Every believer needs the filling of the Spirit both inwardly for life and outwardly for ministry.

The Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom where Jesus reigns as King and those who are royal heirs (engaged to Him) reign with Him on the earth. They will also reign with Him after He returns. As with any kingdom, those subjected to the Kingdom serve the King and live according to protocols. That is why God tells us to seek His Kingdom first and then everything He has will be given to us, but it will be given according to His Kingdom’s ways and protocols. The Kingdom of God is not a geographical place on the earth—it is made up of believers who follow Jesus and are in sync with Him through the working of Holy Spirit. Take a look at this powerful

teaching—the Kingdom of God Defined by Dr. Myles Munroe from June 20, 2017

<https://youtu.be/o6EIWJOO7qY>.

If you don't know, Holy Spirit is our greatest gift. "It's in Christ that you, once you heard the truth and believed it (this Message of your salvation), found yourselves home free—signed, sealed, and delivered by the Holy Spirit. This down payment from God is the first installment on what's coming, a reminder that we'll get everything God has planned for us, a praising and glorious life" (Eph. 1:13–14 MSG). Does this mean we won't have trouble, challenges, or tribulations? Absolutely not! But in Him, we shall overcome.

We have also received other gifts. The following Scripture passages describe just some of the other gifts we have received (of course there are many more).

Gift of Jesus: "For this is how much God loved the world—he gave his one and only, unique Son as a gift. So now everyone who believes in him will never perish but experience everlasting life" (John 3:16 TPT). "Jesus replied, 'If you only knew who I am and the gift that God wants to give you—you'd ask me for a drink, and I would give to you living water'" (John 4:10 TPT).

Gift of eternal life: "The payoff for a life of sin is death, but God is offering us a free gift—eternal life through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, the Liberating King" (Rom. 6:23 VOICE).

Gift of grace: "But the free gift of grace bears no resemblance to Adam's crime that brings a death sentence to all of humanity; in fact, it is quite the opposite. For if the one man's sin brings death to so many, how much more does the gift of God's radical grace extend to humanity since Jesus the Anointed offered His generous gift" (Rom. 5:15 VOICE).

## **Reign from the Heavenly Throne**

We know that the Father reigns over all nations and sits on the holy throne (Ps. 47:8). Psalm 102:12 tells us that Jesus sits on the heavenly throne as well: "But then I remember that you, O Lord, still sit enthroned as King over all! The fame of your name will be revealed to every generation" (TPT). The word *enthroned* means "to seat in a place associated with a position of authority or influence."<sup>1</sup> Jesus left the earth and is sitting at the right hand of His Father until it is

time for Him to return to get us. While He is there and we are here, we are not just waiting and wondering when He will return; we are ruling and reigning until He returns. “He raised us up with Christ the exalted One, and we ascended with him into the glorious perfection and authority of the heavenly realm, for we are now co-seated as one with Christ!” (Eph. 2:6 TPT).

Now, you have to become like a child to comprehend and really walk in that position. When you pray, seek those things above and pray from a Kingdom perspective (not based on what you see and hear but by faith based on who you are, where you’re seated, and what authority you have been given). We don’t pray from an earthly perspective but from a Kingdom perspective, knowing who Christ is (our Great High Priest), knowing the place we can enter into where we can find grace (the throne of grace), and knowing what we wear when we go before Him (the robe of righteousness). Our posture when entering into prayer is to be relational, and we have to hear what He is telling us in that secret place.

Great High Priest: “Therefore, it was essential that He had to be made like His brothers (mankind) in every respect, so that He might [by experience] become a merciful and faithful High Priest in things related to God, to make atonement (propitiation) for the people’s sins [thereby wiping away the sin, satisfying divine justice, and providing a way of reconciliation between God and mankind]” (Heb. 2:17 AMP). “Now the main point of what we have to say is this: we have such a High Priest, [the Christ] who is seated [in the place of honor] at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty (God) in heaven” (Heb. 8:1 AMP). We have a Great High Priest sitting at the right hand of the Father interceding for us.

The throne of grace: “So now we come freely and boldly to where love is enthroned, to receive mercy’s kiss and discover the grace we urgently need to strengthen us in our time of weakness [tribulation]” (Heb. 4:16 TPT). We can approach the throne of grace to seek strength during our struggles with sin and the challenges we face and to receive the comfort we need.

The robe of righteousness: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels” (Isa. 61:10). The bride wears the robe of righteousness. Revelation 19:8 tells us what this means: “She has been permitted to

dress in fine linen, dazzling white and clean—for the fine linen signifies the righteous acts of the saints [the ethical conduct, personal integrity, moral courage, and godly character of believers]” (AMP). “Kings and leaders despise wrongdoing, for the true authority to rule and reign is built on a foundation of righteousness” (Prov. 16:12 TPT).

“We look away from the natural realm and we fasten our gaze onto Jesus who birthed faith within us and who leads us forward into faith’s perfection. His example is this: Because his heart was focused on the joy of knowing that you would be his, he endured the agony of the cross and conquered its humiliation, and now sits exalted at the right hand of the throne of God!” (Heb. 12:2 TPT).

## **Delegated Authority**

In the beginning, God created humans not only in His image but also for us to be fruitful, to rule, and to have dominion (Gen. 1:26–28). Adam gave up that right, but Jesus died so that we now are restored to our place of being fruitful, ruling, and having dominion. Christ “alone is the leader and source of everything needed in the church. God has put everything beneath the authority of Jesus Christ and has given him the highest rank above all others” (Eph. 1:22 TPT). Then Jesus delegated that authority to us. “Jesus said, ‘I know. I saw Satan fall, a bolt of lightning out of the sky. See what I’ve given you? Safe passage as you walk on snakes and scorpions, and protection from every assault of the Enemy. No one can put a hand on you. All the same, the great triumph is not in your authority over evil, but in God’s authority over you and presence with you. Not what you do for God but what God does for you—that’s the agenda for rejoicing’” (Luke 10:18–20 MSG).

However, we often don’t walk and act as if we have been given this authority. As children of God, we don’t realize all that we have and what is available to us. Christians still believe the devil has dominion and that we fight from an earthly, defensive position. My pastor always says that the number one crime in the natural and the spiritual world is identity theft. We have allowed the enemy to keep our eyes blinded and our ears deaf to who we are and what we can do as children of God. The enemy deceived Adam and Eve in the garden by giving them partial truth, and he is still doing the same thing—his modus operandi (method of operation) hasn’t

changed. Satan has Christians believing that because he is the prince of the power of the air, we should be afraid. He is only in control of the world system and those who are unbelievers in the world. He is not in control of us (believers) who are born again and live in the Kingdom of God. And we definitely should not be afraid of him since we are children of God who have delegated power and authority over him.

Psalms 8:6 states, “You have delegated to them mastery over all you have made, making everything subservient to their authority, placing earth itself under the feet of your image-bearers” (TPT). Colossians 1:13 tells us that God “hath delivered us from the power [NIV says “dominion”] of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” Again, Luke 10:19 tells us, “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you” (NIV). And Ephesians 6:12 states, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (NIV). The world is dark, yet we have authority and power over darkness. We reign because of Jesus Christ and our position in Him. We are seated in heavenly places beyond the first and second realm (where Satan rules). Satan is literally under our feet if we take our position—seated with Christ in heavenly places.

God revealed to me that my spiritual authority is similar to my authority as a contracting officer. I have been delegated authority to purchase goods and services up to \$10 million on behalf of the government. However, if I were to purchase something over \$10 million, even by a penny, I would be in trouble because I don’t have authority to exceed that limit. Unlike the authority given to me by the government, there are no limits to the authority God has given us. We have been given unlimited power and unlimited authority.

So the question becomes “Why do we have this authority?” Romans 8:19–24 gives us an answer:

The entire universe is standing on tiptoe, yearning to see the unveiling of God’s glorious sons and daughters! For against its will the universe itself has had to endure the empty futility resulting from the consequences of human sin. But now, with eager expectation, all creation longs for freedom from its slavery to decay and to experience with us the wonderful freedom coming to God’s children. To this day we are aware of the universal agony and groaning of creation, as if it were in the contractions of labor for childbirth. And it’s not just creation. We who have already experienced

the firstfruits of the Spirit also inwardly groan as we passionately long to experience our full status as God's sons and daughters—including our physical bodies being transformed. For this is the hope of our salvation. (TPT)

There is a dark, sinful world with people who are depressed, hurting, sick, enslaved, hating themselves and others. They are looking for people who can help them. God wants to use us, His sons and daughters, to free them, to give them hope, to show them love, to heal them, and to help deliver them. We have been given authority to do such things as sons and daughters of God when we partner with Him.

In a world of 7.5 billion people, there are approximately 2.2 billion Christians. Therefore, 5.3 billion people will go to hell and never experience the love of Jesus unless we become true sons and daughters. And even though there are 2.2 billion Christians, they are some who still need Jesus in regard to hope, deliverance, and freedom. People will know Jesus only if we show Him and use our authority over the power of darkness to help them. We are who the world is looking for, Christ in us the hope of glory.

I remember praying for human trafficking and yelling at God, “Why don't you do something?” He yelled back, “Why don't you do something?” We can no longer sit back as Christians and believe that our only responsibilities are to go to church on Sundays and to be kind to others while we live within our comfort zones (home, work/school, and hanging out with family and friends). We should be maturing in our walk with Jesus so that people see Christ in us and experience Him through us.

The new covenant is Jesus working through a new humanity of people (those who are in Christ Jesus) to liberate the world from evil (Satan and his demons). We were not created to live according to the world; we are a people who are different and who are to walk in the ways of the Lord as He did in times past—casting out demons, laying hands on the sick, delivering those who are in bondage. “Now you understand that I have imparted to you all my authority to trample over his kingdom. You will trample upon every demon before you and overcome every power Satan possesses. Absolutely nothing will be able to harm you as you walk in this authority” (Luke 10:19 TPT).

Jesus did the hard work for us. He was the firstfruit of all God's sons and daughters to defeat the enemy and to reign as the Son. God gave us dominion in the beginning, but Adam gave it away to Satan. When Jesus defeated Satan in Sheol, He took back the authority. Jesus's

death, burial, and resurrection restored the glory, honor, and dominion back to God's creation (us), but we have to exercise that authority and know the rights we have been given. God told me, "The keys of the kingdom have been given to you. Go forth and reign."

Satan is after our authority. Just like with Adam and Eve, he is looking for those who don't know their authority or who will willingly give up their authority. I have had several dreams about coming against the enemy, and I defeated him each time by knowing my authority (as a daughter in Christ). I remember one dream in which a man got real close to me and reached out to touch me with his index finger. I looked him straight in the eye and said, "You can't touch me," and he backed away. I didn't have to yell or speak in tongues; I just said it in my natural voice and by the authority given to me. God gave me that dream to show me the authority we already have in Him. In other dreams, I defeated the enemy with the name Jesus, by the blood of Jesus, and in the authority of Jesus. Jesus defeated the rulers and powers of the dark spiritual world. With the cross, He won the victory over them all and led them away, as defeated and powerless prisoners for the whole world to see. Jesus has now turned over His authority and power to us so that we can continue to do greater works than He did in defeating them (John 14:12).



# 5

## **L = Living a Kingdom Lifestyle**

### *Kingdom Protocols*

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness [His way of doing things], and all these things will be added to you.

Matthew 6:33 ESV

God's ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. We have to recalibrate our way of doing life. Any kingdom has a ruler and its own rules that citizens must abide by. The same is true of the Kingdom of God. We cannot live by the rules of both the kingdom of this world and the Kingdom of God. We have to live by the protocols of the Kingdom of God. Let's start living from a Kingdom perspective. When we gave our lives to Christ, we agreed to live a Kingdom lifestyle according to Kingdom principles and protocols. Therefore, we must reprogram our lives and live by His protocols. Those who sign up to serve in the military are programmed to think and behave differently. The same is true for those of us who said yes to being a Christian. We are to live a different lifestyle. We don't become saved and continue to live the same lifestyle. We don't just tag ourselves "Christian." We actually have to become a completely new person.

According to the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, the bridegroom left the bride for a period of time to go back to his father's house to prepare a home for them. During this separation, the bridegroom was busy. But what was the bride doing while waiting for his return? She was preparing for his return. Jonathan Cahn's book *The Book of Mysteries* states, "So these are now the days of the separation. The Groom is in His house, heaven. And we, as the bride, are in our house, this world. You're still in the same tent, this present world. Things around you may

look the same and feel the same. Your life, your circumstances may look unchanged. But something very big has changed . . . you. It is not the tent that has changed, or your world, but you. And you are no longer of the world. You're in the world, but no longer of it. You no longer belong to your circumstances, nor to your past, nor to your sins and limitations. You don't belong to the world. You belong to the Bridegroom. You're free. You're the *calah!*"<sup>1</sup>

As we wait for our Bridegroom Jesus to return, we must live a Kingdom lifestyle here and now and prepare for our future with our King. To live a Kingdom lifestyle is to be emancipated from the world. We have been conditioned by the world because we have lived in it for so long and we have been taught traditions and have received knowledge from men. For example, the Baby Boom generation grew up with stability that came from good government jobs, and they taught this way of life to my generation. My generation is trying to teach it to the next generation. But this current generation wants to do a new thing. The old generation may not move because of fear, because it's uncomfortable, because it's not the norm. In the same way, God wants to do a new thing. If we can renew our minds, become emancipated from the world, and live a new way of life, we, as followers of Christ, can do great things.

Living the same way we did before we accepted Jesus hurts God. God is saying, "I am longing for My children to grow up. There is so much more. You haven't seen the things that I have prepared for those who love Me and obey Me. You are not even living at 10 percent. Kingdom living takes total transformation. Life in Me doesn't stop at salvation. The Kingdom is a way of life."

## **A Renewed Mind**

A renewed mind thinks like the Father. "And do not be conformed to this world [any longer with its superficial values and customs], but be transformed and progressively changed [as you mature spiritually] by the renewing of your mind [focusing on godly values and ethical attitudes], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His plan and purpose for you]" (Rom. 12:2 AMP).

I heard Carolyn Lief say that the brain is designed to use the least amount of energy. That is why it is so hard to change our lives and habits. If we create pathways of new ways of thinking, we can change our lives and habits. Listen to "Clothed in His Presence with Graham Cooke." He actually teaches believers how to change their habits: <https://youtu.be/02wZAuTTTvI>.

So if you think you are not worthy of love, then to renew your mind, you could watch YouTube videos that show you and motivate you to know that you are loved. You can do a Bible word search on how much God loves you and meditate on those passages. Or just show love to others, and you will reap what you sow. You have to stop focusing on what you used to believe and do something different. When you do something different for at least forty days, you should start seeing something new in you. But you are going to have to keep it up. It's so easy to return to the old ways because we are lazy creatures by habit.

This process works for any change you want to implement in your life. You may have to stop watching the news, certain television programs, or certain movies if they are interfering with your ability to grow and mature in Christ. My problem was lust. I grew up watching so many lustful shows (i.e., *General Hospital*, *All My Children*, *Dallas*, *90210*) and movies. The Lord told me to stop watching anything that had sexual immorality in it, and when I did, the lustful desires no longer had control of me. The process took time. Change doesn't just happen overnight. We must intentionally work to renew our minds.

## **Becoming Emancipated from the World**

How backward is the world compared to heaven? We have been brainwashed and bamboozled to believe that Christians should go after the American Dream, when in reality, we should seek God's Kingdom first. To understand God's ways is to know His ways. Let's look at a story in the Bible.

The story of the rich young ruler is in all three Gospels (Matt. 19:16–30; Mark 10:17–31; Luke 18:18–30). The man is a perfect example of a person who has lived the American Dream and thinks he follows the commands of God. I want to turn this into a modern-day story.

There is a Christian who loves the Lord. They are a very successful entrepreneur. They don't really have time to participate in church activities, but they give to causes to help the poor. One day they decide to go to church. They feel the presence of God come over them—they have never really met Jesus. And in that place of worship, they are wondering whether or not they will be with Him for eternity. So they ask Jesus, "I am a generous giver, but is there anything else I can do?"

Jesus answers, "Yeah, I see that you are a pretty decent person. You know the Word and even obey it to some degree."

They start to brag just a little. “Yeah, I’ve been this way since I was a child.”

Jesus looks at them with such love and compassion and says, “There is one thing you lack.”

The entrepreneur says, “What, anything for you, I will do it.”

Jesus tells them to sell their business and give the proceeds to the poor and they will have treasure in heaven. “And after you do that, come and follow Me.”

The successful entrepreneur is sad and grieved because they have the riches of the world, they have the success they desired, they are living their best life, the American Dream. The entrepreneur is sad because they thought that by keeping some of God’s commandments (honoring their parents, not murdering, not stealing, etc.), they were good in the sight of God. They thought that success in the world and helping people were enough, but they weren’t.

God doesn’t want just your giving of money, your service in the church, your knowledge of the Bible. He wants you—your life, a relationship. The first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37).

If God told you to give up whatever is great to you, would you give it up? Would you be sad? Whatever has a hold on you is your god. If God has given you something to steward, He should be able to come back and ask for it. That includes a loved one, a ministry, a business, a gift or talent—it all belongs to God. If you are saddened by that, then you may have to ask yourself, “Who do I serve?” for a person cannot serve both God and mammon (an idol/a type of god) (Matt. 6:24). The lesson from the story of the rich young ruler is this: Jesus is saying, “Put down those things that come before God, those things that have become your god, and follow Me. If you do, you will have life with Me here and in eternity.”

Now, I missed a big part of this story, which is in the beginning of the story when the rich young ruler ran up to Jesus and asked, “Good teacher, what must I do?”

And Jesus said, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good—except God alone.”

Then they had a dialogue about obeying the commandments. Jesus taught him the lesson and then said, “Then come, follow Me.” Basically, He was saying, “Give up all that connects you to another god (or the world) and come follow Me. I will show you the way to the Father, who is the only one who is good.” Jesus was not declaring that He is good but that He is the way because He not only connects us to the Father but also shows us the way to God so that we can be with Him forever.

Jesus saw the young man saddened by what He told him. Then, using a hyperbole, He said:

“Listen. Do you understand how difficult it is for the rich to enter into heaven’s kingdom realm? In fact, it’s easier to stuff a heavy rope through the eye of a needle than it is for the wealthy to enter into God’s kingdom realm!” Stunned and bewildered, his disciples asked, “Then who in the world can possibly be saved?” Looking straight into their eyes, Jesus replied, “Humanly speaking, no one, because no one can save himself. But what seems impossible to you is never impossible to God!” Then Peter blurted out, “Here we are. We’ve given up everything to follow you. What reward will there be for us?” Jesus responded, “Listen to the truth: . . . anyone who has left behind their home and property, leaving family—brothers or sisters, mothers or fathers, or children—for my sake, they will be repaid a hundred times over and will inherit eternal life.” (Matt. 19:23–29 TPT)

It is impossible for us to enter the Kingdom of God on our own merits, but if we lay down all those things that we are holding on to as great in the world and follow Christ, we will have a great life here in this lifetime and in eternity.

“Don’t set the affections of your heart on this world or in loving the things of the world. The love of the Father and the love of the world are incompatible. For all that the world can offer us—the gratification of our flesh, the allurements of the things of the world, and the obsession with status and importance—none of these things come from the Father but from the world. This world and its desires are in the process of passing away, but those who love to do the will of God live forever” (1 John 2:15–17 TPT).

We must become emancipated from the world to live a Kingdom lifestyle.

## **A New Way of Life**

Again, children of God are to be separated from the world; we are to live a new way of life.

Romans 12:1–2 says:

So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you. (MSG)

And Matthew 3:2 states, “Repent [change your inner self—your old way of thinking, regret past sins, live your life in a way that proves repentance; seek God’s purpose for your life], for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (AMP).

We often think of repentance only in relation to salvation or when we have committed a sin. But repentance is also changing our old way (the world’s way) of thinking and acting. It is not just saying we’re sorry but having a change of mind, heart, attitude. It is the beginning of a new way of living, a new life in Christ. In your own strength, you cannot do it. But you can call on Jesus and Holy Spirit to help you in your weakness. This is a process in which you are conscious of wrongful acts, your focus is on pleasing the Father, and you rely on His help when you miss the mark.

Yes, it seems crazy that God would expect us to be free from this world and still live in it. People often say, “We live in the world but we are not of the world.” I never really knew what that meant until now. We can’t just say it; we have to actually live like that. For years, I thought I was crazy because I no longer wanted to watch television shows or movies like I used to. I no longer wanted to go places I used to go. I couldn’t explain it. But God was taking those desires from me; He was separating me from those things. Yes, I will still dance to or sing an old song, but the difference is that it is no longer in me; it doesn’t pull me back to my old lifestyle. Right now, I look at my life as living in a halfway house. I am no longer in prison to the world’s system, yet I am still being trained to live the Kingdom way so that I can be released to live in the world in the Kingdom way. And no, I am not the only one. I know many people who are also going through this transformation process with God. He wants all His sons and daughters to live the Kingdom way, although He knows that we will still struggle with the desires of the flesh and the intruder of sin. The apostle Paul explains it best:

I’m a mystery to myself, for I want to do what is right, but end up doing what my moral instincts condemn. And if my behavior is not in line with my desire, my conscience still confirms the excellence of the law. And now I realize that it is no longer my true self doing it, but the unwelcome intruder of sin in my humanity. For I know that nothing good lives within the flesh of my fallen humanity. The longings to do what is right are within me, but will-power is not enough to accomplish it. My lofty desires to do what is good are dashed when I do the things I want to avoid. So if my behavior contradicts my desires to do good, I must conclude that it’s not my true identity doing it, but the unwelcome intruder of sin hindering me from being who I really am. Through my

experience of this principle, I discover that even when I want to do good, evil is ready to sabotage me. Truly, deep within my true identity, I love to do what pleases God. But I discern another power operating in my humanity, waging a war against the moral principles of my conscience and bringing me into captivity as a prisoner to the “law” of sin—this unwelcome intruder in my humanity. What an agonizing situation I am in! So who has the power to rescue this miserable man from the unwelcome intruder of sin and death? I give all my thanks to God, for his mighty power has finally provided a way out through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One! So if left to myself, the flesh is aligned with the law of sin, but now my renewed mind is fixed on and submitted to God’s righteous principles. (Rom. 7:15–25 TPT)

## **How the Kingdom Works**

Have you ever heard of reverse engineering? It involves studying the parts of something to see how it was made and how it works so that you can make something that is like it. Basically, this is what the enemy has done. Everything about the world is a copy of the Kingdom. What we don’t realize is that we were trained to live based on the world’s standards, not God’s standards. Yes, even those of us who go to church! So now, God is trying to get us to live and think according to His Kingdom. Our lives need to be deconstructed, and we need to think differently. We need to renew our minds. We need to take off the old and put on the new. If you live as a Christian without a renewed mind set on living a Kingdom lifestyle, the things you do become just religious activities and you will miss Jesus. Remember, even the Pharisees and Sadducees knew the Word (the commandments), but they didn’t recognize the Word made flesh (Jesus), and they missed Him.

Jesus was telling His disciples about God’s plan and His upcoming death. Peter rebuked and spoke against what was to happen. Matthew 16:23 says, “Jesus turned to Peter and said, ‘Get out of my way, you Satan! You are an offense to me, because your thoughts are only filled with man’s viewpoints and not with the ways of God’” (TPT). As a child of God, we are to understand the ways of God. Our lives should no longer be dictated by man’s (the world’s) viewpoint or our own.

The Kingdom of God works by faith and obedience; it is what pleases the Father. “You see that a man is justified (pronounced righteous before God) through what he does and not alone through faith [through works of obedience as well as by what he believes]” (James 2:24 AMPC). This work is not a work unto salvation but a work unto the Lord, whom we should look like as

we live on the earth; it is our own transformational process. That is why it's important not just to know the Word of God but to do the Word of God (James 1:22). Doing the Word transforms us into His very image. He became the Word manifested, and so can we. The Word of God is our Kingdom protocol. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16 ESV).

## **The Heaven to Earth Principle**

"Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:9–10 AMP). The Amplified commentary states that when we pray this prayer, it is "a plea for God's kingdom to be inaugurated on earth including what God wishes to be done by the individual believer—His commands and precepts."

Believers have been trying to live for God from earth to heaven, while in actuality, we should be living from heaven to earth—if we are really seated with Christ on the throne. Yes, the finished work we have heard about for years is correct because God has already done what He is going to do. But He is trying to get His children to bring heaven to earth. God has given the keys of (heaven's) government and power to His Kingdom here on earth. Since He has already done everything, we must live from what is already finished—we must live from the future. Jonathan Caan, in *The Book of Mysteries*, teaches the mystery of the heaven-to-earth life.

You are NOT to live from:

Your present obstacles but from your future breakthrough

Not from the battle but from victory

Not from sorry but from joy

Not from tribulation but from overcoming

Not from fear but from faith

But you are to live from the finished work, from heaven's perspective

From the kingdom

From life yet to be

Even from the you yet to become<sup>2</sup>

We should move from heaven to earth. Everything we did in the past was based on earth to heaven. We used to pray for God to come down into our situation. Or we begged Him for something from an earthly standpoint. Or we understood who we are from a natural perspective



and not a heavenly perspective. This new orientation allows us to know who we are and how to accomplish things on the earth from a Kingdom perspective. For example, I don't beg for things because everything my Father has is mine. God doesn't come down to help us; instead, we go up and take our position and authority because we are sons and daughters in the Kingdom of God.

God gave me a word to share: "There is a point in life when we must move from sonship to kingship. We are at a spiritual place where we can now reign as kings and queens, no longer princes or princesses and definitely not paupers. It's time. The keys of the Kingdom have been given to us. God says, 'Go forth and reign.'" Then God gave me a vision of what that means. The new reorientation affects the earth because when we take our rightful place with our rightful identity, we will affect the earth. Remember, the entire earth is waiting for us (Rom. 8:19).

## **The Night and Day Principle**

Caan also mentions the secret of the night and day principle in his book. To sum it up, the world, which is evil and dark, moves from morning to night. Thereby, the world goes from light (morning) to darkness (night), which also means youth to aging, strength to weakness, and life to death. In the Kingdom, based on the Jewish tradition, each day starts at sunset and moves to morning—night to day. In Genesis, when God created the heavens and the earth, it was evening and then it was morning. Therefore, we should be living life from a place of darkness to light: despair to hope, weakness to strength, and death to life. "But you are God's chosen treasure—priests who are kings, a spiritual 'nation' set apart as God's devoted ones. He called you out of darkness to experience his marvelous light, and now he claims you as his very own. He did this so that you would broadcast his glorious wonders throughout the world" (1 Pet. 2:9 TPT).

I remember someone very dear to me wanting to commit suicide because of their present situation. Nothing was going right in their life, and they couldn't see beyond their current circumstances—they were in darkness. Probably a year or so later, their life completely turned around. Now they are so happy and closer to Father God. But what if they had committed suicide? This is why we shouldn't make a permanent decision based on one season in our lives. We all have struggles and challenges, and we can't see into the future. But we have to live from the future or, better yet, live because we know there is a better future. This is where faith comes in. "Now faith is the assurance (title deed, confirmation) of things hoped for (divinely

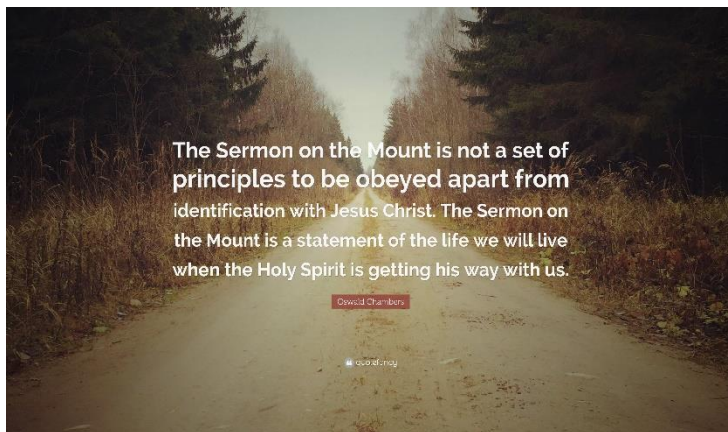
guaranteed), and the evidence of things not seen [the conviction of their reality—faith comprehends as fact what cannot be experienced by the physical senses]” (Heb. 11:1 AMP).

We all encounter challenges; however, our test becomes our testimony or our mess becomes our message. When we overcome challenges with the Lord’s help, we help others to overcome as well. I remember going through a challenge, and this Scripture passage helped me tremendously because it gave me hope: “For I consider [from the standpoint of faith] that the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is about to be revealed to us and in us!” (Rom. 8:18 AMP). This promise applies to the challenges we face currently and those we will face in the future. Never lose hope. Life is better with God.

## The Kingdom Lifestyle

We are no longer under the law, but we still have to be obedient to the law (instructions) in the Bible. Jesus said that He didn’t come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. The Sermon on the Mount is foundational for every believer.

The clear message is that our highest destiny is to live out the Kingdom principles here on earth and to fulfill God’s purpose for our lives. I pray that we will please God as we live and teach the message of Jesus, possess and display the character of Jesus, and walk in the deeds of



Jesus in full authority and with a demonstration of power.

Matthew 5:44–48 says:

However, I say to you, love your enemy, bless the one who curses you, do something wonderful for the one who hates you, and respond to the very ones who persecute you by praying for them.

For that will reveal your identity as children of your heavenly Father. He is kind to all by bringing the sunrise to warm and rainfall to refresh whether a person does what is good or evil. What reward do you deserve if you only love the loveable? Don’t even the tax collectors do that? How are you any different from others if you limit your kindness only to your friends? Don’t even the ungodly do that? Since you are children of a perfect Father in heaven, you are to be perfect [whole, complete, fully mature, lacking nothing, all-inclusive, well rounded] like him. (TPT)

I never put together that although we are to love our enemies and bless those who curse us, this is not just something we do as Christians. We do this because we are to display the very nature of God to them, and this is what He does daily even to people who don't love Him and who curse Him (refuse His love). I never saw it from His perspective. This is the way the Kingdom works—it operates from His very nature.

# 6

## I = Identity as a Believer

### *Representing the King on the Earth*

For he knew all about us before we were born and he destined us from the beginning to share the likeness of his Son. This means the Son is the oldest among a vast family of brothers and sisters who will become just like him.

Romans 8:29 TPT

God is intentional, and He operates through patterns. The ancient Jewish wedding tradition is a pattern to help us understand the new (marriage) covenant we have with Christ. Keeping this covenant in mind, we have to recalibrate our identity as Christians. Our identity is in Jesus. It comes from Him. His life is our prime example. Jesus is our pattern of how to live a life on the earth. The life of a Christian should be different from the life of a non-Christian. People should see the differences right away. You have truly become a son or daughter of God and the bride of Christ when you represent Him on the earth.

We all know that we have a purpose on this earth. We feel it in our very core. We continuously search for it, which is why the book *The Purpose Driven Life* was so successful. For some, when they can't find their purpose, they look for it in people, places, and things. Others who find it try to pursue it on their own without Christ. Can I tell you a secret? What you are seeking is not purpose; it's identity—because in Him is your true identity (*kallah*). In Jonathan Caan's book *The Book of Mysteries, calah (kallah)* doesn't just mean "bride"; it means "the perfect one." Matthew 5:48 tells us, "You, therefore, will be perfect [growing into spiritual maturity both in mind and character, actively integrating godly values into your daily life], as your heavenly Father is perfect" (AMP). Another word for perfect is mature. Jesus's life on earth

and what is written about it are our blueprint. Cahn states, “We’re born *to be* the bride, but we’re not born *as* the bride. We’re born imperfect and subject to imperfection throughout our lives. But we’re to become the calah, the perfect one . . . when we say yes to the Bridegroom . . . in the new birth. . . . Becoming a bride is about being joined to the Bridegroom. . . . The more we join our hearts and lives to God, the more we become the calah . . . the perfect one.”<sup>1</sup> You will never be fully satisfied until you are joined to Christ and know who you truly are in Him. And then you shall do greater works.

Our purpose and identity are not in talents, gifts/abilities, or occupations, although God gives us those things to help impact the world and bring people into the Kingdom. Our identity is in sonship and bridal love. We are sons and daughters of our heavenly Father, who has pledged our hand in marriage to His Son Jesus (Eph. 5:32).

King David was a man after God’s own heart but not because of his talent of playing the harp. Not because he had the courage to beat Goliath. It wasn’t his calling as a shepherd. Those things did not get him promoted to king. It was his love (heart) for God. God used his gifts to help him minister to King Saul and to write beautiful poetry/songs (psalms). Our gifts are used by God, but they don’t move God. I remember reading a book in which the author stated something like, “Does this world need gifted men and women, outwardly empowered? Or does it need men and women who are broken, inwardly transformed?” Let me say that the world needs people who are broken, inwardly transformed.

## **Know Your Father, Know Your Identity**

A person’s identity (DNA) comes from the father. When you allow God to be your Father, your identity comes from Him. It is valuable to see God as a gracious and loving Father because that is who He is. I remember someone saying, “How you see your Father determines what you receive from Him.” He gave the example of the servant who thought his master was harsh. Because of how the servant viewed the master, the servant wasn’t able to do what was right. Most of us have a view of our heavenly Father based on our lives—if our lives are good, He is a good God, but if we experience a lot of pain, He is not a good God, because why would He allow such things to happen to us?

I thank the Lord for blessing me with two awesome fathers who love(d) me deeply. Growing up, my bonus dad was strict, and I thought he was mean. He taught me hard, valuable

lessons as a kid that have stuck with me. And now as a mature woman, I know that I am who I am because of him. My biological father (who is deceased) was sweet and loving one minute and would curse and argue with you the next minute. I actually saw God that way as well—good one day and strict or mean the next. (Let me say that even in that craziness I knew without a shadow of a doubt that my biological father loved me, even during the times when he wasn't showing it.) In the same way, we have to know (*yada*) that our heavenly Father loves us with an everlasting love, even if He seems strict or we face hard times. Throughout the Bible, the majority of God's people faced horrible challenges, but that didn't mean God didn't love them.

And what more could I say to convince you? For there is not enough time to tell you of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. Through faith's power they conquered kingdoms and established true justice. Their faith fastened onto their promises and pulled them into reality! It was faith that shut the mouth of lions, put out the power of raging fire, and caused many to escape certain death by the sword. In their weakness their faith imparted power to make them strong! Faith sparked courage within them and they became mighty warriors in battle, pulling armies from another realm into battle array. Faith-filled women saw their dead children raised in resurrection power. Yet it was faith that enabled others to endure great atrocities. They were stretched out on the wheel and tortured, and didn't deny their faith in order to be freed, because they longed for a more honorable and glorious resurrection! Others were mocked and experienced the most severe beating with whips; they were in chains and imprisoned. Some of these faith champions were brutally killed by stoning, being sawn in two or slaughtered by the sword. These lived in faith as they went about wearing goatskins and sheepskins for clothing. They lost everything they possessed, they endured great afflictions, and they were cruelly mistreated. They wandered the earth living in the desert wilderness, in caves, on barren mountains and in holes in the earth. Truly, the world was not even worthy of them, not realizing who they were. These were the true heroes, commended for their faith, yet they lived in hope without receiving the fullness of what was promised them. (Heb. 11:32–39 TPT)

Their love for, trust in, and faith in God helped them endure the challenges. Some saw God deliver them, while others died knowing that their reward was so much greater because they would be with Him forever.

So don't question God's love for you. Don't try to bring a holy, good Father down to the level of what we experience here on earth. Don't base God's love on someone else and how they

treated you. Because no matter what evil or challenges you have experienced in this world, God is good!

The truth is that 99.9 percent of God’s children will suffer persecution, face tremendous challenges, and go through trials and tribulations. I believe no one is really exempt because we live in a fallen (evil) world. Even Jesus wasn’t exempt. “He prayed, ‘Abba, my Father, all things are possible for you. Please—don’t allow me to drink this cup of suffering! Yet what I want is not important, for I only desire to fulfill your plan for me’” (Mark 14:36 TPT). I can’t even imagine what would have happened if Jesus hadn’t suffered for us. Where would we be? His act of love allowed us to become children of God. “But those who embraced him [Jesus] and took hold of his name were given authority to become the children of God!” (John 1:12 TPT). “The Spirit that we have makes us God’s chosen children. And with that Spirit we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’” (Rom. 8:15 ERV). Take a moment to click here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzN4iuVnGQA> and listen to “Revealing Who He Is (Exhortation)” by Isi Igenegba.

## **Servant of the Lord**

“Whoever wishes to be first and most important among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:44–45 AMP). “Servant” in Greek means “one who gives himself up to another’s will, those whose service is used by Christ in extending and advancing His cause among men.”<sup>2</sup> Matthew 25 tells us this:

Then the King will say to those on his right [sheep], “Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what’s coming to you in this kingdom. It’s been ready for you since the world’s foundation. And here’s why:

I was hungry and you fed me,  
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,  
I was homeless and you gave me a room,  
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,  
I was sick and you stopped to visit,  
I was in prison and you came to me.”

Then those “sheep” are going to say, “Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?” Then the King will say, “I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.” (vv. 34–40 MSG)

Verses 41–46 reveal the complete opposite for those on the left. If you don’t do those things, then you are considered a goat (and that doesn’t mean “greatest of all time”) and you will not spend eternity with the Father. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Everybody can be great because anybody can serve.”<sup>3</sup>

The other part of the Greek definition is one “devoted to another to the disregard of one’s own interests.”<sup>4</sup> As the apostle Paul taught us, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:3–8 ESV). There is a cross (death of self) we all must bear to be a true servant of the Lord. “My old identity has been co-crucified with Messiah and no longer lives; for the nails of his cross crucified me with him. And now the essence of this new life is no longer mine, for the Anointed One lives his life through me—we live in union as one! My new life is empowered by the faith of the Son of God who loves me so much that he gave himself for me, and dispenses his life into mine!” (Gal. 2:20 TPT).

While our identity does not come from what we do as a servant—it is in sonship—we are called to serve God in some capacity. No matter what we do or where we work, He can use us. So let your light shine before men so they can see your good works and glorify God (Matt. 5:16).

## **Son/Daughter**

“Be imitators of God in everything you do, for then you will represent your Father as his beloved sons and daughters” (Eph. 5:1 TPT). Just like any parent, God wants us to mimic Him. He wants us to be filled with His thoughts, His love, His deeds, and His character, just like Jesus was: He



is “the exact expression of God’s true nature” (Heb. 1:3 TPT). Even the apostle Paul said, “I want you to pattern your lives after me, just as I pattern mine after Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1 TPT).

I love the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). The story’s main focus is on the one son who asks for his inheritance and then leaves his father’s house to live a wasteful and reckless life. He finally comes to his senses and realizes who his father is: “And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants” (15:17–19).

If you are a child of God and you feel unworthy because of the things you’ve done and believe that God will never forgive you, you are absolutely wrong. What did the prodigal son’s father do? He ran to him with open arms. “When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry” (Luke 15:20–24).

It is important to know that God is not angry with or mad at you. God is a forgiving Father who doesn’t hold grudges with His children. He is a safe place to run back to no matter what you have done. We are not perfect, which God already knows, so we can be free to make mistakes, knowing that He will forgive. We just need to repent and turn back to Him, as the prodigal son did.

I am also intrigued with the older son, who lived with the father and appeared to be “the good child.” He worked for his father diligently and never really asked for anything—he pretty much had everything at his disposal. He became angry at his father for throwing the lost son a party and giving him gifts, so he refused to go to the party and celebrate with them. “So his father came out and pleaded with him, ‘Come and enjoy the feast with us!’ The son said, ‘Father, listen! How many years have I been working like a slave for you, performing every duty you’ve asked as a faithful son? And I’ve never once disobeyed you. But you’ve never thrown a party for me because of my faithfulness. Never once have you even given me a goat that I could feast on

and celebrate with my friends like he's doing now. But look at this son of yours! He comes back after wasting your wealth on prostitutes and reckless living, and here you are throwing a great feast to celebrate—for him!” (Luke 15:28–30 TPT). There is a common thread between the sons. Do you know what it is? Both saw themselves as a servant of their father and not a son. Although we are called to serve God, He wants us to know that we are His sons and daughters— heirs to His Kingdom. “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:7).

You will never walk in the fullness of being God's son or daughter until you know that He loves you and wants to bless you. He doesn't want to bless you as the world defines blessings; rather, He wants to give you a life of freedom, deliverance, salvation, and peace. He is the Father who is waiting not only for His lost children to return but also for those who have been with Him all the time to realize what they have a right to. “The father said, ‘My son, you are always with me by my side. Everything I have is yours to enjoy’” (Luke 15:31 TPT). Do not become a prodigal son or daughter; do not always have your hands out, wanting the Father to give you something but not wanting to live with Him daily. And definitely don't be like the older son; don't fail to understand who you are or what you have as a son or daughter of our heavenly Father.

As Christians, we should know who we are—our identity in Him. If we know who we are, we won't pray for blessings because we know we are already blessed; we just need to receive our inheritance as sons and daughters of the King. Unfortunately, most of us are like the older brother. He didn't realize that he was already in possession of everything in the kingdom— whatever his father possessed was his. As he did, many of us look at our relationship with God from a performance mindset: “I have served you and I have never disobeyed.” Instead, we must look at it based on our covenant relationship with Him. He is saying, “All that I have is yours.”

Guess who is trying to keep you from knowing what you possess as a son or daughter? Yes, the devil, who roams around seeking whom he can destroy (1 Pet. 5:8). He knows those who are weak in faith, those who don't know their identity, those who really don't know their Lord God. The enemy also knows those who know their God. Acts 19:15 tells us, “One day, when they said those words, the demon in the man replied, ‘I know about Jesus, and I recognize Paul, but who do you think you are?’” (TPT). So both heaven and hell are asking the same question: Who do you think you are? If you don't know, hell (the enemy) will wreck your life. And if you do know,

you will plunder hell and will live courageously and powerfully right now on earth. Check out this scene from the Lion King <https://youtu.be/rFnKWnHT6QQ>.

## **Disciples of Jesus**

Our identity is in Christ. Our identity as a follower of Jesus is not based on our deeds (what we do); it is the foundation of who we are. We are to exemplify Him on the earth. A Christian is an exact replica of Jesus. We must learn from Jesus and strive to become more like Him. A disciple is a learner, a pupil. Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wants to follow in my footsteps he must give up all right to himself, take up his cross and follow me. For the man who wants to save his life will lose it; but the man who loses his life for my sake will find it. For what good is it for a man to gain the whole world at the price of his own soul? What could a man offer to buy back his soul once he had lost it?” (Matt. 16:24–26 Phillips). As a disciple of Jesus, we must identify with Christ regarding not only His image and likeness but also His cross.

We are required as Christians to live a disciplined life as we grow toward spiritual maturity and living holy lives that are pleasing to God. Grace was not given to us to be used as an excuse not to mature in the things of God; it was given to empower us to do what pleases God.

## **The Intimate Exchange of Identity**

In Matthew 27:31, we read how the soldiers stripped Jesus of His robe (righteousness) and put on what they thought were His clothes (humanity), thereby crucifying the human part of Jesus, not His deity. Therefore, our humanity has been crucified, and we are now clothed in righteousness. That is why Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20 NKJV).

God raised Jesus from death. And if God’s Spirit lives in you, he will also give life to your bodies that die. Yes, God is the one who raised Christ from death, and he will raise you to life through his Spirit living in you. So, my brothers and sisters, we must not be ruled by our sinful selves. We must not live the way our sinful selves want. If you use your lives to do what your sinful selves want, you will die spiritually. But if you use the Spirit’s help to stop doing the wrong things you do with your body, you will have true life. The true children of God are those who let God’s Spirit lead them. The Spirit that we received is not a spirit that makes us slaves again and causes us to fear. The Spirit that

we have makes us God's chosen children. And with that Spirit we cry out "Abba, Father." And the Spirit himself speaks to our spirits and makes us sure that we are God's children. If we are God's children, we will get the blessings God has for his people. He will give us all that he has given Christ. But we must suffer like Christ suffered. Then we will be able to share his glory. (Rom. 8:11–17 ERV)

The goal here is to understand that as His children, we have to cross over, make the exchange, from living a life led by our flesh to living a life from His Spirit.

The cravings of the self-life are obvious: Sexual immorality, lustful thoughts, pornography, chasing after things instead of God, manipulating others, hatred of those who get in your way, senseless arguments, resentment when others are favored, temper tantrums, angry quarrels, only thinking of yourself, being in love with your own opinions, being envious of the blessings of others, murder, uncontrolled addictions, wild parties, and all other similar behavior. Haven't I already warned you that those who use their "freedom" for these things will not inherit the kingdom realm of God! (Gal. 5:19–21 TPT)

The only way to cross over is with Holy Spirit. You can plan, make it a goal, and so on, but until you cry out, "Abba, Father! Holy Spirit, help me!" you will fall back into the old way of living. And you may fall even in the crying out because you didn't take the way of escape He offered you or you didn't obey the still, small voice that said no. But you get back up, you repent, you keep seeking His guidance and start anew.

For example, my language of choice was cursing. I grew up around people who cursed and even watched television shows that contained cursing. So years later, I was reading Proverbs 31 and claiming to be a "virtuous woman," but the Lord said, "No, you are not." Only one verse stood out, which was verse 26: "She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness." His rhema word was highlighted through that Scripture passage, and His still, small voice and conviction from Holy Spirit let me know that my mouth was not pleasing to Him.

I tried to stop cursing on my own, but someone would always trigger me. I was letting others dictate how I should respond. I was responding in the flesh. I wanted desperately to please God, yet I was failing miserably. I then started asking Holy Spirit to help me, and I at least became more conscious of my cursing. I would wake up with it on my mind and say, "Okay,

Holy Spirit, I will not curse anyone today,” and then I would fail. I remember that the first day I didn’t curse anyone I was so happy. Quite a few of my family members were at a restaurant celebrating someone’s birthday. A man sitting next to me was disrespectful, and I was about to let him have it. I was rehearsing in my mind what I was going to say, but then I remembered that I would fail the test again if I said it, so I kept my mouth shut. I went home and started rejoicing over how I had passed the test. And the Lord said, “Nope, you didn’t pass the test because you cursed him in your mind.” Wow! We are not to even have evil thoughts in our minds. I was in training for righteousness in the area of self-control.

Our minds should be set on things that are above, that are pleasing to the Father, not on things (or people) that are on the earth (Col. 3:2). Remember, as we move into sonship, we are not fighting against people but against spiritual wickedness and darkness—this is about spiritual transformation from darkness to light. “But you are God’s chosen treasure—priests who are kings, a spiritual ‘nation’ set apart as God’s devoted ones. He called you out of darkness to experience his marvelous light, and now he claims you as his very own. He did this so that you would broadcast his glorious wonders throughout the world” (1 Pet. 2:9 TPT).

# 7

## **B = Baptism of Holy Spirit**

### *Life and Power in the Spirit*

And Peter said to them, “Repent [change your old way of thinking, turn from your sinful ways, accept and follow Jesus as the Messiah] and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ because of the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise [of the Holy Spirit] is for you and your children and for all who are far away [including the Gentiles], as many as the Lord our God calls to Himself.”

Acts 2:38–39 AMP

In this chapter, we will explore the greatest gift from God: Holy Spirit. We are not only to recalibrate our relationship with Holy Spirit but also to know the power/strength we have within us to live a born-again life. The baptism of Holy Spirit is the power we receive inwardly to live a new life in Him and the power we receive outwardly to do greater works (John 14:12). It is the power bestowed on us to do the works of God, who has sent us into all the world to preach the gospel of Jesus, not just with words but with power (signs, wonders, and miracles). As Christians, we believe in the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The three exist spiritually even though we cannot see them. We cannot exclude Holy Spirit because, without Him, we can do nothing from a spiritual standpoint. But with Him, we can experience a spiritual rebirth to live a changed life before our Father.

In the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, the bride purified herself during a *mikvah* (a pool of living water for purification) ceremony. This Jewish ritual signified an inward cleansing and spiritual preparation for the wedding. The word *baptism* comes from the Greek word *baptizo*,

which primarily means “a thorough change of condition accomplished through immersion.”<sup>1</sup> The purification represented the bride changing positions from the old life (as a single person) to a new life (as a married person). According to Jamie Lash’s book *The Ancient Jewish Wedding*, “It also symbolizes a change in status and authority; a woman comes out from under the authority of her father to the authority of her husband. We are alive to God, submitted to a new master: Yeshua, our Bridegroom/King. We have been cleansed by His blood, and a new beginning is ours as a part of the bride of Messiah. Yeshua experienced immersion in the Jordan as recorded in Matthew 3:16. As He entered the waters of the *mikvah* the Spirit of God descended on Him like a dove. As we follow Yeshua in the *mikvah*, the Spirit of God does something new in us as well!”<sup>2</sup>

Chapter 4 talked about gifts we receive as one married to Jesus. One of the gifts was Holy Spirit. The gift of Holy Spirit is the seal (promise) of salvation that every believer receives when they accept Jesus as their Bridegroom.

## **Baptism of Holy Spirit**

Jesus said, “Loving me empowers you to obey my commands. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Savior, the Holy Spirit of Truth, who will be to you a friend just like me—and he will never leave you. The world won’t receive him because they can’t see him or know him. But you will know him intimately, because he will make his home in you and will live inside you” (John 14:15–17 TPT). Faith is believing what we cannot see. This life with God is believing that He exists, that His Son died and rose again, and that His Holy Spirit lives within us if we believe in and accept Jesus by faith. Jesus told His disciples that it was to our advantage that He was going away because if He didn’t leave, Holy Spirit would not come (John 16:5–7).

Holy Spirit teaches us truth and how to live the truth. He reveals Jesus through our lives when we follow His instructions. Trying to live as a Christian without Holy Spirit is a form of religion because we deny the power that is within us. Holy Spirit is the gift of God Himself dwelling in us so we can live a new life in Him.

So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving? I should hope not! If we’ve left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there? Or didn’t you realize we packed up and left there for good? That is what happened in baptism. When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we

entered into the new country of grace—a new life in a new land! That’s what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we’re going in our new grace-sovereign country. (Rom. 6:4 MSG)

This is why being baptized is so important. It is symbolic of our commitment to Christ. When He died, we died, and His resurrection becomes our resurrection. Some people don’t believe that baptism is necessary, but because Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove (Matt. 3:16), we, as followers of Christ, should also be baptized.

Baptism is a part of the Jewish marriage covenant, which is a pattern for our marriage to Christ. Without baptism, it is hard for us to live a complete, powerful, transformed life with Jesus. The Scriptures tell us how important this is: “Therefore let us get past the elementary stage in the teachings about the Christ, advancing on to maturity and perfection and spiritual completeness, [doing this] without laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of teaching about washings (ritual purifications/baptism), the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. [These are all important matters in which you should have been proficient long ago.] And we will do this [that is, proceed to maturity], if God permits” (Heb. 6:1–3 AMP). The Scriptures tell us that this is elementary teaching that we have been taught from the beginning and that we should move on to more mature things, which are the things we are discussing in this book. Paul tells us, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers [because of the time you have had to learn these truths], you actually need someone to teach you again the elementary principles of God’s word [from the beginning], and you have come to be continually in need of milk, not solid food” (5:12 AMP). I believe a majority of Christians already know that baptism with water is an important symbolic act of faith but that there is also a baptism of the Spirit. Check out this beautiful dance:

[https://youtu.be/8q5K\\_C-ey0k](https://youtu.be/8q5K_C-ey0k).

Jesus was speaking with Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader, and He told him, “I speak an eternal truth: Unless you are born of water and Spirit-wind, you will never enter God’s kingdom realm. For the natural realm can only give birth to things that are natural, but the spiritual realm gives birth to the supernatural life!” (John 3:5–6 TPT). Although we may not completely



understand what God is doing, by faith we believe His Word and we receive His gift of Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:17–18, God says, “This is what I will do in the last days—I will pour out my Spirit on everybody and cause your sons and daughters to prophesy, and your young men will see visions, and your old men will experience dreams from God. The Holy Spirit will come upon all my servants, men and women alike, and they will prophesy” (TPT).

I believe we are moving into a dispensation of time when the true children of God will arise because they will be led by Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14) and will worship the Lord with their laid-down lives. We lay down our lives when we no longer desire the things of the world and our affections and actions are only toward the things of God. “But a time is coming and is already here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit [from the heart, the inner self] and in truth; for the Father seeks such people to be His worshipers. God is spirit [the Source of life, yet invisible to mankind], and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24 AMP). Worship takes several forms (to bow down/prostrate, serve, adore, obey, reverence), but basically it is to serve God, to live in obedience to God’s Word (truth), and to reverence Him. In Matthew 4:10, Satan tried to tempt Jesus to worship him, and Jesus responded, “Go away, Satan! For it is written and forever remains written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only’” (AMP). Holy Spirit helps us to live a life of worship to serve our God.

“Since by your obedience to the truth you have purified yourselves for a sincere love of the believers, [see that you] love one another from the heart [always unselfishly seeking the best for one another], for you have been born again [that is, reborn from above—spiritually transformed, renewed, and set apart for His purpose] not of seed which is perishable but [from that which is] imperishable and immortal, that is, through the living and everlasting word of God” (1 Pet. 1:22–23 AMP). Worship is mainly from the heart. David said, “LORD, teach me what you want me to do [your way], and I will live [walk] by your truth [in your faithfulness]. Teach me to respect you completely [Give me an undivided heart to fear your name]” (Ps. 86:11 EXB). Although David sinned and did things that were not pleasing to God, his heart was always pure and wanting to please God. May our hearts not be divided between worshiping and adoring the things of the world and worshiping and adoring the things of God.

## Internal Cleansing

Under the Old Testament, ceremonial purification was an important element in worship. The Levites purified themselves for service through the washing of clothes and bathing. Others also had to wash their clothes and bathe after being in contact with blood (i.e., childbirth, touching a corpse, menstruation) and after receiving healing (i.e., cure for leprosy). God told the Jewish people in Ezekiel 36:25–27, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws” (NIV). In the New Testament, the emphasis is on personal, moral purity rather than on ceremonial purity. Purification is a cleansing of the heart and soul. Like David, we should cry, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10).

Mark 16:16 tells us that anyone who believes in Jesus and is baptized (immersed in water) will be saved and that those who do not will be condemned. Therefore, Christians must be baptized in water, which is actually an internal spiritual cleansing. Washing of the Word—in essence, reading the Word—purifies us and makes us clean when we become doers of the Word we hear. “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church [Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:7] and gave himself for her to make her holy [sanctify her], cleansing her in the washing of water by the word [the ‘washing’ may be (1) baptism, (2) spiritual cleansing (Titus 3:5), or (3) an analogy drawn from the Jewish prenuptial bath (Ezek. 16:8–14); the ‘word’ may be (1) the Gospel, (2) a baptismal formula, or (3) the confession of the one baptized]. He did this so that he could present the church to himself like a bride in all her beauty [in splendor; glorious], with no evil or sin [stain or wrinkle] or any other wrong thing in it [such thing], but pure [holy] and without fault [blameless]” (Eph. 5:25–27 EXB).

I did something in my twenties that was not pleasing to the Lord. Although I repented years ago, and I had even forgiven myself, I was not cleansed of it. Recently, during a discussion with a friend, I revealed what I had done, and all of a sudden, I started crying about it. It wasn’t a normal cry; God was doing a deep cleansing within me thirty years later. I believe the cleansing took that long because even though the event had happened in my early years and I had repented, I didn’t really see what I had done as a deep wound to God’s heart. I had never experienced a cleansing like that before in which I knew I was truly forgiven of that sin.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they hid themselves from God and tried to cover their sin. We do the same thing, knowing full well that God sees and knows everything. God is looking for a man or woman like David whose heart is broken because they know God's heart is broken. Therefore, when you sin, you should run to God, confess your sin, and let what you have done break your heart because you know that when God's children sin, it breaks His heart. He always wants to cleanse your heart, renew a right spirit within you, and forgive you of your sin.

## **The Fruit of God's Character**

Holy Spirit dwells in us and enables us to walk in the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit encompasses the characteristics all believers should have as children of God who display His character. Holy Spirit produces the fruit within us as we follow His leading. "The fruit of the Spirit [the result of His presence within us] is love [unselfish concern for others], joy, [inner] peace, patience [not the ability to wait, but how we act while waiting], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Gal. 5:22–23 AMP). When we walk in these character traits, no law, no person, no enemy can prevail against us.

For example, when someone is arguing with you and saying mean-spirited things to you, do you fight back the same way, or do you use self-control and keep your mouth closed? When you apply self-control, the person can't argue any further, because people can't argue with themselves. In this situation, we can put on the character trait of self-control with the help of Holy Spirit, because, of course, in our flesh we want to fight back. I used to get upset because I thought that not fighting back made me look weak, but God said, "Would you rather look weak in My eyes or their eyes?" As Christians, we shouldn't care if we look weak to others. When we show the love of God through any one of these traits, we are walking in the fruit of the Spirit. We may appear inferior to others, but we are pleasing to God. A key point in God's Kingdom is that when we feel weak, He makes us strong. The world teaches us that we always need to be strong, but that's not how we get our strength. We get strength by going low (humility). We must decrease so that He may increase (John 3:30).

## **Holy Spirit Empowers Us with Spiritual Gifts**

We often seem to think that only certain people have been given gifts, such as those who can sing, dance, draw, write, act, play an instrument, etc. and that if we can't do any of those things,

then we are not gifted. I used to believe that lie because I didn't do any of those things. It wasn't until God told me to write a book, and I did it, that I realized I actually had been given a gift. I believe we all have been given gifts, but we have to try them out and work at them if they don't come naturally. In addition to natural gifts, we all have been given spiritual gifts as well. As children of God, we all have been endowed with gifts from God, but if we choose not to use them, that is our choice. There are many gifts of the Spirit. These are different from natural gifts in that they work through us only by Holy Spirit.

Now about the spiritual gifts [the special endowments given by the Holy Spirit], brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. . . . Therefore I want you to know that no one speaking by the [power and influence of the] Spirit of God can say, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is [my] Lord," except by [the power and influence of] the Holy Spirit. Now there are [distinctive] varieties of spiritual gifts [special abilities given by the grace and extraordinary power of the Holy Spirit operating in believers], but it is the same Spirit [who grants them and empowers believers]. And there are [distinctive] varieties of ministries and service, but it is the same Lord [who is served]. And there are [distinctive] ways of working [to accomplish things], but it is the same God who produces all things in all believers [inspiring, energizing, and empowering them]. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit [the spiritual illumination and the enabling of the Holy Spirit] for the common good. To one is given through the [Holy] Spirit [the power to speak] the message of wisdom, and to another [the power to express] the word of knowledge and understanding according to the same Spirit; to another [wonder-working] faith [is given] by the same [Holy] Spirit, and to another the [extraordinary] gifts of healings by the one Spirit; and to another the working of miracles, and to another prophecy [foretelling the future, speaking a new message from God to the people], and to another discernment of spirits [the ability to distinguish sound, godly doctrine from the deceptive doctrine of man-made religions and cults], to another various kinds of [unknown] tongues, and to another interpretation of tongues. All these things [the gifts, the achievements, the abilities, the empowering] are brought about by one and the same [Holy] Spirit, distributing to each one individually just as He chooses. . . . For by one [Holy] Spirit we were all baptized into one body, [spiritually transformed—united together] whether Jews or Greeks (Gentiles), slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one [Holy] Spirit [since the same Holy Spirit fills each life]. . . . Now you [collectively] are Christ's body, and individually [you are] members of it [each with his own special purpose and function]. So God has appointed and placed in the church [for His own use]: first apostles [chosen by Christ], second prophets [those who foretell the future, those who speak a new message from God to the people], third teachers, then those who work miracles, then those with the

gifts of healings, the helpers, the administrators, and speakers in various kinds of [unknown] tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire and strive for the greater gifts [if acquiring them is going to be your goal]. And yet I will show you a still more excellent way [one of the choicest graces and the highest of them all: unselfish love]. (1 Cor. 12:1, 3–11, 13, 27–31 AMP)

Spiritual gifts are used to expand the Kingdom of God. They should not be neglected or misused. The passage above discussed a majority of the gifts; however, take the time to meditate on all the gifts. Read Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:8–11, 28–31; Ephesians 4:11–16 (TPT); and Isaiah 11:1–2. Read the passages from different Bible versions. Remember, the main gift we should receive and give is LOVE. The apostle Paul tells us to pursue love and desire spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:1).

## **The Gift of Speaking in Tongues**

There is controversy among Christians regarding speaking in tongues. Most believe, according to 1 Corinthians 13:8, that prophecies, tongues, and the gift of special knowledge no longer exist: “Love never fails [it never fades nor ends]. But as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for the gift of special knowledge, it will pass away” (AMP).

However, let’s go through the entire passage. First, let’s remember that prior to this, in chapter 12, Paul was speaking about spiritual gifts. We just read from 1 Corinthians 12: “Now about the spiritual gifts [the special endowments given by the Holy Spirit], brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. . . . Now there are [distinctive] varieties of spiritual gifts [special abilities given by the grace and extraordinary power of the Holy Spirit operating in believers], but it is the same Spirit [who grants them and empowers believers]” (vv. 1, 4 AMP). In 13:1, Paul says he speaks with tongues of men and of angels. He is saying that he speaks a native language and a spiritual language (which is probably the gift of tongues). Then he discusses what love looks like, and then he states, “Love never fails [it never fades nor ends]. But as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for the gift of special knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part [for our knowledge is fragmentary and incomplete]. But when that which is complete and perfect comes, that which is incomplete and partial will pass away” (13:8–10 AMP). What I believe he is saying is that

gifts and tongues will end when love is perfected (matured). So the question is “Has love been perfected in us?” I don’t believe that will happen until Jesus returns and we are reigning with Him in the millennium. If you believe the gifts and tongues have ceased, that belief won’t stop you from making it to heaven; you just won’t walk in the fullness of what has been given to you. We all have the right to accept gifts or not accept them.

Paul goes on in chapter 14 to speak about a heavenly language that God has given us with which we speak mysteries only to God: “When someone speaks in tongues, no one understands a word he says, because he’s not speaking to people, but to God—he is speaking intimate mysteries in the Spirit” (v. 2 TPT). Anyone who has been serving God for any amount of time should know that God doesn’t speak English. Holy Spirit may reveal something to you or give you a dream or vision or someone may prophesy to you, but in most cases, you have no idea what it means. You have to search it out or ask God what it means. I have gone to God many times and asked Him to make something plain so I can understand. But we know that His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts.

Therefore, Paul is referring to two tongues: (1) the gift of tongues; if you are in a crowd of people who speak Swahili, and you don’t know Swahili, Holy Spirit may speak through you in Swahili for their benefit; and (2) a supernatural tongue, through which you connect with God only. Something is a mystery because you have no idea what it means, but then Holy Spirit reveals it to you. The first tongue involves Holy Spirit equipping us to be effective in the Kingdom of God. The second is mainly for prayer—to pray for yourself and to intercede for others, to speak with God, to download mysteries from God, and to build yourself up in faith. It is a heavenly prayer language between you and God.

God loves to commune with His people through Holy Spirit. Mediate on and seek the Lord about the following Scripture passages.

And in a similar way, the Holy Spirit takes hold of us in our human frailty to empower us in our weakness. For example, at times we don’t even know how to pray, or know the best things to ask for. But the Holy Spirit rises up within us to super-intercede on our behalf, pleading to God with emotional sighs too deep for words. (Rom. 8:26 TPT)

But you, my delightfully loved friends, constantly and progressively build yourselves up on the foundation of your most holy faith by praying every moment in the Spirit. (Jude 20 TPT)

Then what am I to do? I will pray with the spirit [by the Holy Spirit that is within me] and I will pray with the mind [using words I understand]; I will sing with the spirit [by the Holy Spirit that is within me] and I will sing with the mind [using words I understand]. (1 Cor. 14:15 AMP)

With all prayer and petition pray [with specific requests] at all times [on every occasion and in every season] in the Spirit, and with this in view, stay alert with all perseverance and petition [interceding in prayer] for all God's people. (Eph. 6:18 AMP)

Holy Spirit is our Helper because He knows the deep things of God. Speaking in a heavenly language allows Holy Spirit to reveal God's thoughts and truths to those who are praying and listening. You won't hear His thoughts and truths with your ears; this happens heart to heart—God's heart to your heart.

To overcome the flesh, we must build up our spirit man, and we can do this by praying in our heavenly language. Jude 20 says, "But you, beloved, build yourselves up on [the foundation of] your most holy faith [continually progress, rise like an edifice higher and higher], pray in the Holy Spirit" (AMP).

Whether you believe speaking in tongues still happens or you believe speaking in tongues has ceased, your belief will not stop you from entering the Kingdom. Speaking in tongues is a gift from God given to whomever receives it. But one thing is for sure: our differing views should never divide His church. Even though we have different gifts, talents, and beliefs, we are one body and should never be divided. If one denomination believes in speaking in tongues and another denomination doesn't, that should not divide the body of Christ. If one denomination doesn't believe in supernatural gifts and another does, that should not divide His church.

"For the Lord God is one, and so are we, for we share in one faith, one baptism, and one Father. And He is the perfect Father who leads us all, works through us all, and lives in us all! And he has generously given each one of us supernatural grace, according to the size of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:5–7 TPT). Since God has given us these great, precious gifts, who are we to separate from His church because of our unbelief (or our not wanting the gifts). Spiritual gifts are given to those who accept them by faith. How great or little faith do you have? And why does that separate you from those who walk in their faith?

How can Christians affect the world when we are divided? In order for the church (God's people) to really influence the world, we all need one another, and we all need to function in our gifts so we can be a powerful people.

## **Gifts to the Church**

What is the church? Is it a building? Is it a person? Should we even go to church? These are questions Christians are asking in this day and time. I do believe attending a church is very precious to the Lord. Just like the temple and the tabernacle, the church is a place where He has called people to come together for fellowship and growth. The building itself is not the church; the church is made up of individual believers. The Bible is clear that God has appointed leaders for the church, and we should definitely honor that, but we (as a body/individuals) have missed the reason for even going to church if we leave week after week with no change and only a feel-good message.

We go to church to be equipped so that as Christians we become the living Word. "For your very lives are our 'letters of recommendation,' permanently engraved on our hearts, recognized and read by everybody. As a result of our ministry, you are living letters written by Christ, not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God—not carved onto stone tablets but on the tablets of tender hearts" (2 Cor. 3:2–3 TPT). The church is not a social club. I believe it should be a place where we go to be trained—a boot camp. Then as believers, we go home and rightly divide the Word and study to show ourselves approved by God (2 Tim. 2:15). The five ministry leaders should help to train Christians in righteousness and help us reach our fullness (maturity) in Christ. All His gifts to the body should be used, and not just by one person.

And he has appointed some with grace to be apostles, and some with grace to be prophets, and some with grace to be evangelists, and some with grace to be pastors, and some with grace to be teachers. And their calling is to nurture and prepare all the holy believers to do their own works of ministry, and as they do this they will enlarge and build up the body of Christ. These grace ministries will function until we all attain oneness in the faith, until we all experience the fullness of what it means to know the Son of God, and finally we become one perfect man with the full dimensions of spiritual maturity and fully developed in the abundance of Christ. And then our immaturity will end! And we will not be easily shaken by trouble, nor led astray by novel teachings or by the false doctrines of deceivers who teach clever lies. But instead we will remain strong and always sincere in



our love as we express the truth. All our direction and ministries will flow from Christ and lead us deeper into him, the anointed Head of his body, the church. For his “body” has been formed in his image and is closely joined together and constantly connected as one. And every member has been given divine gifts to contribute to the growth of all; and as these gifts operate effectively throughout the whole body, we are built up and made perfect in love [in Him—my addition]. (Eph. 4:11–16 TPT)

## **Holy Spirit Helps Us to Discern**

The Lord gave me a vision how, in this season, man will not be able to discern good from evil because the natural man discerns good and evil differently than the spiritual man. The natural (carnal) man determines good and evil based on what he can see, hear, taste, and feel in the natural world. “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). Solomon asked God for a discerning spirit because he knew that only God (Holy Spirit) could help him. We can discern the things of God only by Holy Spirit. And in more cases than not, the things of God will be opposite than what we thought. Please pray as Solomon did for a discerning heart so that you won’t be deceived by what the world calls good; it is really evil in the sight of God.

For example, when Samuel went to anoint one of Jesse’s sons, he said, “Surely this is the one.” But God said, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7 NIV). When Jesus told the disciples that He must be put to death, Peter responded “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” But Jesus’s response was, “Get out of my way, you Satan! You are an offense to me, because your thoughts are only filled with man’s viewpoints and not with the ways of God” (Matt. 16:23 TPT). Jesus wasn’t saying that Peter was possessed by Satan but that his (man’s) viewpoint was of this world and not from God. Peter couldn’t discern the spiritual insight Jesus was telling him at the time because he was probably thinking naturally—Jesus can’t be murdered because He is the Messiah. That didn’t make sense to him. Revelatory discernment is obtained only by Holy Spirit. It will *not* be discerned from a natural (carnal) perspective.

# 8

## **R = Resurrected Life in Christ Jesus**

### *A Holy Life Dedicated to Him*

The Bridegroom-King

I have come to you, my darling bride,  
for you are my paradise garden!

The Shulamite Bride

Come walk with me until I am fully yours.  
Come taste the fruits of your life in me.

Song of Solomon 4:15 TPT

God wants to recalibrate our natural lives. He wants us to become a new person in Christ Jesus. Jesus is not only our Bridegroom but also our prototype of how to live this new life here on earth. Stage 1 of the ancient Jewish wedding tradition took place mainly because the bride may have been too young and not ready for marriage. Both fathers would reach an agreement that their children would be committed to each other until it was time for the actual wedding. In the same way, we, the bride of Christ, are not yet ready for the wedding. God has and is giving us time to prepare for our Bridegroom's return. Our commitment to Him is a personal decision we make. It's not forced; it's not mandatory. It's a choice. While we wait for His return, we are to live a resurrected life in Christ Jesus.

Christ's resurrection is your resurrection too. This is why we are to yearn for all that is above, for that's where Christ sits enthroned at the place of all power, honor, and authority! Yes, feast on all the treasures of the heavenly realm and fill your thoughts with heavenly realities, and not with the distractions of the natural realm. Your crucifixion [death of self—my addition] with Christ has

severed the tie to this life, and now your true life is hidden away in God in Christ. And as Christ himself is seen for who he really is, who you really are will also be revealed, for you are now one with him in his glory! Live as one who has died to every form of sexual sin and impurity. Live as one who died to diseases, and desires for forbidden things, including the desire for wealth, which is the essence of idol worship. When you live in these vices, you ignite the anger of God against these acts of disobedience. That's how you once behaved, characterized by your evil deeds. But now it's time to eliminate them from your lives once and for all—anger, fits of rage, all forms of hatred, cursing, filthy speech, and lying. Lay aside [take off the old life] your old Adam-self with its masquerade and disguise. For you have acquired new creation life which is continually being renewed into the likeness of the One who created you; giving you the full revelation of God. In this new creation life, your nationality makes no difference, or your ethnicity, education, or economic status—they matter nothing. For it is Christ that means everything as he lives in every one of us! (Col. 3:1–11 TPT).

As Christians, we are to focus on living a life that proves we have been resurrected with Christ Jesus and we live for Him.

## **A Repentant Life**

As we live a resurrected life in Christ Jesus, we live a repentant life. Have you noticed a theme throughout this book—a theme of repentance. How critical it is for us to live a repentant life at this time! Repentance is not asking the Lord for forgiveness with the intent to sin again. We repent with a broken heart because we know that we have sinned against God. “The Lord is close to all whose hearts are crushed by pain, and he is always ready to restore the repentant one” (Ps. 34:18 TPT). Repentance is an honest, regretful acknowledgment of our sin (living outside of God's commandments) and a commitment to change. Remember the definition of repent: to “[change your inner self—your old way of thinking, regret past sins, live your life in a way that proves repentance; seek God's purpose for your life], for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17 AMP).

I remember listening to Daniel Kolenda preach. I don't remember word for word what he said, but the following stuck with me. Brokenness refers to those who are crying out for the living God. Yes, we can do life without God, we can do business without Him, we can do ministry without Him, we can use the gifts and talents He gave us without Him, but if His

presence, His anointing, is not with us, then we are like every other person. With Him, though, we can do all things. And Kolenda said that God told him, “I will never send anyone empty unless they are full of themselves.” When we are empty of ourselves, we can be filled with the fullness of God. “Feel the pain of your sin, be sorrowful and weep! Let your joking around be turned into mourning and your joy into deep humiliation. Be willing to be made low before the Lord and he will exalt you!” (James 4:9–10 TPT). “Fools mock the need for repentance, while the favor of God rests upon all his lovers” (Prov. 14:9 TPT).

*Lord, may our hearts break for the things that break Your heart. May our lives be one with Your Son and with You. May our very lives on this earth speak for You. In Jesus’s name, amen.*

## **A Consecrated Life**

As we live a resurrected life in Christ Jesus, we live a consecrated life. Jamie Lash, in *The Ancient Jewish Wedding*, says, “The consecrated bride of Messiah is God’s treasured possession, His witness, His servant, His worshipper, even His army. She is strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, and does battle with the enemy of her soul. Her consecration is a source of strength and anointing. Yeshua delights in our separation to Him. We may be in the world, but we are not of the world. We belong to our Heavenly Bridegroom.”<sup>1</sup> (“She” refers to the bride, not to gender. Both men and women are the bride of Christ.)

While the Jewish bride awaited the bridegroom’s return, she was faithfully awaiting her beloved. She was consecrating herself. While we await our Bridegroom, King Jesus, we are not just sitting and waiting for His return; we are getting ready; we are consecrating ourselves. The word *consecrate* means “to dedicate to a higher purpose.”<sup>2</sup> A person who is consecrated is one who has dedicated their life to be set apart just for Him. In other words, we are to be “holy.” No more do we just see going to church and claiming salvation as our entrance into heaven. God wants a people that looks like Him, loves like Him, acts like Him. As followers of Christ, we have a higher purpose. Consecrating ourselves to God is saying, “Yes, God! I will live a life totally dedicated to you. I give you my whole heart, soul, and mind, which is the greatest commandment.”

As we live a resurrected life in Christ Jesus, we live a surrendered life. The enemy's motto is the same today as it was with Adam and Eve. There was one tree they could not touch—there were boundaries. The enemy told them that they could touch any tree (there were no boundaries), for they would not die. We are being deceived that our best life is a life with no restraints—we can do what we want, when we want, with whomever we want. The truth is an unrestrained life leads to destruction (Prov. 14:12). Jesus tells us, “All who seek to live apart from me will lose it all. But those who let go of their lives for my sake and surrender it all to me will discover true life!” (Matt. 10:39 TPT).

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If you truly want to follow me, you should at once completely reject and disown your own life. And you must be willing to share my cross and experience it as your own, [offer yourself up to death] as you continually surrender to my ways. For if you choose self-sacrifice and lose your lives for my glory, you will continually discover true life. But if you choose to keep your lives for yourselves, you will forfeit what you try to keep. For even if you were to gain all the wealth and power of this world with everything it could offer you—at the cost of your own life—what good would that be? And what could be more valuable to you than your own soul? It has been decreed that I, the Son of Man, will one day return with my messengers and in the splendor and majesty of my Father. And then I will reward each person according to what they have done. But I promise you, there are some standing here now who won't experience death until they have witnessed the coming of the Son of Man in the presence and the power of the kingdom realm of God!” (16:24–28 TPT)

The reality is that if we truly want to live for God and reign with Him on this earth and in the age to come, our flesh has to die. “No flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor. 1:29). God is a holy God, looking for and desiring a holy people. If we cannot be distinguished from the rest of the world, then we have some surrendering to do. Dying to flesh is not works unto righteousness but righteousness unto works.

## **A Crucified Life**

As we live a resurrected life in Christ Jesus, we also, paradoxically, live a crucified life. “And those who belong to Christ Jesus (the Messiah) have crucified the flesh (the godless human nature) with its passions and appetites and desires” (Gal. 5:24 AMPC).

Ephesians 4:21–32 tells us some flesh-like things that we can crucify.

If you have really experienced the Anointed One, and heard his truth, it will be seen in your life; for we know that the ultimate reality is embodied in Jesus! And he has taught you to let go of the lifestyle of the ancient man, the old self—life, which was corrupted by sinful and deceitful desires that spring from delusions. Now it's time to be made new by every revelation that's been given to you. And to be transformed as you embrace the glorious Christ-within as your new life and live in union with him! For God has re-created you all over again in his perfect righteousness, and you now belong to him in the realm of true holiness. So discard every form of dishonesty and lying so that you will be known as one who always speaks the truth, for we all belong to one another. But don't let the passion of your emotions lead you to sin! Don't let anger control you or be fuel for revenge, not for even a day. Don't give the slanderous accuser, the Devil, an opportunity to manipulate you! If any one of you has stolen from someone else, never do it again. Instead, be industrious, earning an honest living, and then you'll have enough to bless those in need. And never let ugly or hateful words come from your mouth, but instead let your words become beautiful gifts that encourage others; do this by speaking words of grace to help them. The Holy Spirit of God has sealed you in Jesus Christ until you experience your full salvation. So never grieve the Spirit of God or take for granted his holy influence in your life. Lay aside bitter words, temper tantrums, revenge, profanity, and insults. But instead be kind and affectionate toward one another. Has God graciously forgiven you? Then graciously forgive one another in the depths of Christ's love. (TPT)

We crucify the flesh by not doing the things we shouldn't be doing, in a sense, fasting from them. For example, if there are shows we shouldn't be watching, we fast from television. This is similar to fasting from a favorite food or coffee. Doing so may be difficult at first, but after a while, it becomes easier.

Let's also use anger as an example of crucifying the flesh. If you have an anger problem, every time anger rears its ugly head, you have to literally stop yourself. You do it with prayer and asking for God's help. Then you go to be alone with God, and you ask Him where the root of your anger comes from so He can take it away from you. At this point, you may still experience anger, but at least you are conscious of it. You keep praying and asking God to help you until you start to see a change. When you do become angry, you immediately do something that will calm you down—take a walk or drive, listen to calming music, or sit quietly in God's presence. Holy Spirit is available to help you develop and be trained in godliness. "Rather, train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (1 Tim. 4:7–8 ESV).

## A Sacrificial Life

As we live a resurrected life in Christ Jesus, we live a sacrificial life. “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you” (Rom. 12:1–2 MSG).

Okay, I hear you asking, “What does a sacrificial life look like?” Mainly, it is doing what you don’t want to do. It will always be a laying down of self (your will, your plans, your desires, your thoughts). For example, my husband asked me to be a stay-at-home mom when we started our family. I didn’t want to leave my career due to fear and what I thought I would be losing, but I did it anyway for our family. What if someone in your family hurts you and you want to hold on to unforgiveness and the hurt but God tells you to forgive them and love them unconditionally? Or what if God tells you to do something that is totally outside the box and your comfort zone? Or what if you had plans to do something, like start a business, but God wants you to be a missionary? Basically, a sacrificial life is saying yes to God and no to self. The end result(s) will always bring God glory—it’s an act of worship.

We discussed worship in the previous chapter, but I think this Webster definition is appropriate here: “Worship is to honor with extravagant love and extreme submission.” If your life does not express an extravagant love for Jesus, and you do not live in extreme obedience/submission to Him, then I invite you to worship and make Him a priority in your life. Because guess what? Obedience is the love language of the Bridegroom. “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15 NKJV). You make the ultimate decision as to whom you will obey. “Do you not know that if you continually surrender yourselves to anyone to do his will, you are the slaves of him whom you obey, whether that be to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience which leads to righteousness (right doing and right standing with God)?” (Rom. 6:16 AMPC). Listen to this song by Lindy and the Circuit Riders: <https://fb.watch/4s6TNra8rB/>.

Yes, I know what you are thinking. There are two extremes: good versus evil; God versus Satan; life versus death; slave to sin versus slave to righteousness. Well, that is true. God says, “I

know your works: you are neither hot nor cold. . . . Because you are lukewarm, . . . I will spit you out” (Rev. 3:15–16 ESV). Unfortunately, there is no middle ground. God is looking for your entire heart, mind, soul, strength, and body. Give it all to Him, and He will guide you along the way.

## **Christ Our Prototype**

Jesus is our example to follow. He is God’s prototype of the new man. We can truly become a new creature in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). “For those whom He foreknew [of whom He was aware and loved beforehand], He also destined from the beginning [foreordaining them] to be molded into the image of His Son [and share inwardly His likeness], that He might become the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29 AMPC). Listen to this spoken word by Gloria Umanah <https://youtu.be/cxBysb52Sis>. The apostle Paul tells us to imitate him, as he imitated Christ. The apostle Paul struggled just as we will in walking out this new life in Christ. He said, “I’m not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back” (Phil. 3:12–14 MSG). The Voice translation says, “I am sprinting toward the only goal that counts: to cross the line, to win the prize, and to hear God’s call to resurrection life found exclusively in Jesus the Anointed” (3:14). “He gave us resurrection life and drew us to himself by his holy calling on our lives. And it wasn’t because of any good we have done, but by his divine pleasure and marvelous grace that confirmed our union [marriage—my addition] with the anointed Jesus, even before time began!” (2 Tim. 1:9 TPT).

Our divine calling—our very purpose in life as a Christian—is a heavenly marriage with Christ our Bridegroom. Our Bridegroom says, “You have ravished my heart and given me courage, my sister, my [promised] bride; you have ravished my heart and given me courage with a single glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace” (Song of Sol. 4:9 AMP). The Hebrew word for “ravished” is *libabthini*, which is taken from a Semitic root word that means “to tear bark off of a tree.”<sup>3</sup> He is saying that our loving eyes of worship have uncovered His heart and laid it bare, making Him vulnerable to us. What a description of what happens to Jesus when He looks into our eyes! Our worship brings to Him an ecstasy and a delight that are hard to



even imagine. God has placed inside of us the ability to ravish the heart of our King—not someday in heaven but now, even when we feel incomplete and weak. These divine jewels are the beautifying graces that Holy Spirit gives to us. They are the graces of righteousness given to the redeemed bride of Christ. May we ravish His heart!

# 9

## **A = An Awakened Church**

### *A Ready Bride*

To live like this is all the more urgent, for time is running out and you know it is a strategic hour in human history. It is time for us to wake up! For our full salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

Romans 13:11 TPT

I believe this is a critical time in history for Christians to awaken from our sleep, from our spiritual complacency, for our salvation is much closer now. Do you not see what the Lord is doing? He is re-forming the church to become His bride! Remember, in the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, the bridegroom and the bride were separated for about a year. The bride didn't know the exact time the bridegroom would return, but she had an idea. During this critical time in history, we, the bride, should be consumed with thoughts of our Bridegroom Jesus. We should be in such anticipation of His return, for we know He is returning soon because of the letters (Bible) He has written. With any bride, the closer the wedding date, the more anxious she gets, and she makes sure that everything is ready. We, the bride of Jesus, the church, should be doing the same thing. We should be daily preparing spiritually, knowing that what pleases our Bridegroom the most is not our outward beauty and garments but our inner beauty and spiritual garments.

We have already discussed how, in the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, the bridegroom left his bride to prepare a home for her. This is called the bridal (wedding, marriage) chamber, or *huppah*. Once he finished, he was ready to return to get his bride and take her to her new home. Again, no one knew except his father when this would be. So here we are at the time when the

father tells his son, “Go get your bride.” This is the start of stage 3 of the Jewish wedding, called *nissuin*.

In the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, the bridegroom would usually get his bride during the midnight hour with a procession of people singing and dancing and calling out, “The bridegroom is coming.” The bride and her bridesmaids would awaken, trim their lamps, and wait for his arrival. The bride was then seated in a carriage (*aperion*) that was lifted up and carried by men on foot. Once the couple reached their new home, they celebrated with their guests and then went into the marriage chamber for seven days to be alone to consummate the marriage.

In the natural, consummation is sexual. However, in the spirit, it means something completely different. In *Strong’s Concordance*, the Greek word for “consummation” is *sunteleia*, which means “a completion, consummation, end.” According to the *HELPS Word Studies*, the word means “culminating end, finish.”<sup>1</sup> It is not strictly “termination” but rather a “consummation” (completion) that ushers in a new time, era, age. I believe what the Lord is saying is that this new era has begun in which His bride awakens, trims her lamp, and goes into the bridal chamber with her Beloved, Jesus.

## **The Parable of the Ten Virgins**

At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: “Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet [encounter] him!” Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, “Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.” “No,” they replied, “there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.” But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. “Lord, Lord,” they said, “open the door for us!” But he replied, “Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.” Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour. (Matt. 25:1–13)

Notice they were all virgins, they all had lamps, and they all slept. Let’s look at the word *virgin*. It comes from the Greek word *parthenos*, and it corresponds to the Hebrew word *almah*.

*Almah* refers to the secluded, concealed state in which a person lives. So these women were not necessarily virgins as we would think of virgins. I submit that they are the ones who are engaged unto the Lord. “I am anxious for you with the deep concern of God himself—anxious that your love should be for Christ alone, just as a pure maiden saves her love for one man only, for the one who will be her husband” (1 Cor. 11:2 TLB).

So when the virgins heard the announcement that the bridegroom was coming, they all woke up and lit their lamps. Unfortunately, the foolish ones didn't have enough oil to keep their lamps lit, so they had to go buy some. But while they were purchasing oil, the bridegroom finally arrived. The wise virgins went into the chamber, but when the foolish ones tried to get in, they couldn't, for the door was shut. They knocked on the door and said, “Lord, Lord.” They knew the Lord, but He did not know them. What is the difference between the wise and the foolish virgins? As the Scripture passage states, the wise virgins were ready—they were prepared and went in. They had extra oil for their lamps. The oil is symbolic of Holy Spirit.

Let's look at two examples from the Old Testament that speak of oil. First, according to Exodus 30:30–32, priests were anointed with oil: “And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons and sanctify (separate) them, that they may minister to Me as priests. And say to the Israelites, This is a holy anointing oil [symbol of the Holy Spirit], sacred to Me alone throughout your generations. It shall not be poured upon a layman's [other versions state ‘ordinary,’ ‘man's flesh’] body, nor shall you make any other like it in composition; it is holy, and you shall hold it sacred” (AMPC). The second example involves David, who was anointed to be king. Psalm 89:20 says, “I have found David My servant; with My holy oil have I anointed him” (AMPC). In the Old Testament, priests and kings were consecrated (anointed with oil), which means they were declared holy and were set apart or dedicated for the service of God for a holy purpose.

In a previous chapter, we discussed that we too are consecrated/set apart unto the Lord for service. And the New Testament tells us that we too are priests and kings: “And You have made them a kingdom (royal race) and priests to our God, and they shall reign [as kings] over the earth!” (Rev. 5:10 AMPC). Priests sacrificed animals under the old covenant, but we, the new covenant priests, sacrifice our very lives. “And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the

way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Rom. 12:1–2 NLT).

We all have a knowing within us that there is something great we are to do in this life. That is why people are always searching and searching, trying to find their destiny, trying to find and fulfill their purpose. People are looking outwardly, but we have an inner, divine calling—to be like Christ on the earth and to do the will of God. The throne is the Lord’s, and the work we do is for His Kingdom. We are priests and kings who serve Him. We are not to hoard, to take, to protect, and to keep. And the anointing we receive because of our assignment is not a badge of honor that we wear to be proud and boastful. We are to be submitted to God at all times.

## **A Foundation of Love**

Nothing in life is more important than having a strong, intimate relationship with the Lord. Truly understanding this is foundational in order for us to be effective in His Kingdom. Love is a powerful force. We must love Him above all. A life, a ministry, actions that have a foundation of love will be sustained and powerful.

People are always looking for purpose, love, success, ministry, and so on, but we look for these things externally—from others. The reason life is so hard—we can’t find purpose, we aren’t fulfilled or successful, our ministry isn’t going well, we look for love in all the wrong places—is because we haven’t grasped the greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37 NIV). In addition, if we seek the Kingdom of God first and His righteousness, everything else will be added to us (6:33). It appears that most of us have gotten this backward. We seek everything else first. We seek things, people, accolades, and supernatural gifts without first connecting to the Creator. God doesn’t want to control us, but He does want to guide us into a prosperous life in Him on the earth and so that we can also be with Him in heaven.

We must focus on pursuing Him more than anything else. No one or no thing—not a job, a person, a ministry, money, or success—should be our primary focus. He should be our primary focus. If we understood how powerful the greatest commandment is and we took it seriously, we would have a stronger relationship with the Lord and we would be more impactful disciples because we would know the heartbeat of God and would hear His voice clearly. Then we would be able to help others. We believers are called according to Luke 4:18: “The Spirit of the Lord is

upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recover the sight to the blind and to set a liberty them that are bruised.” Literally, we can do these things in the natural and the supernatural when we seek after the Lord with all that is within us. It is not our might nor our power but His spirit within us that does the work (Zech. 4:6). God has to become greater, and we have to become less. He has to be visible, and we have to be invisible. This can only happen when Matthew 22:37 is our primary focus.

And the second commandment is to love our neighbors (people) as we love ourselves. God’s Kingdom operates on love. In this era, the world will get darker, but we should be shining bright like a diamond. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Loving people, all people—those we don’t like, those we don’t agree with, those who have hurt us, those who are in darkness, and those who make loving them really hard—is what God requires of us. This is the beginning of the world seeing Christians differently. The greatest among us will live as one called to serve others without honor. Let’s start within the church.

## **A United Church**

Religion is a particular system of faith and worship. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as “the belief in or acknowledgement of some superhuman power or powers (esp. a god or gods) which is typically manifested in obedience, reverence, and worship; such a belief as part of a system defining a code of living, esp. as a means of achieving spiritual or material improvement.”<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says it is “human beings’ relation to that which they regard as holy, sacred, spiritual or divine.”<sup>3</sup> Christianity has different denominations: Baptist, Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, AME, nondenominational, Grace, etc. All believe in Jesus and His finished work at the cross. However, because of our differences and our different beliefs, we tend to treat our brothers and sisters in Christ as strangers. Are we all not created in His image and likeness, and shouldn’t we all treat one another with kindness and respect? I look at it this way. I have nine siblings, and we are all different: we like different things and we are passionate about different things, but in the end, we respect and love one another. We attend family events together, and our differences don’t separate us. As a matter of fact, I love to hear what they are doing and learning and experiencing. The same should be true

with all of God's children. We should be united because of our DNA (the blood of Jesus), not divided because of our differences.

Unfortunately, the church is in a state of division as God's holy people. There are believers who won't fellowship with other believers because "I believe in . . . and they don't." What does the Bible say about fellowshiping with the brethren? Hebrews 10:25 says, "This is not the time to pull away and neglect meeting together, as some have formed the habit of doing, because we need each other! In fact, we should come together even more frequently, eager to encourage and urge each other onward as we anticipate that day dawning" (TPT).

As a church, the children of God, we are to be one body (people) with Christ as the Head. If we want God's plan to come to pass and Jesus to be seen on the earth before He comes back, we have to be united. There is a spiritual battle going on, and we are stronger when we are united in Him. God told the people at the tower of Babel that as one united people, nothing would be impossible for them. "And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do" (Gen. 11:6). Can you imagine what a united church could do? Can you imagine how pleased the Father would be if His children were united in their efforts to help execute His plans for them to reign and rule on the earth?

We can go to one another's conferences and learn from one another. Don't you know that your revelation is just that—yours? There is so much we can learn from what others are hearing from God and doing for God. We must be open to the fact that there is so much more to God. In our fellowships, we are not trying to convert people to our denominations; we are only required to convert unbelievers. We are to share and fellowship with one another because of what we have in common—Christ. God wants His children to come together and not be divided over small differences. He wants us to be united in Him and to be part of a movement that is coming. He is coming back for His church, His bride, with no spots or wrinkles.

## **A Chosen People**

The Scriptures tell us that Christians are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a [special] people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies [the wonderful deeds and virtues and perfections] of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9 AMP). The Greek word for "chosen" is *eklektos*, which describes

people who choose to follow the Lord; they become God's choice by freely receiving faith from Him.

This is the time for God's sons and daughters—as His consecrated, chosen ones—to arise and walk in the fullness of His authority, His anointing, His blessings. We are kings and priests anointed for such a time as this. “Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the Lord will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you” (Isa. 60:1–2 NKJV). Take a moment to listen to this song by Shekinah Glory – Yes, Part 1 & 2

<https://youtu.be/7kTPX0CXEB8>

## **Faith**

Faith is the leaning on the entire personality on God in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness. The heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 did phenomenal things, and in most cases, they did things that took courage. They had great faith. Verse 2 states, “This testimony of faith is what previous generations were commended for” (TPT). We have minimized faith. Faith is doing something for the Lord. Often it doesn't make sense, we don't know what the end result will be, it takes courage, and we can't do it without Him. In this generation, what will we be commended for? Selah.

We are required to live by faith. God has given everyone gifts, talents, and a purpose. God will not give us the entire plan or picture. We are not to focus on the purpose. We are to be obedient to the assignment put in front of us. The way it has always worked for me is that God tells me to do something, I take a step of faith in that direction, He provide the resources, and then He shows me a little more. For my first book, *Marriage 101*, I kept thinking, *Is this You, Lord? Did You tell me to write this?* I kept writing by faith, but it wasn't until I finished the book that He gave me confirmation. Then He gave me the workbook. Then I got a major publishing deal. If God told us everything up front, the big picture would likely overwhelm us. And if He told us everything up front, we would not have to live by faith. So we take the baby steps of faith. The Scriptures tell us that faith pleases God (Heb. 11:6). God wants us to enjoy not only the assignment but also His presence during the process.



This is a season of specificity, as in the days of Noah and Moses. God will give you a specific thing to do, and you must do it according to His plan. This is a new season in which you cannot bring the old with you. You cannot bring the way the world does things into the new. It is not church as usual. It is not business as usual. He wants to do a new thing, something that has never been done before. Your plans, ideas, and ways must fall to the wayside in order for you to step into the new.

## **Partnering with God**

God is inviting us into a secret place—to know what heaven is doing. In this secret place, we are allowing our hearts and His heart to become one. This is where we feel safe and comforted and loved. This is where we can be transparent and honest with Him. In this place, we are like Moses asking to see God’s face. This secret place is our prayer and fellowship time with the Lord. It can be a time of being still and soaking in His presence; praising and worshiping Him by leaning into and getting caught up in honoring the one whom our hearts desire; reading His Word and hearing what He wants to reveal through that Word; praying silently; or interceding by crying out for His heartbeat about an issue or for others. During this time with the Lord, you may get strategic ideas that you never would have thought of. I promise you, in this place, He will reveal His deepest secrets. This secret place is the Holy of Holies, where only the priests could enter once a month. But our Great High Priest gave us access all day, every day. God is waiting on you to tap in to heaven.

It is lazy for us to think that things are just going to happen. There are probably some Christians who don’t believe they have to pray because God already knows all things, He is the one who gave me the vision, and so on. But He gives us glimpses so that we can work with Him, not so He can do all the work. Partnering with God is relational. He is always wanting to get close to us. Imagine you and your spouse or children working on a project together. Isn’t it great when you are creating with them? The project doesn’t just happen by itself.

I have someone in my life who calls or wants to see me only when they want money. They don’t want to take the time to get to know me, to see how I’m doing, or to strengthen the relationship; they just want money. How many of you think that is a healthy relationship? How many of you would continue in that relationship? I am interested in having a more meaningful relationship with them, but they have to want it too. The good thing is that God is more gracious

and merciful than any of us. He continues to give because of His unconditional love toward us, but the entire time He is seeking for us to desire Him the same way He desires us. God wants us to fulfill what He has planned for us since the beginning of time, but our goal is not to complete a project for Him; it is to develop a deeper relationship by taking the journey with Him.

You don't want to get to the end of your life and knock on heaven's door and hear God say, "Get away from me, you worker of iniquity. I don't even know [*yada*] you." This will happen if you focus more on the calling than on the relationship or if you are working toward something that God hasn't called you to do.

### **All the Glory Belongs to Him**

Deuteronomy 8:18 says, "If you start thinking to yourselves, 'I did all this. And all by myself. I'm rich. It's all mine!'—well, think again. Remember that God, your God, gave you the strength to produce all this wealth so as to confirm the covenant that he promised to your ancestors—as it is today" (MSG). If you take credit for anything the Lord has given you or done for you, you take His glory. And if you don't testify of His goodness, you take His glory. All glory belongs to Him. When we are successful, we are to testify of Him and His glory. We are to make no reputation for ourselves. In this era, only Jesus should be lifted up. We are to be hidden and invisible as much as possible. Man has stolen too much of His glory. Our assignment is to humble ourselves before God and to serve Him so that His plan, not our plan, is fulfilled on the earth. If you had a business, you wouldn't want your employees going off and doing their own thing, acting like they were running the company and that it was successful because of them. The same thing is true with God. He is the owner, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), of it all.

### **A Different Model**

Remember the parable of the lost son. Both of the sons looked at their father with a servant mentality. The younger son wanted to return to the father to be a servant, not a son. The older son was so mad at his father because he worked alongside his father for years in the family business and didn't know he had access to everything. They didn't have a relationship with their father. They saw their father only as a person to work for. When God gives us an assignment, we are working *with* God, not *for* Him. We often approach our assignment or calling as the world would, like it's a job. But in the Kingdom, we have a Helper (Holy Spirit) and a Father (God)

who know all things and are here to assist us. We are not “workin’ for the man every night and day” (in my Tina Turner voice). We are walking with God.

If you want to hear “Well done” from God, you have to walk alongside Him at every stage. You cannot wait until you get into a bind (didn’t get the contract) or need help (money to fund a project) to petition Him. He is looking for Enochs—those who will walk daily with God. “And Enoch walked [in habitual fellowship] with God” (Gen. 5:24 AMPC). Every day, all day you are seeking His plan and purpose. You are spending time with Him. Do business, do ministry, do your calling with Him, and He will give you the strategic ideas and plans that can exponentially catapult you in your destiny. “With Him all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). With Him, your prayers will be answered. “If you abide in me and I in you, you can ask anything and I will do it” (John 15:7). We use that Scripture passage incorrectly because we forget the words *if* and *abide*. The Greek word for “abide” is *meno*, and it means “to stay (in a given place, state, relation, or expectancy).”<sup>4</sup> You cannot disconnect from God in this season. He wants to be intricately involved in every part of the destiny He has called you to. This is a partnership.

God doesn’t want to do something without you, and you can’t do something without Him—that is connection. Yes, you may have had some success to date. Yes, you may see others who are very successful and do not have a relationship with God. But if your soul longs to please Him and desires only His perfect plan, this is the season for you to arise and do things His way. I see a shake up; it is not a shift; it is a complete overturn. “Those who were first shall be last, and those who were last shall be first” (Matt. 20:16).

We are called to serve God and to fulfill the call He has given us, but we must remember that we are sons and daughters first. We are walking with Him and doing all the things He has called us to do, and He wants to bless us as sons and daughters.

The mature children of God are those who are moved by the impulses of the Holy Spirit. And you did not receive the “spirit of religious duty,” leading you back into the fear of never being good enough. But you have received the “Spirit of full acceptance,” enfolding you into the family of God. And you will never feel orphaned, for as he rises up within us, our spirits join him in saying the words of tender affection, “Beloved Father!” For the Holy Spirit makes God’s fatherhood real to us as he whispers into our innermost being, “You are God’s beloved child!” “And since we are his true children, we qualify to share all his treasures, for indeed, we are heirs of God himself. And since we

are joined to Christ, we also inherit all that he is and all that he has. We will experience being co-glorified with him provided that we accept his sufferings as our ours.” (Rom. 8:14–17 TPT)

God appreciates your service and your desire to want to fulfill His plans, but you can’t put service first. Sonship, relationship comes first, and from that comes everything else. God gives you an assignment, but that assignment should not replace your position as a son or daughter. Don’t chase after the assignment and lose sight of who God is as your Father.

If the older son in the parable had had a real relationship with his father, he would have known and rejoiced in the things his father loved and rejoiced in. He would have known that his father had been longing for his son to come home. The older brother was jealous of what the father did for the younger son. We too are always looking at what other people have and get. We must be careful that we do not become jealous of others. There is enough to go around. If someone is jealous, they limit God because they don’t think He is big enough or has enough of something to go around. God wants us in this season to work together. The body can function only if all the parts are working together. If we can get out of religious ideologies and jealousy, God can do some amazing things. In this season, we cannot do His work alone. We have to partner with others. And we must be open to working with people who do not look or think like we do. We need to be a unified body—a family. Christians can no longer be divided. God is looking for His family to come together. Just like in a marriage, we often don’t agree on the same ideas or philosophies, and we grew up differently. But we have one thing in common—we are family, and we love each other.

I love the questions I used earlier in the book: “Does this world need gifted men and women, outwardly empowered? Or does it need men and women who are broken, inwardly transformed?” The world needs people who are inwardly transformed. When what God is calling you to do hangs in the balance and you have two choices, to lose everything or to be like Saul, what will you do? You should pray, seek God’s will and wisdom, and do nothing of yourself (only what you know God is telling you to do). We can’t be afraid to lose it all. We should desire His will over everything. We are to be like Jesus, who said, “Not My will but Your will be done” (Luke 22:42).

This season is very critical—just as it was with Noah, Moses, and Solomon. He gave them specific instructions regarding what He wanted them to do. He gave Noah specific instructions as to how to build the ark. He told Moses how to build the tabernacle. And even though David

wanted to build the temple of God, which would have been a great thing, God said no because he was a man of war. God wanted David's son Solomon to build His house, and God gave him specific directions. He will give us specific instructions as well.

In this season, we must combine what we do with a mission or purpose. We must see the goal of business not to make money but to change the world for the better. We must see the jobs we do as a means of helping others. For example, a cook who has a meal delivery business can also feed the homeless. A person who writes screenplays can write about a mental health issue and use their platform to promote discussions about mental illness. A person who owns a retail store can offer prayer as a service as well. A person who owns a business can give a certain percent of their proceeds to nonprofit organizations. This is social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurs develop, fund, and implement solutions to social, cultural, and environmental issues. These people blend for-profit goals with social, cultural, and environmental goals. This is how Christians will infiltrate the world. It is time for the people of God to arise and go into the world and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we can do so using the platforms we have. As we do this, we must have a consistency of the heart. Whether we are working under someone or leading, our heart and character should remain the same. This says that we respect the anointing on all people.

God is saying, "I want to use My children mightily. You haven't seen all that My people can do. I've given you only a glimpse. The next season is now. The next level is now. This is when you make the decision to truly live for Me and to walk in My ways, My plans, and My purposes. Stop looking to others, to a system that is of the world. Look at Me. I AM all you need. My ways are higher. Come up! Arise, My children, and shine, for this is your season. Trust Me, for I am trustworthy. My ways aren't hard in the Spirit, but they are in the flesh. I love My children, and I wouldn't do anything to harm them. But I need them to be and do what they were created to be and do. Trust the process. Jesus questioned the process, but He submitted to it anyway."

# 10

## T = Truth of God's Word

### *The Unveiling of Jesus*

Jesus explained, "I am the Way, I am the Truth, and I am the Life. No one comes next to the Father except through union with me. To know me is to know my Father too."

John 14:6 TPT

I was out and about enjoying the beautiful scenery when all of sudden it was as if the clouds opened up and I was able to see a glimpse into heaven. It appeared as if there was another world



behind the clouds. I tried to take a picture of it, but all I could see was light behind the clouds. As Christians, we must know and understand that there are two worlds vying for our souls: the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. They are totally separate and are run by different authorities. The Ruler and King of the Kingdom of God is the Creator of all, heaven and earth and above and below the earth. His Kingdom is eternal because of

Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection. Satan is the ruler of the kingdom of darkness (Eph. 2:2), and he rules those outside of God's Kingdom. What's interesting is that there are people, including Christians, who don't even realize that they are living in darkness because they follow the ways of the world. Christians must recalibrate and decide if they are going to live in the light or stay in the darkness. If you choose light, then you must repent! "The [appointed period of] time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent [change your inner self—your old way of thinking, regret past sins, live your life in a way that proves repentance; seek God's

purpose for your life] and believe [with a deep, abiding trust] in the good news [regarding salvation]” (Mark 1:15 AMP).

In the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, the groom left to go prepare a place for his new bride. No one except his father knew when he could return to get her. Hopefully, throughout this book, you have come to know that Jesus our Bridegroom has left this earthly realm and is preparing a heavenly place for us. He is returning for us, His bride. God wants to recalibrate our perspective concerning the season we are in and for us to prepare for His Son’s return. In addition, according to Jewish custom, the bridegroom would get his bride in the middle of the night—when it was dark outside. Does darkness represent the hour of the day, or could it mean evil (darkness) in the world or an end of a dark era? Whatever it means, be prepared! Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 and pray about it.

Back to my story. I saw a bright light behind the dark clouds. There is a bright light—another world—not yet fully known to us because we currently live in a dark world where evil exists. We are not of this world, but we live in it. There is a light, a hope, an eternity that has yet to be revealed in its fullness—when Christ returns for His bride.

The enemy is well aware that Jesus took back the authority that Adam and Eve gave him. The enemy knows that his time is limited because Jesus will return and reign as King. But his plan is to take as many people with him to hell. But God’s plan is greater. He left Holy Spirit to help us overcome all evil in the world until Jesus returns. We literally are a threat to the enemy’s kingdom, which is why we have to fight the good fight of faith every day. The beauty of the Bible is that it tells us how to win, but we’ve been deceived into thinking the Christian walk and its strict rules are bondage. Hello! We’ve got the playbook, and when we do everything according to the playbook, we win (Josh. 1:8).

## **Bondage**

The enemy has lied and told you that God’s Word is bondage, that it’s an old, ancient book that is not relevant for today, that it has too many rules and stops you from living your best life. Matthew 11:30 states, “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly”

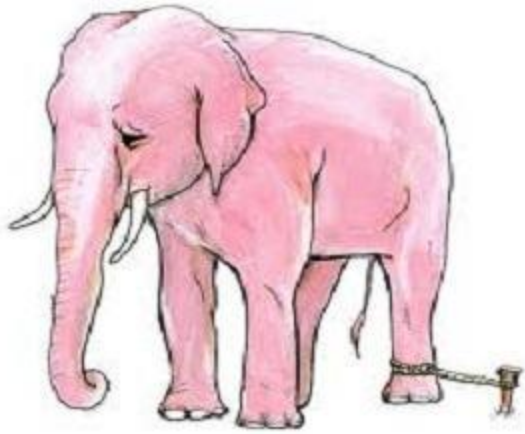
(MSG). The truth is that you can burn out because of religion, but that is not God's intention. God wants a relationship, and He desires for you to live from a Kingdom perspective. The truth of God's Word is that although you are giving up yourself and the life you currently know, you are gaining so much more—it will be your best life.

The children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt. They called out to God on many occasions to set them free. God raised up Moses (a type and shadow of Christ) to deliver them. (Note: Egypt is used as a symbol of spiritual bondage; this is not a charge against the Egyptian people.) In this same way, we are in a world system (bondage), but the difference between us and the children of Israel is that we don't even know we are in bondage. God tells us, "Do not love the world [of sin that opposes God and His precepts], nor the things that are 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 lust and sensual craving of the flesh and the lust and longing of the eyes and the boastful pride of life [pretentious confidence in one's resources or in the stability of earthly things]—these do not come from the Father, but are from the world" (1 John 2:15–16 AMP). (Note: Read 1 Corinthians 10 for more information about the children of Israel. God was trying to set them free, but they kept wanting to go back to Egypt [bondage].)

## **The Elephant Story**

A gentleman was walking through an elephant camp, and he spotted elephants that weren't being kept in cages or held by the use of chains. All that was preventing them from escaping was a small piece of rope tied to one of their legs. As the man gazed upon them, he was completely confused as to why the elephants didn't just use their strength to break the rope and escape the camp. They could have easily done so, but they didn't try at all.





## ELEPHANT ROPE

Curious and wanting to know the truth, he asked the trainer nearby why the elephants were just standing there and not trying to escape. The trainer replied, “When they are very young and much smaller, we use the same size rope to tie them, and at that age, it’s enough to hold them. As they grow up, they are conditioned to believe they can’t break away. They believe the rope can still hold them, so they never try to break free.” The only reason the elephants weren’t breaking free and escaping was because over time they had adopted the belief (lie) that it just wasn’t possible.

### **A Dream of Freedom**

I am reminded of a dream I had a couple years ago. I felt like I was in prison. It was a prison with open walls. It appeared that I could just step out and be free, yet I couldn’t. There were invisible bars. I wondered whether I was imprisoned by my job, my marriage, or fear. I didn’t feel trapped within myself. Nothing appeared to be wrong (with my marriage, my job, etc.), but deep within I wanted to escape. I wondered if I was faking life. I wondered, *How do I get out of this prison and step into reality? How do I get past the invisible bars? How do I become untrapped?* Although I felt trapped, something inside me could see beyond the invisible bars. If I could just step into a new reality . . . It seemed within my reach yet so far. My heart ached for that new reality. I thought that my new reality was a new life or a new time in my life. It wasn’t necessarily a new place, a new job, or a new husband, but it was a new way of living—a new reality. Maybe it was an inner dream that I longed for. For years, I hoped that one day I would fulfill dreams, but it wasn’t that. I wanted to scream at the top of my lungs because I felt trapped.

There was a cry so deep within me. I'd actually been crying within for so long. But hollering and screaming weren't going to open the bars to freedom. Freedom starts in the mind.

I realized that I was a slave in my mind and in bondage to my soul. I wanted to take a step of faith into a new reality that I didn't even know existed. I started pressing into it. Then I realized it was a Kingdom reality where I could be truly free. I wanted so badly to be free. I called out to Jesus, "Help me to understand how to be free!" I understood at that moment that living my best life was not outward. It didn't involve my job or my husband. It was about being connected to the one my soul, my spirit, my mind needed to be connected to. Living my best life was inward. I called out to Jesus, "I want to be free! Help us all to be free! I don't know what true freedom looks like, but I know that I want it." I started praying, "Father, I pray that You show me what freedom looks like. I don't want to fake it anymore. I want to be free indeed. I am on that path, and I have decided that if it leads me to a place where I am still on my job, still with my husband, still doing life as is but I am spiritually free in my soul and in my mind and I live from that truth and am happy in that truth, then I am good."

I then heard the Lord say, "You have desired the one thing. I am all you need. My desires for you are great. Continue to trust Me. There is more. You are tapping in to it. I AM it. I am your riches. I am your treasure. I am whom your heart desires. In Me is everything. You are on the right track. I love you so much. You are well on your way to becoming."



## **The Mystery of Freedom**

The world tells us that freedom is the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint, the state of not being imprisoned or enslaved. But the Bible tells us that "everyone who commits (practices) sin is guilty of lawlessness; for [that is what] sin is, lawlessness (the breaking, violating of God's law by transgression or neglect—being unrestrained and unregulated by His commands and His will)" (1 John 3:4 AMPC). The Message says, "Sin is not part of his program. No one who lives deeply in Christ makes a practice of sin. None of those who do practice sin have taken a good look at Christ. They've got him all backward" (3:5–6). Absence of a father leaves a child unto himself to do as he pleases. Spiritual Fathering includes accountability and submission. The laws of God were not designed to give

people a performance-based way to salvation or to burden them with strict rules to limit their lives; they were designed to provide them with details and specifics of how they can live in right relationship with a heavenly Father. The mystery of how to obtain freedom is to submit to God and walk according to His Word. “For if you embrace the truth, it will release more freedom into your lives” (John 8:32 TPT).

God brought justice (Moses) to the children of Israel to take them out of bondage and bring them into the promised land. He brought justice to a people who thought they wanted to leave but in their hearts really didn't. Jesus is justice, and if you accept Him and follow Him, He will lead you out of bondage, out of darkness, and into freedom and light, which is a type and shadow of the promised land.

## **Tactics of the Enemy**

The enemy has many tactics. First, the devil steals, kills, and destroys. He is after your identity because Christians are to look and be like God. He is after your destiny . . . your eternal life with Jesus. And he is looking to destroy marriages because they are a metaphor of life with our Bridegroom Jesus. If you are suffering from any of these—sickness, disease, lack, despair, hopelessness, bondage, etc.—it is of the enemy.

Second, the enemy tempts us to sin. God does not tempt; the devil tempts. “And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, ‘God is tempting me.’ God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death” (James 1:13–15 NLT). We all know what it feels like to be tempted, but God is there to help us escape. When you are being tempted, God always gives a way of escape, and when He gives it, take it. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

Third, Satan distorts the knowledge of who we are and who God is. He is always working in our minds to convince us that we are not really God's children and that God is not loving and forgiving. Satan is looking to condemn us, to feed us lies. The devil is so subtle because he causes people to think the opposite of the truth. It is interesting that when people become sick, they want to blame God. The sad thing is that people who say they know God want to blame

Him too. But even Jesus said, “Why would Satan fight against himself?” (see Matt 12:26). A good and loving God would not put sickness and disease on His own children. We must renew our minds and know what the heart of God is by reading the Word and spending time with Him.

Last, the devil always distorts the truth. He is a liar, and he tries to make us believe that a lie is true. He did this with Adam and Eve, Jesus, and others in the Bible. We believe a lie if we don't know the truth (Word of God). What goes in our eyes, ears, and hearts consistently is what we believe. If we are not spending time with God, reading, meditating on, and following His Word, we will believe a lie. Know that the enemy knows the Word and will distort it. Guess what: a half-truth is a lie. Satan used half-truths with Jesus, and he will do it with you as well.

### **The Devil's Method of Operation**

The enemy will always tempt you in three ways: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. “Don't love the world's ways. Don't love the world's goods. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world—wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father. It just isolates you from him. The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out—but whoever does what God wants is set for eternity” (1 John 2:15–17 MSG).

Eve was deceived in the garden when the snake told her a partial truth. “And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food [lust of flesh—my addition], and that it was delightful to look at [lust of eyes—my addition], and a tree to be desired in order to make one wise and insightful [pride of life—my addition], she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate” (Gen. 3:6 AMP). We need to be careful, because once we have been deceived, we can lead others astray. Adam knew what Eve was doing was wrong, and yet he allowed her to persuade him to disobey God.

Here is another example of how the devil operates.

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread [lust of flesh].”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone [pride of life].’”

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me [lust of eyes].”

Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”

Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (Matt. 4:1–11 NIV)

The way to resist the devil and to cause him to flee is to submit to God’s Word (James 4:7). With both Adam and Eve and Jesus, the devil offered partial truths. In Adam and Eve’s case, they believed the partial truth (lie) and were cast out of the garden (presence of God). Their sin separated them from God’s presence but not from His love. On our own, we can’t resist the enemy—we are fallen people. Jesus beat the enemy with the truth of God’s Word. When we rely on Jesus’s strength (grace) and follow His example, we can win against sin. We must know the Word, believe the Word, and use the Word in order to defeat the enemy. This is how we can overcome the enemy’s tactics when he comes against us.

Here is an example. Perhaps you are dealing with fear. That was an issue for me for years. I feared I wasn’t successful according to my idea of what success looked like. I never wanted to try anything new for fear of failure. I feared being rejected. Fear is from the enemy. I remember going to Africa and being faced with the opportunity to ride a camel. That camel was huge, and fear wanted to take over, but I said no and quoted 2 Timothy 1:7: “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, of love, and of a sound mind.” And I got on that camel. It was scary, but I did it!

No matter what you face, find Scripture passages regarding your circumstances and meditate on them until you defeat the enemy and get your breakthrough.

## **Don’t Believe the Lies**

Here are just a few lies the enemy has told us; know that there are many more.

LIE: Good works (going to church, serving people, tithing, and any other good act) will get you into heaven.

TRUTH: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31 NIV). Luke 19:1–10 tells the story of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a notorious sinner (tax collector). After meeting Jesus, he gave half of what he owned to the poor and paid back people four times the amount he had stolen from them. His life reveals what a person who has truly encountered the Lord acts like and what true repentance looks like. Zacchaeus was saved, and then good works came from that. Although doing good is what we should be doing, good acts alone don’t give us a pass into heaven. We must receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

I pray right now that you take a moment to ask the Lord to encounter you as He did Zacchaeus so that His very presence will surround you and that your life will be forever changed. Spend time in prayer and allow Him to show you how you can do good from this encounter.

LIE: For a Christian, life is a bowl of cherries. There will be no trouble, and you will receive only blessings after blessings. If you name it, you can claim it.

TRUTH: “I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace and confidence. In the world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration; but be of good cheer [take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world. [I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you.]” (John 16:33 AMPC). I don’t believe there was anyone in the Bible who did not have trouble. Moses’s own brother and sister caused a revolt against him as he was leading his people to freedom. Elijah ran in fear from Jezebel, who said she was going to kill him the next day. The apostle Paul was beaten and jailed multiple times doing the Lord’s work. Jesus was brutally beaten and crucified for us. Yet by His death and resurrection, He has overcome the world, and we have a far greater reward awaiting us in heaven.

LIE: God sends people to hell. Check out this clip from the movie *Heaven’s War*:  
<https://youtu.be/LiZKS38sk1Q>.

TRUTH: “There is no doubt at all that he will ‘render to every man according to his works,’ and that means eternal life to those who, in patiently doing good, aim at the unseen (but real) glory

and honour of the eternal world. It also means anger and wrath for those who rebel against God's plan of life, and refuse to obey his rules, and who, in so doing, make themselves the very servants of evil" (Rom. 2:8 Phillips). However, God wants all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Although Jesus is coming back (and His return is closer than we think), some don't believe it anymore because He is taking too long. "The Lord is not being slow in doing what he promised—the way some people understand slowness. But God is being patient with you. He doesn't want anyone to be lost. He wants everyone to change their ways and stop sinning" (2 Pet. 3:9 ERV)

LIE: There are many ways to God.

TRUTH: "I am the [only] Way [to God] and the [real] Truth and the [real] Life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6 AMP). The way to God is through Jesus. John 3:16 tells us, "This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one needs to be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him" (MSG). The lie that there are many ways to God will be one of the greatest lies told before Jesus returns. Watch and beware!

LIE: Christians are saved by grace and are no longer sinners. (This is a partial truth.)

TRUTH: "So then, my dear ones, just as you have always obeyed [my instructions with enthusiasm], not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation [that is, cultivate it, bring it to full effect, actively pursue spiritual maturity] with awe-inspired fear and trembling [using serious caution (AMPC says "watchfulness against temptation"—my addition) and critical self-evaluation to avoid anything that might offend God or discredit the name of Christ]" (Phil. 2:12 AMP). We are saved by grace (by accepting Jesus as our Lord), but we still have a sinful nature. We don't keep sinning and use grace as an excuse. We use grace as a power source to help us stop sinning. If we are no longer sinners, then salvation would be enough. It's not. God wants us washed clean and holy. Salvation is a start, but holiness is the standard for a holy God.

## **Ignorance Is Not Bliss**

We have all heard the phrase “Ignorance is bliss.” It means that if you don’t know about something, you don’t need to worry about it. I believe that is a lie of the enemy. You need to be fully aware of the spiritual realm from God’s perspective and from the enemy’s perspective because they are very different. God is trying to save you from a life of destruction and hell, and Satan is trying to kill and destroy you. God has given us insight upfront, and the enemy is sneaky, trying to keep us from knowing truth. Walking around not wanting to read the book of Revelation or discussing the end times is a detriment to anyone, especially the believer.

Opposition to truth cannot be excused on the basis of ignorance, because from the creation of the world, the invisible qualities of God’s nature have been made visible, such as his eternal power and transcendence. [Look around you and see the splendor of His works: how the trees turn different colors, the different types and uniqueness of animals, the different flowers and how they bloom every spring, the diversity of people, how the sky can set in so many different colors, etc. He has made everything we can see, and seeing the visible makes us understand the invisible (although we don’t see Him, we know He exists)]. So then, this leaves everyone without excuse.

Throughout human history the fingerprints of God were upon them [think about those things He has done for you—if nothing else, the fact that you are still alive and reading this book; He is trying to show you a better life with Him], yet they refused to honor him as God or even be thankful for his kindness. Instead, they entertained corrupt and foolish thoughts about what God was like [the Burger King methodology—you can have it your way]. This left them with nothing but misguided hearts, steeped in moral darkness. Although claiming to be super-intelligent, they were in fact shallow fools. For only a fool would trade the unfading splendor of the immortal God to worship the fading image of other humans [what they see on television, humans (celebrities) they admire and want to become like], idols made to look like people, animals, birds, and even creeping reptiles!

This is why God lifted off his restraining hand and let them have full expression of their sinful and shameful desires . . . all because they traded the truth of God for a lie. They worshiped and served the things God made rather than the God who made all things. (Rom. 1:20–25 TPT)

## **Good versus Evil**

God created the angel Satan (Ezek. 28:12–19), who decided that he wanted to be like God. So he exalted himself as god, and he and a third of the angels rebelled against God. This was the start



of evil. Satan was kicked out of the third heaven and became the god of this world. God created man in His image and likeness to rule the earth.

Wikipedia's definition of evil is this: "Evil, in a general sense, is defined by what it is not—the opposite or absence of good. It can be an extremely broad concept, although in everyday usage is often used more narrowly to denote profound wickedness."<sup>1</sup> Most people think of evil as demonic or satanic acts, and if we are not profoundly wicked or of a demonic nature, then we are good. The definition of evil according to *The Student Bible Dictionary* is this: "Bad, wrong, worthless, vain (Ps. 23:4; Rom. 12:21). Any force, action, or attitude that works in opposition to God; anything not in harmony with God."<sup>2</sup>

God's Word tells us that there were two trees in the garden of Eden: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. God wanted us to live from the Tree of Life, but Adam and Eve were deceived by the evil one and ate from a tree that looked good but was not good—the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. We believe we can discern good from evil. Our definitions are often based on the world's view. If something sounds, tastes, or looks good, then it must be good. But that is not always the case. Eve knew she shouldn't eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but the fruit *looked good*. Satan will not tempt people by presenting something that doesn't look good. He did not present Eve with a rotten apple, for instance.

Solomon asked for a discerning spirit because he understood that he really didn't know the difference between good and evil and he wanted to understand it from God's perspective (good) instead of his own perspective (evil). Many Christians will be led away by false prophets because they will say what people want to hear and will even perform signs and wonders. The message will look good and sound good—it will be mixed and twisted with God's truth. What's interesting is that we think we know what evil is. Evil is a deceiving spirit, and it doesn't look evil; it looks good. It doesn't speak evil; it speaks good. Pray every day from this day forward for God to give you a discerning heart to know the difference between good and evil.

## **God Is Good**

Jesus said that no one is good but God. God made all things good, and then He made an image of Himself and said, "Very good" (Gen. 1:26–31). Evil exists because people choose not to follow God and His ways.

For example, Peter was Jesus’s disciple, walking with Jesus every day and seeing the miracles and listening to the teachings. He even declared by revelation from God that Jesus was the Messiah. But Jesus had to rebuke him: “But turning around [His back to Peter] and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, Get behind Me, Satan! For you do not have a mind intent on promoting what God wills, but what pleases men [you are not on God’s side, but that of men]” (Mark 8:33 AMPC). Another version states, “Your thinking is from a human perspective, not from God’s perspective!” (CJB). “And Jesus said, ‘I have come to judge those who think they see and make them blind. And for those who are blind, I have come to make them see.’ Some of the Pharisees were standing nearby and overheard these words. They interrupted Jesus and said, ‘You mean to tell us that we are blind?’ Jesus told them, ‘If you would acknowledge your blindness, then your sin would be removed. But now that you claim to see, your sin remains with you!’” (John 9:39–41 TPT).

## **Repentance**

Three terms in the Bible describe actions of people who need to repent but do not because they love the world (darkness) more than God.

*Lawlessness* is another word for transgression. It is rebellion against God’s authority and law. It is a willful violation because the person understands the standard (i.e., a law, principle, or duty) but intentionally defies it. “Everyone who commits (practices) sin is guilty of lawlessness; for [that is what] sin is, lawlessness (the breaking, violating of God’s law by transgression or neglect—being unrestrained and unregulated by His commands and His will)” (1 John 3:4 AMPC). (Also read Matt. 23:28; 24:12; Rom. 6:19; 2 Thess. 2:3; 1 John 1:9 in the AMPC.)

*Iniquity* is another word for lawlessness or wickedness. It is a transgression of the law, a moral uncleanness that is demonstrated by an intentional twisting or defiance of God’s standard. It is a condition of not being right (unrighteousness) with God, according to the standard of His holiness and righteousness, or with other people, according to the standard of what people know to be right by their conscience. “And then I will declare to them publicly, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me [you are banished from My presence], you who act wickedly [disregarding My commands]” (Matt. 7:23 AMP). (Also read Ps. 25:11; Luke 13:27 in the AMPC.)

*Sin* is missing the mark of God’s will by choice and because of human weakness. It is an action or attitude by which a person disobeys God, betrays Him, or fails to do good. “So if you

know of an opportunity to do the right thing today, yet you refrain from doing it, you're guilty of sin" (James 4:17 TPT). (Also read Rom. 3:23; 7:24–25; James 1:14–15.) One sin will not be forgiven. "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven" (Matt. 12:31 ESV). Do not blaspheme Holy Spirit, and do not deny the power of Holy Spirit to help you in your weakness and in your transformation process.

We know that the moral code of the law is beautiful when applied as God intended, but actually, the law was not established for righteous people, but to bring conviction of sin to the unrighteous. The law was established to bring the revelation of sin to the evildoers and rebellious, the sinners without God, those who are vicious and perverse, and to those who strike their father or their mother, sinners, murderers, rapists, those who are sexually impure, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, those who break their oaths, and all those who oppose the teaching of godliness and purity in the church! They are the ones the law is for.

I have been commissioned to preach the wonderful news of the glory of the exalted God. My heart spills over with thanks to God for the way he continually empowers me, and to our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, who found me trustworthy and who authorized me to be his partner in this ministry.

Mercy kissed me, even though I used to be a blasphemers, a persecutor [murderer] of believers, and a scorner of what turned out to be true. I was ignorant and didn't know what I was doing. I was flooded with such incredible grace, like a river overflowing its banks, until I was full of faith and love for Jesus, the Anointed One!

I can testify that the Word is true and deserves to be received by all, for Jesus Christ came into the world to bring sinners back to life—even me, the worst sinner of all! Yet I was captured by grace, so that Jesus Christ could display through me the outpouring of his Spirit as a pattern to be seen for all those who would believe in him for eternal life. (1 Tim. 1:8–16 TPT)

To *repent* is to acknowledge wrongdoing and make a commitment to change. When we repent, not only do we change inwardly but we also change outwardly. These changes are visible to those around us. Repentance is a basic Christian principle. Repentance happens when we have been shown an area in our life that is not pleasing to the Father and we not only tell Him we are sorry but also ask Holy Spirit to help us change in that area—because the bottom line is that we cannot change if we don't ask Holy Spirit to help us. We cannot change on our own.

When we repent, we change not only inwardly but also outwardly, and these changes are visible to those around us.

I believe most of us don't repent because of pride and because we have no fear of God. God is invisible to us, but we are not invisible to God. He sees and knows all. We can't hide from Him, and we can't hide our sin from Him. It is no wonder that we have trouble apologizing to our heavenly Father when we have done wrong; we struggle to apologize even to the people we love because we don't want to humble ourselves. Saying "I am sorry" is a humbling thing. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6 NKJV). It is in humility that we receive the gift of grace, especially from the Father.

We must be like King David. Although he sinned on many occasions, his heart was always toward the Father and his repentance was from the heart. That is all God is looking for: a repentant heart. David was convicted of his sin, and he cried out in repentance, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps. 51:2). David didn't repent to receive the Father's love, but it was the love of the Father and David's love toward Him that brought him to repentance. "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil" (Joel 2:13). Unlike others, who may or may not forgive you, God will always forgive you, especially when you repent.

## **Can't Go in Dirty**

I remember reading a story about Dick Gregory. Basically, he said, "We humans, when we're born, have one thing to do, which is to work our way back home. God has one restriction: we must be clean." Then he told a story about how some boys threw him into the mud and he became dirty. He ran to the door of his house, and his mother said, "Boy, look at you. You can't come in this house looking like that." She didn't say he couldn't come in but that he couldn't come in looking like that. Gregory then said, "Just hope that you carry yourself in a way so that when you get to that big door, you don't hear, "You can't come in here looking like that."

I know some people are saying, "I thought God accepts me as I am," and others are saying, "God should accept me as I am and not expect me to change." In regard to the first response, once you realize you need help and deliverance from sin, God accepts you and then helps to clean you up because your sins are as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). In regard to the second response, the

Western church has it so backward. I didn't want to change at first. I wanted to hold on to me because I liked me, but God wanted a better version of me. We don't realize that life is better when we allow God to change us. "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39). The more I lose of myself, the more I become like Him. I am a better person, wife, mother, and so on because of the work He is doing in me. I don't want a little change. I want a big change. My cry is "Make me like Jesus." People often see repentance as just saying they are sorry, but repentance is really a 180-degree turn from the old life to a new life.

I am reminded of the man in the parable of the wedding feast who got in but didn't have the proper garments (Matt. 22:1–14). Sin is dirty, and you will not make it to heaven if you walk in perpetual sin. Perpetual sin shows that a person never understood or really put on the robe of Jesus's righteousness. Sin separates us from God but does not separate God from us. Sin is usually defined as transgressing against God's law (1 John 3:4 ampc). "Now the practices of the sinful nature are clearly evident: they are sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality (total irresponsibility, lack of self-control), idolatry, sorcery, hostility, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions [that promote heresies], envy, drunkenness, riotous behavior, and other things like these. I warn you beforehand, just as I did previously, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19–21 AMP). The Passion Translation says, "Haven't I already warned you that those who use their 'freedom' for these things will not inherit the kingdom realm of God!" (v. 21).

The next verse in Galatians 5 states, "But." It shows us a better way. "But the fruit of the Spirit [the result of His presence within us] is love [unselfish concern for others], joy, [inner] peace, patience [not the ability to wait, but how we act while waiting], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature together with its passions and appetites. If we [claim to] live by the [Holy] Spirit, we must also walk by the Spirit [with personal integrity, godly character, and moral courage—our conduct empowered by the Holy Spirit]" (vv. 22–25 AMP). The power of the gospel helps us get rid of sin in our lives.

"God is pure light. You will never find even a trace of darkness in him" (1 John 1:5 TPT). Sin equals darkness, and if there is no darkness in God, then there can be none in us if we are to be in fellowship with Him. Our fellowship (the Greek word is *koinonia*, which means having

things in common, sharing in what He has and who He is) with God is to be conscious of Him at all times and to walk in the light—the love and character of God. First John 1:6 tells us that we fool ourselves if we think that we can walk any other way and say we are walking with Him. However, as long as we repent of our sins, He is just to forgive us and we remain in fellowship with Him. The Bible tells us that we all sin and fall short of His glory.

Let's take a *selah* moment.

*Father, I repent of those sins that are known (speak those you know about) and those that are unknown. I thank You that You have forgiven me and that I am in right relationship with You. Restore the intimacy between us. Help me to know You more intimately—to know Your ways and plans for my life. Amen.*

God is still our Father even when we, His children, sin. God hates sin but never the one who sins. We are righteous in Him, but we have to walk out our righteousness by allowing Him to teach and guide us to avoid and turn from sin.

Because of His grace, God forgives us. Grace is wonderful, and thank God that the apostle Paul teaches us about grace. But he does not teach us about grace so that we can use it as an excuse to continue to live in sin, to live a life outside of God's plan, to go about life with no work toward spiritual maturity, growth, and development. In fact, most of his writings teach us how to grow in Christ. Second Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed [given by divine inspiration] and is profitable for instruction, for conviction [of sin], for correction [of error and restoration to obedience], for training in righteousness [learning to live in conformity to God's will, both publicly and privately—behaving honorably with personal integrity and moral courage]" (AMP). If the Word of God is given to us for reproof, correction, discipline, and instruction in righteousness, why aren't we living what we read and hear? "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22 NKJV). We deceive ourselves if we believe that the Way of Life is not about obedience to God's Word.

Though some are saved and others perish, there is no unrighteousness in God, because whoever perishes, their destruction is of themselves. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself" (Hosea 13:9). God offers grace, and the sinner refuses it. Is God bound to give grace? If a surgeon comes to heal a man's wound, and he will not be healed, is the surgeon bound to heal him? "I have called, and ye refused" (Prov. 1:24). God is not bound to force His grace and mercy

upon us. If you willfully oppose His offer of grace, your sin, not God's justice, is the cause of your perishing. "Your sinful deeds have built a barrier between you and your God. Your sins have made God turn his face from you so that he does not hear your prayers" (Isa. 59:2 TPT).

Jesus's death and resurrection gave us access to the Father once and for all. When we sin and fall short of His glory, we can repent, and God will restore our relationship with Him. Just like any parent, God will continue to love you and to be with you and to receive you with open arms when you repent. Repentance is something we all should be doing on a regular basis because we all sin in some way. If you think you are living right but you walk in unbelief, in offense, in unforgiveness, you walk in sin. Therefore, repent and be forgiven.

And when you see someone else sinning, you are to pray for God's help. We are our brother's keeper. For instance, if you see a Christian sinning (clearly I'm not talking about those who make a practice of sin in a way that is "fatal," leading to eternal death), ask for God's help, and He will gladly give it. There is such a thing as a fatal sin, and I'm not urging you to pray about that. Everything we do wrong is sin, but not all sin is fatal (1 John 5:16).

God's justice starts with getting back what the devil has stolen from His people—their identity and inheritance. The devil has given us a false reality that keeps us focusing on the here and now. As with Eve, something sinful looks good, feels good, and appears good, but we are blinded by earthly/fleshy things and a false doctrine. A foundational deception in Satan's kingdom is that people can live independently of God and without constraints. But "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" (1 John 2:16 ESV).

My prayer for you is that God will break any fear, disappointment, or lie you have been trapped in. Your past no longer has power to hold you in bondage. Be filled with strength, courage, and boldness and allow the authority God has given you to be released in you this day. This is your hour to seize God's promises and the newness of life to be fulfilled in you. You are destined for greatness.

One of two destinies awaits us: (1) to remain in spiritual darkness for eternity or (2) to experience spiritual Light (Jesus) now and remain with Him for eternity. The good news is *you* have a choice. If you choose Light, you will never be disappointed. John 8:12 says, "Then Jesus said, 'I am light to the world, and those who embrace me will experience life-giving light, and they will never walk in darkness'" (TPT). You can experience this Light now by becoming a true

son or daughter of God, thereby fulfilling your ultimate destiny of being like Him (1 John 4:17) now while on the earth and for all eternity.



# 11

## **E = End Times**

### *The Royal Wedding*

A joyous blessing rests upon the one who reads this message and upon those who hear and embrace the words of this prophecy, for the appointed time is in your hands.

Revelation 1:3 TPT

The book of Revelation is the revelation of Jesus Christ—our King, our Bridegroom. It is the only book in the Bible that states that those who read it, “who keep themselves true to the things which are written in it [heeding them and laying them to heart]” (Rev. 1:3 AMPC), are blessed. However, so many stay away from this book because of rumors that it is about the doom and gloom of the world. Actually, it’s good news. It’s about the return of Jesus for His bride.

God wanted us to know the truth about our wonderful future. It is not the end of the earth; it is the beginning of a new regime. We need to recalibrate our minds and hearts to know there is a beautiful love story awaiting Christians. For thousands of years, God has had a plan of restoration for His children. “For I know the plans and thoughts that I have for you,” says the LORD, ‘plans for peace and well-being and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope’” (Jer. 29:11 AMP). Yes, a battle will take place to end sin and darkness, but know and be confident that in the end, Jesus will win and He and His bride will reign for a thousand years.

In the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, after the bridegroom prepared a home for his bride, he returned for her and the actual wedding (*nissuin*) ceremony took place. “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 ESV). When the bridegroom’s father told him it was time to get his bride, he and the groomsmen started a procession from his house to hers. The bridegroom blew a trumpet

in the middle of the night to awaken all who were asleep to let them know he was coming for his bride. She and her bridesmaids heard it from afar and went out to meet him. The bride was then lifted up in a carriage and taken to her new home. The final part of the wedding was performed, and then the bride and the bridegroom were alone in the room (*huppah*, which also means “covering”) for seven days while the others celebrated outside.

## **The Bridal Chamber**

In chapter 9, we discussed the bridal chamber from the standpoint of the bride preparing for that day when she and her bridegroom would enter the bridal chamber together. We are now discussing the part of the ceremony when the bride was lifted up and taken to the place where the bridegroom had prepared a home for her. Again, the bride and bridegroom were within the chamber for seven days while the celebration of the wedding was going on outside the chamber. In regard to the Bridegroom and His bride, the church, this is where traditional stories about the rapture take place. After the bride is lifted up to heaven and while the bride is with the Bridegroom, the world will be in a time of judgment and tribulation. Isaiah 26:20–21 says, “My people, go into your rooms and lock your doors. Hide in there for a short time until God’s anger is finished. Look! The LORD is coming out from his place to judge the people of the world for the bad things they have done. The earth will reveal the blood that has been spilled on it. It will no longer hide the proof of those murders” (ERV). We don’t know when the tribulation will happen, but one thing is for sure: the bride will be hidden, in the bridal chamber, from the wrath of God.

I am reminded of four times in the Bible when people were shut in—hidden from the wrath of God. First, Noah and his family were shut in the ark while the flood happened (Gen. 7:16). Second, the Israelites put blood on their doorposts and stayed inside until the angel of death had passed by in the story of the Passover (Exod. 12:22–23). Third, after the priests were consecrated unto the Lord, they remained shut away with God in the holy place for seven days (Lev. 8:33). Fourth, in the parable of the ten virgins, when the foolish virgins finally arrived, they found the door shut and the five wise virgins locked in with the Lord (Matt. 25:10).

I believe we are in a season when, just like the priests, those of us who have decided to fully dedicate ourselves to the Lord are being consecrated and are locked away. This current lockdown is not what you think it is. I pray you will lock yourself away in a secret place with Christ and prepare yourself for Him. This intimate, secret place is the Holy of Holies. The bride is granted

access to enter this place—a place where we can dwell in His presence. In this place is safety, unconditional love, peace, joy, goodness, mercy, courage, and strength.

## **The Wedding Attire**

According to Revelation 19:8, the bride wears white. “She has been permitted to dress in fine linen, dazzling white and clean—for the fine linen signifies the righteous acts of the saints [the ethical conduct, personal integrity, moral courage, and godly character of believers]” (AMP). The white garment signifies “the righteous acts of the saints,” or “the righteous deeds of the saints” (ESV). Our garment represents our way of living. While our garment is a garment of righteousness that cannot be earned (when we accept Jesus, we are the righteousness of Christ Jesus), our garment is also based on “deeds”—our love for God, our obedience to Him, our faithfulness to His covenant, and our marriage to His Son. Our deeds can defile the garment (Rev. 3:2). That is why God tells the churches at Sardis and Laodicea to keep their garments clean (3:4–5, 17–18). It is clear that our garment for the wedding is based on what we do here and now before Christ returns.

In the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, the bride and the bridegroom wore white robes and were treated as royalty—kings and queens. On the day of the Bridegroom’s return, He will give the bride a crown, a crown of righteousness! “[As to what remains] henceforth there is laid up for me the [victor’s] crown of righteousness [for being right with God and doing right], which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me and recompense me on that [great] day—and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved and yearned for and welcomed His appearing (His return)” (2 Tim. 4:8 AMPC).

## **A Falling Away**

You can expect to be persecuted, even killed; for you will be hated by all the nations because of your love for me. Then many will stop following me and fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. And many lying prophets will arise, deceiving multitudes and leading them away from the path of truth. There will be such an increase of sin and lawlessness that those whose hearts once burned with passion for God and others will grow cold. But keep your hope to the end and you will experience life and deliverance.

Yet through it all, this joyful assurance of the realm of heaven's kingdom will be proclaimed all over the world, providing every nation with a demonstration of the reality of God. And after this the end of this age will arrive. (Matt. 24:9–14 TPT)

Unfortunately, the Bible states that many Christians will fall away from the faith. As I am writing this, I feel a heaviness in my heart because God wants everyone, especially His children, to remain with Him. I am not sure if some Christians are tired of religion, or they have given up waiting for Christ's return, or they find that the world (the here and now) appears to offer them a better life. I pray that if any of these describe you that you won't cave in to the lie!

Second Timothy 3:1–5 warns:

But you must realise that in the last days the times will be full of danger. Men will become utterly self-centered, greedy for money, full of big words. They will be proud and contemptuous, without any regard for what their parents taught them. They will be utterly lacking in gratitude, purity and normal human affections. They will be men of unscrupulous speech and have no control of themselves. They will be passionate and unprincipled, treacherous, self-willed and conceited, loving all the time what gives them pleasure instead of loving God. They will maintain a facade of "religion," but their conduct will deny its validity. You must keep clear of people like this. (Phillips)

There is so much more to Christianity. Even as I wrote this book, I learned so much. Yes, you will have to give up some things to live for Jesus, but the more you relinquish, the more you gain. As you empty yourself, He will fill you with more of Himself. Yes, we have been waiting patiently for His return for generations. But He tells us not to grow weary in well doing, for we will reap if we faint not. The beauty of His delay is that He wants others to come to know Him because He doesn't want anyone to perish. He is tarrying because of His love, mercy, and patience toward us all. He wants not just the unbeliever to come to know Him but His church to be ready for His return.

There is a way that seems right to man, but in the end it brings destruction (Prov. 14:12). Remember, we can't possibly think like God; His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. We have to trust Him by faith. We have to believe that His ways are better than ours. We have to know that His plan is perfect, even when we don't understand it. Proverbs 3:5–7 tells us, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways

acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil” (NKJV).

## **Insider Information**

The blessing in reading the book of Revelation is that it gives us insider information from heaven regarding God’s plan for the final restoration of humankind back to God the Father. If someone has insider trading information in the financial world, they can use that information to gain wealth. In the Kingdom, we can use our insider information to help us maneuver through the end times. But more importantly, our insider information gives us confidence that our future is with our King forever. To know the end from the beginning is to have hope, to walk in victory and blessings, to partner with God, and to pray for His will to be done every day of our lives. That is a blessing.

The book of Revelation is a prophetic book that shows us what the end of the ages will look like. Some believe the church will be raptured at the beginning of the tribulation, some believe this will happen in mid-tribulation, and some believe it will happen right before the bowls (wrath) are poured out. My question is What difference does it make? Are you prepared? Do you know what is going to happen and how you should respond? I can hear people crying, “Why, Lord? Why have You forsaken us?” And He is crying, “Why? Why didn’t you prepare when I told you to?” The Jews missed their Messiah because they knew, from a religious standpoint, about His coming but failed to see Him hidden throughout the Torah and the rest of the Old Testament.

Yes, God has given us signs to look for and clues concerning what the end will be like, but do not be deceived into thinking that you or anyone else knows when and how He will return. Just be ready. I’ve had a couple dreams about people missing Jesus’s return. One is a recurring dream I’ve had over the last twenty years, but in the most recent dream, I’m crying out, “It’s too late! It’s too late! He’s here! He’s here!” Please be ready. Don’t be too late.

## **Paradise**

Imagine a place like the garden of Eden, a heavenly paradise created for people to live in for eternity. There is a great abundance of food, a glorious light, and so much love. Everyone lives

in beautiful mansions in this Kingdom. There is always singing, dancing, and instruments playing.

One being (Satan) decided that he wanted his own kingdom, so he plotted to deceive Adam and Eve so that an entire people would be under his reign. People were not originally created to live in a world knowing good and evil. We were to live an eternal life under the Tree of Life, which was located in the same garden as the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God told Adam and Eve they could eat from any tree except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but they disobeyed Him and ate from it.

In the movie *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle sings, “There must be more than this provincial life.” Let me tell you, there is more than this provincial life we now live on earth. Provincial is defined as “a region outside the capital city of a country [in this case, paradise—my addition], especially when regarded as unsophisticated or narrow-minded.”<sup>1</sup> This is what God has been wanting to show us, but we’ve been blinded (narrow-minded) because we see and live only by natural means. We can’t see all the beauty in the Kingdom of God because we are enslaved to a natural world. This is the very reason Jesus came to release us. God wants us to live as Adam and Eve did before they ate from the forbidden tree. That life was lived with Him—in His very presence (relational) in paradise as they ate fruit from the Tree of Life. A day is coming (soon and very soon) when we will not only see the King but also reign with Him for all eternity. “The one whose heart is open let him listen carefully to what the Spirit is saying now to all the churches. To the one who overcomes I will give access to feast on the fruit of the Tree of Life that is found in the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7 TPT). Everything started in the garden, where Adam and Eve were not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 2:16–17). But it ends with the Tree of Life: “Blessed (happy, prosperous, to be admired) are those who wash their robes [in the blood of Christ by believing and trusting in Him—the righteous who do His commandments], so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14 AMP).

God has a glorious plan and a glorious destiny for His children. He has not forsaken or forgotten about us. We will experience a glorious Kingdom and will reign with Him for eternity. But guess what? We don’t have to wait until we die or He comes back. We, as kings and priests, sons and daughters of God, the bride of Christ, can walk in that Kingdom realm here on earth. Do you believe it? If not, ask God to help your unbelief.

## A Glorious Destiny

I am convinced that any suffering we endure is less than nothing compared to the magnitude of glory that is about to be unveiled within us. The entire universe is standing on tiptoe, yearning to see the unveiling of God's glorious sons and daughters! For against its will the universe itself has had to endure the empty futility resulting from the consequences of human sin. But now, with eager expectation, all creation longs for freedom from its slavery to decay and to experience with us the wonderful freedom coming to God's children. To this day we are aware of the universal agony and groaning of creation, as if it were in the contractions of labor for childbirth. And it's not just creation. We who have already experienced the firstfruits of the Spirit also inwardly groan as we passionately long to experience our full status as God's sons and daughters—including our physical bodies being transformed. For this is the hope of our salvation.

But hope means that we must trust and wait for what is still unseen. For why would we need to hope for something we already have? So because our hope is set on what is yet to be seen, we patiently keep on waiting for its fulfillment.

And in a similar way, the Holy Spirit takes hold of us in our human frailty to empower us in our weakness. For example, at times we don't even know how to pray, or know the best things to ask for. But the Holy Spirit rises up within us to super-intercede on our behalf, pleading to God with emotional sighs too deep for words.

God, the searcher of the heart, knows fully our longings, yet he also understands the desires of the Spirit, because the Holy Spirit passionately pleads before God for us, his holy ones, in perfect harmony with God's plan and our destiny.

So we are convinced that every detail of our lives is continually woven together to fit into God's perfect plan of bringing good into our lives, for we are his lovers who have been called to fulfill his designed purpose. For he knew all about us before we were born and he destined us from the beginning to share the likeness of his Son. This means the Son is the oldest among a vast family of brothers and sisters who will become just like him.

Having determined our destiny ahead of time, he called us to himself and transferred his perfect righteousness to everyone he called. And those who possess his perfect righteousness he co-glorified with his Son! (Rom. 8:18–30 TPT)

Verses 23–24 tell us that not just creation is waiting: “We who have already experienced the firstfruits of the Spirit also inwardly groan as we passionately long to experience our full status as God's sons and daughters—including our physical bodies being transformed. For this is the

hope of our salvation.” I have always felt there was something more; there is a groaning in my spirit for more. I believe you feel it too! The Passion Translation commentary states, “The firstfruits of the Spirit would include his indwelling presence, his gifts, his wisdom, and his transforming power.” Imagine what the full harvest of the Spirit will bring to us! The Aramaic can be translated “the awakening of the Spirit.”

I believe that, similar to in the ancient Jewish wedding tradition, a dedicated work (unveiling of the bride) will happen soon. The bridegroom would take a sneak peek into the carriage (*aperion*) before the bride was lifted up and carried away. He would lift her veil to make sure he had the right bride. This tradition started because of the story of Jacob being tricked by his father-in-law into marrying Leah instead of Rachel (Gen. 29:21–30). I believe now is the time when those who accept the invitation to be a bride for Jesus will be used mightily for God. “Whenever, though, they turn to face God as Moses did, God removes the veil and there they are—face-to-face! They suddenly recognize that God is a living, personal presence, not a piece of chiseled stone. And when God is personally present, a living Spirit, that old, constricting legislation is recognized as obsolete. We’re free of it! All of us! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him” (2 Cor. 3:18 MSG). These will be the ones who will do exploits on the earth and usher in a great harvest of souls.

## **Are You Future Ready?**

We cannot continue to live day by day without being conscious of a future beyond death. Whether we see the end times or not, we will leave this body and live in eternity somewhere. If you get to live a long life, don’t forget that you are living out a prearranged plan and destiny.

Psalms 23:6 says, “So why would I fear the future? For your goodness and love pursue me all the days of my life. Then afterward, when my life is through, I’ll return to your glorious presence to be forever with you!” (TPT). But still the end times have me thinking two things: (1) Take me now so I don’t have to go through what is about to come; and (2) Am I ready? Will I be ready, and will I be able to survive those times? Even though I understand that sin and darkness are massive and have to be dealt with because God is a holy God and that He has a plan



to rid the world of darkness forever, I am asking the same question most people are asking: Why?

I do believe we are in a season of preparation for the end times. I have received several prophetic messages and dreams from God sounding the alarm that the time is near. I believe the mark of the beast is right around the corner. Yes, for generations we have been hearing that He is coming back soon, but His return is closer than we think.

In his book *End Times Simplified*, David Sliker states, “If we are content to live without experiencing more of God, then we will [live without experiencing more of God].” He also states that people think “good men are in conflict with an angry, unreasonable God instead of concluding that evil men are in trouble with a good God.”<sup>2</sup> Our perspective is wrong. So don’t look at God as being so mad at the world that He is going to destroy it. He is a good God who hates sin and darkness and is preparing a better world for His children—only evil will be destroyed. The coming storm is not just an end to an age but God birthing a new age.

Sliker also says, “Most people want a God who requires nothing of them, who is easy to figure out, and who allows God Himself to be under *their* control.”<sup>3</sup> I don’t want that kind of God, and I hope you don’t either. As a parent, I have rules, and there are things I am willing to accept and things I am not willing to accept from my children. God is our Father. He has an order, a standard. There are things He is willing to accept and things He is not willing to accept. We, as children of God, cannot tell Him what He should be doing or what we are going to do. Children don’t have a clue about how to live life, which is why we, as parents, guide and direct them. In the same way, God our Father knows what is best, and we have to trust Him and His ways.

I have read the book of Revelation several times. I must say that when I read it the first time, I didn’t see any hope. I saw doom and gloom, and God was being very harsh. How could He let so many people go to hell? I actually didn’t want to read it again and felt like millions of others: just stay away from the book and pray all will be well at the end. However, after reading it again, I found there is hope, there is light, there is salvation, and there is an awesome God who is loving and good. The doom and gloom is for those whose hearts are so hardened against God. I can’t fathom how people will go through the wrath of God and still not want to serve Him, but now I know they are completely evil (demonic) in nature and they like serving in the kingdom of darkness.

People have various opinions about what the end times will look like. Let's be humble enough to allow others to have their opinions, even if they are different from ours. As Christians, we don't have to pick sides; we just have to be ready.

## **Message to the Church**

End times urgency is near, and much of the church doesn't even know it. They're asleep. Again, it is not yet time, but the end is nearer than we think. God's message is still the same. You have to determine where you stand with God. Which passage(s) below is God speaking to you individually? First, listen to Instrumental Worship Music | IN THE SPIRIT | Prophetic Worship | Prayer and Meditation by #bethelmusic#Joshuaselman <https://youtu.be/yXV8oITVwW4> for a while. Then, read and write down what He is saying to you as you read each one.

I know all that you've done for me—you have worked hard and persevered. I know that you don't tolerate evil. You have tested those who claimed to be apostles and proved they are not, for they were imposters. I also know how you have bravely endured trials and persecutions because of my name, yet you have not become discouraged. But I have this against you: you have abandoned the passionate love you had for me at the beginning. Think about how far you have fallen! Repent and do the works of love you did at first. I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place of influence if you do not repent. The one whose heart is open let him listen carefully to what the Spirit is saying now to all the churches. To the one who overcomes I will give access to feast on the fruit of the Tree of Life that is found in the paradise of God. (Rev. 2:2–7 TPT)

I am aware of all the painful difficulties you have passed through and your financial hardships, even though, in fact, you possess rich treasure. And I am fully aware of the slander that has come against you from those who claim to be Jews but are really not, for they are a satanic congregation [they are Jews only by blood, and do not believe and truly honor the God whom they claim to worship]. Do not yield to fear in the face of the suffering to come, but be aware of this: the devil is about to have some of you thrown into prison to test your faith. For ten days you will have distress, but remain faithful to the day you die and I will give you the victor's crown of life. The one whose heart is open let him listen carefully to what the Spirit is presently saying to all the churches. The one who conquers will not be harmed by the second death. (Rev. 2:8–11 TPT)

I know where you live—where Satan sits enthroned, yet you still cling faithfully to the power of my name. You did not deny your faith in me even in the days of my faithful martyr Antipas, who was

executed in your city, where Satan lives. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you. There are some among you who hold to the teachings of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to eat things that were sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. Furthermore, you have some who hold to the doctrines of the Nicolaitans. So repent, then, or I will come quickly to war against them with the sword of my mouth. But the one whose heart is open let him listen carefully to what the Spirit is presently saying to all the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will let him feast on the hidden manna and give him a shining white stone. And written upon the white stone is inscribed his new name, known only to the one who receives it. (Rev. 2:12–17 TPT)

I know all that you've done for me—your love and faith, your ministry and steadfast perseverance. In fact, you now excel in these virtues even more than at the first. But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess [claiming to be inspired] and is seducing my loving servants. She is teaching that it is permissible to indulge in sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I have waited for her to repent from her vile immorality, but she refuses to do so. Now I will lay her low with terrible distress along with all her adulterous partners if they do not repent. And I will strike down her followers with a deadly plague. Then all the congregations will realize that I am the one who thoroughly searches the most secret thought and the innermost being. I will give to each one what their works deserve. But to the rest of you in Thyatira who don't adhere to the teachings of Jezebel and have not been initiated into deep satanic secrets, I say to you (without laying upon you any other burden): Cling tightly to all that you have until I appear. To everyone who is victorious and continues to do my works to the very end I will give you authority over the nations to shepherd them with a royal scepter. And the rebellious will be shattered as clay pots—even as I also received authority from the presence of my Father. I will give the morning star to the one who experiences victory. So the one whose heart is open let him listen carefully to what the Spirit is presently saying to all the churches. (Rev. 2:18–29 TPT)

I know all that you do and I know that you have a reputation for being really “alive,” but you're actually dead! Wake up and strengthen all that remains before it dies, for I haven't found your works to be perfect in the sight of my God. So remember all the things you've received and heard, then turn back to God and obey them. For if you continue to slumber, I will come to you like a thief, and you'll have no idea at what hour I will come. Yet there are still a few in Sardis who have remained pure, and they will walk in fellowship with me in brilliant light, for they are worthy. And the one who experiences victory will be dressed in white robes and I will never, no never erase your name from the Book of Life. I will acknowledge your name before my Father and his angels. So the one

whose heart is open let him listen carefully to what the Spirit is now saying to all the churches. (Rev. 3:1–6 TPT)

I know all that you've done. Now I have set before you a wide-open door that none can shut. For I know that you possess only a little power, yet you've kept my word and haven't denied my name. Watch how I deal with those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews but are not, for they're lying. I will make them come and bow down at your feet and acknowledge how much I've loved you. Because you've passionately kept my message of perseverance, I will also keep you from the hour of proving that is coming to test every person on earth. But I come swiftly, so cling tightly to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown of victory. For the one who is victorious, I will make you to be a pillar in the sanctuary of my God, permanently secure. I will write on you the name of my God and the name of the city of my God—the New Jerusalem, descending from my God out of heaven. And I'll write my own name on you. So the one whose heart is open let him listen carefully to what the Spirit is now saying to all the churches. (Rev. 3:8–13 TPT)

I know all that you do, and I know that you are neither frozen in apathy nor fervent with passion. How I wish you were either one or the other! But because you are neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm, I am about to spit you from my mouth. For you claim, "I'm rich and getting richer—I don't need a thing." Yet you are clueless that you're miserable, poor, blind, barren, and naked! So I counsel you to purchase gold perfected by fire, so that you can be truly rich. Purchase a white garment to cover and clothe your shameful Adam-nakedness. Purchase eye salve to be placed over your eyes so that you can truly see. All those I dearly love I unmask and train. So repent and be eager to pursue what is right. Behold, I'm standing at the door, knocking. If your heart is open to hear my voice and you open the door within, I will come in to you and feast with you, and you will feast with me. And to the one who conquers I will give the privilege of sitting with me on my throne, just as I conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. The one whose heart is open let him listen carefully to what the Spirit is saying now to the churches. (Rev. 3:15–22 TPT)

Many believe that these churches are actual churches in biblical times or they represent church history. Others believe the message is for the church today or the individual. I don't know, but whatever God is speaking to you, take heed, repent, and make a change.

## The Royal Wedding

I came by again and saw you, saw that you were ready for love and a lover. I took care of you, dressed you and protected you. I promised you my love and entered the covenant of marriage with you. I, GOD, the Master, gave my word. You became mine. I gave you a good bath, washing off all that old blood, and anointed you with aromatic oils. I dressed you in a colorful gown and put leather sandals on your feet. I gave you linen blouses and a fashionable wardrobe of expensive clothing. I adorned you with jewelry: I placed bracelets on your wrists, fitted you out with a necklace, emerald rings, sapphire earrings, and a diamond tiara. You were provided with everything precious and beautiful: with exquisite clothes and elegant food, garnished with honey and oil. You were absolutely stunning. You were a queen! You became world-famous, a legendary beauty brought to perfection by my adornments. Decree of GOD, the Master. (Ezek. 16:12 MSG)

As the ancient Jewish marriage ceremony came to an end, the groom stepped on a glass that was inside a cloth bag, shattering the glass. He did this in remembrance of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. According to Jamie Lash, “This is still a part of the Jewish tradition. At one time in history, the glass that was broken under the huppah was the one used to seal the pre-nuptial covenant of *kidushin*. The betrothal was over, the marriage had begun and the two lives would never be the same. The broken glass symbolized this reality.”<sup>4</sup> When Christ returns, our lives will never be the same. The enemy, Satan, the evil one, will be defeated.



Revelation 19:6–9 says, “And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the

Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true sayings of God’” (NKJV). And we will share a final cup of wine with our Bridegroom. “Masel tov!”

# Conclusion

The Lord is saying, “It is not time to sleep. It’s time to rise up! This is not the end times. It is the preview before the movie. It is time for the children of God to be seen, recognized, and distinguished. Many are fake. You will know who is truly with Me. This is a time of preparation. Only faith, only belief in Me will take you into the next season with success. Man and his system will not. Trust in Me and Me alone. Many of My children will not pass the test during this season because they don’t fully trust Me. They still want one foot in the world and its system. I need you all the way for Me. You can’t be lukewarm. This is a clarion call. The shofar is being blown and is sounding the alarm. This is a warning to My church to stop playing church. Be My church. If people don’t see Me through you, make a change. I want to use My children mightily. You haven’t seen all that My people can do. I’ve given you only a glimpse. This is when you must make a decision to truly live for Me and to walk in My ways, My plans, and My purposes. Stop looking for purpose in others or in a system that is of the world. Look for it in Me. I AM all you need. My ways are higher. Come up. Arise, My children, and shine, for this is your season.” I then heard Him say, “Don’t forget that I am looking for Enochs—those who will walk with Me.”

To sum up the book, the Lord wants to recalibrate our thinking regarding the following:

1. We need to reestablish and protect our relationship with God. The best part of being a Christian and being a part of the Kingdom of God is knowing the King. “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matt. 22:37–38 NIV).
2. Jesus is not just our Savior; He is also our Bridegroom King. We have been redeemed and are betrothed as a bride in waiting. He should be our greatest desire as we, His bride, await His return. “You were bought with a price [you were actually purchased with the precious blood of Jesus and made His own]. So then, honor and glorify God with your body” (1 Cor. 6:20 AMP).
3. The New Testament is our marital covenant. The Word of God renews our minds; therefore, we must read it, learn it, and do it. “But prove yourselves doers of the word

[actively and continually obeying God’s precepts], and not merely listeners [who hear the word but fail to internalize its meaning], deluding yourselves [by unsound reasoning contrary to the truth]” (James 1:22 AMP).

4. We have been given authority to reign on the earth. We have been given access to sit in heavenly places so that we rule and live from above. So if you are going through challenges and tough times, remember who you are engaged to. Remember who your Father is! So get up—reposition yourself, straighten your crown, and walk in who you are as a son or daughter of the King. “He raised us up with Christ the exalted One, and we ascended with him into the glorious perfection and authority of the heavenly realm, for we are now co-seated as one with Christ!” (Eph. 2:6 TPT).
5. The Kingdom of God works differently than the world. We have to reprogram our minds to live from God’s perspective. “Set your mind and keep focused habitually on the things above [the heavenly things], not on things that are on the earth [which have only temporal value]” (Col. 3:2 AMP).
6. Our identity is not what we do in this world or what we do for God. We are to represent Jesus on the earth. “And we all, with unveiled face, continually seeing as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are progressively being transformed into His image from [one degree of] glory to [even more] glory, which comes from the Lord, [who is] the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18 AMP).
7. Holy Spirit helps us live a born-again life (spiritual rebirth) and empowers us with spiritual gifts for the work of the Kingdom of God. “Those who repent I baptize with water, but there is coming a Man after me who is more powerful than I am. In fact, I’m not even worthy enough to pick up his sandals. He will submerge you into union with the Spirit of Holiness and with a raging fire!” (Matt. 3:11 TPT).
8. This resurrected life in Christ may seem a bit extreme, but it is God’s heart to have a holy, consecrated, disciplined, submitted, transformed Kingdom of people who live for Him. “And this, so that I may know Him [experientially, becoming more thoroughly acquainted with Him, understanding the remarkable wonders of His Person more completely] and [in that same way experience] the power of His resurrection [which overflows and is active in believers], and [that I may share] the fellowship of His



sufferings, by being continually conformed [inwardly into His likeness even] to His death [dying as He did]” (Phil. 3:10 AMP).

9. It is time for the bride to awaken from slumber, for the time is near. God wants to re-form the church to become a ready bride. “Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you” (Isa. 60:1–2 NKJV).
10. The Word is true, and the devil is a liar. Repent (turn away) from living a lie that the world has convinced you of and live in the truth (freedom) of God’s Word. The truth of God’s Word is not a yoke around your neck—it is not to stop you from enjoying life. It is actually the complete opposite. Living this truth brings freedom now and for all eternity. “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 John 1:4 ESV).
11. Although none of us want to hear that there will be an end to this world (as we know it), Christians have comfort in knowing that life on the other side is going to be so much better than the here and now. God is restoring His children; therefore, trust Him. He is working out His plan. “For I know the thoughts and plans that I have for you, says the Lord, thoughts and plans for welfare and peace and not for evil, to give you hope in your final outcome” (Jer. 29:11 AMPC).

We have been taught about the finished work of God from the standpoint that we don’t have to do anything. True, the finished work is His finished work—He has put everything in order—but we still have to walk out our righteousness in obedience to His Word. We, believers, have some personal, internal work to do but with His (Holy Spirit’s) help. “I am convinced and sure of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ [right up to the time of His return], developing [that good work] and perfecting and bringing it to full completion in you” (Phil. 1:6 AMPC).

“There are two paths before you; you may take only one path. One doorway is narrow. And one door is wide. Go through the narrow door. For the wide gate leads to a wide path, and the wide path is broad; the wide, broad path is easy, and the wide, broad, easy path has many, many people on it; but the wide, broad, easy, crowded path leads to death. Now then that narrow door

leads to a narrow road that in turn leads to life. It is hard to find that road. Not many people manage it” (Matt. 7:13–14 VOICE).

This invitation is being sent to all, the entire world, but you have to make the personal decision to be a bride for Christ. This is truly the free gift of God. “If you openly admit by your own mouth that Jesus Christ is the Lord, and if you believe in your own heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is believing in the heart that makes a man righteous before God, and it is stating his belief by his own mouth that confirms his salvation. And the Scriptures say, ‘Whoever believes on him will not be put to shame’” (Rom. 10:9).

You will go to heaven if you have confessed with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord. But know that you are also required to live a righteous life. “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt. 13:43). However, if you have renounced your faith by doing deeds not consistent with what God says in His Word, then that’s a different story. All I can say is “Repent, and turn your life back to God.”

You must be ready dressed and have your lamps alight, like men who wait to welcome their lord and master on his return from the wedding-feast, so that when he comes and knocks at the door, they may open it for him at once. Happy are the servants whom their lord finds on the alert when he arrives. I assure you that he will take off his outer clothes, make them sit down to dinner, and come and wait on them. And if he should come just after midnight or in the very early morning, and find them still on the alert, their happiness is assured. But be certain of this, that if the householder had known the time when the burglar would come, he would not have let his house be broken into. So you must be on the alert, for the Son of Man is coming at a time when you may not expect him. (Luke 12:35–40 Phillips)

# Notes

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## Preface

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge Diction, s.v. “recalibrate,” accessed May 11, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/recalibrate>

<sup>2</sup> Glosbe Dictionary, s.v. “calibrate,” accessed May 5, 2021, <https://glosbe.com/en/he/calibrate>.

## Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “know,” accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/know>.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius. "Hebrew Lexicon entry for Yada`". "[The KJV Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon](#)".

<sup>3</sup> Dictionary.com, s.v. “love,” accessed May 4, 2021, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/love>.

<sup>4</sup> W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words* (Zeeland, MI: Reformed Church Publications, 2015), 141.

## Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/kalah.html>.

## Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Peterson, “The Abide Bible: Engaging Scripture, Engaging God,” BibleGateway Blog, April 15, 2020, <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2020/04/the-abide-bible-engaging-scripture-engaging-god/>.

## Chapter 4

<sup>1</sup> *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “enthroned,” accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/enthroned>.

## Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Cahn, *The Book of Mysteries* (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline Charisma Media/Charisma House Book Group, 2016), 93.

<sup>2</sup> Cahn, *The Book of Mysteries*, 15 and 136.

## Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup> Cahn, *The Book of Mysteries*, 336.

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<sup>2</sup> *King James Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “servant,” accessed May 4, 2021, <http://kingjamesbibledictionary.com/StrongNo/G1401/servant>.

<sup>3</sup> “Martin Luther King Jr. Quotes,” GoodReads, accessed May 4, 2021, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/757-everybody-can-be-great-because-anybody-can-serve-you-don-t-have>.

<sup>4</sup> *King James Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “servant.”

## Chapter 7

<sup>1</sup> “Mikvah (Baptism): The Connection between Immersion, Conversion, and Being Born Again,” Bibles for Israel, accessed May 4, 2021, <https://free.messianicbible.com/feature/mikvah-baptism-the-connection-between-immersion-conversion-and-being-born-again/>.

<sup>2</sup> Jamie Lash, *The Ancient Jewish Wedding* (Fort Lauderdale: Jewish Jewels, 2012), 12.

## Chapter 8

<sup>1</sup> Lash, *The Ancient Jewish Wedding*, 15.

<sup>2</sup> Vocabulary.com, s.v. “consecrate,” accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/consecrate>.

<sup>3</sup> Passion Translation footnote, s.v. “ravished.”

## Chapter 9

<sup>1</sup> “4930. sunteleia,” Bible Hub, accessed May 5, 2021, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4930.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “religion,” accessed May 13, 2021, <https://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/161944#>.

<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “religion,” accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/search?query=religion>.

<sup>4</sup> Blue Letter Bible, s.v. “meno,” accessed May 5, 2021, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=kjv&strongs=g3306>.

## Chapter 10

<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. “evil,” last updated April 16, 2021, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evil>.

<sup>2</sup> Johnnie Godwin, Karen Dockery, Phyllis Godwin, et al., *The Student Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “evil” (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 2000), 203.

<sup>1</sup> Collins Dictionary, s.v. “provincial,” accessed May 13, 2021, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/provincial>.

<sup>2</sup> David Sliker, *End Times Simplified* (Kansas City, MO: Forerunner Publishing, 2013), 44, 81.

<sup>3</sup> Sliker, *End Times Simplified*, 98.

<sup>4</sup> Lash, *The Ancient Jewish Wedding*, 18.