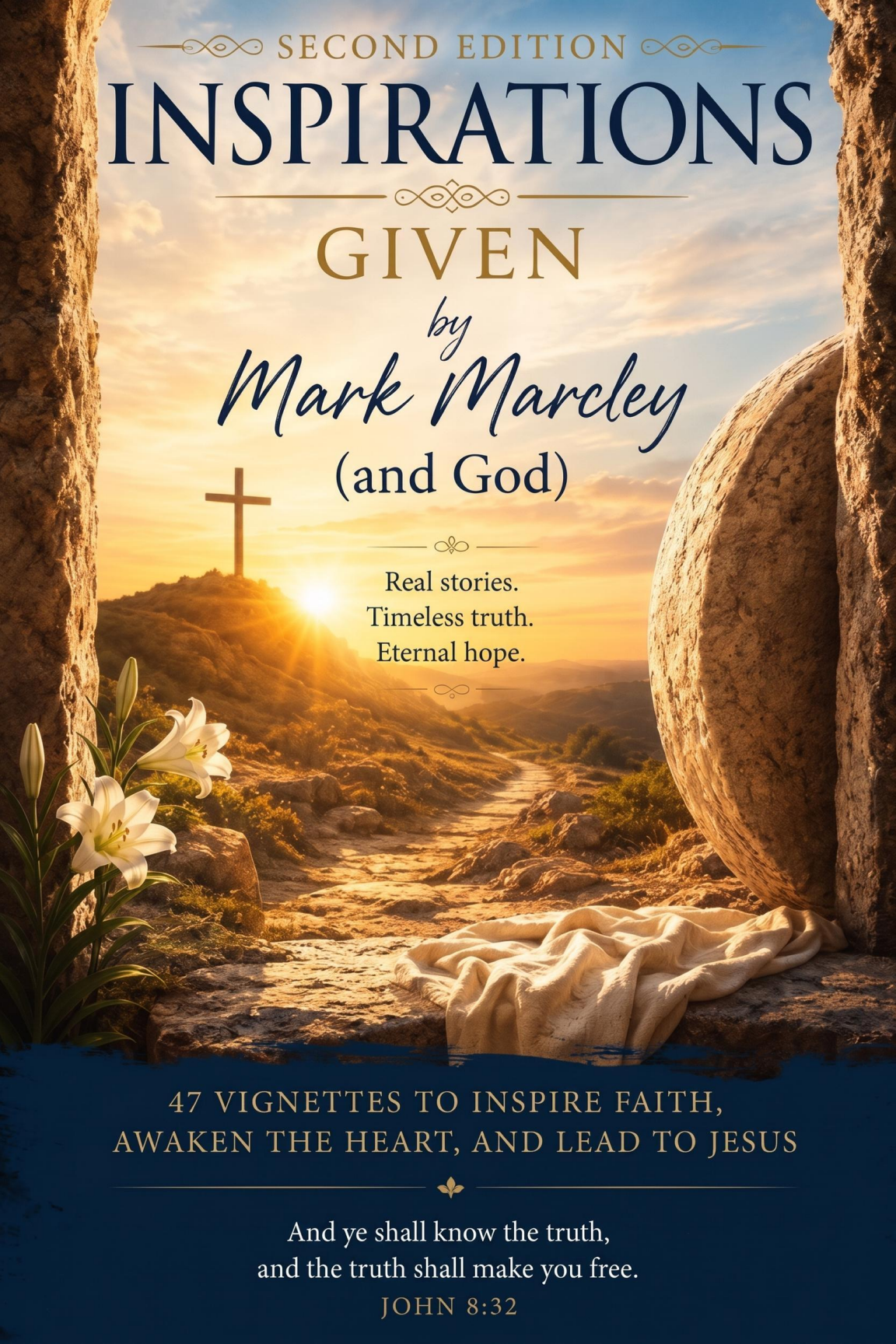

SECOND EDITION
INSPIRATIONS
GIVEN
by
Mark Marcley
(and God)
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Timeless truth.
Eternal hope.
47 VIGNETTES TO INSPIRE FAITH,
AWAKEN THE HEART, AND LEAD TO JESUS
And ye shall know the truth,
and the truth shall make you free.
JOHN 8:32

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2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

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Inspirations Given
by

Mark Marcley
(and God)

Second Edition

Use the QR code or link below
if you would like to contact Mark



InspirationsGiven.com

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Second edition

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A Note from the Author

I think I need to explain why I wrote, "by Mark Marcley (and God.)" I believe God put it on my heart to write this but more so because there's a lot of His book that I refer to which is what is most important and life changing. My contributions are simply that of another carpenter.

This is the 2nd edition of Inspirations Given. God just keeps giving me more to write about and I have so much more that I plan to write. So, in an effort to continue on this journey and to share it with those interested in reading, and hopefully commenting one way or the other, we have established a forum to keep these inspirations going. You can go to: www.InspirationsGiven.com. There may be more editions to come, we'll see what He does.

As with the first edition, my intentions in writing this which began in 2005, were and are to "share" (see chapter 6) the loving message God has given us in what some call His love letter to humanity. I understand all too well there is much opposition to Christianity as a whole. Prior to my conversion in 1994, I don't know how I would react to someone trying to share the love of God with me. Well, in 1994 someone did and I'm very thankful that he did. This is explained in chapter 2.

The chapters are in no specific order. Many of them are written to help answer some common questions regarding the Bible in general or Christianity as a whole. There are many objections people have regarding the Bible and that is certainly understandable. I remember a book I read many years ago, I forget the author, but I'll never forget one of his quotes: "Objections are

opportunities in work clothes!" I hope you might see this little book as my opportunity to overcome common objections.

I'm not sure the best way or place in this book to "share" this thought, so I'll put it here. I really think this is the main reason I'm writing this and why it all started so many years ago; it's mainly about my family. I have shared a lot of emails, particularly with my siblings and my sons, regarding matters of faith and, as explained in His Word, I want them to know, "the peace that surpasses all human understanding."

> ***Philippians 4:*** ***6*** ***Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*** ***7*** ***And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

I never sensed that I was successful in saying as much as I wanted to say or that I had the right approach, never wanting to ruffle their feathers, although there's been some ruffling! So, I am praying that this collection of my reflections on Christianity will not only have a positive impact on my family, but on everyone who reads this. I think of this as planting seeds. (Chapter 44) I can plant them, but I cannot determine the harvest. Evangelist Bill Fay has said it takes people 7 times to hear the gospel, at average, before accepting it as truth and believing. We shall see; I pray this might be the 7th time.

I also pray you won't take offense to anything contained in this collection of "Inspirations" and that some of these short stories might encourage you to ask yourself, is this true? Is this worth the time to continue reading, to try and figure out if there is "eternal" life after death? Are heaven and hell real? Is the Bible truly the Word of God?

I pray that if nothing else I may have aroused your curiosity to find out. There

is a list of resources in the back of the book from some great authors should you decide to dig deeper. Not the least of which is the best seller of all time, The Holy Bible.

This is a poem I think my wife, Lynne, brought to my attention some time ago and it occurred to me the other day to include this here. (As you'll see, Lynne has contributed several very interesting parts to this book.) I think this very adequately sums up my reason for and passion for writing this book.

My Friend

My friend, I stand in the judgment now,
And feel that you're to blame somehow.
On earth, I walked with you day by day,
And never did you point the way.
You knew the Lord in truth and glory,
But never did you tell the story.
My knowledge then was very dim,
You could have led me safe to him.
Though we lived together on the earth,
You never told me of the second birth.
And now I stand this day condemned,
Because you failed to mention him.
You taught me many things, that's true;
I called you "friend" and trusted you.
But I learn now that it's too late:
You could have kept me from this fate.
We walked by day and talked by night,
And yet you showed me not the light.
You let me live, and love, and die,
You knew I'd never live on high.
Yes, I called you "friend" in life,
And trusted you through joy and strife.

And yet, on coming to this end,
I cannot now call you "my friend."

D.J. Higgins

Whether you're a friend, a relative or a future friend I pray you will not just read this book or the vignettes that spark your interest, but that you may refer to this often and "share" it with a future friend.

Genesis

Genesis is the first book of the Bible and refers to a "beginning". Therefore, I thought it would be a good idea to begin with some information about the Bible.

There are many so-called "sacred" books that claim to be enlightened or dictated by an angel or someone who saw a vision. The Bible, although penned by human hands, was inspired by the Holy Spirit and has a 100% track record for accuracy. There are countless prophesies (predictions) in the Bible, many have been fulfilled, yet many remain in the future, the most significant of which is Christ's return. (Chapter 42) If you care to do a little homework, you will find this to be true. The evidence is solid and would hold up in a cross examination.

We commonly call the Bible a "book" however, it is actually a collection of 66 books. 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. These were written over a period of approximately 1,500 years, on three continents and penned by 40 human authors inspired by the Holy Spirit. With such a long period of time, different languages, places and people, yet there are no contradictions. The theme is consistent and the accuracy is nothing short of super-natural. But as one of my favorite dearly departed pastors, Horace Hilton, told me in 1996, "Don't take my word for it, take God's word for it!"

I mention this here because I will quote a lot of scripture in the following chapters, but if you don't believe the Bible to be true and accurate it might seem meaningless to you. I think it's worth noting that the Bible is still the best-selling book of all time. Estimates suggest between 5 and 7 billion copies

of the Bible have been printed and distributed over the centuries. I pray that you may come to understand this and either begin or continue your journey on the road to eternal life. Chapter 8: Evidence that demands a Verdict.

Alive-a-Cation

There is absolutely nothing dead about the vignettes contained in this booklet; so, I could not call this a "dedication." Perhaps it should simply be called a "Thanksgiving". First and foremost, I thank God for the inspirations to put some of my thoughts in writing intended to "inspire" and create some curiosity in the reader to search for themselves the truths of God's Word.

This book is dedicated to anyone that is perhaps unsure about Christianity for any number of reasons. In today's culture, it's not uncommon for some to think Christians hate certain people for the "personal" choices they make. A **real** Christian doesn't hate someone who has a different sense of moral values. I won't give any examples in an effort to refrain from insulting anyone. It can be summed up as any sinful behavior. Hate the sin, not the sinner! Many have been insulted, and understandably so, from the actions and/or words of someone perhaps proclaiming to be a Christian. (See Chapter 27) God will be their judge. I know some of my own behavior falls short of WWJD. Christians are not sinless, but as we grow in our faith, we will sin less. My prayer is that at least some of the contents of this book will appropriately address some of those issues.

> ***John 8:32 and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.***

I also want to thank my beautiful wife and best friend, Lynne. Her example of being a great wife, mother and now a grandmother could eliminate the need

for a book like this, by just knowing her and her kind ways you can see God in her.

Additionally, I'm thankful for the countless pastors from many different churches and fellowships and to many Christian friends I have gotten to know and that have inspired me over the years. I started writing these vignettes around 2005 and when I discovered them in an old word document, I decided that I really wanted to publish them. I saw the table of contentment I had written which contained 32 "chapters". However, chapters 13 – 26 had titles only. It is now August of 2026, so I recently completed the missing information. I find myself coming up with other scenarios, so after getting this published, I think there will be more, a 3nd edition perhaps? (This edition contains 47 chapters and counting.)

For the Word

Over the years as I have grown in my faith and familiarity of the Bible and my ensuing relationship with Jesus Christ, I have often found myself thinking of various ways to share my faith with those who may not have a proper understanding of who God is, the deity of Jesus Christ or the inerrancy of God's Word. In recent years, my burden of seeing others saved has been increasing as I think it should. The thought of anyone spending eternity in hell troubles me very much.

Before I came to believe and accepted Christ as my personal Savior in March of 1994, I don't know how I would react to someone trying to tell me what I have often tried "sharing" with others. So, as I have consistently studied the Bible and developed a relationship with Him over the years, I would think of scenarios in my mind that would "get them to understand". Well, at some point I began to write a title to the letters I kept dictating in my mind and finally decided the best way to "share" them, there goes that word again, (see chapter 6 on "Sharing the Gospel") is to write them down which I began to do late in 2005.

As I go along, I will refer the various topics I'm writing about here to one or two applicable scriptures. (Scripture is taken from the New American Standard version, 1995) As I think about it, this is perhaps a sub-topic in and of itself and the importance is immeasurable. (I think I'll get into this in chapter 15, "Digesting the Word of God").

One very important thing to understand is that the Bible teaches us that the Word of God is the same as God. Depending on where it is used in scripture, I

believe it is derived from the Greek word, "logos", which means power. Here are a few examples:

> ***John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.2 He was in the beginning with God.3 All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.4 In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.***

The above verses, John 1:1-4 and 14, are also a great example of the deity of Jesus Christ. This means that Jesus is God in the flesh, sometimes referred to as the God-Man.

> ***Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.***

He spoke the Heavens and the earth into existence. (Evolution is covered in chapter 40)

> ***Luke 1:37 "For no Word from God shall be void of power".***

There is so much more to explore and to enjoy from the Word of God. I pray that I can find a way to create a hunger, and a curiosity for you to go deeper

into the Word.

1

It's not a religion, it's a relationship

Mt 22:37 And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

There are many "religions" in the world. The word religion generally refers to an individual's or a society's belief in some sort of deity or power or provider. When we do something "religiously", it typically means out of habit or a requirement. (For an interesting exercise, if you are ever in another part of the country, and don't know where to go to church, pick up the phone book and see some of the choices that are listed. It has also been brought to my attention that this is also a good way to see the evidence that this is a Christian nation; at least it was set out to be. The overwhelming number of Christian based places of worship outnumbers every other. Since it's 2026 now, I guess we would use Google, no more phone books). Unfortunately, depending on where you live, what your family or tribe worships is generally what & why many believe what they believe and don't even think to question the legitimacy of their belief(s). I was born into the Catholic faith, very comfortable believing what I was taught in twelve years of Catholic school, without the desire or curiosity to find out where or why this denomination existed and to check the resources or foundational beliefs. After marrying into a Lutheran family, I

learned why the "Protestants" protested. Sadly, Lutheranism as with most other denominations, have been greatly watered down and forced to conform to the "intolerant, politically correct" pressures of today. Jesus was anything but politically correct. I'd like to add that He never forced anyone to believe. He told it like it was and said "if" you follow Me; He never said you have to!

The "relationship" which Christianity promotes is what sets it apart from all other world religions. Most other belief systems teach that it is what we can do for god. (Small "g" intentional) Christianity teaches us it is what God did for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Creating and maintaining a relationship with Jesus Christ is the religion of a Christian. There are a number of ways to achieve this, but it cannot be done first and foremost without spending time with Him. How can you love someone without knowing Him? How can you know someone without spending the time? In so doing the next inevitable step will automatically take place; you will love Him. It is through & because of this love that countless other benefits will be evident in your life. You'll naturally want to serve Him in your community and your church; you'll teach and show your family the importance of this relationship in things you do and say and conversely by what you don't do and don't say. It will also be evident, and here goes one reason that will send some running in the other direction, in where and how you spend your money. But, contrary to what many pre-Christians believe, these things are not done because you have to; they are done because you want to. It is a token of appreciation.

> ***Luke 11: 11 "Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? 12 "Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? 13 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"***

2

Sinner's prayer & forgiveness

Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

What is the sinner's prayer? Why ask for forgiveness? The sinner's prayer is a common name given to a prayer one prays to God to begin a relationship with Him. This is one very key point that separates Christianity with every other so-called religion in existence today. Every other "religion" is based on what man can do to get right with God and is also commonly works based. In other words, there are things you have to do; you have to give a certain amount of money, you have to pray a certain number of times per day, you have to "volunteer" to do this and that or you have to knock on doors. All these are works or efforts by us. When an individual establishes a relationship with Jesus Christ, typically through a sinner's prayer, you do "works" not because you have to, but in gratitude for what He did for you. Christ did all the works; He died a gruesome, painful death for us and miraculously rose from the dead, conquered death that we may have a relationship with Him. It's a personal relationship, not a religion. As Andrew Farley put it in one of his books, it's "Jesus + Nothing".

Here's a sample of the sinner's prayer I prayed in March of '94 and many others have done also:

Lord, I know that I am a sinner and I am truly sorry. I repent of my sin. I want to change my life and for you to come into my heart and be Lord of my life. I believe you died and rose again for the forgiveness of my sins. Please come into my life that I may know and love you forever, starting right now. I pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

If you prayed that prayer and were sincere, you have begun a new life. I want to emphasize the need for sincerity here. Whether you're 8 or 80 and look back over your life you know there are things you've done wrong or haven't done at all, some of which are sinful. Whatever these things are for you, you can rid yourself of the possible guilt or shame by talking to Jesus, that's prayer, and telling Him you're sorry, you want and need a fresh start.

For me, when I prayed that prayer, there was no instant change that took place. It wasn't until I started reading the Bible and got involved with a Christian fellowship at my church that I saw changes in my life. Two years later we moved to NC and soon afterwards I got involved in a great Bible study and I can tell you with certainty that I am a new creation:

> ***2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.***

The forgiveness aspect of a sinner's prayer is perhaps often overlooked. God knows our actions, good and bad. You might think why ask for forgiveness? Think of someone you know that has done something very wrong to you, perhaps it wasn't even major. You might still be their friend or if it's a relative, the relationship doesn't change. What happens when they come to you and ask for forgiveness? Your heart is glad and your relationship is better!

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

3

What If?

Romans 3:3 For what if some were without faith? Shall their want of faith make of none effect the faithfulness of God?

Imagine that you discovered some sort of cure for a disease or a common condition that had the potential to affect virtually every person alive today. Let's take it a step further and say that this condition was absolutely fatal and to make it worse, the death you would die is slow and very painful. Of course, many others have attempted to solve this problem in every conceivable fashion; lotions, potions, idol worship, indulgences and even child sacrifices. The malady is called sin; the cure is Jesus Christ.

Stay with me here, here comes the "**what if**"! What if as a human being in your walk through your life, you discovered the cure, the absolute, indisputable, 100% effective solution to the problem? Would you keep it to yourself? If you could, you would probably try to package and sell it. Well, there are a lot of people doing that today. However, the price is free, and the benefits are price-less. It's simply a matter of a choice we make. Although the choice is simple & free, it must be real for it to take effect. It is to whole heartedly believe in Jesus Christ – His divine birth, brutal death and physical resurrection. This,

and many other life applications, is found in His supernatural communication with us, The Holy Bible.

Here comes another what if: What if what can be referred to in the Bible as guidelines for life such as, honor your mother and father, don't steal, murder or use the Lord's name in vain, keep the Sabbath holy and the rest of the 10 Commandments; what if we do as much of that as possible? Believe it or not, no one can keep all 10, that's why I referred to them as guidelines, although we should try. But what if we really tried to do that for our time on earth and when we die, we simply slip into nothingness? Or, as some believe, we all end up in a place called heaven regardless of how we live or what we believe? What is the harm in abiding by the way of life God has prescribed? If you answered that question honestly, there is absolutely none, no harm done! Think how great life on earth will be! It is virtually unimaginable. (No offense Mr. Lennon.) There's a bonus involved here as well: We get to spend eternity in paradise!

Okay, here's the opposite what if scenario: What if we refuse to behave in a way we know we should? We live a life controlled by the desires of the flesh; we believe in a different god which can be anything that controls our life, usually material possessions or some other god-like figure. The true God does give us a choice. You cannot force someone to love you, and God does not force Himself on anyone. So, let's say you have chosen to worship someone or something other than the God of the Bible. Life can still seem pretty good. Here's the clincher: The other eternal destination. What if that's true? That means an eternity of pain and gnashing of teeth. This is what compelled me to write this booklet. Please, give some thought to this, do your homework, ruthlessly pursue the truth. Here are a few verses that describe eternal damnation:

> ***Matthew 8:12, "but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."***

Mt 13:50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Mt 22:13 "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

4

You just need to love Him; the rest will come naturally

John 14:21 He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.

There seems to be so many "suppose to's" in our Christian walk one can easily feel overwhelmed with the rules. It is not unlike a human relationship, dating, marriage, etc., where we feel unsure at times about saying or doing what's right. What gift should I get her? Will she like this, does she need it, and is it the right size? I very often think in these circumstances that it is the thought that counts, and it is. (It also gets me out of the store quicker.)

In a very similar fashion, the same thing is true in our relationship with Jesus Christ. As we continue to walk with Him and love Him more & more, we won't need to be told how much time to spend with Him or how much money to give or that our prayers may be untimely or somehow inappropriate. God looks at and knows our heart. As I heard a preacher say once about the topless dancers

(sinner's) life; just tell her about Jesus, Jesus will tell her about her occupation. (Chapter 19)

Another analogy here might be if someone was to introduce a couple to one another and as time goes by, they may take a liking to each other. Once this happens the introducer no longer has to convince them they ought to spend more time together. This is ideally what every Christian wants for their circle of friends or family or anyone they share the love of God with; it's a relationship, remember? A relationship that can produce real joy which surpasses all human understanding.

> ***Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

5

"I am my father's son and my Father is God"

This is a quote I heard from a pastor on a retreat I was on with my son Erik many years ago. I don't know if the following thoughts originated there or from some other place, but I found it interesting and thought I'd write it down here.

It occurred to me one day as I often battle internally to find some powerful, effective, non-confrontational ways to *share* my faith. Sometimes I don't want to be non-confrontational, but I like to be friendly, and we've all got to be so politically correct these days it's ridiculous. Anyway, this isn't long, so here goes:

As in the above quote, God is our Father, Father of every person that is alive or has ever lived; He's, our Father. Some may not agree, understand or believe that, but that doesn't change the fact. Here's my analogy: If someone has never met his biological father, that doesn't change the fact that there is one human being, dead or alive, who fathered that child. Your belief or opinion is irrelevant; it doesn't change the facts. The same is true about God. We are given the choice to believe it or to like it, but the facts remain the same. Unlike a human father, we cannot do a DNA test, but there are tests we can take to learn, to understand, to believe the truth. And just like most biological conditions, God the Father loves His children with an unconditional love. Sadly, the vast

majority of people don't understand or believe that and therefore they will never know the joy of the greatest relationship that is free and available to everyone for the asking.

As time goes by, I see more and more similarities between what I expect of my sons and what God expects of me. I need my sons to obey what I tell them, and when they are obedient, when they give thanks, etc., it makes me happy and I am inclined to continue to give. Then I find myself being disobedient to what I know God wants me to do, or not to do, and I feel like a hypocrite. God did not set up a family in this way as some sort of coincidence. We need to obey and give thanks to God and let this be the model of our behavior with our children!

It is this analogy that I shared with one of my employees on July 29th, 2005, that led him to his Father.

Thanks Dad!

6

Sharing the Gospel

In all of the stories or testimonies we read or write, there is a very important aspect we cannot leave out, but all too often we do; I know I do. However, lately it has come to my attention again & again through things I read and hear from other sources that I am leaving out the most important part: The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, "The Gospel". Leaving this part out robs the power that is in the blood of Jesus Christ from having any supernatural effect on the recipient. I know that once you mention the name of Jesus sometimes people want to end the conversation, or they start to squirm and get uncomfortable, but I believe that lends credence to His power. You can talk about the devil all day long and few people would ask you to stop. In any case, this is not even what I planned to write about "sharing" the gospel.

Most people are familiar with the term, "sharing your faith" or a similar cliché. It occurred to me to take a closer look at the word, "share". If you are going to share something with someone you are making several assumptions and if you are wrong about any one of them, the sharing doesn't work, and they may very likely share something with you that you don't want.

One assumption is that they don't have what you want to share, right? So, if I am telling, I mean sharing, with someone how to "become a Christian" I am obviously assuming, or making the accusation, that they are currently not a

Christian. Defense mechanisms begin getting fired back at you and you've got an argument on your hands instead of giving them a gift.

Another assumption I often make is that they are going to like what I have to share. Most people wouldn't mind sharing a banana split or a nice juicy steak, not necessarily in that order and with separate utensils of course. Although once someone understands the love God has for them and what He did to save us, they would crave the gospel over any man-made treat. I think, therefore, it is important that we make Jesus "delicious". The love and joy in the heart of a believer is incomparable to any temporal satisfaction we can get from anything or anywhere else.

One suggestion I can make and must remind myself is to be pre-prayered before sharing, add a double scoop of love, go easy and leave the results up to God

7

Muddy Waters

Here's an interesting little exercise you can do to show someone how God can work in their life no matter how "dirty or muddy" they think their life is. I gave this illustration to my son and daughter-in-law after they got married and began living in their first apartment out of state. I went outside and put some dirt in a glass. I added some clean water to the dirt, so we had some "muddy water". I asked them how we can get the dirt out without turning the glass over which could symbolize starting completely over instead of working with where they were and what they had. The answer was to slowly, but steadily add more clean water. This eventually cleansed or purified the water, and it became drinkable. This is true with our "relationship" with God. We have to steadily drink in the living water. John 7:38 "***He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.***'" The key is steady, consistent flow of the Living Water!

I have been accused of being brainwashed and I was probably insulted and may not have known what to say. Actually, they were correct. I am continually brainwashed because I had, and to some degree still do have a dirty mind. Sanctification is a process and as long as I am growing closer to God my mind gets cleaner and my relationship with Him gets closer and closer. For the past 32 years I spend time every day reading some of God's Word, listening

to Christian messages and music because for the first 38 years of my life my mind was filthy. I don't do this because I have to, it is because I love Him and I want to know Him better. There was and still is much mud to be removed.

8

Evidence that demands a Verdict

I borrowed the title of this chapter from Josh McDowell, author of a book by the same name with a lot more "evidence" for the Christian faith. The point I have often tried to make and want to do the same thing here in an abbreviated manner, is pretty much wrapped up in the title. I think many people are prone to think or believe that since many Christians express their faith by saying I "believe" this or that which makes it sound like there's not a whole lot of truth or credibility to what they believe. To me what someone believes about a topic or a person, or some scientific fact can have little or no relevance on the truth of what they believe. In other words, if I do not believe in the effects of gravity on my body it's not going to make a difference if I decide to jump off a roof; gravity will win every time. On the other hand, just because someone believes something, does not in any way make what they believe to be right; no matter how passionate their belief may be. It is often difficult and can understandably get a little heated at times when trying to make this point in person, nevertheless, depending on the subject matter; it may not be worthwhile pursuing your point. However, when it comes to the truth about our God, the creator and sustainer of all that exists; to be wrong about Him and His plan for our lives has some very serious consequences. And, as the title suggests, there is a tremendous amount of evidence to back up Jesus' birth, life, death, and most importantly, His resurrection! I usually suggest that you think of the validity of the aforementioned claims as a court case. Produce the

evidence. Similarly, for those who have other beliefs than Christianity, who believe in other gods, where is your evidence? What makes your god, God? I know it's unpopular and very politically incorrect to be so exclusive, but there is no other God but the God of the Bible. I am not trying to be pompous or flex my righteousness muscle; I am trying to give you something to think about. If you are or claim to have some degree of intelligence, wouldn't you want to know if your belief system can be backed up? I know you can't say no to that oneJ

> ***Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.***
>
> ***Acts 17:3 explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."***

Yes, there is much evidence of the Christian faith: Archeological, genealogical, historical, extra-Biblical as well as scientific. However, the greatest evidence is that of a changed heart in those who believe.

> ***John 7:17 "If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or* whether *I speak from Myself." This is a great verse which in a way says, "Put My word to the test and you'll see that it's true!***

A great example of evidence is an analogy of only 8 prophesies (predictions) coming to fruition regarding Jesus and there are hundreds! It is analogous to covering the state of Texas with silver dollars two feet deep and marking one

with an X and a person blindfolded would find it their first try. This is from a book by D. James Kenedy entitled, "Skeptics Answered". I think the odds were 10 to the 17th? I read that book many years ago. There's nothing wrong with being skeptical, however, I think there is something faulty to claim something is untrue or inaccurate without looking at the evidence.

This is one of those 4 o'clock in the morning things I thought of as a result of listening to my nightly sermon. (I always go to bed listening to the Word of God) Anyway, I was reminded of the vast number of people that Jesus appeared to after He walked out of the tomb; when He exchanged the grave for a changing room. Here's a couple of powerful passages:

> ***1 Corinthians 15:*** ***5*** ***and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.*** ***6*** ***After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; (fallen asleep in this case means they have died)***

There are many more examples of Him appearing to others and one key point here is that when this was written, many of those witnesses were still alive and there's no record of anyone claiming otherwise. Here's another verse from the apostle Peter that I really love:

> ***2 Peter 1:*** ***16*** ***For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.***

Come, let us reason together.

9

Can you “prove” faith is real?

I covered some things in the last chapter regarding evidence; there is a tremendous amount of evidence if anyone is curious enough to look for it. Faith, however, is not based on any physical, touchy, feely type of evidence or it wouldn’t be called faith.

Personally, my faith grew as I began to experience the power and reality of prayer. There was one prayer in particular that seemed corny then and still does. It was one of those deals that you pray this prayer 9 times a day for perhaps 9 days you will see results; positive results that is. I believe that prayer went like this: “May the Sacred Heart of Jesus be adored glorified, loved and preserved throughout the world forever, Sacred Heart of Jesus have mercy on us, St. Jude, helper of the hopeless pray for us?” After praying that prayer for the prescribed number of times per day and for however many days, one prayer was fulfilled and it was major at the time. I found it very interesting that when I was looking through my mother’s prayer/devotional books after her death, I found the same prayer which was clipped from a newspaper, and she had kept count in Roman numerals on the side for every time she prayed it as well. I also found that prayer in a newspaper perhaps it was the same paper, but I do not remember giving it to her and I’m sure I would have remembered that.

Besides that one series of prayers, there just seemed to be more and more prayers that I knew God was hearing and answering, I could no longer say it was a coincidence. There's another term I learned, it's called a "God-Incidence". This is surely what began the development of my faith and drew me closer to God. I could not really explain it then and perhaps I still can't. I have occasionally thought of an analogy which might not be too hard to consider because it also involves a relationship. If you are or ever have been in love with someone, how can you prove it? Can it be measured, quantified, reproduced in a lab? Of course not, yet as time is spent with that person, in many cases that love just grows. It is very much the same way with faith in God. It is relationship based, and if you are active in that relationship your faith will grow. I remember an answer a Christian man gave to someone who asked him, "How do you know God is real or real in your life"? I'll never forget his answer. He said," I know that I know that I know"! Now that's not scientific, but I was surely convinced he knew, and so do I!

Heb 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Heb 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.

10

God is watching from the upper room

I think that from the time when we were little kids, we thought we actually got away with so much stuff; how could anyone's parents be so stupid? Then one day you find yourself as a parent and realize your children don't think you know what they are doing. Sometimes it is wiser to let them find out you knew at a later time or sometimes you just don't want to be bothered with the reprimand if the infraction was not too serious. Yet there really are many times when we as parents have no clue what was done and perhaps never will.

I'd like to look at some situations where we do know that your son or daughter did something wrong and they know you know, but nothing is said. Perhaps more than anything else we just want the child to tell us they are sorry; to show remorse and then how joyful the reconciliation can be. Somehow it seems to cancel out the wrong that was done; a genuine confession. This is what God wants and longs for from His children. He knows our thoughts, words and deeds before they are done, and He just can't wait for us to come to Him and make it right.

In our day-to-day activities, we all mess up; big or small we all do it. We like to think that perhaps no one else knows, but deep inside, we know He knows. It's like He's watching out the window of an upper room. We know He's there, yet we cannot associate any immediate punishment for our deeds, so we keep

it up. Eventually it gets to a point where our conscience doesn't bother us much anymore. Yet He still knows and like the loving Father He is, He never stops longing for our confession; our surrender. And like any loving Father, He will never send us away. But we must come to Him because He does know our deeds and they will not go unpunished.

Genesis 3:8 They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Psalm 14:1 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good.

2 The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God.

3 They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one.

11

Obedience to our parents, from children & to God

Romans 5:19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall the many be made righteous.

In another chapter I referred to obedience and the similarities of a human family and relationships and how it is the same with God. The above scripture is the epitome of obedience.

All too often as a father I have told my children many times what to do and the importance of obeying what I tell them. Perhaps equally often I find myself feeling hypocritical for not being consistently obedient to my biological father when I was young, but more importantly being disobedient to the things I know God wants me to do now. Again, it's a simple and direct analogy; when your child obeys you, you usually react by showing him or her your love, right? How about when they blatantly disobey you? Do you unleash your wrath, do you stop loving them? It might seem that way temporarily, but I believe a parent is incapable of not loving their children. God is absolutely incapable of

not loving His creation. He, like us, craves obedience. Not due to an egotistical power struggle, but because He knows what is best for us and if we are obedient, if we cultivate that proper relationship with Him, then and only then will we know true happiness.

Lastly, just like the parental example, when we disobey God, it is crucial to let Him know you're truly sorry. Unlike a parent, God knows every single case of even the slightest disobedience on our part. How do you feel when someone has done something wrong, and then they come to you, perhaps with a tear in their eye and ask for forgiveness? To quote a greeting card I once read, "Yeah, it's like that!"

12

Meeting with the President

Have you ever had a meeting with a CEO of a major company? Or maybe a local mayor, congressman or imagine a meeting with the president? You would have to plan this well in advance, you would arrive early, wear your best outfit and have some of the things you want to discuss all written out or memorized. This would probably be a very rare and exciting opportunity.

Although meeting with a high-profile person would be an interesting and memorable venture, how many of us ever consider the privilege of meeting with God? The creator and King of the universe; the savior and sustainer of all that lives and exists! Almighty God makes Himself available to you and me anytime and anywhere. It is impossible in our limited capacity to imagine how that happens, but it does. In trying to explain to someone when He asked how God managed to feed 15-20,000 people with a few fish and a little bread (I know, the Bible says 5,000, but it also says plus women and children) I said, "He can create the entire universe, catering a lunch was nothing."

So perhaps the next time you are getting ready to pray, to thank God for all your blessings, try to realize that you are about to address Almighty God. Take time to prepare your heart, to give Him glory, to confess your sins, to thank Him for His sacrifice and for all your blessings and then your supplications.

Recently when I begin to pray, I try to imagine what God looks like. Do we picture an old man with a long white beard in the clouds, or more of a hippy looking dude in a robe? Well, I think God gave me an answer not too long ago.

> ***Genesis 1:*** ***[26]*** ***Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."***

So, as part of a trilogy, God looks like us. "In Our image" to me means in a trinitarian way, we are body, soul and spirit: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I can only imagine how awesome it will be to be in the presence of God.

13

Truth is truth, regardless of one's beliefs

John 8: *[31] So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word,* **then** *you are truly disciples of Mine; [32] and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.*

It's a relatively common misunderstanding that something is true for someone and not someone else. Let's leave that to the definition of an opinion. Opinions, among other reasons, are often subject to an individual's experience or perspective. What author and apologist Frank Turek often replies when someone says, "all truth is relative", Frank famously responds: **"Is that true?"** He uses this to show that such statements are logically self-defeating.

This kind of reasoning, if you can call it that, is perhaps best utilized in a court room. As passionate as I am to share the truth, it's important that it does not turn into a debate. If you know me, I don't mind a good debate, but it should be with gentleness and love to share the good news.

1 Peter 3: *[15] but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always* **being**

> ***ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;***

(This is the definition of apologetics; it's not an apology, it means to give a defense for what you believe.)

14

One day we will all know for sure

This is perhaps one of the most haunting thoughts that I have and really the main reason for writing this booklet. I pray this **book** will **let** some people know, among other things, what's next in what some call the afterlife. I realize some think that this is it, when we die, lights out and we're worm food. Here's one verse about worms:

Mark 9: *44* ***where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.***

I can't help but think about the people who have heard or perhaps read about the good news, the Gospel, and rejected it. One day they will know for sure and at that point there will be no turning back. Here's a short story Jesus tells about that:

Luke 16: *19* ***"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day.*** *20* ***And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores,*** *21* ***and longing to be fed with the*** **crumbs** ***which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his***

sores. [22] Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. [23] In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. [24] And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' [25] But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. [26] And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that ***none may cross over from there to us.' [27] And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house— [28] for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' [29] But Abraham *said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' [30] But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' [31] But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"***

This would be the most dreadful "I told you so" anyone could imagine. There will be no turning back! This story doesn't mean that if you are rich, you can't go to heaven and if you are poor your odds are any better. When I read the part of the 5 brothers, I always think of my family, I am one of five brothers. (And 4 sisters) I too passionately want them to know the truth. (I go into more detail on this subject in chapter 46.)

15

Digesting the Word of God

Over the years I've tried to understand how the Word of God, the Bible, effects our lives. I've been studying the Word on and off for over 32 years (this is now 2026) sometimes a casual devotional which might be just a few verses or several chapters, and sometimes in-depth Bible studies with a group. For the last 3+ years I've been reading 5 Psalms and a proverb every day. Well, this is my analogy: I don't know how my digestive system processes the food I eat, absorbs the nutrients and discards the rest. In the same way, I don't know how God takes what I read and or when I listen to His Word and how It capital I, changes my life. But I can tell you, it does, it produces peace beyond human understanding.

> ***Philippians 4:[7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

The Word of God was written by men inspired by the Holy Spirit.

> ***2 Timothy 3:[16] All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; [17] so***

that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

I do not claim to have this same "inspiration," but I am certain that the reason I'm writing this is due to the conviction of my beliefs and perhaps mildly inspired by God.

Bon Appetit

16

Ingredients to everything

When I began writing these vignettes 20 years ago, it seems like I only wrote the titles for chapters 13-22. I'm not sure what the title of this chapter refers to, but I'll give it a shot.

I think what I meant by this title is that at the creation of the universe, which includes Earth, and all the ingredients were created for everything that exists today. There will be another chapter on evolution, so I won't get into that here. I will just say how fascinating it is when you look at all the things He created by His Word! From all the different species and animals including of course all the different birds and what really amazes me is all the different fish that even at the present time we seem to discover some weird looking creatures from the ocean depths. (I recently read a book with my 4-year-old granddaughter Rian entitled "Strange Creatures" by David Perters. Well, that was a great title because it contained some very strange looking creatures!) I don't think anyone could ever count all the things God created or to understand why He created them. That brings to mind a verse that might help:

Isaiah 55: *8* ***"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,***
Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.
9 ***"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,***

So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

In the book of Genesis God says:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

The Hebrew word *bara* (*bārā'*), translated as "created" in Genesis 1:1, strictly means "out of nothing" So much for the big bang theory. Thank you, Chuck Smith, founder of Calvary Chappel, for that explanation.

17

The Power of the Holy Spirit

This is perhaps the most misunderstood subject and one I feel incapable of explaining. The trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; one God in three persons. There are a number of examples in the holy scriptures that speak of trinitarian activities. Here's the first one:

> ***Genesis 1:*** *[26]* ***Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."***

Over every creeping thing makes me think of what I wrote in the previous chapter about His creation. The Holy Spirit is given human characteristics, He hears, He has a mind, He thinks, knows, and searches the deep things of God.

> ***1 Corinthians 2:*** *[10]* ***For to us God revealed*** **them** ***through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.*** *[11]* ***For who among men knows the*** **thoughts** ***of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the*** **thoughts** ***of God no one knows except the Spirit***

of God.

He has emotions: He can be grieved by human sin and experiences love:

Ephesians 4:[30] Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

And a will: He makes sovereign choices and distributes spiritual gifts as He decides:

1 Corinthians 12:[11] But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

Jesus told us, via his disciples, when He departs, He will send the Holy Spirit whom He refers to as a Helper.

John 14:[26] But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

The word "helper" in the Greek is paraclete, it is the same word used to describe Eve, the first woman. Please don't misunderstand this, this does not denigrate women, on the contrary it honors women to use the same term to describe the third person of the trinity.

The Bible tells us that as believers, our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit,

He dwells within us.

> ***1 Corinthians 6:*** ***[19]*** ***Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?***

I fall way short all too often of this supernatural privilege. The Bible also tells us that not only are we a temple of the Holy Spirit, but that Jesus dwells in us:

> ***John 17:*** ***[20]*** ***"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;*** ***[21]*** ***that they may all be one; even as You, Father,*** **are** ***in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.***

It's easier for me to believe that God dwells in me, but this verse also says that we dwell in Him! I think, what would God want with me in Him? Well, He is our Father and loves us that much!

18

God Is love and God is Law!

God is the epitome of love. There is no love greater than the love of God.

1 John 4:8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

This is another aspect of Christianity that can be difficult to explain or understand, at least it is for me. As a fairly recent student of the Psalms, there are many instances where God wipes out many people. He gives to some the ability to destroy others, entire armies, often including innocent women and children. I have to admit, that's tough to digest sometimes. However, God is just and He cannot look the other way when He is rejected. I'm confident that in every case where people are wiped out, they had opportunities to repent, to do what is right.

Isaiah 11:4 But with righteousness He will judge the poor And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay

the wicked.

Psalm 98:9 Let the mountains sing together for joy
9 Before the Lord, for He is coming to judge the earth;
He will judge the world with righteousness
And the peoples with equity.

Proverbs 3:11 My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord
Or loathe His reproof,12 For whom the Lord loves He reproves,
Even as a father* corrects *the son in whom he delights.

Hebrews 10: 31 It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

I suppose the best example of God's love is that He sentenced His son to death for the forgiveness of OUR sins. That is what Christianity is all about; forgiveness. For He gave His only begotten son.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

19

Topless Dancer

Years ago, I heard a story by pastor and author James Dobson about a trip he was taking on a bus with a friend. It seemed like James was sitting close to a woman who was a topless dancer and his friend was able to listen to the conversation. After they reached their destination, his friend asked him why he didn't confront her about her profession. Jame's reply is something I've never forgotten, he said, "I told her about Jesus, Jesus will deal with her dancing."

We all know people who are perhaps going down a path that appears to lead to destruction and we might feel compelled to "set them straight". This often is received as criticism and not a genuine concern for their well-being. If we can help them to experience the love of God, one way or another to introduce them to Him, God will show them the error of their ways.

My daily prayers consist of many aspects of our lives; from our health, our wealth, safety, protection, our families, gratitude, forgiveness; it's a long list. I get to the part about an acronym, TOLL: It stands for to Trust, Obey, Listen and Love God. The Bible sums this up here:

Mathew 6: 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and

all these things will be added to you.

The point is to simply love God, and all the other stuff will fall into place. That by no means suggests that life will be a bed of roses, it does mean that there will be guidance and peace through the storms, not the elimination of them.

Psalm 34: ***[17]*** **The righteous** ***cry, and the Lord hears***
And delivers them out of all their troubles.
[18] The Lord is near to the brokenhearted
And saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Isaiah 43: ***[2] "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;***
And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched,
Nor will the flame burn you.

This next verse I found comforting when I read it and it still is:

Psalm 50: ***[15] Call upon Me in the day of trouble;***
I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me."

He wants us to cry out to Him. I used to think that perhaps that showed a lack of faith or we were insulting God when we cry out to Him. What a loving Father we have.

20

In prosperity He whispers; in pain He Shouts

I borrowed the title of this chapter from a famous concept by the Christian author C.S. Lewis. He essentially wrote that God whispers to us in our pleasures and speaks in our conscience, but He shouts to us in our pains; it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world. Over the years, since I accepted Christ as my personal Savior in March of 1994, I've found this to be incredibly true in my own walk.

When life is going smoothly—when the bills are paid, everyone in the family is healthy, and the sun is shining—it is dangerously easy to put God on the back burner. We might still go to church or read a quick daily devotional, but our total reliance on Him tends to fade. We start thinking we've got it all figured out. During those times of worldly prosperity, God is still there, gently whispering His love and guidance to us, but the "noise" of our comfortable, busy lives often drowns Him out.

Then, the storm hits. It could be a sudden job loss, a frightening medical diagnosis, or a crisis with one of our children. Suddenly, our self-reliance vanishes. We are brought to our knees, and all at once, God has our full, undivided attention. In our pain, He is shouting. He isn't shouting out of

anger; He is shouting to wake us up, to remind us that He is our true foundation and our only source of lasting comfort.

As I mentioned in earlier chapters, Christianity is a relationship, not a religion. Think about our human relationships. When my beautiful wife and best friend, Lynne, and I are just going about our regular daily routines, our communication might just be the normal, quiet chatter of life. But if there were a fire or a sudden emergency, I wouldn't whisper—I would shout to save her, because I love her! God does the same with us. He allows the trials of this fallen world to break through our spiritual deafness so that we will run back into the safety of our Father's arms.

It reminds me of a verse from the Psalms:

> ***Psalm 119:71 "It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes."***

It can be very difficult to understand why a loving God allows suffering. I've asked those same questions myself. But time and again, I've seen how pain acts as a catalyst to strip away our worldly distractions. When we are broken, we finally realize our desperate need for the Savior. He uses the hard times not to punish us, but to pursue us. If you are going through a season of pain right now, please listen closely. It might just be God shouting His love to you, calling you to come home.

21

It's not what you know, but who you know

We've all heard this from time to time. In chapter 12 I speak about meeting the president, I suppose this chapter is similar. The Bible, particularly in the Old Testament, speaks of many who knew the Bible of their day by heart, but they failed to truly know and therefore love the Author. We can know someone and not love them, but when someone truly gets to know God, I don't understand how they cannot love Him. Several verses come to mind.

> ***James 2:[19] You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.***

Satan believes in God but certainly doesn't love Him. He's quite familiar with scripture as well. We can be fooled by those who might quote certain Bible verses, but that does not mean they love God; the relationship needs to be there. Here's another:

> ***Matthew 7:[22] Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in***

Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

That is something no one wants to hear on judgment day, and that day is coming, and I believe it will be soon. What will He say to you?

22

Physical vs Spiritual Workout

Seems like no matter what we do to in any way improve our lives, there's a certain amount of effort on our part. Whether it's toning up at the gym, higher education, or in this case, establishing and maintaining a relationship with Jesus Christ, we must put in the time and effort; no pain, no gain. However, unlike toning our bodies or advancing our academic status, the effort we put into our faith is not something we need to do or is required of us, it is something, as mentioned in a previous chapter, we will naturally just want to do. I think many Christians, myself included of course, at times we tend to experience our ups and downs in our habits of prayer and Bible consumption. The book of James puts it this way:

> ***James 2:[14] What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? [15] If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, [16] and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for* their *body, what use is that? [17] Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead,* being *by itself.***

So, just like various physical and academic pursuits, the more time and

dedication you have contributed, the greater the results will be. One big difference between Spiritual, capital S, and any type of carnal pursuits, is that there is no end to getting closer to God. It's not like getting that doctorate and then off to your dream job. When our journey is complete, this is what we long to say like the apostle Paul:

> ***2 Timothy 4:*** *[7] I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; [8] in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.*

23

The King cleaned their feet, first order of business

John 13: [3] **Jesus**, ***knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God,*** [4] ***got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.*** [5] ***Then He poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.***

Something I just read recently is that Jesus' washing of their feet is analogous to washing their souls. The bottom of our feet is the soul!

The above verse confirms that the Father has given Jesus full authority and power and what is the first thing He does? Perhaps one of the most humiliating and humble things a person could do in those days, He washes His disciples' feet! He doesn't sit back and start telling people what to do, He humbled himself and set a powerful example. Here's another example of His humility:

> ***Philippians 2:*** ***5*** ***Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,*** ***6*** ***who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,*** ***7*** ***but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant,*** **and** ***being made in the likeness of men.*** ***8*** ***Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*** ***9*** ***For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,*** ***10*** ***so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*** ***11*** ***and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

This is one of my favorite verses, and there are many, that confirm the deity of Jesus Christ, in other words, Jesus is God in the flesh:

> ***John 10:*** ***28*** ***and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*** ***29*** ***My Father, who has given*** **them** ***to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch*** **them** ***out of the Father's hand.*** ***30*** ***I and the Father are one."***

This fact is what separates Christianity from any other so-called religion. There are many who try to mimic what's in the Bible, but they do not profess Jesus as Lord. You need to be careful to understand these differences, not to criticize other belief systems or individuals, but to clearly understand what is true and what is not. Is there any other "sacred" book that foretells the future? The Bible is 100% accurate in that regard and all others. I'll address this in another chapter, but here's a little more food for thought. How does a banker learn to identify counterfeit money? They do not study all the fake money, that would be virtually impossible. No, they study real money so when they encounter an imposter, counterfeit bills, they can tell immediately that

it's fake. As we study the sacred scriptures, we too will be able to detect the imposters, and the world is full of them! It's very important, however, to do so in a gentle and respectful manner:

> ***1 Peter 3:[15] but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always* being *ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;***

24

What is at the core of a person?

The core of a person is the heart and the soul. The heart is much more than our personal pump station; it is where our actions are planned and thought out prior to taking action. The Bible says our hearts are wicked:

> ***Jeremiah 17:*** *9* ***"The heart is more deceitful than all else***
> ***And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?***

Some people try to defend certain actions saying, "it's human nature", so it's okay. Well, it's human nature to want what someone else has, whether the solution to that desire is to steal or commit an act of adultery, so, human nature although being real, does not justify or condone immoral behavior.

Perhaps the heart can be compared to a person's core beliefs. A plumb line so to speak, a reference point that drives many of our decisions. This might help explain for those who believe we evolved from animals have little reverence for human life and treat people as animals. There was a recent celebration in one of our "woke" states for legislation that makes it legal to abort an unborn child up to the point of natural birth. I know abortion is a sensitive subject,

but the bottom line is when you intentionally terminate the life of another person, that is murder. Whether it's in a clinic or in a bar, murder is murder! However, by the grace of God, this too is forgivable if you wholeheartedly ask for forgiveness.

Our soul is the part of us that will live eternally, perhaps the soul can be referred to as our spirit. Eternal life is what these writings are all about; we will all live eternally; the big question is where that will be. I may have delved into this before, but if that is not what you believe, I think you owe it to yourself to find out if whatever you believe about the afterlife is true, is there any evidence to substantiate your belief? There is no turning back, no do overs, or for you golfers, no mulligans.

Genesis 2: ***7*** ***Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.***

Psalm 42:1 As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for You, O God.
2 ***My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;***
When shall I come and appear before God?

25

He Loved Us to Death

John 19:16 Then therefore he delivered Him unto them to be crucified.

As I began my Bible reading today, 2/3/06, I am in John 18 as we approach Jesus' crucifixion. Before reading as I was praying, I was also hoping for a different ending; that I didn't have to read of His suffering & death. I thought, "Why He couldn't have poured out so much love, that He just loved us to death?" Isn't that exactly what He did? We have read about, heard and/or discussed Jesus' death many times throughout our lives. Believing it and relating to it is a different story altogether. Doesn't He at least deserve some deep thought? What if it's true and it all really happened. What does it all mean, why did He have to do it? Why don't you find out?

My wife sent me a podcast where Sean Ryan interviewed someone and I think Sean asked him, "Why did Jesus have to be crucified"? His answer was amazing and I'll try to explain it; he gave this illustration"

There was a king who announced an edict regarding a law that was broken, I think money was extorted. He announced to his kingdom that when they find the criminal, the punishment was 40 lashes. 39 lashes were the most that could be endured without killing the culprit. After some time, they discovered the

criminal was the princess, the king's daughter. He had to fulfill the sentence and commended her to be whipped. After she received the first lash, the king wrapped himself around her body and commanded them to commence with the punishment. It was her sin, but He took the punishment.

He loved us to death.

26

Why does Jesus call God Father and God calls Him, Son?

I was listening to Greg Laurie last night, 5/14/07 and he was talking about Jesus' mother, Mary. He touched on the virgin birth and how some revere Mary to the point of being a deity, in his words. It was strange and for me a profound thought I got as to why Jesus is called the Son of God and why Jesus calls God, Father. It was the Holy Spirit of God that caused Mary to conceive and therefore in a human way is the Father of Jesus. Since Jesus is fully God and fully human, this does not take away from His deity, if anything it adds to it. The Immaculate Conception is anything but natural; it was supernatural. The Holy Spirit, in effect, became a sperm cell. I absolutely mean no disrespect to Him, but that is I think how the immaculate conception took place.

There is another way to explain the word, "son" as it refers to Jesus' relationship with the Father. Son, as I understand it, is a word used to mean, "In the image of".

John 10: ***29*** ***My Father, who has given*** **them** ***to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch*** **them** ***out of the Father's hand.*** ***30*** ***I and the***

Father are one."

27

What is a Christian?

This is a very important question. Simply put, a Christian is someone who loves the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength! Not the God of their choosing, but Almighty God, the creator of the heavens and the Earth, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. One distinction that is often made to refer to a true believer is a "born again" Christian. I've heard it said that if you're not born again, you're not a Christian and I agree with that statement.

> ***John 3:1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; 2 this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." 3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."***

I remember when a man who gave me a lift to my hotel while in Florida in March of '94 asked me if I ever prayed to ask Jesus to be my savior. My answer was no, although I considered myself to be a Christian before that. So, he asked me if I would like to pray to invite Jesus to be my savior. I said how can I call

myself a Christian if I didn't want Him to reside within me. He agreed, then led me in a prayer as outlined in chapter 2. I remember thinking, "oh no, I'm gonna be one of those born agains". Well, I was right, I was born again. For me, it was a slow and steady process, but God slowly and surely changed my life. The muddy water removal process had begun. (Chapter 7) 32 years later, there is still work to be done, it's a process known as sanctification.

28

What are we saved from?

Has anyone ever asked you if you are saved? I remember an old neighbor asking me what that means, saved from what? The short answer is saved from hell!

Mt 13:50 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (many other references in chapter 3)

There are many references to hell in the Old and New Testaments. Jesus spoke more about hell than Heaven. I think one common misconception or FAQ is, how could a loving God "send" anyone to hell? God doesn't send anyone to hell, by rejecting Him, by turning away from opportunities to have a relationship with Him, you are the one making that decision. I often remember crying out to God years ago asking Him, how can that happen, who deserves an eternity in someplace so utterly awful, constant pain and torment, knowing there is no way out, EVER! My next thought was, and this is where some people would say, God answered my question and said, "who deserves an eternity in Heaven?" A place where there is no pain, no suffering, where we will be with God and we will be like Jesus. We'll be reunited with loved ones who were believers. No

more tears, just total bliss. Well, I know I don't deserve that, no one does. But it remains a free gift to anyone who truly wants it. One of my favorite verses:

> ***Jeremiah 29:[11] For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. [12] Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. [13] You will seek Me and find* Me *when you search for Me with all your heart.***

A description of Heaven:

> ***Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer* any *sea. [2] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, [4] and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be* any *death; there will no longer be* any *mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."***

I've heard many people say that since the only way to Heaven is to have a relationship with Jesus is unfair, there should be other ways. Well, although it is true, the only way is to have a relationship with Jesus, and it is available to everyone, everywhere. Regardless of your age, gender, nationality or most importantly, regardless of what you've done.

The apostle Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, spent many years

persecuting Christians (people of the Way) until he had an encounter with Jesus:

> ***Acts 9: Now Saul, (His name later changed to Paul) still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, 2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.***

Some think that the things they have done make them unforgivable, that God could never love or forgive them, this is not true. Forgiveness is the whole basis of Christianity.

> ***John 14: 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.***

29

Why don't they get it?

John 3:20-21 For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

That's another FAQ. I was at a Bible study the other night and one of the guys asked why so many Jews don't believe Jesus is the Messiah when there's so much evidence that He is? So many of their ancestors witnessed countless miracles, particularly during the exodus from Egypt. One of the amazing miracles was the parting of the red sea when it seemed like the Israelites were going to be massacred by the Egyptian army. Then as the Psalms put it, "the red sea saw them coming and hurried out of their way." So many of the OT Jews knew many scriptures by heart, but memorization alone is not equivalent to belief or understanding. This question of why a particular group of people don't believe Jesus is the Messiah can be asked of anyone with such an abundance of evidence. Some say it's pride that keep people from believing the Truth. They don't want to be governed by a "higher power" because they know that they don't want to follow the rules. Remember what the Bible says about the heart, it is truly wicked and most people want to leave it that way, and that is very sad. I can remember when I sensed God knocking

at my heart and I thought, no God, I want to have more fun, not now. This wasn't a conscious thought, but I sense that was what I thought at the time. When I was in my early 30's I sensed that I was searching for the truth. I was going to different churches but felt lost. Here's where a scripture I referred to previously came into play:

> ***Jeremiah 29:[13] You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.***

Here's a verse that helps to explain why so many don't believe:

> ***1 Corinthians 2:14 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.***

Well, I found Him or He found me, and for that I am very grateful.

30

It's all about the empty tomb!

As I sit here this "Good" Friday morning of 2008, my first thought was being thankful for the empty tomb. However, the tomb wasn't empty for a few days, so that led me to think what is so good about this Friday? Where did "we" get that name? Was it really a Friday that Jesus was murdered? (I just checked and there is a range of other names: Sad Friday, Holy Friday, Black Friday, Crucifixion Friday…)

It is somewhat interesting that when you really study the facts, He did not die on Friday at all. Most people know that Jesus "rose on the 3rd day", right? Well, if He died on Friday, we are told it was about 3 PM, and rose very early on Sunday, how do you get 3 days out of that? That's not even 48 hours. I'm not real sure of the details, but we do know they were celebrating the Passover meal, the last supper, then He was betrayed, put through a kangaroo court in the wee hours of the morning, scourged, crucified and buried the next day. Thursday or Friday, not a good day so far in my book. Jesus Himself said in Matthew 12:40 "***for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth***".

Once again, the day of the week and number of hours in the tomb are not the issue here. If it wasn't for the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, He would

have just been another unfortunate victim of a crime He did not commit, right? Well, no, He was guilty, according to His accusers, of being the King of the Jews, or, to put it another way, being equal to God, right there in the flesh. Not believing He was the Messiah, they killed Him.

I love the way author Max Lucado describes His resurrection: "He turned the grave into a changing room."

There was one major problem for them; they just could not keep Him dead. Here is not only what made that *Thursday* good, but also what has established everything the Christian faith is based on; His magnificent Resurrection! Without the resurrection there would be no Christianity. Just like in our times, there were many skeptics back then too. All they had to do was to produce the body. There are many interesting theories of what happened on that Easter weekend and all the evidence points right back to the truth; He really did what He and many Old Testament prophets said He would do, He rose from the dead and He wasn't just showing off, He did it to save us from eternal damnation, we simply need to believe.

In wondering over the years why He had to suffer so much, why all the blood? Why couldn't He just love us to death? Well, that's exactly what He did; He loved us to His death. He simply asks us to return the love.

31

How do you feel after spanking your child (God's grief)?

As with the last 12 or so chapters, it seems I just wrote the titles, but no content which I found odd. This is one title that I don't remember what I wanted to write. Here's a verse or 2 to consider:

> ***Hebrews 12:*** ***7*** ***It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom*** **his** ***father does not discipline?*** ***8*** ***But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*** ***9*** ***Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?*** ***10*** ***For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He*** **disciplines us** ***for*** **our** ***good, so that we may share His holiness.*** ***11*** ***All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.***

I think that's like saying, "this will hurt me more than it will hurt you".

Proverbs 3: ***[11]*** ***My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord***
Or loathe His reproof,
[12] ***For whom the Lord loves He reproves,***
Even as a father **corrects** ***the son in whom he delights.***

If you're a parent, surely, you have had to discipline your child. Depending on the circumstances, a loving parent never feels good about discipline, whether it's something as simple as taking away a toy, or more serious measures like spanking. I know for me, I raised my voice more than I care to admit or remember and that can be as damaging as being spanked, perhaps even worse. I clearly remember feeling bad afterwards and I would often hug my sons and then prayed with them. Sadly, you can't undo the damage that words can do. James speaks about taming the tongue:

James 3: ***[5]*** ***So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and*** **yet** ***it boasts of great things.***
See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! ***[6]*** ***And the tongue is a fire, the*** **very** ***world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of*** **our** ***life, and is set on fire by hell.*** ***[7]*** ***For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race.*** ***[8]*** ***But no one can tame the tongue;*** **it is** ***a restless evil*** **and** ***full of deadly poison.*** ***[9]*** ***With it we bless*** **our** ***Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;***

32

Chosen by God

Chosen, Not Overlooked

I have been reminded again that God chooses us; we do not first choose Him. One everyday picture comes to mind: choosing sides for a game. As a young man, I was not a skilled athlete, and I was usually picked near the end. I often laughed it off, but it still hurt a little because I knew I was not very good. By the grace of God, the story is different with Him. I have been chosen by God to belong to Him and to be with Him eternally in heaven. There can be nothing greater than that.

There is a tremendous amount of controversy over several doctrines: Free will or predestination. Both are Biblical and I don't think we will ever fully understand them. This might need to wait for the second edition to go into detail. For now, suffice it to say as Jesus said, "**Romans 10:13: "For, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"**

A Moment of Assurance

I remember sitting in my den, probably in 1997 or 1998, after reading something that caused me to question the authenticity of my faith. Then I came across this verse:

> ***John 15:16 You did not choose Me but I chose you and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.***

That was one of those rare "wow" moments—an unmistakable reminder of divine intervention and assurance. This verse helped me see that my faith did not rest on my ability to hold on to God, but on His gracious decision to hold on to me.

I do pray that this little book of mine will be considered fruit bearing.

33

Understanding Him: My thoughts are not your thoughts

Whether you're a Christian or as a pastor friend would say, "a pre-Christian" I'm sure you've had a hard time understanding so much of the daily grind also known as, life. I know I have and often still do. Here's a reference from the Bible that might help to clear things up:

> ***Isaiah 55:*** *8* ***"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,***
> ***Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.***
> *9* ***"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,***
> ***So are My ways higher than your ways***
> ***And My thoughts than your thoughts.***

We are incapable of understanding the mind and ways of God. Have you ever tried listening to some people with superior skills or knowledge of various topics like a "rocket scientist?" Elon Musk comes to mind. He can be hard to follow when he speaks; he seems to struggle to put things in words that we, the commoners, will be able to understand. Yet we know he knows so much

more than what comes out of his mouth. Well, Elon is no God, but I think you get the picture.

If you're an adult, by now you've had perhaps more struggles than you care to remember; I know I have. After certain challenges I've endured, I remember questioning God, "How do these things happen in a Christian family?" Then I remember Job. If you're not familiar with him, it is one of the books in the Bible, and I believe it is the oldest book in the Bible. Quite frankly, I hate how it starts:

> ***Job 1:[8] The Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil."***

God gave Satan permission to put his servant Job to the test. God knew Job would not deny God, no matter what. Job's children were killed, his livestock, which was numerous, this is what Job had as described in verse 2:

> ***[2] Seven sons and three daughters were born to him. [3] His possessions also were 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants; and that man was the greatest of all the men of the east.***

It's a long and interesting story and I recommend you read the entire book. But here's the part that applies to the opening verse from Isaiah and I love how God puts Job in his place; it's sort of like a cross examination:

> ***Job 38: "Who is this that darkens counsel***

By words without knowledge?
3 "Now gird up your loins like a man,
And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!
4 "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell Me*, if you have understanding,*
5 Who set its measurements? Since you know.
Or who stretched the line on it?
6 "On what were its bases sunk?
Or who laid its cornerstone,
7 When the morning stars sang together
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?
8 "Or who *enclosed the sea with doors*
When, bursting forth, it went out from the womb;
9 When I made a cloud its garment
And thick darkness its swaddling band,
10 And I placed boundaries on it
And set a bolt and doors,
11 And I said, 'Thus far you shall come, but no farther;
And here shall your proud waves stop'?
God's Mighty Power
12 "Have you ever in your life commanded the morning,
And *caused the dawn to know its place,*
13 That it might take hold of the ends of the earth,
And the wicked be shaken out of it?
14 "It is changed like clay under *the seal;*
And they stand forth like a garment.
15 "From the wicked their light is withheld,
And the uplifted arm is broken.
16 "Have you entered into the springs of the sea
Or walked in the recesses of the deep?
17 "Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
Or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?
18 "Have you understood the expanse of the earth?

Tell* Me*, if you know all this.

By the way, God provided another family and all his possessions were restored.

I think Isaiah's passage is worth reading again:

Isaiah 55: *8* ***"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,***
Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.
9 ***"For* as *the heavens are higher than the earth,***
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

I have to include the following verses from Isaiah as it concludes with one of God's most precious promises:

10 ***"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,***
And do not return there without watering the earth
And making it bear and sprout,
And furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater;
11 ***So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;***
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding* in the matter *for which I sent it.

So, when, not if, you don't understand or doubt God's sovereignty, memorizing Isaiah 55:8-9 might help you; it helps me regularly.

34

The Serenity Prayer

Almost everyone associates this prayer with those in recovery from addictions. I found the mass card that one of my siblings picked out in memory of my mother, Eugenia Claire Marcley, what a mother she was. Sorry, I got distracted thinking of her. The prayer on the card was the serenity prayer and at the time I didn't see how it fit, but most people leave out the rest. Here it is in its entirety:

"God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
As it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
If I surrender to His Will;
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life
And supremely happy with Him

Forever and ever in the next. Amen."

So how does that apply to my inspirations? Here's how: I need to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference. As I mentioned a few times, I struggle with the fact that most people will not put their faith in Jesus Christ, and they will suffer in hell for all eternity. I have a hard time with that, but I cannot change anyone; that's God's job. Just as the serenity prayer is most popular in AA, I often equate recovery from addiction to believing in God, truly believing. The word "believe" when used in the Bible to say someone believes in God, it means placing total trust in Him and committing your entire life to His will. Again, I mentioned in a previous chapter, the devil believes in God, but he does not give authority to Him or love Him. The analogy between addiction and matters of faith is that you cannot force either one on someone; they must want it from their heart. They must be sick and tired of the disease of addiction and to be convinced that life without God, without His divine guidance is not life at all. I was just reminded of the song I chose for our wedding; one of Frank Sinatra's most popular, no, not New York, New York, but "I did it my way." At least I thought I did. It took me quite some time to learn His way is best!

35

It's not hard to live a Christian life, it's impossible!

That's a quote from one of my favorite authors and pastor Andrew Farley. If you're not familiar with his books and his ministry, I would highly recommend learning more about him. He's got some great grace filled messages. The first book I read of his is called, "The Naked Gospel, Jesus + Nothing." I've touched on this before, I think in chapter 1, that Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship. So many "religions" have their to do lists and often you'll feel guilty for not jumping through their hoops and checking the boxes.

As the title suggests, it is impossible to live a Christian life, particularly when you think about following the big 10. No one can consistently obey all 10, not to mention the other 603 the Old Testament Jews added to them. This is the exact reason that Jesus had to die, He is the propitiation for our sins. We are incapable of being sinless. As we mature in our faith, we will, or at least we should, sin less, but sinlessness was accomplished by one man, the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

The 10 commandments were given to the Jews, not the Gentiles (non Jews) in the book of Exodus chapter 20:

20 Then God spoke all these words, saying, (This is the abbreviated form for simple reading)

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make or worship idols.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord.
4. Keep the Sabbath day holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods

One evangelist in particular, Ray Comfort, often speaks to people in a very open and somewhat humorous way and he'll ask people on the street a number of questions, he
usually will start like this:

Do you think you'll go to heaven when you die? And a lot of people say yes, they think so. He'll then ask if they've ever stolen anything, even a piece of gum, who most agree they have. Have you ever told a lie, yes again. Have you ever used God's name in vain, you guessed it, yes again. He'll then say, "You just admitted you're a thief, a liar and a blasphemer; do you still think you'll go to heaven?" He does this gracefully and makes it clear he doesn't want them to go to hell.

The "big 10" were given to us to see that although we should try to keep them, yet we are incapable and therefore in need of a Savior, THE Savior:

Romans 3: *[20] because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law* **comes** *the knowledge of sin.*

Galatians 3: *[24] Therefore the Law has become our tutor* **to lead us** *to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.*

The point is that no one keeps all of God's commandments, that is why He loved us to death. (Chapter 25) So if you feel unworthy of being a Christian due to certain behaviors, join the club, but repent and believe!

36

Believer's Benefits

It's a falsehood to think or believe that when you put your faith in Jesus that all your troubles are going to go away. Oft times we may tend to tell pre-Christians who may be going through some hard times that if they would only believe in Jesus all their problems would go away. I wish that was true; it certainly didn't work that way in my life or in the lives of many of the Bible's most notable characters. There are four men in particular who performed miraculous events but actually wanted to die:

Moses.

Everyone's heard of Moses. He was clearly given a task directly from God to "set His people free." You would think when you're doing God's will He would make it easy. No, they spent over 40 years trudging through "the wilderness" with what I believe was 2.4 to 3 million people, even if no one ever rebelled, and they surely did, that was quite a task. And after all that effort, due to Moses being disobedient to one of God's specific commands, Moses never made into the promised land. Moses wanted to die:

> ***Numbers 11: [14] I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. [15] So if You are going to deal thus with me,***

please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness."

Elijah.

Elijah was quite the prophet, perhaps best known for calling down fire from heaven; you've got to read the story in 1 Kings chapter 18; here's the condensed version ala Mark: There was a group of pagans challenging Elijah, so Elijah gave them a test. He told them to prepare a burnt offering and to call on their god to send fire to light the wood and consume the offering. Well, nothing was happening. It's funny how Elijah taunted them and said things like, "maybe your god is using the bathroom or perhaps he's taking a nap, he had a good sense of humor. Well after they danced around, cut themselves, chanted, etc., nothing happened, no bar-b-q today for them! Now it's Elijah's turn. He prepared his sacrifice, placed his firewood, however they usually did these things, but he made it even more challenging; he poured water all over his soon to be campfire. Here are Elijah's words for the rest of the story. (Thank you Paul Harvey):

1 Kings 18: ***[36]*** ***At the time of the offering of the*** **evening** ***sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word.*** ***[37]*** ***Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God, and*** **that** ***You have turned their heart back again."*** ***[38]*** ***Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.***

How's that for evidence of God's power. You would think that would have inspired him to continue his ministry in a powerful and steadfast manner.

There were other things happening around that time and he wanted to die:

> ***1 Kings 19: [4] But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers."***

Jonah.

You remember Jonah, the guy that jumped overboard and was saved by a whale. God gave Jonah a mission to go to a city called Nineveh to proclaim the good news. Nineveh was known to be the sin-city of the day, and he didn't want to go. Well, after being swallowed by a whale, and putting it nicely, was regurgitated by the whale 3 days later, he accomplished the "mission impossible." You would think that deserves a celebration; apparently that's not how Jonah handled it:

> ***Jonah 4:[3] Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."***

(There are actual cases of men being in a whale and shortly thereafter, discharged. I first heard that from Paul Harvey.)

And then there's Jeremiah.

> ***Jeremiah 20:[14] Cursed be the day when I was born;***
> ***Let the day not be blessed when my mother bore me!***
> ***[15] Cursed be the man who brought the news***

To my father, saying,
"A baby boy has been born to you!"
And *made him very happy.*

There are so many other examples of men and women having a very tough life as a result of their faith. So much for making Christianity appealing huh? Well, although He won't always help you avoid the storms, and we all have them, He does help us get through them. Once again, there are some things my family has experienced that I didn't think happened in a Christian family. Let's just say if it wasn't for our faith, the outcome would have been much different. The most life changing and horrific example is the brutal beating and crucifixion of our Savior, Jesus Christ. He did nothing wrong, He was perfect, sinless and yet took our sins upon Himself. Like a billboard I and some others put up years ago for Christmas which read, "Don't forget the birthday Boy, all He wants is your heart." Is that too much to ask?

37

Is Everyone Punished the Same in Hell?

Hell is a hell of a thing, how's that for a start? I certainly don't mean to make light of the most horrific experience anyone could ever have; particularly when the alternative is so indescribably delicious and free to everyone. (Do you remember that old Mounds and Almond Joy commercial? indescribably delicious they were!)

Once again, a few nights ago I heard a sermon by John Pipre that there are varying levels of pain and suffering in hell. He described this as great despair and unspeakably terrible. Some say there are different rewards and blessings in heaven as well, I'll look into that too. Piper refers to several scriptures and expounds on them. I think this book will be available digitally which would make the link below easily accessible, but if not, I would type it into your browser and listen; it's only 12 minutes.

https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-everyone-punished-the-same-in-hell

Here are some of his scriptures and key points:

Luke 12: [47] ***And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get***

ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, [48] but the one who did not know* it*, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

Matthew 11:[20] Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. [21] "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. [22] Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in* the *day of judgment than for you. [23] And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. [24] Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in* the *day of judgment, than for you."

From what I understand, and this is actually somewhat of a frightening thought, is that those who have clearly been told of the good news, the gospel, and reject it, which is rejecting Jesus' sacrifice, particularly if they reject Him again and again, you will experience greater wrath for all eternity. This is a very sad statement, especially when I realize that I have frequently "shared" this great news with so many, particularly with family members who may or may not actually read this. I know you can't scare someone into believing and that's not my intention. I've heard it said that in an effort to not upset someone by "sharing" the gospel, by staying silent you will love them right to the pit of hell. I'll take the risk of upsetting them and pray they understand my intentions.

I made reference a couple of times of "the gospel", the great news. What is the gospel? I'm glad you asked; here it is:

The gospel of Jesus Christ according to the Bible is the "good news" that God saves sinners through the substitutionary death and physical resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

The word *gospel* literally means good news. According to the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, the core elements of this message are that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day, all according to the Scriptures

Can you tell I use Google?

38

What does AI have to say about Eternal life?

Well, I decided to ask IT:

Here's my question to IT: Based on the evidence from the Bible and other non-biblical findings, who will go to heaven and who will go to hell? Here's its answer: (We need to remember AI is an IT and IT doesn't have emotion and IT is not concerned about eternity so IT should be neutral, just the facts mam.) Here is IT's answer:

According to the mainstream teaching of the New Testament (the primary biblical source for these claims), and as understood by the large majority of historic and evangelical Christianity:

Who goes to heaven

- Those who place their faith/trust in Jesus Christ as the risen Lord and Savior—specifically, those who believe that He died for their sins and rose from the dead, and who receive Him (John 3:16–18; Romans 10:9–13; John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8–9).
- This is presented as a gift of God's grace received through faith, not earned by good works, religious performance, or moral superiority.
- The New Testament repeatedly ties eternal life to a personal relationship

with and trust in Jesus rather than merely intellectual assent, church membership, or moral effort (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:11–13).

Who goes to hell (or eternal separation from God)

- Those who reject or refuse to trust in Jesus Christ (John 3:18, 36; John 8:24; 2 Thessalonians 1:8–9).
- The New Testament portrays this as the result of human choice to remain independent of God rather than God arbitrarily "sending" people there against their will. Hell is described with language of outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth, fire, and eternal destruction or exclusion from God's presence (Matthew 25:41–46; Revelation 20:11–15; Mark 9:43–48).

These are the consistent claims of the New Testament documents themselves.

Important nuances and variations within Christianity

- **Protestant/evangelical view**: Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Good works follow as evidence of genuine faith, but do not contribute to being accepted by God.
- **Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox views**: Faith is essential, but it is joined with baptism, ongoing participation in the sacraments, and cooperation with grace through good works. There is also the concept of purgatory for those who die in God's grace but still need purification. (Author's perspective: There is no Biblical evidence of purgatory, one of many things the Catholic church invented.)

What "non-biblical findings" actually show

Non-biblical historical and archaeological evidence supports several foundational facts that the New Testament claims rest on:

- Jesus of Nazareth was a real historical figure who was crucified under Pontius Pilate.
- His followers very early claimed He had risen from the dead and that this was the basis of forgiveness and eternal life.
- The movement spread rapidly despite persecution, and the core proclamation (Christ died for sins, was buried, rose on the third day) appears in the earliest Christian sources.

However, **no historical, scientific, or archaeological finding can confirm or disprove the existence of heaven or hell, or who ultimately goes where**. Those claims are theological and eschatological. They cannot be verified by the methods of history or science the way an empty tomb claim or the existence of a first-century preacher can be investigated. Extra-biblical sources (Josephus, Tacitus, early non-Christian writers, archaeology) corroborate the historical setting and the early Christian belief in the resurrection, but they do not provide independent proof of the afterlife destinations themselves.

Bottom line from the sources

The Bible's consistent answer is that eternal life with God is received through trust in Jesus Christ, and that rejection of Him results in separation from God. Non-biblical historical evidence strengthens the credibility of the historical Jesus and the early resurrection proclamation, but it does not independently settle the question of anyone's eternal destiny. That remains a matter of the theological claims of the texts themselves.

So, in my conclusion, an unbiased and neutral entity is in agreement with the Bible. Thank you, AI, for the "Almighty Inspirations" given.

> ***Daniel 12:4 But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase."***

Would you say knowledge is increasing? There's a difference between knowledge and information. Information is clearly increasing and I think knowledge is actually decreasing.

39

I wish I was wrong

As I was getting ready to pray this morning, thinking about some of the headlines that always contain horrible stories of death and war and the reminder that there is so much evil in the world, I couldn't help thinking about the fiery afterlife, aka, HELL! My next thought was, and I guess still is, I wish I was wrong. I think it might be nice to live without the realization that hell is real, no eternal judgement, just lights out and that's it, regardless of your beliefs and/or actions. We've all been to funerals where a friend or family member of the deceased will say, "at least they're not suffering anymore," I politely nod my head, but in my heart, I do pray that is true.

I remember years ago talking with a man who was a Jehovah's witness about hell. He said, "do you think a loving God would put a child in an oven?" His metaphor, not mine. Naturally he was trying to say there is no hell, no consequences for your beliefs or lack thereof. I was relieved to hear that; too bad it can't be backed up.

So, I guess the question that arises here is, what do you believe happens when you "shuffle off" as my father put it before he left us. (I think there will be a chapter coming about his last days called, Vaya con Dios.) But whatever you believe happens, what do you base that opinion on? I say opinion because that's what it is. This is perhaps one of the most important questions you've

ever been asked. Referring to chapter 3, "What If", what if you are wrong and what the Bible tells us is true. Can you give me the benefit of the doubt and just really ask yourself, what if there is either eternal judgment, flames included, or eternal bliss? Wouldn't it be wise to find out while you still can? I get my beliefs and understanding about this from a great resource that has a 100% track record for accuracy, The Word of God, the Holy Bible.

Like the title of this chapter, I sure do wish I was wrong.

40

Evolution

I know like much of what is contained in this book is or can be controversial, but evolution, I call it evil-ution, because it is evil in that it denies God and puts man in the same class as animals. I think one thing that is often taught is, "The Big Bang Theory." Other than an excellent and humorous sitcom, it is in my opinion a ridiculous theory. I would imagine that when God created the heavens and the Earth, Genesis 1:1, there may have been some sort of explosive activity, but it came from God, from His Word as mentioned previously. Without God's power, for those who believe in this theory, where did all the matter come from that exploded? Does order ever come from an explosion?

When discussing evolution with people, I will often ask this question: If you have some sort of a sealed container, whether the size of a shoe box or a gigantic warehouse, and you seal it up so nothing can get in, how long before any living thing walks or crawls out? Or even that a blade of grass can grow. Like the song goes, "nothing from nothing, leaves nothing!" It's really absurd to think that even if it was billions of years, that this incredible universe just "evolved" from nothing. No designer, just a biproduct of pond scum and a lot of time. It takes so much more faith to believe that, than to believe what the Bible says.

The other morning, I was in the hot tub while it was still dark, looking up at the sky, it was a rather clear morning. The moon was a perfect crescent with either a bright star, but I think it was a planet nearby. Other stars doing their twinkling all over the otherwise dark vastness. And I just sat there, surrounded by soothing, clear water, thanking God not just for a luxurious bath, but for his magnificent creation.

There are a number of illustrations I've heard over the years to describe the absurd assumption that this world and the extremely complex beings, humans the most magnificent, all came into being accidentally. Here's one: The picture is of a tornado in a junk yard, when the tempest is over, there's a brand new, functional 747 on the ground, ready to go.

The intricacy of our bodies, our eyes, brains, hearts, all formed in the wombs and each one totally unique. I remember in grammar school, St. Martin of Tours, in Amityville, NY where I was born, seeing the theoretical evolution of monkeys to man in the textbooks. I think it's still mandatory that all schools continue to teach this "theory." Do we wonder sometimes why some people treat others like animals, little or no appreciation of human life. There is absolutely no evidence for one species evolving into another species, macro evolution. There are cases of micro evolution, where certain animals adapt to their environment with minor adaptations. But there is no fossil of any species to another. There are so many great books on this subject that can clarify things so much better than I. There is actual evidence of "scientists" faking the remains of a so-called monkey to man, or shall I say woman because I think her name was Lucy; how I love Lucy!

41

Forgiveness of Sins

Forgiveness is such a wonderful thing to receive, particularly when you know you are or were wrong. It's also a great thing to give to someone else. I may have said this multiple times, but it's worth repeating here, forgiveness is what Christianity is all about. Almighty God, creator and sustainer of all that exists, lowered His majesty and became a man, the God-Man, to live among us a perfect, sinless life with the intention to voluntarily lay down His life for the forgiveness of our sins.

> ***Philippians 2:*** ***5*** ***Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,*** ***6*** ***who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,*** ***7*** ***but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant,*** **and** ***being made in the likeness of men.*** ***8*** ***Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*** ***9*** ***For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,*** ***10*** ***so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*** ***11*** ***and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

This verse is one that so clearly explains the deity of Jesus, meaning Jesus is God. It's a difficult thing to wrap our heads around this as mere mortals, but it is absolutely true. God knew we are incapable to live without sin and therefore provided the only way for us to be forgiven, the propitiation for our sins. I remember growing up Catholic and going to confession. Kneeling in a little booth and sharing my many sins with a priest in screened section of the same booth and then he prescribes a litany of prayers that remedied, according to their tradition, my sins; that is until I came back for further medicine. I think there might be something psychologically beneficial in this form of confession, but God gave us direct access to the forgiver, we don't need to go through a third party. Gosh, I can't imagine some of the things priests have heard over the years!

Another great tidbit I got from Andrew Farley is the following Q & A: How many sins did you commit when Jesus was crucified? Whenever I ask that question most people have to ponder that for a bit and most of the time I have to provide the answer. Okay, times up, the answer is obviously none! You weren't born yet, however if you believe in Jesus and His substitutionary death, your sins are forgiven as well. And here's the amazing part of that. Not only are yesterday's sins forgiven, but today's, tomorrow's and all of your sins are forgiven according to the Word of God:

> ***Psalm 103:[10] He has not dealt with us according to our sins,***
> ***Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.***
> ***[11] For as high as the heavens are above the earth,***
> ***So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him.***
> ***[12] As far as the east is from the west,***
> ***So far has He removed our transgressions from us.***

How far is the east from the west? You can't get much further than that! This should not encourage anyone to just go on sinning knowing we're forgiven, it

should deepen our relationship with Him, to be thankful for taking our place on that old rugged cross.

Isaiah 43:25: "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, And I will not remember your sins.

42

I'll be Back

Most likely many will associate that phrase with a muscle-bound actor named Arnold. However, there is another man, the God-Man, who said that as well, Jesus Christ.

> ***John 14:*** *[2] In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. [3] 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.*

I mentioned in a previous chapter one of the supernatural aspects of the Word of God; its uncanny record of predicting future events, aka prophecy. There are approximately 300 prophecies that foretold Jesus' first coming regarding His birth, life, death and miraculous resurrection. Just give that a little thought. I would think that if there were a few that alluded to His life that that could be considered coincidental. But 300 cannot be co-incidental, that are God-cidental. So, considering this to be true, and of course I encourage you to do a little digging, here's some info that is more applicable to our time, November of 2026.

I'm referring to His glorious return. That's right, He'll be back! There are as many as 1,800 references to Jesus' coming in the Old and New Testaments and in1 out of every 25 verses in the New Testament. A solid track record has been established and validates His coming as a Babe in Bethlehem, which, by the way, not only was the exact time predicted, so was the location.

> ***Micah 5:*** *2* ***"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,***
> ***Too little to be among the clans of Judah,***
> ***From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.***
> ***His goings forth are from long ago,***
> ***From the days of eternity."***

I believe Micah, an Old Testament book, was written about 800 years BC, and here's another one which really amazed me when I learned it too was written about 800 BC as well:

> ***Isaiah 7:*** *14* ***Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (Immanuel means God with us)***

There are many legitimate sites to go deeper if you want to learn more and I hope you do. Here's one: https://www.thesecondcomingofchrist.org/

The main reason I make references to these prophecies is to hopefully help you see and understand that based on the accuracy of previous events, you can completely depend on the accuracy of His 2nd coming. When that will happen, no one knows. Many have tried to predict His return, but they've all been wrong. The Bible is very clear about false teaching:

Deuteronomy 18: ***[20] But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' [21] You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?' [22] When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.***

One of the most startling signs that the time is near is the reformation of Israel as a country. Here's one of several Old Testament predictions:

Isaiah 11: ***[11] Then it will happen on that day that the Lord***
Will again recover the second time with His hand
The remnant of His people, who will remain,
From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath,
And from the islands of the sea.
[12] And He will lift up a standard for the nations
And assemble the banished ones of Israel,
And will gather the dispersed of Judah
From the four corners of the earth.

The fulfillment: The modern establishment of Israel on May 14, 1948, is widely viewed by Christian and biblical scholars as the fulfillment of ancient Hebrew prophecies regarding the regathering of the Jewish people to their historic homeland.

Mathew 24: ***[42] "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. [43] But be sure of this, that if the head of the***

> ***house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think*** **He will.**

Mathew 24 has much more to say about His return and signs of the times. Earthquakes, wars, famine, what's wrong will be deemed right and vice versa.

However, fret not; things are not falling apart, they're falling into place!

43

I believe, help my unbelief

Mark 9: ***[24]*** ***Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief."***

This verse has become part of my prayers that I pray often. You might think that someone writing a book with so much scripture and reflections from his life never doubts any Biblical proclamations. I remember hearing something years ago from a well-known and respected theologian; it might have been Billy Graham. It went something like this: "Every believer has some doubt about eternity." In a way, it's somewhat comforting to know others struggle with what I struggle with. The above verse comes from an incident where a young man comes to Jesus to cast demons out of his son. Jesus says, "if you believe, he will be cast out" (paraphrasing here), and the father says, "I do believe; help my unbelief."

Another example of the reality of the Christina life and how we all struggle is taken from the book of Romans when Paul expresses his contempt about his own behavior. Try to understand his inward struggle:

Romans 7: ***[14]*** ***For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh,***

sold into bondage to sin. [15] For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I* would *like to* do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. [16] But if I do the very thing I do not want* to do*, I agree with the Law,* confessing *that the Law is good. [17] So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. [18] For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good* is *not. [19] For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. [20] But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

I fear some might think this gives them license to continue to sin. As Paul would say, "May it never be." It does give us a better understanding as Christians that we all struggle with sinful thoughts, actions and desires. The Christian life is a battle between good and evil. This might only be true in English, but the words good and evil are so close to God and devil! We live in enemy territory; we are behind enemy lines so to speak. When a military operation is on the enemy's turf, their guard is up more than ever, and they are ready to defend themselves from every direction. This is in some ways how we need to behave, to be ready. As a martial artist I am prepared to defend myself against an attack. (Although it's been many years since I was active, at 70 I still feel that I can defend myself better than the average old man.) There are no black belts in Christianity, but consistent prayer and Bible study will prepare, or shall I say pre-prayer you for the arrows that will try to take you down. Here's our defense strategy:

Ephesians 6:[10] Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. [11] Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. [12] For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual* forces *of

wickedness in the heavenly* places. *13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil* one. *17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

So, if you find yourself doubting try to remember, you are not alone, God is sovereign and He understands.

44

The Son-Light

This is very similar to chapter 15, Digesting the Word of God. As I am in the process of editing, again, the original material, I was going to add this to chapter 15. However, I found this such an amazing analogy, it deserves its own chapter.

I can't take the credit for this material, it came from something my wife, Lynne sent me on Instagram. You can get some profound information from social media sometimes. This is a summary from a short video by Nathan G May. I am planning on having this material on a web site in the not-so-distant future, Lord willing, so when that happens you will be able to use this link to watch it:

https://www.instagram.com/reel/Deb3m3Qzx8w/?srtk=MTdpb3l6NmdiMjVicw%3D%3D

I'll do my best to summarize it for you. He compares what happens internally when you spend a little time in the sun-light to what happens internally when you read the Bible.

When you're outside enjoying the feeling of the sun on your body, you have no way to know so many of the health benefits that your body is going through

internally. You are getting vitamin D, your immune system is gaining strength, hormones are being regulated, bones are strengthened and, according to Nathan, millions of these processes are going on inside you, but all you're doing is basking in the sunlight.

You don't have to, and quite frankly you are incapable of knowing what is happening in your body, but it is, nonetheless. You just need to step into the light.

> ***John 8:[12] Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."***

The Word of God works the same way. You don't know what's happening, it just does. The Word of God is alive and active:

> ***Hebrews 4:[12] For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.***

You're not just reading the Bible, it's interactive! Just like the sunlight, its passive effects on you are beyond your understanding or control. I think I need to add an important aspect of these phenomena, it's important that you believe that the Bible is the supernatural Word of God. And, if you are not there yet, I invite you to ask the tough questions, to ruthlessly pursue the truth.

> ***Jerimiah 29:[13] You will seek Me and find* Me *when you search for Me***

with all your heart.

When you open the Bible, the Holy Spirit starts to move, He plants seeds:

> ***Mark 4:*** ***[26] And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; [27] and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know.***

The seed is the Word; the soil is your heart. Every time we read it, we plant seeds that we are not even aware of. The Holy Spirit waters the seed, and we grow closer to Him in many cases little by little, you may not even notice it, until one day you realize a more intimate and wonderful love for and from God that is beyond our understanding or comprehension. This has happened to me many times over the past 32 years and I must say, even while writing this book. This is a culmination of many years of study, prayer and the cultivation of the seeds that God has planted along the way. The fears, the anxiety, depressive moments have been minimized and greater faith has resulted. Now, anyone who knows me knows that my life is most certainly not without its challenges, but the peace that surpasses human understanding helps us overcome the battles.

So, I invite you to step into the "Son-Light" perhaps more often and think about what's happening. (Don't forget the sunscreen!)

45

Vaya con Dios

Vaya con Dios means, "go with God".

I'm at the airport in Atlanta, GA with a 4-hour layover so I thought this would be a good time to share an incredible story regarding my last visit to see my father; at least while he's alive. This is March 9, 2015, and on February 20 of this year the deal closed on the sale of my father's home. Several weeks prior my father moved into an apartment with some care from the landlords who are friends of the family. No one really thought this was a good idea, but my father wanted to be as independent as he could. As a frail, 93-year-old blind man, we knew this would be for a limited duration.

For the most part, things went fairly well until the morning after the ink was dry on the closing documents of his home; our home of 48 years. This fretful, cold, dreary February morning found him on the floor of his apartment. We later learned this was the result of a stroke. After several days in the hospital with some rather bleak news on his overall condition, rehabilitation seemed the way to go. With an overabundance of love, concern, time and effort from so many great friends, siblings, grandchildren and I must add, great grandchildren, the emails and texts regarding his condition became the reason so many of us were glued to our electronic gadgets. It was a result of all this information that helped me make my decision to visit dad, which would

be my last visit, and to help lighten the load of all the others tirelessly and sometimes with much despair, to help what really seemed to be a helpless situation. For me, that was one of the hardest things to deal with; that feeling of helplessness. I never felt so accomplished feeding someone ice cream in my life; he really enjoyed that. That was only topped when we did a couple of shots, but that's coming.

As a Christian man, my greatest concern was my father's eternal destination. I know many people will differ on this, but that's okay, you can take that up with God when you die. Everything I've learned since taking my faith very seriously is that when you die there are two destinations, they're both eternal. I knew when I left Wilmington that it's up to God, not me to determine his final resting place, but I felt the need to go, to do what I can, and I prayed God would use me to perhaps guide him in the right direction.

The opportunity never seemed to come to speak with him about such a serious matter with all the visitors and because of his pitiful condition. He was constantly gasping for air, often choking from the pneumonia and stroke complications; his hearing was bad and the right time just wasn't presenting itself. Until I woke up Sunday morning with a new thought. I had listened to a sermon the night before and the topic was about prayer. One point Pastor John MacArthur brought up was that sometimes it is not so much what we say to God, but it is important to listen to what He might be saying to you. In that regard, I've never really been a good listener. That is until Sunday morning. It occurred to me, for some peculiar reason, to put what I want to say on tape so he could listen to it clearly with his earphones. As a blind man my father has been listening to books on tape for many years. I was excited about my new opportunity so after my regular morning routine I began pecking away on this laptop with my last letter to my father.

While writing I had no idea how I was going to record it; I had no recorder with me. I was staying at my brother's house and thought there was a good chance he had one, but I didn't know. After about 2-3 paragraphs my father called

me! This was only about 7 AM Sunday morning. I missed the call but threw my clothes on and started heading to the rehab facility. He called again on my way there. There was no emergency, he just wanted me to sand down the handle of his walking stick which he had asked me to do the day before, but I had forgotten. He also said to bring as many of my siblings with me as I could. (I still don't know why he asked that). Well, I got his walking stick and saw his tape recorder, mmm hmmm, you guessed it, asked him if I could borrow his tape player and told him what I wanted to do. He of course agreed.

I needed a blank tape, and it was eight o'clock on a Sunday morning and there weren't many options to get one. A local CVS was on the corner, so I went in. The clerks all but laughed at my ridiculous request; they were so young they probably never handled a cassette tape. When I'm on a mission, I don't usually take no for an answer. So, I asked to please check in some old inventory or something. Well, guess what, mmm hmmm, they had one pack left.

I forgot to mention the trip my brother Doug and I took to the old homestead. We wanted to see what the new owners were doing to OUR house. The doors were all locked, well all but one, so as former owners we felt we had the right to make sure they were doing the right job. We were amazed at how much was ripped out. While in the upstairs hall looking at what used to be the hall bathroom, I saw some cash on the floor. I asked Doug if he had dropped it, he said no and gave it to me since I saw it first. I shamelessly accepted. It looked like a $5.00 bill folded in half, so I deposited it into my pants pocket.

Back to CVS and the tapes. When I got to the counter to pay for the last cassette tapes on earth I pulled that folded money out of my pocket. To my surprise it wasn't $5.00, it was two $5.00 bills. Cost of tapes, $9.99! Money from the old homestead was about to pay for the medium upon which I was about to enter a very important, personal and final message to my father.

Got back to Henry and Lee's, finished writing my heart out, put it on tape and was very anxious to deliver the goods. I went back to the rehab, plugged his ear

buds back into the recorder and left it in the spot where he knew it would be, but he was sleeping. Visit number three for the day was a little later and there were more visitors there at that time than I had ever seen. Standing room only and it was not the time to say, so dad, you want to listen to my farewell tape?

Went back to Henry's, and was going to eat but I wasn't hungry, so after a little while went back to rehab central. Finally, my father was alone, awake and seemed attentive. As we were talking, he asked if I had any 2/3, 1/3. Yea, I said the same thing; what's that? He said in his low, difficult to understand voice, 2/3 water, 1/3 whiskey. I laughed and said I don't normally travel with whiskey to which he replied that I might want to start. So, I said dad, if that's what you want, I'll be right back. But before I left, I asked if he would like to listen to the tape I made, and he said yes. I positioned the buds in his ears and pressed play.

Henry and Lee have a well-stocked liquor cabinet and somehow, I knew they had whiskey. I poured out some otherwise good water from a bottle and replaced it with a few ounces of good whiskey. I made my bootleg run back to the rehab, trip number 5, and did a couple of shots with my father. I will admit my shots were straight; he sipped his mixture with great enjoyment!

It was after our little party that I said my final goodbye. He mentioned part of what I said on the tape, so I know he heard it. Just to share a small part, I compared the reconstruction of our old home to the reconstruction he is preparing to experience. It also contained a simple message of good news, the Gospel! "If you confess with your lips and believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord, you will be saved."

It was after a short embrace and a kiss that he said to me, Vaya con Dios! I repeated it to him and left.

A sad time, no doubt, but I was and am filled with joy and the hope of eternal glory for my father. I know God is his judge, not me, but I am more certain

than I've ever been my mother and father, not to mention many more saints, will have a grand reunion and no more "Dancing in the dark". (Dancing in the dark was the title of a book my father wrote years earlier.)

My father took his eternal journey on March 10, 2015.

Vaya con Dios mis amigos!

46

Understanding the times

I'm writing this on November 4, 2026, the day after national elections. There have been many changes in leadership at all levels. It's very sad to think about what lies ahead with many former candidates, now elected to various offices, espousing their socialist agendas. I believe this has been in the making for many decades. For a variety of reasons, mostly the war with Iran, the electorate has felt the economic pinch where it hurts, their purses. So, to a degree, it's understandable when candidates promise free healthcare, free tuition, Medicare for all that those that are vulnerable will fall for the rhetoric. Many people are very concerned and even scared for their future and that of their children and grandchildren. Let me quote Jan Markell of Olve Tree Ministries, "Things are not falling apart, they're falling into place."

These events, and whatever is to follow, are not taking God by surprise. The Word of God tells us of the tribulation to come, prior to Christ's return. Pardon the grammar but, you ain't seen nothin' yet! Some years ago, I would pray for peace but realized I was praying against what the Word of God tells us is going to happen. We are commanded to pray for the peace of Jerusalem and to be peaceful, but God's plan cannot and will not be thwarted.

As I've mentioned several times in this book, there are many prophesies in the Bible, many of which have been fulfilled, but there are still many unfulfilled,

particularly regarding the second coming of Jesus Christ. The book of Matthew, chapter 24, contains many of the signs to alert us to His return. At the risk of redundancy, I will say, since thousands of events that were foretold came to fruition, and they did, why would anyone think those yet unfulfilled will not also come to fruition? Well, they will and I do pray that people will believe this and be prepared by being pre-prayered.

I know that you can't scare someone into believing what the Bible says and therefore they'll come to believe it's all true. And these inevitable events are scary for non-believers. Since I don't just believe, I am completely convinced that these things are true, would it not be cruel to not "share" this information with others? I often think of a scenario where someone is parked on train tracks, but they don't know what train tracks are and I know a train is coming. Well, more than a train is coming and at the risk of upsetting some people, GET THE HELL OFF THE TRACKS!

Here are a few verses from

> ***Mathew 24:*** ***3*** ***As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what*** **will be** ***the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"***
> ***4*** ***And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you.*** ***5*** ***For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.*** ***6*** ***You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for*** **those things** ***must take place, but*** **that** ***is not yet the end.*** ***7*** ***For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.*** ***8*** ***But all these things are*** **merely** ***the beginning of birth pangs.***

I would encourage you to read the entire chapter, not to mention much more of the Bible. There has been an exponential number of "birth pangs" in recent history. Catastrophic hurricanes, earthquakes, flooding and I don't need to

remind you of the increase of wars. Again, at the time of this writing, I read that Iran is threatening to use chemical weapons against Israel and neighboring American allies. If that was to happen, I can't imagine what our response would be; or perhaps a devastating preventative measure. Ukraine and Russia have been killing each other for more than 4 years now, with what seems like no end in sight.

The next event on God's timeline is the rapture of the church. The church meaning believers. I know it sounds crazy, but we will be airlifted out of here before the major and devastating tribulation begins.

> ***1 Thessalonians 4:[16] For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of* the *archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. [18] Therefore comfort one another with these words.***

There is a book series entitled, "Left Behind" that vividly described life after the rapture. Although fictional, it followed what the Bible says will happen based mostly from the book of Revelation. The story opens describing what happened on an airplane when suddenly people disappeared and nothing but their clothing and jewelry were on the seats they formerly occupied. Planes were falling from the sky and all sorts of vehicular accidents below because the people that were driving these things were suddenly snatched away. The rest of the series describes life in the aftermath.

A group of survivors whose spouses or friends were believers, "left behind" their Bibles and some of them remembered hearing about this rapture, but didn't believe it. People can still repent after this cataclysmic event, but life will be extremely difficult under the new leadership, The Anti-Christ.

In the book of Revelation, the Bible describes the mark of the beast. This will be some sort of tattoo or other mark that proves your allegiance to this new ruler. Without this mark or symbol, you will not be allowed to do any commerce with anyone.

> ***Revelation 13:*** ***[16]*** ***And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead,*** ***[17]*** ***and*** **he provides** ***that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark,*** **either** ***the name of the beast or the number of his name.***

This is already beginning to be implemented in different parts of the world. Here's one that came close to confirmation across the pond:

A proposed digital ID scheme (also known as "BritCard" or "Brit Card") for adult residents of the United Kingdom was announced by prime minister Kier Starmer on 25 September 2025. The Starmer government stated that introducing it was part of their plan to tackle the rise in illegal migrant crossings in small boats across the English Channel, and that it was to be mandatory to prove the right to work.

The mark of the beast will be implemented along with other digital currency. Have you noticed the "convenience of "tapping" your credit card to make a payment. Imagine if you had a simple chip inserted under your skin. The implications of this technology are far reaching and one more way to track and control humanity. A further explanation might have to wait for the 3rd edition.

47

The Crimson Worm

This is a fascinating explanation of Psalm 22:6. Another gem my wife shared with me. I thought I was done with this revised version, but evidently not. If you're reading this online, please watch the video with the link below, if not, I recommend you search for this story yourself; it is absolutely fascinating. Here's the interpretation of the Worm in Psalm 22:6:

When the Savior hung on the cross, he said, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Jesus wasn't just saying words, he was quoting scripture. He was pointing us to Psalm 22. Because Psalm 22 opens with the exact same words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Let us focus on one verse in Psalm 22. Verse 6 says, "But I am a worm and not a man." The common Hebrew word for worm is rima, but the word used in this verse 6 is not rima, it is tola'ath. Tola'ath refers to a very, very specific type of worm called the crimson worm. A crimson worm only lays eggs once in her lifetime. When her time has come, the crimson worm inches her way up a tree and she adheres herself on the wood. As she takes her position and presses her body against the wood, she forms a hard, crimson-colored shell which welds her to the wood surface. Her choice is made and it's permanent. This is the position in which she will spend the rest of her natural life. And it's there under her body, under the distinctive protective crimson shell, that her children are born. And then the most peculiar thing happens. The children of the tola'ath begin

feeding on the living body of the mother for three days. "I am a tolaath, a crimson worm, and not a man." And after three days, the crimson worm gives up her life. And as she does, one of the most profound events in all of nature takes place. From the body of the mother, a blood-red substance begins to flow that stains the wood to which she has been attached. The crimson worm has one purpose for climbing that tree, sacrifice. The only way for her children to live is for her to die. She willingly climbs up that tree knowing that she will not come down alive. Jesus Christ has one purpose in coming into this world, sacrifice. The only way for us to live is for him to die. This is how we know what love is. Christ Jesus laid down his life for us.

Psalm 22: But I am a worm and not a man,
A reproach of men and despised by the people.

Isaiah 1:18: Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.

There is a treasure trove of other interpretations from the Bible that are also so fascinating. The English translations are good, but there are times when looking at the original language can show so much more depth and meaning. I think this is probably one of if not the most amazing examples.

After-word

Let's see if I can wrap this up, at least for now. There are so many other topics that are interesting to read about and to discuss. Some topics I'll cover in the next edition and on our website.

- What's it all about Alphie (Who's Alphie anyway)?
- A final message. It's sad when we learn something interesting about someone we've known for years, but we learn it from their obituary.
- Thesis or hypo-thesis
- Insurance replaced faith
- When you're broken, go to the manufacturer, you're still under warranty.
- Lifeguard on the beach
- You better cut that out devil (You remember Flip Wilson?)
- Prayer, answered and unanswered: Expect and accept

There seems to be almost an endless number of scenarios that the Bible addresses. I remember when my first son was born, Erik David Marcley, December 3, 1982, at 4:44 AM. One amazing and perhaps supernatural thing about that is when we got to the hospital at about 6 PM, I told Lynne she would have the baby at 4:44 AM and it happened! I still don't know how I got that premonition. When leaving the hospital, I remember thinking that we didn't get a manual. You buy a car, an appliance, a boat, and you get a comprehensive manual complete with a trouble shooting section! There is really nothing more challenging or complicated to learn than for 2 new parents to learn how to raise a child. It wasn't until about 11 years later that I began to study the

manual, the Holy Word of God.

It is my prayer that some of the material I "shared" here will in some way help to draw you closer into the arms of our loving Father.

> ***Revelation 3:[20] Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.***

About the Author

Mark Marcley was born in Amityville, New York, in February of 1956, growing up in a bustling and lively household as one of nine children. It was during these formative years that he learned the invaluable traits of resilience and craftsmanship from his father, **Henry**. Although Henry's eyesight diminished over the years due to an eye disease known as RP, and eventually was completely blind, he possessed a profound inner vision and meticulous dedication, teaching Mark the intricate skills of carpentry and finish work. This earthly apprenticeship beautifully mirrors the life of Jesus Christ, who also learned the carpenter's trade from His earthly father before embarking on His divine ministry. Armed with these skills and a strong foundational work ethic, Mark went on to establish and operate his own successful construction business.

In 1982, Mark married his beautiful wife and best friend, **Lynne**. Together, they built a home centered on love and faith, raising three sons: **Erik**, **Dylan**, and **Kristofer**. Today, Mark and Lynne embrace the immense blessing of being proud grandparents to two beloved granddaughters, **Raelyn** and **Rian**, continuing a legacy of deep family devotion.

A pivotal spiritual turning point occurred in 1996 when Mark and his family relocated to Wilmington, North Carolina. It was there that he joined his first Bible study, an experience that completely opened his eyes to the living truth of the scriptures and ignited a profound, relationship-driven faith. Driven by an increasing burden to see others saved and to help them experience the unconditional love of Christ, Mark began drafting the heartfelt vignettes that form this book in late 2005. Now, with the steadfast encouragement and

publishing assistance of his close friend **Phil**, Mark has brought this two-decade journey to fruition. His deepest prayer is that these inspirations find their way into the hands of anyone looking to draw closer to God.

Resources

Here's a list of some of the books and other resources I referred to and perhaps some that I just recommend:

The God Diagnosis by Dr. Greg Viehman (This is an excellent book by a doctor who sought to prove the Bible can't be real and true.)

Evidence that Demands a Verdict by Josh McDowell

Skeptics Answered by D. James Kenedy

The Naked Gospel, Jesus + Nothing by Andrew Farley

The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel

Buried Alive by Jack Cuozzo (exposing lies of evolution)

Here's are a few links to some of my favorite Christian speakers/pastors

Ravi Zacharias: www.RZIM.org

RC Sproul: https://www.renewingyourmind.org/

John MacArthur: www.gty.org

Adrian Rogers: https://www.lwf.org/broadcasts/

Chuck Smith: www.twft.org

Louie Giglio is an awesome pastor. I highly recommend watching his "Indescribable" presentation regarding our magnificent universe, it'll be worth every moment! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qh4HcVY2_KE

Experiencing God Day-By-Day by Henry and Richard Blackaby is an excellent daily devotional, great way to start the day.

I recommend BibleGateway.com for easy online reading, numerous versions and other resources.