

Beside Ourselves, “Seated in Heavenly Places”

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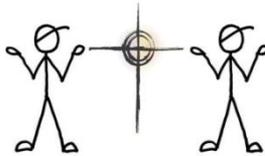
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Intro. Beside Ourselves (Seated in Heavenly Places)

“For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God (2 Cor. 5:13)”

This book is dedicated to the missionaries who bring the Lord’s Light into the 10/40 window and who are beside themselves; they are so taken by the Gospel that no matter the risk involved, they share the “Good News” of Jesus Christ coming into our world with His light, love and life. All who trust in God’s Son are set apart from sin and seated with Christ in heavenly places. Being beside oneself through faith in Jesus gives one a new perspective for living their life, for the love of Jesus has captured their heart. They forsake the world’s ever-changing new normal. They live compelled to boldly proclaim the Gospel message despite the personal risks that might accompany this.

This book contains 3 sections which highlight the major work of God’s grace. God’s grace works through the Gospel to gather God’s children into the unending journey of growing in the intimate knowledge of the fullness of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God’s grace is calling sons and daughters into their new identity and new life; one seated by faith in heavenly places.

Section I. “The Call”, chapters 1-5 introduce how the Lord calls us with His “Good News”, overflowing with grace and truth, to be yoked to Himself by faith. It references the words of Christ in the Gospels and how they personally drew the author by faith to His side.

Section II. “The New Identity”, chapters 6-12 summarize the teaching of Romans chapters 1-5 with the purpose of emphasizing how God’s grace can set a person apart from sin. The power of God’s grace begins life anew through faith in His children and supernaturally identifies them by the righteousness and “Living Word” of His Son Jesus.

When one is marked by the Gospel, its power brings the Living Word to bear upon one's new identity, their new life in "spirit, body and soul" and calls them to be ambassadors for God's Kingdom of Heaven, not prisoners of the power of sin (one's old identity).

Section III. "The New Life", chapters 13-21 summarize the teaching of Romans chapters 6-12 to emphasize how God's grace leads and empowers God's children to embrace by faith the new lifestyle of being yoked to the unending righteousness of Jesus Christ. Living yoked to the newness of life under God's "Covenant of Grace", supernaturally empowers one to co-labor with the body of Christ in God's "Spirit and Truth". When one receives the gift of new life in Christ, they live empowered by God's supernatural presence and power rather than in their old life of being enslaved to sin and its power.

This book was written to impart a strong biblical foundation for understanding the Gospel and following Jesus.

Prayer: Father, thank you for Your loving "Spirit and Truth" which offers everything necessary to be yoked to Your eternal, life-giving presence and power. Your unstoppable and unending grace makes this possible. You have called us to walk with You by faith so that Christ, the hope of glory, might dwell within us. Your "Kingdom of Heaven" comes to earth only as Your Gospel is proclaimed. Come Holy Spirit and set many hearts apart for this lifestyle of being marked by the Gospel, being "beside oneself, seated in heavenly places"---AMEN.

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:4-6)"

“Hearts Turned Back to God through His Gospel Truth”

Heart-Changing Gospel Truth	Inspired by these Scriptures	Covered In
Jesus is calling people with His Good News	Selected words in the Gospels of Jesus Christ	Section I. (Chs. 1-5)
The Gospel marks one with God’s eternal calling	Romans 1:1-17	Section II. (Ch. 6)
People marked by the world and false identities	Romans 1:18-32	Section II. (Ch. 7)
God alone is the “Judge of Righteousness”	Romans 2:1-29	Section II. (Ch. 8)
People living in sin separated from God	Romans 3:1-31	Section II. (Ch. 9)
God provides salvation through faith	Romans 4:1-25	Section II. (Ch. 10)
Hope, love and peace in the life of Jesus	Romans 5:1-11	Section II. (Ch. 11)
A new direction in Christ’s obedience	Romans 5:12-21	Section II. (Ch. 12)
Death to sin and newness of life	Romans 6:1-23	Section III. (Ch. 13)
Holy union with God’s righteousness and love	Romans 7:1-6	Section III. (Ch. 14)
The Letter of the Law reveals we alone are powerless against sin	Romans 7:7-25	Section III. (Ch. 15)
The Spirit of the Law brings freedom from sin and spiritual fruit	Romans 8:1-11	Section III. (Ch. 16)
Hearts are transformed through God’s adoption	Romans 8:12-30	Section III. (Ch. 17)
Letting the love of God have full access	Romans 8:31-39	Section III. (Ch. 18)
Carrying by faith the Gospel Seed of Christ	Romans 9:1-33	Section III. (Ch. 19)
Sowing the Seed of Christ’ righteousness	Romans 10:1-21	Section III. (Ch. 20)
Shining the Gospel Light	Romans 12:1-21	Section III. (Ch. 21)
Representing God’s Kingdom of Heaven	Romans 13 - 15	Conclusion

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.” (Romans 1:16)”

Section I. “The Call”

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. (John 15:16)”

(Note: These chapters reference the words of Christ calling us to come to Him by faith)

1. Following Jesus, the “Fisher of Men”

Let’s begin now by looking at the picture on the cover of this book. Many times as I have walked on the beaches of Florida, I have stopped and asked the fishermen on the beach these two questions, “Have you caught anything?” and “What are you fishing for?” The fishermen like the one in the picture are either standing or sitting in a chair. This one in the picture is fishing under a bright light shining through a cloud above him in the shape of a heart. It looks like God himself is shining His light through this heart-shaped cloud in the sky and directing the fisherman towards where His heavenly catch is awaiting his line to be cast. Perhaps, the fisherman caught no fish before God interceded by shining His light through the heart shaped cloud painted on the book cover.

This interpretation of this cover picture describes both my life before trusting Jesus fully and now as I have become beside myself with the goodness of God. On a recent trip I took there were numerous air flights required and a long train ride to share the Gospel in northern and southern India. My willingness to endure all this travel time led me to opportunities to follow the Lord (follow the heart shaped cloud in the sky) and experience the incredible grace-saturated work of the Gospel in action.

During my trip to India, I met and worked with many missionaries and pastors who are currently laboring to share the “love of Jesus” with others in the 10/40 Window. The 10/40 Window (latitude/longitude around the globe) is an area in the world known for violent opposition to the sharing of the Gospel. In these countries, there are many missionaries laboring to draw in catches of the many hearts who currently are trapped in societies which stand forcibly against the message of “New Life in Christ”.

I see the fisherman on the cover picture seated. The missionaries and pastors I met in India were definitely seated in their faith in Christ. Despite the challenges they faced they remained “fisher of men” seated by faith in Christ. This is the true position for all people who boldly share their faith; they remain seated in Christ, the hope of glory and His life given to (for) them.

How does one get to that place of being seated by faith in Christ? That is what I hope this book brings to light. We all should have personal testimonies about how we have come to faith and how our faith in the Lord was tested. *“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (Rev. 12:11)”*

Stories from my journey of faith are often like the stories of others. The central aspect of our personal stories is that God is faithfully drawing His people through His eternal promise (grace) to trust in His Son daily. As one recognizes that this is how God desires to manifest His presence and power in one’s life, they become willing to take risks and to cast their concerns upon the living waters of faith in Christ. They live and thrive in ways that go beyond themselves, their own abilities to make things happen. This is where the heart in the clouds is pointing the fisherman sitting on the beach to cast his line by faith; into the waters of God’s grace where a heavenly catch is promised for those who reign eternally with the Lord.

“And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. (Matt. 4:19)”

Prayer: Lord, what can we ever do to properly thank and repay you for drawing us into your heavenly catch, the family of God. We can never repay You but we can thank you by following Your Word as You have called us to join You in Your heavenly endeavor of drawing many into God's hands. As You continue to cast Your lifeline of truth into the ocean full of misguided souls, help us to see where your Spirit is actively at work and how we can point others to Your Light. You desire to pull many out of the waters of deception like You did for us. The Light that brings in your bountiful catch is Your "faithfulness to Your truth and Your everlasting love" which leads many to Your side. We continue to pray that many will be saved, drawn into Your loving hands as many become fishers of men---Amen.

2. Seeds of Lies Planted to Hide One's Calling

I was born into a family with parents always struggling with stretching their finances while they devoted themselves to raising a Christian family. They always professed their deep love for their five children despite the financial strain that we placed on them. I was the middle (3rd) child and being in this position spoke a lie about my identity (lot in life) that grew in my soul as a child. I believe this seed was sown in my young heart to hide from me my true calling to walk closely by faith with Jesus.

It's not uncommon for the middle child to act out due to a twisted perception of the impact of their position in the family pecking order. This position can lead the middle child to think that their older siblings are getting more blessings because they are more loved and receiving more of the available spending money while the middle child gets the leftovers which is usually sparse. I wore hand-me-down clothes from my older brother growing up. In addition, the middle child observes the younger children getting more attention as babies protected by the parents from harassment coming from the older siblings. There's a song I would hear growing up played on the radio entitled "Stuck in the middle with you". As I grew up, I thought the best it was going to get was being stuck in the middle because of my birth position. This led me to believe I was missing out. Later in life, I encountered the truth of the Lord which removed this lie that had been planted in my soul. I knew both my parents and God loved me deeply.

Unfortunately, this lie and its false perception of missing out had caused me, the middle child, to become the wild child (black sheep) of the family. My siblings witnessed their crazy brother acting out in many crazy ways to get attention. It was a twisted attempt to overcome the lie that my number 3 position in the pecking order was holding me back.

I got accustomed to using the “feeling that I had been wronged” as an excuse to justify my wayward words and deeds. Too often, we can use feelings coming from misconceptions to justify any inappropriate behavior that lashes out in destructive ways. Thank God this twisted perception of being held back because of being the middle child was eventually replaced by my position in Christ. The Lord connected me with His truth to my much more important eternal position, one of being seated in Christ in heavenly places.

Later, as I was struggling to understand the simplicity of the Gospel message, I was awakened one morning by what I believe was the voice of God saying in my ear loudly, “I have given you my name”. After this experience, I was led to these two verses in the Bible: 1. *“But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.(Isaiah 43:1)”* AND 2. *“I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it. (Rev. 2:17)”* Our heavenly birth into Christ by faith makes us eternally known by God and that is much more important than our earthly birth name or position which is forgotten by this world.

God’s call awakened me to His loving presence and joined me to His Son. The reality (truth) of my desperate need to trust God and be seated in His Son brought this about. This lie sown like a seed about the wrong that my family of origin’s birth position placed upon me and others that had taken root were removed from my soul surgically through God’s living “Word and Spirit”. I don’t dwell on my past and my many years of wild child behavior going well into my adult years. I look forward to the fruit of the successful rebirth God gave me as He pulled me out of the waters of the lies of this world.

My early life struggles pointed me to the Lord's "Parable of the Weeds" (Matt. 13:24-30). For a season, God allowed the seeds of lies to be planted in me so that I might eventually fully turn from a life defined by my sin to a life defined by surrendering my heart to the truth of God. There are many seeds, lies that attempt to plant themselves and flourish in our hearts. God's Gospel Seed pushes all other lies (seeds) aside so that through God's grace one can answer God's call and be truly made new in Christ. *"Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new. (Rev. 21:5)"*

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."

(Matt. 13:24-30)"

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for calling me to receive Your Gospel Seed in my heart which overcomes all other seeds which try to take control of my heart. I pray that Your marvelous grace sanctifies my heart and soul forever. I pray that You remove the power of lies from my heart as Your truth calls me to be a vessel for Your Truth and totally free from sin. I pray that all lies and excuses are rooted out of my heart by Your incorruptible Gospel Seed and out of the hearts of all who hear and answer Your call---Amen.

3. Friend or Foe, Seated in Christ or the World

There are many ways one defines what being a faithful friend is all about. One common definition given is that a faithful friend is a person who always stays with you no matter what, even when we are the most unlovable and at our lowest points. This is how Jesus defines those who are His friend. He shared this with His disciples before He went to the cross; *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you... You are my friends if you do what I command you. (John 15:12,14)”*

In the verse above Jesus is defining friendship. Jesus is describing friendship as being one who does what is expected like the relationship between a husband and a wife. It's a friendship standing upon the faithfulness and love of Jesus being carried in their hearts. His love prepares one to live selflessly by giving their “time, talents and treasures” to their friends and even future friends (strangers). Having this place for God's love in one's heart is essential for one to be considered a friend of God.

It's not a suggestion but a call to live by the foundational truth about how His followers, friends relate to Jesus and each other. In verse 13, which I've bypassed above, Jesus specifies that it could even require one to lay down their life for another. The Lord has demonstrated to us who is the best friend of all time. Jesus laid down His life so that many might know the eternal friendship of God (John 17:3). His friends are eternally held by the Holy Spirit in the perfect love demonstrated between the Father and the Son. Jesus sacrificed His life in obedience to God's perfect love. He hoped that many might answer His call to be seated in heavenly places, the love of “Father, Son and Holy Spirit”.

For years, I wanted to be a friend and follower of Christ, but my “thoughts, words and deeds” were very divided when it came to obeying the Lord’s commandment to love as He loves. I would always let my personal agenda get in the way. However, by grace through faith, one life-changing night through prayer the Lord’s selfless love brought forth a major change into my selfish heart. When this happened it removed the “what’s in this for me” perspective I brought into every relationship that I had or thought of having. A changed life brings about a greater understanding and ability to follow the Lord’s definition of friendship. It comes as one lives to encounter the Lord in “Spirit and Truth”. It comes as one is totally honest with God about their shortcomings, their tendencies to stray from being a faithful friend of the Lord while at the same time asking the Lord to help them overcome their selfish ways.

These encounters turn one’s relationships radically around as they walk with God in vibrant faith. Friends of God are joined with the Lord on a personal journey to the Promised Land. They have crossed their personal “Red Sea” as they have been freed from being a slave to sin and embraced the freedom that grace has brought into their life as they sojourn to “*a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1).*” Being seated in Christ through faith looks at life through the lens of being a friend of Jesus who has access to both heaven and earth’s best. It’s a place where God’s nonstop, perfect love is demonstrated, and Paradise becomes more about the relationship than the location. One of the two thieves on the cross next to Jesus entered this place right before he died as he heard and answered the Lord’s call to be His friend and journey with Him to Paradise.

“Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 24:39-43)

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for continuing to call many into the fellowship of your perfect love which leads one to love God and others. Lord, thank you that this world is temporary because God’s family and friends weren’t created to live in a world where hearts are cold to Your definition of friendship. Despite the world we live in, You came to us as both the God of eternal friendship and fellowship. Thank you for calling us to the opportunity to be partakers in the treasures of God’s eternal love and its holy power. Help us Lord to live as friends who love to obey Your commandments of love. Help us to remember Your grace is always there for us along with its power that keeps us from sin. Lastly, we pray that we live to tell others about the greatest friend one could ever have, Jesus---Amen.

4. The Tug of War for Our Heart

Jesus addresses the state of the hearts of people who want to follow Him. He has an enlightening conversation with someone who has approached Him and His disciples. *“As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:57-62)*

This Scripture brings to light some major issues that challenge one from submitting their heart fully to follow Jesus. I dealt with my own personal issues for a long time that held me back from giving my life to Jesus. I attended church for many years while letting my personal issues (and sin) keep me from making Jesus the Lord of my life. These issues discussed between Jesus and the stranger in the story above or our unique personal issues point to the who we are letting be the master of our life. We must put these issues (and sin) behind us as we follow Jesus. Jesus in His closing statement (v.62) points to His calling to ALL to live a lifestyle that makes one fit and fruitful for the Kingdom of God. No can devote their life to the service of this world and at the same time be ready (fit) for the arrival of God’s Eternal Kingdom and King Jesus. All of us must look deeply within our hearts and choose which is more important, to follow the world or to follow Jesus. The call of Jesus eventually led me to surrender and to be “beside myself” for the glory of God. This is a tug of war that pulls on everyone’s heart as one hears the Gospel of Jesus Christ which will draw hearts fully into God’s Kingdom.

Words like these of Jesus spoken in Luke 9:57-62, pierced my heart for a long period of time as I attended church. I struggled with the wrestling match over the desires of my heart. Did I desire more to be fit for this world or to be fit for the Lord's "Kingdom of Heaven". The Gospel calls out to every heart as its message is heard. It will eventually pierce the very core of every heart who hears its message and then decides to dedicate their lives to following the Lord's "Word made flesh".

Remember, it's impossible to physically travel to 2 different destinations at the same time which is why our phone/car travel maps don't support this. Neither can a heart travel to 2 different destinations at the same time. You must determine where you are going before you start moving. The spiritual direction we are heading is either set by faith in the call of Jesus or faith in something else. Let's look at a few examples Jesus gave of stumbling blocks, personal issues that have many hearts tied up in a wrestling match over which direction to head.

These same stumbling blocks stood in the way of the Lord's first disciples before they followed Him. In fact, in the Gospel of John we can read that a few of the Lord's first disciples asked Jesus "*where are you staying? (John 1:38)*" These soon to be disciples had been spending their days out in the wilderness with John the Baptist searching for the Messiah before they encountered the Lord. We are all searching for some "one, place or thing" before we encounter the Lord. In Luke, Jesus is mindful of this as He speaks to this stranger. During this discussion, Jesus addresses a major need people often commit their lives to fulfill, to have a nice home in this world to live in. I wonder how many people asked Him if He was leading His followers to have a nice home in this world. Therefore, Jesus says to the stranger, "*foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head (v.58)*".

He is declaring that all who answer the call of the Gospel, take to heart the truth that in this world we are strangers in a strange land. In doing so, we have committed our lives to taking hold of our eternal, heavenly home which has been prepared for us by the Lord. In this life, God has given all who answer His call the security of His Spirit living in us no matter what physical location we live at. The home Jesus promises us is much greater than what this world promises. Therefore, He immediately lets His followers know that following Him does not guarantee them that they will attain a prominent place in this world with a nice home to live in. Many when they make decisions in this life are guided by “location, location, location”; their need to find the perfect home in this world. In Christ, God provides something that changes everything including our need for the best home this world provides. The Lord promises us and provides for us through His cross and resurrection, the presence of His eternal “Word and Spirit” which through faith becomes our new place of security.

Another stumbling block in our life that Jesus addresses in the above Scripture in Luke is “who gets to run my house?” Many as they approached Jesus in the Gospels wonder who should have the greatest authority over their life. The Jewish believers have followed the Law (Torah) but Jesus preaches a new message of being fit (holy) under the “Law of the Spirit of Christ (Living Word)”. One dilemma they face living under the written Law given to them through Moses is that the discussion below appears to challenge its fifth commandment, “to honor your parents”. Jesus is approached by another follower of the written Law who asks this question, “*Lord, let me first go and bury my father (v.59)*”. Jesus answers, “*Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God*”. Those who follow Jesus submit their lives to first be vessels for the proclamation of the Gospel (Living Word). His followers hope in the Gospel is greater than one’s desire to follow strict traditions, even the prompt burial of the dead.

For followers of Jesus, traditions and rules have become secondary to the following of the Spirit of the Law (love). Jesus speaks this seemingly foreign response to those who follow the Law and are considering becoming a follower of His. He takes this issue head on with His response to those who want to follow Him and attempt at the same time to keep their many traditions and family obligations. Jesus says that we can only serve one master (Matt. 6:24) and these prior obligations will tie up one's heart to prevent them from following the Spirit of Christ and its Kingdom of Righteousness.

The Gospel which leads to eternal life has the ultimate authority over every aspect of one's new life in Christ. Over time, we will experience the Lord providing sufficiency in His grace to help us maintain our family relationships and commitments to loved ones while we seek first His Kingdom. However, it's important that from the depths of our heart that we never forget the reason for being a sold-out follower of Jesus. The prophet Isaiah spoke of God's greatest calling to His family of faith in Isaiah 43:10, "*You are my witnesses,*" declares the Lord, "*and my servant whom I have chosen (Isaiah 43:10)*" This verse connects with the heart of what Jesus is emphasizing that the Kingdom of Heaven will come to earth through those who live like they have been chosen to be its witnesses. Jesus re-emphasizes this calling with His disciples on the night prior to going to the cross, "*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit (John 15:16)*"

The tug of war between worldly places, possessions and relationships in this life will always clash with the calling of the "Lord of Life". It is a tug of war which we can win once and for all by surrendering to Christ; turning our lives over to the leadership of the Holy Spirit and the Lord's commandments to love the least, last and the lost.

When one believes the message of Christ and is seated by faith in Christ, they experience the Lord's call to follow Him making them fit for heaven. His Spirit leads them away from many deceptive and tempting messages that try to tug on their heart. Unfortunately, it wasn't until the middle of my adult life before I took these words of Jesus in Luke to heart the way that Jesus meant them to be taken. I wasted years chasing after the world's empty promises before I turned to Jesus to become both my Savior and Lord. This is when the Kingdom of God became the first priority in my life. This happened one night home alone in prayer as I asked Jesus to take my life. I was done with making my life all about trying to be satisfied with the lust of this world which fueled a nonstop tug of war going on for my heart. The back-and-forth journey of serving two masters ended. I had a singleness of eye on the prize, Jesus Christ. Now I have one destination that I'm heading for, to be fit for my King and His Kingdom both now and when He returns.

*"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.
(John 10:27-28)"*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for You constant calling to Your flock, the body of Christ which draw us into Your faithful fitness plan. Lord, there is nothing more blessed than the sweet surrender of one's heart to Your heart, the heart of God. You have taught me that whenever I struggle with a temptation or fearful situation, I simply remember what direction You are leading me. Your voice, "Word and Spirit" will ALWAYS lead me to Your eternal home. What comfort it is to know that Your loving voice leads us to eternal life and that no one can snatch that from us. Help me to continue to follow You to be fit for Your "Kingdom of Heaven" so others may know You. I continue to pray for the church that Your calling to her will truly become her first priority---Amen.

5. The Covering of God, His Holy House

Last year, our house was severely damaged by an electrical fire that started in the afternoon while we were home. We quickly reported the fire using the 911 emergency hotline. When we called in the fire my wife and I never imagined that most of the house would require restoration work after the fire was extinguished. We had reported the fire early but by the time the fire was fully extinguished, most of the rooms in the house were damaged beyond repair. This is not an experience I would want anybody to go through. I didn't realize at that time that not only were we dealing with fire damage but also with smoke and water damage. This combined damage required all the rooms to be gutted and rebuilt.

As we watched the fire roaring and waited for it to be extinguished, I was overwhelmed by unbelief in what I was seeing. However, my mind went to Romans 8:28, "*and we know that for those who love God all things work together for good*". I declared in my heart to the Lord, "I believe this will be a Romans 8:28 experience". Immediately, in my heart the peace of Christ came upon me. From that moment I was able to be calm despite watching the fire gut my house. I'm thankful nobody was injured and believed that God would make our home better than it was before.

When the fire was extinguished, we were told that we couldn't go back into the house. However, the firemen did go inside for us to retrieve our keys and wallets that we had left on the kitchen counter as we ran out of the house. Access to our home and its contents were taken away from us that day. Days later, there were some items salvaged out of the house that we were able to access. However, as that day ended, my wife and I had no access to our home or our clothes inside. However, we had our lives and the grace of God to lead us to see a better day and to testify that God is good, all the time!

The covering of that home that the Lord had given us for 30 years had been taken away in one day. Personally, I believed that the enemy had attacked my family and my home because I had recently been called into an exciting ministry which would bring many souls into God's Kingdom. My faith was being tested but my heart remained fixed on the calling that the Lord had given me to this new ministry in India. My wife was as resolved as I was to watch God turn this situation around as He rebuilt my home and blessed my service in this new season of ministry.

I thought about the attack that Adam and Eve had to endure from the enemy. The initial sin that had entered the world through the deception of the evil one had left them instantly homeless and without proper clothes to wear to face the world. They too were ushered out of their "Garden of Eden", home and place of security. Like them, I was trying to process what had just happened through a single event. Unlike them, we knew that the covering of God's grace and His eternal home could never be removed. This covering in God's "New Covenant", His grace provided in Christ guarantees us that the Lord has a Heavenly Home awaiting all His children of faith.

Now, one year later our home has been fully restored from the fire and has given us a greater appreciation of God's home (covering). Both physically and spiritually we are better off than before the fire because of the faithfulness of God. His promise of being with us and preparing a heavenly home, gives us hope even as our homes are being damaged in this sinful world we inhabit. I've had the opportunity to witness to many people since the fire about God's faithfulness both as our earthly home was being restored and now as we enjoy being back in our home. I am forever thankful for the covering that God provides. I believe when my wife and I meet Adam and Eve in heaven, we now have a common experience to talk about; being in a beautiful home one day and homeless the next.

My house fire and rebuild experience has helped me to better relate to the Lord's teaching that He shared with the Pharisees about trying to repair an old garment and a new wine skin in Mark 2:21-22 *"No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins."* I observed as our home was being restored after the fire that although some of the rooms' walls weren't destroyed by the fire, they still needed to be replaced because you can't join new building materials to those exposed to fire, water and smoke damage. The work required to properly restore our home after the fire is another example of the problem Jesus was addressing in His parable above about repairing an old garment.

A stronger garment can't be produced by joining two pieces together that are in different condition. The rate of shrinking and aging of the clothes will differ as the garment is worn and washed. Eventually, the repair work using the two different pieces will pull apart and the garment will be in worse condition than it was before. I didn't realize that every room in my house would need a new ceiling, walls and floor after the fire to provide us with a clean, sturdy like new constructed home. We needed a new covering (skin) over every room of our home as it was restored. Without this approach of using all new materials for the covering, the remanence of the fire, smoke and water damage would still be in our home leaving the repaired home inferior to what it was before. Imagine walking in God's house with stinky rooms. Only the aroma, newness of Christ takes away this smell. The Pharisees denied the fact that their sinful hearts wouldn't be acceptable in God's heavenly house. Sin hardened their hearts against the plans of God. They made temporary sacrifices in their temple to cover the sins of their flesh but NOT to make their hearts new.

Restoration of their house (temple) and relationship with God needed more than just superficial cleaning (animal sacrifices). The temple needed to be made new and eternally fire proofed. This is what the new and holy fabric of the life of Jesus was bringing, the complete restoration of God's house and a brand new (better) relationship with His people; a new, holy, and indestructible house for them. The Pharisees rejected God's call to be properly covered with His new house, His eternal covering of righteousness offered through the sacrifice of God's Son sent from heaven. The Pharisees sacrifices like the practice of sowing on patches to cover imperfection, couldn't protect them from their horrendous house fire experience as the Romans in A.D. 70 burned their temple to the ground. However, the resurrection of the New Temple in Christ (A.D. 33) has provided Christians an eternal house.

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

Prayer: Come, Lord Jesus, with your heavenly, eternal house and replace our works with the complete and splendid work of Your righteousness and faithfulness. You make all things new every day. You are calling God's children to God's mercy and a life made new in the holiness of Your sinless life. We give you thanks and praise for the new residence that we have entered as we trust in Jesus. Help us to rest in the Good Seed of the Gospel; to be completed in Christ and to be ready for the amazing eternal home that will one day join heaven and earth. Help us to see ourselves living in this house where there will be a heavenly aroma of Christ coming forth from Your holy life being in our midst---Amen.

Section II. “The New Identity”

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
(2nd Corinthians 5:17)”*

(Note: These chapters highlight how God’s grace sets one apart from sin as it references the Gospel teaching of Romans Chapters 1 through 5)

6. Marked by The Gospel of Christ

As the Gospel message is proclaimed in the world, humanity's fallen identity (sinful image) is drawn into the light of God's perfect identity found in Christ. This question is answered through the proclamation of Gospel, "Are we here to be defined by a sinful world OR are we here to be set apart (marked) through the intimate knowledge of a loving and holy God; a God who has given us His best through His Son?". The Apostle Paul shares his answer to this question in Romans 1:1, "*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God (Romans 1:1)*". Paul was marked by this new identity through the Gospel and now lives to give witness to its life-changing, supernatural mark placed upon believers.

In the Gospel, the righteousness of Christ is revealed through the impact of God's "Living Word". All who hear, receive, and take the Gospel message to heart (bear its mark) live as follows: "*the just shall live by faith (Romans 1:17)*". God's mark of righteousness is visibly seen both on one's godly use of their body and from the Spirit of Christ one exudes. Those who trust in God's "Living Word" bear the mark of the Gospel as they consume His life-giving daily bread. This bread of Christ from heaven continually nourishes God's children and sets them apart to walk in the presence of God forever by faith.

The Gospel of Christ is God's Superior, all-encompassing "Living Word" that has been spoken over fallen humanity. Its completeness alone brings God's higher purpose to light and overcomes the darkness of all incomplete messages that this unjust world has produced. The Gospel message is heaven sent and aimed at all hearts to deliver them from sin into a new identity; one that is clothed in Christ and living in unending fellowship with God. This message moves Paul to write in Romans 1:16-17,

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.”

God’s holy life (and justice) personally comes to humanity through the Gospel. His “Living Word” faithfully works to form people into the image of God, Christ the “Living Word”. Those who carry the Gospel don’t live like prisoners hiding behind a mask. Rather, they live a life of walking in freedom through one’s “new identity”, one that is forever destined to reveal the goodness of God and His life-changing truth alive in them. All who have received the “new identity” of Christ through the Gospel message are set apart, marked for God’s calling and purpose. The Gospel has been sent to humanity from heaven with God’s power. Forces against the Gospel are real and empowered by sin. While sin can make inroads for a short season (compared to eternity) in this world they are defeated in the light of Christ and His gift of eternal life. The grace of God can’t be stopped from marking people through the Gospel to step out boldly by faith with their “new identity” and to live for God’s Kingdom.

*“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’
(John 8:31-32)”*

Prayer: Father, thank you for sending Your Son Jesus into this world from Heaven with His righteous life. I thank you for Your Gospel message which strips off worldly marks and masks that this world puts on us. Only Your gift of freedom from sin sets us apart and gives us a new identity. I pray that many will hear and receive the Gospel message. I pray that the Spirit of Christ will bring many to receive the Lord’s Heavenly mark upon their heart and soul. All praise, honor and glory to you God, forever---Amen.

7. Marks and False Identities (Masks) from the World

All born into this world are called to become “salt and light”, a living testimony which testifies to God’s glorious presence and power. However, humanity’s fall into sin has given them worldly birth marks and masks to be identified by. Despite this, God hasn’t changed his purpose for humanity to give witness to this truth that His *“invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. (Romans 1:20)”* That’s why all who refuse to testify about the God of creation stand under His judgment (Romans 1:19).

Nonetheless, free will allows one to choose to be defined by Heaven’s revelation that came down with the Son of God or to be defined by the fleeting knowledge of this world. When Christ returns, all the world’s false identities that seek after this fallen world will perish. Those who choose to be defined by Heaven’s revelation rest every day in the finished work of Christ and will not perish. They have chosen the eternal rest that comes from dressing themselves in the “love and righteousness” of God as they believe the Gospel message. They enjoy unbroken fellowship with the “Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. They have chosen to live yoked to the life of Christ through His sacrifice for them on the cross. They are witnesses of the Holy Spirit which has set them free from the sinful marks of this world that try to define who they are. They live with a biblical worldview that makes the things of God’s Kingdom and His righteousness of first importance in their life (Matt. 6:33). They run and endure in their calling to have faith in Christ. This pursuit transforms them and moves them to walk with God’s “thoughts, words and deeds”, His righteousness. They are confident that God’s faithfulness has chosen them to be His prize in Christ. They live as students who are learning how to understand and be empowered by God’s presence and power.

Meanwhile, those who are defined by the world's ignorance and weakness have chosen to stand in opposition to God's Word. They align themselves with the wicked and are slaves to sin. They have rejected walking in the "Light of Christ" as Paul shares in (Romans 1:21-22), *"although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools."* Unfortunately, this movement towards unbelief is common in many of the contemporary cultures of today. The cultures which stand outside of or opposed to the "Light of Christ" follow a cultural drum beat which leads many to rest in selfishness and unbelief. They encourage their people to live from a worldview that stands upon the premise that humanity exists to satisfy itself rather than to live for their God-given purpose.

The ungodly acts of unrighteousness listed in Romans 1:24-32 shows the depravity of sin, how far away humanity can move from God's revelation in creation and His call to be redeemed through His Son Jesus. There are many different masks that the unrighteous (unbelievers) put on. These masks are ignorantly put on to satisfy the god of this world's purpose; *"to steal, to kill and to destroy (John 10:10)"* humanity. The destructive path many people chose leads the unrighteous in this world to be footstools of Satan as they live: 1) to destroy every opportunity to have fellowship with the One, true, "loving and righteous" God AND 2) to destroy every opportunity to walk in the "Light of Christ" which leads all to love God and others. The depravity of sin battles against humanity's created destiny of being transformed through fellowship with God's "Spirit and Truth". Those who reject God's promise to be perfected in the life of His Son never receive God's gift of His Spirit which identifies those who eternally belong to God. Despite the battles that rage on, God's Kingdom and righteousness is being established in humanity through faith the Gospel.

*“Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.
(Romans 1:32)”*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the ongoing work of Your redeeming love. Before one turns to You and Your redeeming love, they are imprisoned by sin and the destructive lifestyle of the evil one. Help us to embrace Your “Way, Truth and Life” as we turn away from the short sighted and fleeting ways of this world. Our “thoughts, words and deeds” can either testify about life or death. Connect us each day with Your life-giving Word that is being proclaimed from Your throne of grace and stating that “You make all things new”. This gift of Your holiness through the sacrifice of Jesus brings forth “life and life abundant”. May our lives be fruitful, NOT destructive and glorify our Father in Heaven as we lift-up Your name over ALL people and circumstances that are before us---Amen.

8. God Alone is the “Judge of Righteousness”

Whether one believes in God and His Word or not, ALL will be judged according to God’s perfect “Standard of Righteousness”, the fulfillment of God’s law in Christ. *“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law. (Romans 2:12)”* God sent His only begotten Son to reveal God’s righteousness and to be humanity’s covering of grace. The righteousness of Christ alone overcomes God’s final judgment of sin. God, the “Judge of Righteousness” has decreed that all sin will be judged and removed (John 16:8-11). He does this as He offers humanity total freedom from sin; the opportunity to walk by faith with God eternally in the incorruptible righteousness of His Son’s life.

God gave the Jewish people “The Written Law” through the prophet Moses to reveal to them His righteous ways and His plan for those who would walk with Him by trusting in His righteousness. Those ignorant of “The Law” given to Moses, still have the testimony of creation around them and a God-given conscience (knowledge of right and wrong) to direct them towards God’s holiness. Whether by the wonders of creation or one’s moral conscience informed by the written Law, humanity is being called to *“love the Lord (Duet. 6:5)”* and to *“do to others what you want them to do to you (Matt. 7:12)”*.

Living outside of God’s righteousness is unfruitful and destructive. Walking by faith in God’s righteousness, the life of His Son Jesus leads God’s people to eternal life and fruit. Trusting in the life and righteousness of Christ brings forgiveness from sin and disallows all from living as the final judge of another’s soul. *“Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. (Romans 2:1)”*

There is no comparison between humanity's self-righteousness and God's perfect standard of righteousness which perfectly reflects God's Truth. Moses was given the Law to provide humanity with a bridge to understanding the depths of God's righteousness. It served as a bridge for believers to begin to come alongside God's life-giving "thoughts, words and deeds". However, the prophets (even Moses) spoke of an unbreakable covenant (life-giving bridge) that would connect God's people permanently with His heaven-sent Word and power to overcome sin. The bridge of the Law was sent as a tutor and a nanny to keep God's community of faith together with Him. In the Law alone, God didn't include the power to live totally free from sinning. God's mercy and compassion embodied in Christ allowed the Judge of Righteousness in His timing to empower His people through His fulfilled, "Living Word (The Gospel)" to live free from sin.

God's Living Word included the power to take His people from simply recognizing unrighteousness to seeing their greater need to receive power from on high to overcome their sin. God's power to overcome sin came as a new, Gospel-centered heart was transplanted into His people through the Divine hands of the "Master Heart Surgeon", Jesus Christ. His surgery places God's righteousness into the hearts of His children. *"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly nor is, circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly and; circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God. (Romans 2:28-29)"* Only the pure (holy) heart of Jesus fully pleases God and can stand against God's final judgment.

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)"

“And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. (John 16:8-11)”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for bringing Your judgment to bear upon our sin. Living a religious life will NEVER free us from Your final judgment of all sin in both body and soul. Only Your holy “thoughts, words and deeds” will stand the test of eternity. Lead us to hunger and thirst for Your righteousness which stands the test of time. Teach us NOT to judge others but to bear the sins of others as we forgive others instead of judging them. Help us to grow in this relationship of receiving God’s grace and abiding, finding abundant life in Your righteousness. Enlighten and empower us to live humble lives that abide in and put on the righteousness of God found only in His Son, full of “Grace and Truth”---Amen.

9. People Live Separated from God by Sin

When a person acknowledges that their sin separates them from living with the “God of Righteousness”, they can understand why God sent His Son into the world. *“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. (John 3:13)”* God’s righteousness, the Word made flesh, only became visible (Light) to the world in God’s sinless Son. Now, humanity can behold the holiness of God. Sinners can only take hold of God’s peace and rest as they turn from their unrighteous works (Romans 3:10) to the righteousness of God. *“I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins. (Isaiah 43:25)”*. Faith in the righteousness of Christ rescues us from the separation from God caused by sin and its power that holds unregenerate hearts captive.

The power of sin left unchecked in the hearts of people keeps them prisoners to their unrighteousness. No one is able through their own power and righteous works to overcome sin and its wages, eternal death (Romans 6:23). This hopeless state of being held captive, yoked to unrighteousness and the power of sin is where all reside who haven’t heard about and received God’s beloved Son, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)”*. Living a life without eternal hope, destined only to be the recipient of God’s final judgment of ALL sin, is NOT God’s will for humanity. The Righteous One, the “Son of God”, NOT born of man but born of the “Spirit of God” and sent from heaven, now makes God’s righteousness and freedom from sin available to ALL. He is seated on the throne of God and His blood intercedes for the sins of humanity. *“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. (Romans 3:21-22)”*

God's hope comes as one acknowledges their sinful predicament and turns to Jesus by faith. Many marvel both people and angels, at God's righteousness coming from heaven to earth through the supernatural event of the (arrival) virgin birth and (departure) resurrection of Christ. God is still performing miracles today in our world but this miracle of the sinless man coming from heaven to earth is the greatest miracle for humanity. Jesus came (John 6:38) to redeem humanity; to demonstrate God's supernatural power to overcome and remove sin. Absolutely, there will always be mystery when it comes to fully understanding how the natural (physical) realm coexists with the supernatural (spiritual) realm. Jesus came to unite the two.

There are many prophecies recorded in Scripture that predicted that the event of the Righteous One, Christ coming to earth (Isaiah 9:6-7). His Gospel (Good News) *"brings to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things. (Eph. 3:9)"* All who trust in His message and God's gift of righteousness, will experience the eternal fruit of the Lord's finished work on the cross, righteousness in their lives. The gift of the sinless life of Christ and freedom from sin will always point to the holiness of God. Also, this gift points to the mercy of God and that nothing is impossible for God, even the removal of sin and eternal death from one's future.

*"But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."
(Isaiah 53:5-6)*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for revealing the truth that it's impossible to please God by resting in our righteousness deeds. Your Gospel brings us to repentance as the truth about our unrighteous state comes to light. Lead us Lord by the grace of God to take hold of Your righteousness which will forever please God and set one's soul free from sin and its power, eternal death. Help us to acknowledge that only Your life that has come from heaven has the power to overcome sin. There is a way to live that is pleasing to God but it is NOT to live one's life under the judgment of sin. Lead us all to Your everlasting way of turning from our sin to Your heaven-sent forgiveness for our sins which is God's desire for all before Your return--- Amen.

10. God Provides Salvation through Faith

The “Most High”, God has interceded for humanity’s lack of faith through many acts of grace (mercy). Scripture reveals that God’s mercy is gathering a people of faith to Himself as His people are justified through faith. *‘For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness (Romans 4:3-5)’.*

This lifestyle of faith starting with the Jewish patriarchs such as Abraham demonstrated to us how God’s early people of faith relied on Him alone. They were justified and lived by faith in God’s Word, which is the same lifestyle that the followers of Christ emulate today. Abraham believed God’s promise that even in his old age he would father a son and be the father of many nations. Abraham believed in the *“God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did (Romans 4:17)”*. Like Abraham, Jesus the “Son of Man” walked out the prophetic “Word of God” as He believed fully in its plan for His life recorded in Scripture. Trusting in God’s Word is the example Jesus faithfully followed and how He leads others to become God’s eternal inheritance from this world.

“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. (Isaiah 9:6-7)” This is God’s promise to all of Abraham’s descendants who cling to His Word and are justified by faith in the Son given for us, *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin. (Romans 4:7-8)”*

Like Abraham who lived in covenant with God by faith, God's children of the Gospel live by faith in God's new covenant through faith in Christ. Both then and now God's people look forward to receiving His promise (inheritance) for them. Faith in the finished work of Christ, unites God's children with the gift of the Lord's eternal righteousness. Abraham was *"fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Rom. 4:21-25)"*

The grace of the Old Testament covenants has been rolled into the unending covenant (grace) founded upon the "life, death and resurrection (New Covenant)" of Christ. God's promise of eternal life and His Kingdom's presence coming to earth rests fully upon the faithfulness and righteousness of the resurrected King of Glory, the Lord Jesus. Only Christ could satisfy God's requirements for this gift of eternal righteousness to be bestowed upon humanity. Through the resurrection of Jesus, God has declared that His followers will be forever joined with Him through the shed blood of His sinless Son (1 John 1:7-9). All who trust in the life of God's Son through faith are made clean through His sacrifice and bring glory to God. They worship God as they turn from sin daily and live their lives trusting in His Son and following His Way.

*"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
(Hebrews 11:6)"*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for leading us to the lifestyle of living by faith. All the children of God must walk by faith and NOT by sight. Help us to continue trusting that Your righteousness alone sets one free from the eternal judgment of sin. Your holy faith which led You in life, in death and in being resurrected is the model of faith we desire to follow now as it supersedes the Old Testament model of faith demonstrated through the life of Abraham. Help us to look at each day in this new light given from Your faithfulness and to be made new each day. Help us to let Your light shine through us upon this world which needs Your redemption to take hold of every heart. Be glorified as we live the life of trusting in Your righteousness and telling others about God's "Kingdom of Heaven" coming to earth through Your righteous "words and deeds"---Amen.

11. Hope, Love and Peace in the Son's Life

“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:5).” “Living Hope” comes from the covenantal “love of God” given to this world as God establishes eternal peace through the love of His Son. The hearts of those who receive God’s Son, experience the Father’s covenantal love being poured over their lives through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Until Christ returns, God continues to pour His life-giving “hope and love” into many hearts to point them to the upcoming resurrection. This brings eternal peace to one’s soul as they rest in the incorruptible righteousness embodied in God’s Son Jesus. While humanity was a prisoner of sin with no hope in sight, the Son of God, Jesus came into the world with God’s righteousness so that His life could be given as a ransom for many on the cross He bore for us. He paid the debt for the wages of sin so that God’s redeemed could have eternal life. *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)”*

“For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (Romans 4:13)” God brought “hope and love” into Abraham’s life as Abraham believed God would give him a son and a future born out of his hopeless situation. Abraham and his wife Sarah were far beyond childbearing age when God approached them and spoke life into their hopeless situation, the dead womb of Sarah. He gave them a heir. This act of grace pointed Abraham towards God’s faithfulness to His promise for all His descendants, people of faith. Later, the God of Mercy provides Abraham with a sacrifice (ram) to spare Abraham’s son’s life. Lastly in Christ, God provides a one-for-all sin sacrifice so that ALL the nations for ALL generations might receive His Son Jesus and be saved.

Hope and love eternal comes to ALL through the Holy Spirit who call God their Father and Jesus their Savior and Lord. God has established an eternal, unbreakable and unending covenant by faith through the righteousness and faithfulness of His Son Jesus (Gen. 21:2). The life that God brought into Abraham and Sarah's life (Isaac which means laughter or rejoicing) has led us to carry in our hearts the "Living Hope" founded upon the sacrifice of God's only Son Jesus for all of God's children. Only the Christ, the "Holy Word made flesh" brings eternal "hope and love" to bear upon His children of faith. Jesus paid the ransom for humanity's sin on the cross despite their sin and unworthiness. Humanity has been chosen by God to take possession by faith His destiny for His redeemed, to walk forever by faith in holy fellowship with their God. Faith in God's Son radically changes lives as His unconditional, holy act of love is received personally in one's heart. The chains of sin which imprison lives are being broken as God's "hope and love" is poured into the hearts of many.

"That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (Romans 4:16)"

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the payment You have made for me with Your righteous life exchanged for my sinful life on the cross. Your blood sacrifice, and risen life now received through "faith in You" brings me eternal hope and love as I trust in Your righteousness. You alone set God's children of faith apart from the world and its judgment of sin. Without Your sacrifice, there is no way to attain what God desires, His mercy, hope and love poured out upon this world. I thank God for His mercy on many who receive His Son. May this faith in the sacrifice of Christ move many hearts to receive and carry His "hope and love" into this world until His return---Amen.

12. The New Destiny in One Man's Obedience

“Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’ (Genesis 2:15-17)” Adam’s refusal to eat only what God commanded him to eat, occurred despite receiving God’s instruction and led ALL of humanity into sin. Adam by disobeying God caused humanity to be bound to sin and eternal death; a life forever separated from the glory of God. Adam was deceived by Satan into rebelling against God just like Satan had rebelled in heaven. *“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned (Romans 5:12).”*

Lucifer had tried to establish His own way of righteousness and he along with his followers (1/3 of the angels) were expelled from heaven. Satan allowed his pride to lead him to seek his own way and declare himself the lord of righteousness, *“I will be like the Most High (Isaiah 14:14)”*. Lucifer’s words and actions led to his judgment by God and penalty of being cast out of heaven into hell; *“Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit” (Isaiah 14:15).”*

Life NOT “judgment and eternal death” is the Creator’s desire and destiny for all who trust in Him. Adam and Eve disobeyed God’s righteous commandment for remaining in God’s loving care. This was a costly lesson for Adam and Eve to learn. Scripture declares that there is no one righteous, no not one in this world but God (Romans 3:10,23). Now, Lucifer stands eternally judged but humanity through grace has been offered the opportunity to receive new life in the righteousness of God’s Son.

God offers the sacrifice of His sinless Son as the Way to be identified by righteousness, through faith in the New Covenant, God's perfect union established in the perfect love demonstrated between the Father and the Son Jesus who came from heaven (John 6:38). Through faith in the Good Testimony of Jesus Christ many are set free from the eternal punishment of sin (Romans 5:8). The sin of the first Adam brought suffering and death into the realm of humanity's existence. Jesus, the second Adam through His perfect obedience to God's "Spirit and Truth" restored humanity to its created destiny as He gave His life as a ransom for many. Now, God's life-giving righteousness is received through faith in His Son who ushers believers into "new life" and God's eternal reign. *"For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:17)"*

Jesus fulfilled the righteous requirement of the Law (Matt. 5:17) and the Spirit of the Law (Duet. 6:4-6) to justify flesh under the Law and place it under grace by faith, humanity's created destiny (Gen. 1:27). Now, the redeemed of God await the Lord's second coming. *"For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth. (Psalm 96:13)"* This is the new destiny that identifies God's beloved, "when Christ returns, all who have received Jesus and walk in His righteousness by faith will experience a bodily resurrection like Jesus and live forever with God."

"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19)"

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for Your payment, the sacrifice You made for my sin so that I might receive the new destiny I have in You. When You return to judge this fallen world and its hopeless destiny only those who trust in Your faithfulness will be spared from the penalty of sin. Thank you for Your mercy and for changing my heart as I await Your return. Continue to widen my heart as you reveal to me the depths of Your Gospel message in “Spirit and Truth”. Help me Lord to obey Your “Word and Spirit” that has been placed inside of me so that I will follow God’s will and bring glory to His Holy Name. Lead me to embrace my “new identity” in Christ daily and the perfect life-changing love demonstrated between the Father and the Son so that my heart is ready for Your return and eternal reign---Amen.

Section III. “The New Life”

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)”

(Note: These chapters highlight God’s grace leading and empowering believers to be yoked to a Christ-like lifestyle, as they reference the Gospel teaching of Romans Chapters 6 through 12)

13. Death to Sin and Living Anew in Christ

“Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)” As one is baptized into Christ through faith, the death that Christ suffered on the cross brings death to the “dominion of sin” in one’s life. In addition, through the Holy Spirit as one rises from the baptism waters, they begin living a “new life” which comes from their being joined with the supernatural resurrection of Christ from the grave. Baptism is a time for one to publicly declare that they desire the finished work of Christ, God’s righteousness to reign in their life. This means of grace (sacrament) opens one up further to be led, to live anew in the power of the Holy Spirit. During baptisms, the manifestation of the glory of God can be visibly seen as some participants are freed from their long-term bondage to personal sins while being baptized.

“For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. (Romans 6:10)” What happens when the “newness of life” takes hold of one who is made new in Christ? God’s promise (Living Word) of eternal life in Christ, closes the door to sin’s dominion in one’s life and opens one’s soul to the power of the Holy Spirit bringing “new (sanctified) life”. *“Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:13-14)”* Faith in the Gospel and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit transforms one as they become an instrument of God’s “love and righteousness”.

One's course (purpose and destiny) is changed as one turns from sin to the sinless life of Christ; turning from the wages of sin to the promise of God. The newness of life, God's gift of righteousness leads and empowers believers to step away from unrighteous "thoughts, words and deeds". On the day of Pentecost after the crucifixion and resurrection, when the Jewish people heard the Gospel preached to them by the Apostles, they realized their sin had sent Jesus, their messiah to the cross, *"they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."* These first converts submitted themselves to be baptized. New believers today should repent of their sin and be baptized. They will receive the Holy Spirit who opens them up to the blessings of possessing "new life" in the Lord's righteousness. The ongoing work of God's grace teaches many about the goodness of God and leads them to submit "body, soul (heart and mind) and spirit" to embrace God's good purpose of bringing heaven to earth.

*"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 6:23)"*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I thank You for Your "new life" given to me to live anew in You. Despite my sin and sinful inclinations, You have come into my heart and placed me on the path of living by grace for Your righteousness. Your grace has come through Your payment for my sin on the cross. Renew in me a right spirit this day and everyday which submits to the power of Your love. May Your sacrifice for my sin and Your grace NOT be in vain but reap the harvest You deserve for the glory of God----Amen.

14. Holy Union with God's "Righteousness and Love"

"Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. (Romans 7:4)" Prior to encountering and receiving (trusting in) the "Life of Christ", one is married to their body of works including sin; what's born of their unregenerate spirit and its accompanying fruit (death). The Jews believed they stood fully righteous before God as they followed "The Law". Certainly, the Law gave them a temporary covering before God and a better promise than those living outside of the Law. However, following the Law didn't eternally cover their sin and empower them "to be" forever free from ALL sin for God's good purpose. Approaching God solely through the animal sacrifices of the Law and one's righteous works still fell short of the fullness of God's "righteousness and love".

Paul stated in Romans 7:4 above *"you have become dead to the law through the body of Christ"*. He shared this so that we could better understand what union with the righteous flesh of Christ is offering us, something far superior to being married to one's fallen works to obey the Law. Jesus declared, *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it abundantly. (John 10:10)"* A life spent trying to attain self-righteousness doesn't lead one to be eternally united with God's righteousness. However, a life spent living by faith under God's "grace and power" does. God is glorified as one receives His son and acknowledges that they need a Savior, *"I desire mercy not sacrifices says the Lord. (Hosea 6:6)"* His Son is the culmination of the Law (Romans 10:4). His life-giving sacrifice on the cross brings forgiveness to bear on the lives of those who turn to God's mercy (Romans 5:8). This is the marriage proposal that God is calling His beloved bride to say "yes" to; union with the fullness of God's "grace and power" forever through His gift of righteousness.

“Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You. (John 17:1)” The Jewish believers’ hearts had grown cold and unresponsive to God’s prophetic plan for His people after years of living under the Law. It’s like a failing marriage that needs more of God’s “grace and power” to restore life into that union. The Jewish believers were so singularly sin focused through their interpretations of the law that they had no ability to receive God’s goodness, His grace and love being offered as a new unbreakable covenant to them. Married partners who always focus on who is right and who is wrong lack the ability to come together as well. The glory of Jesus would bring down ALL of sin’s walls of separation.

They made the law their idol which made the prophetic writings in the Old Testament powerless to keep their hearts open to God’s greater purpose to be united by faith with them and to save the world through them. Over time, their hearts had become cold like an inattentive marriage partner. The leaders lacked God’s passion for the people both inside their fold and outside their fold. The Jewish leader’s zeal for righteousness according to their interpretation of the law had blinded them as they had made their faith all about their ability to look good on the outside. They were so concerned with how they looked that they were rotting on the inside and unable to love anybody on the outside of their circle (those they judged as righteous). It made them incapable of understanding the prophetic words of Scripture (God’s greater desire for His chosen), like *“I desire mercy (Hosea 6:6)”*. With Christ, the time had come for God’s complete work, His righteousness to be poured upon the world through His “Covenant of Grace”. Only His all-sufficient grace and its power could bring new life to the spiritually dead who worshipped in the flesh and NOT in the spirit (love) of God.

The religion of the Jewish believer had taught them about sin (like a good nanny) through the covenant of the Law. However, they responded to this teaching with only exterior works of their flesh that failed to join them into eternal good standing with God, perfect in love and holy. The people needed a greater work within their heart than the law by itself offered; *“for when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. (Romans 7:5)”* God did NOT take His bride to Himself for her to live forever under the power of sin. For a season, God had built a fence for them (nation of Israel) to keep sin out. Now was the time for His bride (including all nations), to live and enjoy eternally His righteousness covering for them. The power of sin in their hearts was being replaced by the power of God’s forgiveness to make their inner image like God’s righteous Son.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)” Only faith in the righteous flesh of Christ unites two to be one, God and flesh living together forever in holy matrimony. Being in Christ, His newness of life keeps believers free from the judgment of sin. It makes them new every day to God from the inside-out as the Spirit of Christ manifests His grace and truth through their lives. It keeps God’s beloved, His bride consumed with the love of God rather than being consumed with the fear of failing to obey the written Law. Now through the goodness of God, like newlyweds exchanging their wedding vows at the altar, we fix our eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2).

*“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion’, says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him.’
(Lamentations 3:22-24)”*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in faith I come to you like a bride walking down the aisle in a wedding ceremony who believes in her husband's love. I realize as I do this that I have done nothing on my own to deserve to be in this position of being taken into Your heart and home. May Your eternal promise change my life forever and make me new for You each day. I pray that You continue to bring the life-giving power of Your grace to bear upon my heart. Lord, like a wedding ring on a finger encircling my heart with Your righteous love and be my daily portion this day and every day. May I be smitten by Your love forever--- Amen.

15. The Letter of the Law was Powerless Against Sin

“For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (Rom. 7:22-23)”

The Apostle Paul was a religiously righteous Jew who delighted in living under “The Letter of the Law”. Nonetheless, he struggled like any person trying to get close to God without Christ to overcome the power of sin within. His worst attempts at drawing close to God through the Law, caused him to take delight in the stoning and incarcerating of many followers of Christ. His best attempts still highlighted to him the struggles he had living a life entrapped by the power of his fallen nature (sinful man). Paul experienced that living under the Law as one who knew its regulations almost perfectly, had offered no spiritual power to free him from the “law and power” of sin at work in his body. Paul had discovered that living under the Law still left one vulnerable to do what they despised because of the power of sin. Like many religious persons Paul asked, “is there not anyway I can overcome the power of sin within me?”

Paul describes the utter frustration he was experiencing in his battle against the power of sin working within him this way, *“for the good that I will to do, I do not do. (Rom. 7:19)”* Sin inside one’s heart left unchecked by the power of God’s forgiveness (the blood of Jesus) and the gift of Christ’s righteousness leaves one wide open to the sinful desires of one’s soul. The Law contained many different sacrifices to help one blot out various sins. It has no power to permanently remove sin from one’s heart. Sin is an enemy that has encamped itself in the human heart. This enemy within has erected an impenetrable wall between one’s heart and God’s divine nature. However, God’s divine power as it comes to us through the knowledge of Jesus pulls down this wall of sin in one’s heart.

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. (Romans 7:18)” God by His mercy did NOT forsake humanity to live walled off forever in this hopeless state. Paul reveals God’s remedy for delivering one from the hopeless and powerless state of living separated by sin from God. *“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:24-25)”* We thank God for His divine power which enters one’s life by faith to connect them with a life of abiding and having access to God’s divine nature. Through the intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ one overcomes “sin, death and the grave”.

“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

(2nd Peter 1:2-4)”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for bringing to humanity Your “Living Word”, Your “Spirit of the Law” into this world so that many hearts might be delivered from the hopeless state of being under the power of sin. The Law pointed God’s people to the truth that they have a tremendous need to be delivered from sin. The “Spirit of the Law” brought God’s divine power to bear upon the lives of His children. We thank God for sending His “Living Word” to us through the life of His Son. May we be led every day to embrace this journey of being partakers of God’s divine nature found in His Son. I pray that all would receive Jesus Christ to live free from sin and to be empowered by the righteous life of Jesus Christ to walk with God forever---Amen.

16. The Spirit of the Law is Freeing and Fruitful

Those who are married, yoked to God's nature through the "righteousness of Christ" are joined to the obedience of the heart and flesh of His Son. Through faith they abide in the Lord's house of the New Covenant. Here, there is NO condemnation for ALL who have entered God's "Holy Household" through "grace by faith". How is this possible? *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1)"* The new covenant (marriage) unites one with the "forgiveness and righteousness" of Christ. It keeps them living under the roof (Life-giving Word) of God's holy dwelling. Faith in Christ is the key that keeps the door open to God's holy house. As one walks through this door by faith they are covered and empowered to live in the house of the Sinless One, Jesus. The Spirit of Christ reveals to them how to walk in the "Spirit of the Law" (love) and how to keep trusting in God's eternal promise. The New Covenant blesses the followers of Christ with the freedom to walk without condemnation in God's mercy (grace) and leads them to live fruitful lives aimed at glorifying God.

"And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. (Romans 8:10)" When a believer receives "new life" in Christ, the finished work of Christ and the Holy Spirit draws them to God's Kingdom and righteousness. Faith in Christ leads one to walk in the unending "newness of life (Romans 6:4)" which is not beholden to sin. One's faith abides in the Spirit and righteousness of Christ (John 15:4). The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, unrighteousness, and judges it. The Spirit leads and empowers believers to follow the "Spirit of the Law". They follow Jesus who obeys God's commandments (John 5:19) as they are all joined together to fulfill God's greatest commandment given to His people of faith,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. (Mark 12:30)” This Way of the Lord leads many to walk in His perfection and abundance. It draws the hearts of God’s children to hunger and thirst for a deeper, personal knowledge of the love and righteousness of God’s Son. As one walks by faith in the Kingdom of God, the gift of the newness of life continually works to transform one into the image of God’s Son. This gift of new life eternally positions one in the love of Christ to co-labor in the harvest fields of the Gospel where eternal, spiritual fruit is being harvested. Following the Spirit of the Law leads believers to experience God’s radical love and righteousness flowing through them. The life of Christ is a gift that keeps on giving as it leads His bride to be content in His spiritual presence as they await His physical return, second coming (Phil. 4:11). This place of no condemnation in Christ is where all who are being transformed by the Gospel best represent the Gospel truth.

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:7-8)”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for bringing us into the Father’s House and to the place where Your grace is working abundantly in us to bear much fruit. Lord, Your Truth has made Your glorious Kingdom and righteousness of first importance in our lives. Worldly desires no longer rule our hearts as they are being replaced by a deeper desire to love God and others whole heartedly. The bread of Your righteousness Lord brings us “newness of life” every morning as we awake to Your presence and trust in You. Holy Spirit come and transform our “thoughts, words and deeds” so that much fruit can continue to be manifested both in and through our lives for Your glory--- Amen.

17. Transformed Hearts through Adoption

“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:15-17)” The children of God through faith in Christ have received the Spirit of adoption which has overcome the spirit of bondage to fear. God’s faithfulness through the Spirit of adoption moves God’s people to thrive in His Son. His faith makes them part of His royal family, joint heirs and a royal priesthood adopted by the Spirit of Christ. This work of the Spirit of adoption transforms hearts through the Gospel to shine their light as they announce the arrival of God’s Kingdom of Heaven despite life’s challenges. *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good. (Romans 8:28)”*

Creation has been waiting, groaning for the day of the full revelation of God’s glory, the victory of Christ to rest upon all of humanity. *“For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God (Romans 8:19).”* Humanity’s sin has subjected this world to endure suffering. Despite this, God’s freedom through faith in the righteousness of Christ is still reaching many in this world. Romans 8:19 points to the truth that all creation is here for God’s Son Jesus. Nothing will prevent the Lord from returning and restoring everything back to its created purpose (Rev. 21:5). That’s why the Truth (Gospel of Jesus) comes with demonstration of miracles, power over nature. Jesus encourages His followers to hold on for this end time restoration event even as creation itself endures suffering from humanity’s fall into sin. *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)”*

This suffering of creation is like the labor pains a woman suffers in childbirth as she awaits the gift of new life on the other side of her ordeal (Romans 8:18-25). While there is suffering from the consequences of sin, God's children still believe that they have been yoked to the resurrected life of Christ. *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. (John 14:12)"* God's redeemed (adopted) thrive as they grow in their understanding of the Gospel, carry the Lord's name and authority and follow His teachings to be like Christ. *"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)"*

God continues to move hearts through the Spirit of adoption from bondage to sin, to sonship (daughtership), partnership with the Son of God. God's children co-reign with the "Risen Christ" over creation as they steward in God's Kingdom where there is NO sin and condemnation. They trust that knowing and believing God's Word (Truth revealed fully in Christ) NEVER returns void. Therefore, when they face death in this life, God's Word reminds them of God's eternal promises. Jesus spoke this promise over the least of them, the thief dying on the cross as he confessed his faith in the Lord, *"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise. (Luke 23:43)"* Through faith we enjoy a foretaste of God's paradise promised to us when one's spirit is yoked to God's Word. God's children abide and rule from this place of walking by faith as they have become part of His adopted royal family (Romans 8:15-17).

*“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
(Hebrews 12:1-2)”*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you were with the Father at the beginning of creation where everything was very good. You knew what the “Father, Son and Holy Spirit” set out to do in the beginning would be accomplished at the end. Thank you for Your faithfulness in the ongoing work of creating “sons and daughters” made in the image of God. Now many have been set free from “sin and condemnation” as they trust in You, the Gospel message and their adoption into God’s Holy Family. As God’s will is done, may all things continue to come together for the glory of God and the rebirth of creation. I pray that You will continue to transform the hearts of God’s “sons and daughters” to be fully prepared for your return, for heaven and earth to be perfectly joined together---Amen.

18. Letting the Love of God Have Full Access

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32)” Believing God is fully committed to saving and sanctifying (redeeming) one’s soul, moves one to look at life’s temporary challenges as hurdles that can’t hold back the goodness of God. The faithfulness of Christ works within each member of the “body of Christ” so that they will become the “Apple of God’s Eye”. God looks at each of His children like He gazes upon His Holy Son. God does NOT see the “sin and condemnation” that this world has attempted to brand His children with. Rather, through the incorruptible seed of His Son, God sees the incorruptible, eternal “newness of life” now being formed in His children through the “righteousness of Christ”. *‘Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” (Revelation 21:5)’* God looks at us like a mother who look at their children as precious even if they have failed miserably in their lives. These mothers never forget their birthday and always believe their potential will be fulfilled.

Mature faith in Christ leads God’s children to look at their lives through the glasses of trusting in the perfect work of the love of Christ. *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:33-37)”* As God’s children look at their lives based upon these verses, holy boldness rises up from His love within their hearts. The love of Christ brings forth confidence that one can overcome every challenge they face, even death itself. *“There is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear. (1st John 4:18)”*

God's abiding love in them through the knowledge of Jesus Christ leads believers to walk in the ever-present awareness of His love and to grow closer to Him; *"to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:19)"*. This knowledge of Christ leads God's children to trust fully in His victory over "sin and death" which was accomplished for them on the cross and through His resurrection. *"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)"* All of God's children who trust in His Son have become royal vessels of God's perfect love. As God's children are marked by their "new identity" in Christ, they live anew daily. This daily gift of newness of life yokes them to these words which the Father spoke over His Son, *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. (Matt. 3:17)"*

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

Prayer: Lord Jesus, how can I ever thank You enough for Your abiding love which is greater than any love this fallen world can produce? Consume me with the perfect love written about and shared between the "Father and Son". Never stop making me a holy vessel for Your love and power. Lead me through Your all-consuming love so I never doubt Your authority and power to fulfill every single promise recorded for Your children in Scripture. Come Holy Spirit and continue to sanctify my heart through Your amazing grace and the one-of-a-kind love only found in You Lord. May the singleness of my heart and mind ALWAYS be focused on loving You back my Lord---Amen.

19. Carrying the Gospel Seed of Christ

All who follow Jesus have hearts impregnated with the “Gospel Seed”, God’s promise to His children of faith. *“Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah. (Romans 9:29)”* Many Jewish leaders unknowingly rejected the “Gospel Seed” because of their great zeal to follow the Law. They didn’t follow the way of the patriarchs of faith who believed God’s prophetic Word starting with Eve. *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed [sin] and her Seed [Messiah]; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel. (Genesis 3:15)”* This is why Jesus told them, *“If you were Abraham’s children,” said Jesus, “then you would do what Abraham did. (John 8:39)”* Abraham believed in God’s promise despite his understanding and the timing of its fulfillment (Gen 21:1-2). Mary trusted the Word of the angel spoken over her life (Luke 1:38). Joseph trusted in the Word of the angel spoken to Him (Matt. 1:23-24). We trust in the promise of the Gospel Seed (1st John 5:11).

The pharisees trusted in their understanding and religious works. Their obedience to the Law was their greatest hope. God’s promise of bringing holy Seed to humanity through the Messiah became of secondary importance to their religious practices. This led them to reject and murder God’s prophets and His Son. They elevated following the Law over prophecy, that God would fulfill His promise by sending His mercy (Hosea 6:6), the Seed being passed through His people. Over time, they stopped trusting in God’s promise shared through His prophets (Isaiah 9:6-7). They elevated their religious works over God’s faithfulness. Their single-minded focus on their works disqualified them like Sodom and Gomorrah’s focus on sinning from receiving God’s mercy; *“that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory. (Romans 9:23)”*

Unknowingly, they forsook the holy Seed (Word made flesh) that God was passing through His people and prophets over many years. *“In Isaac your seed shall be called. That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise. (Romans 9:7-8)”* This Seed of God’s promise being passed through Abraham’s child Isaac would eventually bring incorruptible righteousness, the newness of life to humanity. As the Christ, the Word (Seed) became flesh the children of God became holy vessels who carried God’s fulfilled promise, the eternal work of His mercy.

The carriers of “God’s Seed” do NOT lose sight of the eternal life-giving, sanctity of life found in God’s perfect and fulfilled Word, the Christ. They carry His Seed of “righteousness and radical love” eternally working within them. *‘What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.”’ (Romans 9:14-16)* God alone is the Righteous One who has mercy on His clay, humanity as it is formed into His holy image. He knows and sees exactly the end-product of His faithful work which He is forming. *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:10)”*

A diamond is formed from a lump of coal and the force of gravity causing the weight above it to compress it. Similarly, the force of the redeeming love that God has sent to the world through His Son is bringing the pressure of God’s righteousness to bear on humanity’s fallen flesh to bring about God’s holy image (His diamond). God’s incorruptible seed is passed on through His children who believe God’s faithfulness, mercy and righteousness have been revealed in His Son, the promised messiah.

Those who follow Jesus acknowledge they have been given new life by and for carrying His Seed. They gladly share what has been given to them freely (Matthew 10:8), God's Word (Seed) planted in their heart through the hearing, believing and receiving of the Gospel (Truth) and the Holy Spirit.

*“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.
(Ephesians 1:13-14)”*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we are forever thankful for Your Seed being sown through faith in all of God's children. You have restored life giving hope to us through Your Seed. Help us to remember that Your desire is that all would be impregnated with Your “Gospel Truth” and its sanctifying work would make everyone new in Your holy image. Thank you for Your commitment to keep humanity from a hopeless future of being cast into the abyss of hopelessness and eternal death. May God's will and plan for humanity, to know Him intimately and His abundant life be accomplished on earth as it is in heaven. Holy Spirit come with the goodness of God and continue to refresh our souls. We need You to shine Your Light daily upon us and to lead us to obey God's call for our lives, to carry His Seed so that others might receive the Gospel Truth---Amen.

20. Sowing the Seed of Righteousness in Christ

“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:5)”. Jesus embodies and delivers God’s superior, life-giving Word (Seed) which brings forth “new life” through God’s grace. God’s gift of His righteousness, the life of Jesus is the fulfillment (apex) of ALL Scripture. Jesus has come to rescue and empower people as His righteousness sets them apart from the abyss of an existence enslaved by sin and death. Trying to escape this enslavement by dying in one’s sin doesn’t set one free from sin. Only death in Christ as one turns from their sin to the Lord’s righteousness brings the death that leads to freedom (Romans 6:4). God has sent from heaven His righteous life in Jesus Christ and this new life proclaims the Gospel. This Good Testimony of Jesus is planted like a seed in one’s heart through the grace and power of God as it is shared. Jesus now reigns in heaven as Lord above all humanity and looks for good soil (hearts) to be presented to Him by His followers for His Seed to be planted. The harvest from this crop that God is growing from His Seed was spoken about in the beginning, *“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. (Genesis 1:26)”*

“But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above)’ or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)”. But what does it say? *“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach)”*: that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:6-9)”

The righteousness of God is the Holy Seed because it is higher than any “thought, word or deed” born from the flesh of humanity. This Seed carries humanity beyond its own efforts to access unending, holy fellowship with God.

It's absolute foolishness to judge the Son of God by thinking that one could visit hell and ascend into heaven on their own. This foolishness leads one to think that they could stand naked before the holiness of God in their sin and escape judgment (and its penalty). The lifeless crop of one's unbelief only produces death. However, God in His mercy has intervened for humanity by sending His Son Jesus to be both "Savior and Lord" to all. Sowers of God's Seed share that eternal life is received by faith as follows: 1) all must confess that their life is enslaved by sin and their self-righteousness can't free them; 2) all must trust in the sinless life of Christ and follow His Way (Living Word); AND 3) all must believe Christ has been resurrected and all will follow Him into eternity by the power of the Holy Spirit. *'For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.'* (Romans 10:10-13)

This gift of the Lord's righteousness replaces selfish pride with humility like the Lord Jesus displayed as He walked with the Father here on earth, *"I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me (John 5:30)"*. Humility acknowledges that only the Holy Spirit can open the door of one's heart and lead them to receive God's righteousness. The Spirit prepares one's heart through the Gospel Truth to receive and follow Jesus. This allows the righteousness of the Lord to lead and to guide God's children in the way they "think, speak and act" from the day they first believe in Christ unto eternity. Letting one's life proclaim the life of Christ within them sows (plants and waters) the Seed of Christ into the hearts of others.

*“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.
(John 5:24)”*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, sowing Your Seed of righteousness has everything to do with trusting fully in Your holy life. Without the grace of God, we would live in the clutches of sin and its judgment. Wash us daily with Your Holy “Word and Spirit” as we put on Your righteousness. Keep us humble and open to Your leadership. The Father desires that all would be saved on the day of His Son’s return. May we never forget this as we have been given the opportunity to be mouthpieces for Your voice of righteousness. How does one ever think that they alone can overcome the abyss and ascend into heaven by our own efforts? Deliver us and others from foolishness and unbelief in You. Move us to sow Your Seed of “love and righteousness” all the days of our lives as we walk with Your Seed born life within us. May we bear much fruit as we sow Your Seed and live to bring glory alone to our Heavenly Father---Amen.

21. Prepared to Shine the Gospel Light for God

What treasure comes from the Triune (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as the Gospel Light illuminates the souls of His children? *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! (Romans 11:33)” “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:3)”* Treasures beyond our imaginations are being kept for God’s children as they walk in the “Light of the Gospel”. This eternal wealth is unmeasurable because of the unlimited Light which floods one’s soul to unlock heaven’s treasures kept for them. All of God’s blessings flow from the intimate knowledge of God; the Father above us, the Son alongside us and the Spirit within us.

Knowing God makes the impossible possible, even eternal life. As one grows in their ability to identify God’s mercy and righteousness at work in their life, they grow in their ability to let God’s Light shine through them. They desire to live a life of loving the Heavenly Father back for the treasure of His holy presence (Spirit and Truth). *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:1-2)”* The Spirit led Jesus to give His life (righteous flesh) as a sacrifice for the sin of the world on the cross of Calvary. The Spirit leads the followers of Christ to offer their lives as living sacrifices to God through their ever-growing knowledge of the Gospel. God’s gift of a redeemed life through His grace has opened the door wide for His children of faith to be overcomers in this world as they walk in the marvelous Light of His Son. *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matt. 5:16)”*

As the revelation of how the Gospel transforms one's life becomes known in an intimate manner what fruit does its redeeming message produce in God's children? *"Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good...Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. (Romans 12:9-13)"* Passion for God's unbridled and unending love prepares one's heart to bear fruit which loves God back for who He is. Our passion is sourced in the first love of God (1st John 4:19). It's continuous because the Light of Christ shines upon God's children to teach and empower them to bear the fruit of His Spirit. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. (Gal. 5:23)"* No law prevents them from bearing this fruit of the Spirit because a life redeemed in Christ is all that is required to become an instrument of God's love.

What is one of God's most direct ways for His children to shine His light into the world? *"Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)"* We walk with the understanding that evil is a real threat and we do NOT walk in ignorance of its attempts to overcome our lives with its deceptions. Evil's darkness attempts to block God's wonderful light from shining down from heaven into and through hearts. Since Christ has come, God's eternal Light will never be totally blocked by sin in hearts that have the Seed of Christ sown in them. God's redeemed follow the example of the life of Christ and learn how to overcome evil's deceptions (darkness) with the goodness of God. They cling to these words spoken by the Lord to the Apostle Paul to allow the Gospel's Light to prepare them to shine their light non-stop, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."*(2nd Cor. 12:9)

“For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring.’ (Acts 17:28)”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You are the Light of humanity. Let the Light of the Gospel shining upon our souls continue to prepare us for God’s good purpose, to love God and others. You have instructed us not to place one’s light under a basket but rather to let it shine in a fashion that would lead many to encounter You and know You. We pray that you will continue to renew our hearts and minds with Your Spirit and Truth daily. Help us to be prepared every waking moment of our lives to let Your Light shine through us as we submit our lives to the ongoing work of Your Spirit within us. As Your Light continues to shine upon us, we pray that many are drawn to our Father in heaven---Amen.

Conclusion – Representatives of God’s Kingdom

“For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17)” The Apostle Paul ran an excellent race of faith as he submitted his life to be a representative of God’s Kingdom. He looked forward to receiving God’s eternal promise to His children. *“There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2nd Timothy 4:8)”* God’s Kingdom representatives have entered unbroken and unending fellowship with, *“the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. (Rom. 3:22)”*

The Apostle Paul knew God’s calling for his life; to live for Christ---His righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Paul’s call to follow Jesus was unshakeable. He lived his life led by the Holy Spirit with his path illuminated by the Living Word. The revelation of God’s Word alive in Christ had marked Paul for life. *“Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God. (Romans 1:1)”* The disciples of today have received the same calling to be set apart by the Gospel and to live for Christ. *“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. (2nd Cor. 5:18)”*

Paul was marked with the same new identity of the Gospel and Spirit, that the Lord’s first disciples received. When God sets a believer apart to represent the Gospel and God’s Kingdom, they are called to live anew with their new Christ-like identity. This “new identity” has been forged as one rests in the fullness of God’s “grace and truth” and allows themselves to be marked for eternity by God’s radical “love and righteousness”.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1st Peter 1:3)”

God’s representatives are no longer slaves to sin and fear. They are being transformed into servant/leaders of the “love and righteousness” of Christ (Romans 8:28-30). Knowing who one is in Christ, propels one to walk in, to reflect and to shine the “Gospel Light” (Matt. 5:16). God’s children who have been born-again through the Gospel and Spirit of God become a mobile temple sent into the world by God. Faith in the “Good News” and the indwelling “Spirit of Christ” brings joy unspeakable as one marches to the drumbeat of His spiritual heart, gift wrapped with the love and righteousness of Jesus Christ. They exude the aroma of Christ as they follow Jesus.

God’s people receive “grace upon grace” to live by faith every day as they move from “glory to glory”. The natural / supernatural lives they live bring glory to God. These lives rely upon the presence and power of God to be poured upon their heart daily through the “love of Jesus”. Their life stage has been set for them by God as: 1) God has been glorified through His Son; 2) His Son’s followers are yoked to God’s holiness and love AND 3) God’s grace and power brings heaven to earth through His children as they approach His throne of grace boldly on a regular basis.

The redeemed of the Lord represent God’s Kingdom because they are besides themselves and seated with Him in heavenly places. Representatives of God’s Kingdom through the Gospel walk with God in His righteousness empowered by His love.

“For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God (2 Cor. 5:13)”

Representatives of God's Kingdom are consumed by the love of Christ...

*“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.
(1st Cor. 13:4-8)”*

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I pray that the reading of this book along with its many references to the Book of Romans might lead many to take hold of a deeper understanding of the faith You are calling all to possess. To know you Lord is to know intimately the “truth and love” of the Gospel that You supernaturally have brought into the world. I pray that the Gospel will be shared across ALL the earth and that the same radical impact that it had on the early church would be duplicated in the church of today. I pray that every nation and people would be transformed by the goodness of God revealed through the Gospel message and seated with Him in heavenly places. I pray that Your glorious “Kingdom of Heaven” would continue to come to earth through the abundant life of Jesus Christ. I pray that God alone is glorified as every heart is captured through faith in His grace, His truth, His love and His Spirit as they encounter You, the Lord and Savior of the world---Amen.

FINAL NOTE: It's highly recommended that you re-visit the table presentation of the “Gospel Truth” found on page 5.