

Don't Just Survive - THRIVE!

**God's Love For Us & Our
Relationship Together**

**Promises from the Word of God –
"MY NEVER AGAIN LIST"**

**The Grand Gift of Salvation -
What it contains**

What Do You Want?

By Bart Nelson

www.etsministries.info


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For more information please contact me:

Phone – 253.564.3261

Email – etsministries@yahoo.com

Visit my website for all teachings, my book and much more:
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Don't Just Survive - THRIVE!

I want to give credit to Mike Fenton for the inspiration of this teaching. He was sharing in a men's group about a horticultural class he had taken and the instructor had told of the difference in raising plants that survive or that thrive. They both live, but one is able to produce luscious, abundant fruit. The other produces sparse, puny fruit. No fault of the plant itself, it is the fault of the care it is given. Most of us have either had some 'house-plant' or yard/gardening experience of our own or have seen others do it, whether in person or via media. Hopefully this study will be something that all of us can relate to. The Bible was written to an agrarian/shepherding society who knew how to work the earth to produce what they needed to survive. Again, if they didn't have personal experience, someone they knew did. That is one reason the Bible is filled with agricultural object lessons. We will draw from many of them here.

I believe one of the main reasons God resorts so often to analogy, parable and metaphor is so that we can look objectively at a situation before we have the opportunity to get defensive. Like Nathan did before David, with his parable of the rich man with the many sheep stealing the lone lamb from a poor man, David reacted quite strongly, just before Nathan pointed his prophet's finger and said, "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12.1-7.) So, in the many object lessons from scripture here, let's think about the plant before we get defensive. Some sections are going to hurt, but if we react properly we'll say, Thanks, I needed that!"

I have to confess that in my horticultural experience, my plants are lucky if they survive. Few thrive, and that not because of anything I have done. Likewise, in life many times, we are content to survive. Often, we think of that as the goal in the midst of difficult times. Indeed, that can be a worthy goal when times are truly tough. In the midst of a forest fire, drought, severe storm or freeze, survival of the plant is what is hoped for. But that is not to be the norm. I have found myself, having weathered the struggle, to remain in the survival mode out of habit. Or, I fall into that mode, even though the struggle is not that intense. Putting up that wall of protection is a comfort zone. It is more difficult to get hurt badly when the defenses are up. Unfortunately, it is also more difficult for God to get through as well. And that's the problem!

This idea of a plant thriving, producing abundant fruit isn't just imagination. The scriptures are full of such references. Ps. 92.12-13 The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. Gal. 5.22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. Col. 1.10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. 2 Thes. 1.3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other. 1 Pet. 2.2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 2 Pet. 3.18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. The word grow or flourish in the Hebrew means: Strong's 6524 to bud, sprout, shoot, bloom, send out shoots, blossom, to break out, to fly, spring, break forth, abundantly, spreading, climb. Strong's 5927 ascend, to spring up, shoot forth (of vegetation), go up over, rise, extend, to excel, be superior to, climb, train, to rouse, stir up, offer, come, go, offering, increase, raised, arose. In the Greek Strong's 837 to cause to grow, augment, to increase, become greater, intensive, to grow luxuriantly, as a good and healthy tree in a good soil; and, if a fruit tree, bearing an abundance of fruit to compensate the labor of the husbandman.

I often tell a parable of my own (actually, hopefully, of Holy Spirit) origin. I feel like when we become Christians it is like turning a vacant lot over to the Lord to cultivate. Now, when I grew up, vacant lots were plentiful in

Tacoma and they made wonderful imagination-filled play areas for my friends and I. The vacant lots I grew up around had rocky, hard soil, loads of weeds, scotch broom, thistles and stickers as well as a scrub tree or three. Nothing worthwhile or productive as far as adult eyes were concerned, but lots of room for camps, forts, hide and seek, well, you get the picture! If someone were to try to plant flowers, veggies, or trees of any worthwhile kind, it is extremely doubtful they would grow. There was hard ground, no water in the summer, no cultivation, etc. It is a miserable place for any well respecting plant. But turn that lot over to the Master Gardener, He would have a plenty of room for everything. He might start by burning what was there, because it was literally good for nothing. Then He'd probably till the soil, perhaps with a roto-tiller and rake out the rocks. He'd probably have to add some mulch, compost and maybe manure to enrich the land. Then He'd plot what was going where and plant seeds.

The Master Gardener's work would be done, right? What do you mean, no? We all know that the only thing that grows without much attention are weeds and thorns. But our Christian life is much like that parable. God cleans us up, gives us a new heart, and plants some incorruptible seed in us. Eze. 36.1 “And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say, ‘O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord! 3 therefore prophesy, and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Because they made you desolate and swallowed you up on every side, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you are taken up by the lips of talkers and slandered by the people”— 4 therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God! Thus says the Lord God to the mountains, the hills, the rivers, the valleys, the desolate wastes, and the cities that have been forsaken, which became plunder and mockery to the rest of the nations all around. 8 But you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel, for they are about to come. 9 For indeed I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. 11 I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bear young; I will make you inhabited as in former times, and do better for you than at your beginnings. Then you shall know that I am the Lord. 22 “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. 23 And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord,” says the Lord God, “when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. 24 For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. 25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. 28 Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God. 29 I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. I will call for the grain and multiply it, and bring no famine upon you. 30 And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations. 31 Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations. 32 Not for your sake do I do this,” says the Lord God, “let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel!” 33 ‘Thus says the Lord God: “On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will also enable you to dwell in the cities, and the ruins shall be rebuilt. 34 The desolate land shall be tilled instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass by. 35 So they will say, ‘This land that was desolate has become like the Garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.’ 36 Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted what was desolate. I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I will do it.” 37 ‘Thus says the Lord God: “I will also let the house of Israel inquire of Me to do this for them: I will increase their men like a flock. 38 Like a flock offered as holy sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem on its feast days, so shall the ruined cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.” ’ ” 1 Pet. 1.23-25 having

been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. As we shall read, it is up to us to cultivate, continue planting, allow the Master Gardener to prune us, water, and even warm and fertilize the lot until it bears luscious fruit, fragrant, beautiful flowers and trees to provide shade. The goal of this study is to help us learn how to get the most out of our revamped vacant lot.

Our study begins with Gen. 1.11-13 Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth”; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the third day. Gal. 6.7-10 adds: Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. One of the first laws of horticulture is plant what you want to harvest. Begin with the seed of that which you wish to produce. No farmer plants orange seed and expects to harvest apples; neither does a wheat farmer plant corn. There are no real surprises when we go to harvest our crops. If we follow the rules of good horticulture and if no disasters occur (flood, freezing, fire, draught, extreme winds, etc.) we will have a bumper crop of whatever we planted. If we are planting the wrong seeds, don't be asking for crop failure! The bottom line is, if you don't like the crop you have been reaping lately, try sowing different seeds!!

Mt. 7.15-23 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn-bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. *In Israel there were thorn bushes that produced an inedible 'fruit' that looked like grapes and a thistle that produced an inedible 'fruit' that looked like figs We must check out the words, the actions and the results of both to determine if they (or we) are good trees or not. The exterior is often not a clue, as the following verses show us...* “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you (*same word is used for Adam knew Eve, meaning intimate knowledge or relationship*); depart from Me, you workers of iniquity!’ (*Iniquity implies doing one's own will, not following the will of the Lord.*) Mt. 13.24-30 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’ ” *Wheat and tares look quite similar, however the fruit of the tares is poisonous. The only way to tell the difference is to wait for the harvest. At that time, the heads of wheat bow with humility, while the tares, which have no fruit worth harvesting, stand tall in pride.* Having the supernatural gifts of the Spirit is part and parcel of the abundant life God has for us. But gifting and anointing do not equal character. God is seeking intimacy

with us and longs to see us surrendered to His will, rather than willfully doing our own thing. 1 Cor. 3.11-15 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Paul here presumes we are all working for the Lord, that there are fruit and gifts in our life. The thing that is tested here is motive, what type of fruit or gift is it. Were we motivated by selfish things, or was God's glory our chief end? If it had to be tested by fire, the outside had to look similar, it was what was beyond view that had to be revealed.

Ps. 126.5-6 Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. I heard a missionary share on this verse from real life in Africa. The farmers there must save some seed from their harvest in order to plant the following year. Harvest time was a real celebration, for there was plenty to eat. But when planting time came, they were down to 1-2 meals a day. The farmer's kids were literally crying for more food. He knew he had stashed some seed for planting time. It was a true temptation to feed his crying children and wife, but if he did, there would be no food the following year. Truly, he was sowing in tears, but he knew the reaping with joy would come! 2 Cor. 9.6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. This scripture is specifically applied by Paul to finances, and much of what we will share here can apply to that, but all of it has a much broader scope to include all of life, health, finances, relationships, our walk with God, literally everything. The principle here is. "Don't eat your seed! Whatever that seed may be, given time and proper care, will produce an abundant crop. The more we can set aside to plant, the more we will have for harvest next year.

Speaking of seed, there is a principle here that is crucial for a seed to germinate: Jn. 12.23-28 Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." In this particular analogy, we are the seed. We, like Jesus, must fall in the ground and die, literally lose our identity as seeds, in order to bear fruit. The outer, tough coating of the seed must rot away in the moist, warm earth for the inner seed to be able to germinate and grow. Is the picture graphic enough for you?

There are areas in each of our lives that need to die in order for the incorruptible seed to bear fruit. It may be part of our identity, plans, dreams, visions, etc. that may need to be done away with or put off so that Jesus may be fully manifest in us. Often, there must come a death to our vision, so that God can resurrect it, like in the case of Abraham offering up Isaac. Only Holy Spirit or the word can reveal what that is, and often it is revealed via trials and tribulation. That outer part of the seed actually becomes food for the rest of the seed as it deteriorates and the inner part sprouts. So it is something that is absolutely necessary, but if it remains in the same condition, it will keep the inner seed from doing what it was created to do. Jesus, in this passage, shows us the proper attitude to have. This one might hurt a little bit. He was facing torture and crucifixion and anyone's natural reaction, even Jesus in the garden, was, "Deliver me from this". In this passage, He said, " But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." 2 Cor. 12.8-10 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is

made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. Col. 1.24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church. Heb. 12.3-4 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. 1 Pet. 4.1-2 Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. Did you know one of our purposes is to suffer? No, I don't like it either, but we'd all be a lot happier if we would embrace this truth and quit trying to run from suffering. I told you this might hurt. The purpose of our lives is that the Father would be glorified in and through us. That requires death to me, so that He can resurrect me to His purposes. Rom. 8.28-30 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. If we have been a Christian for a while, we will be familiar with Rom. 8.28. What often aren't quoted are verses 29-30, which show the purpose of what we go through and how God will work it out for our good. God uses the trials of our life for our good as He conforms us into the image of Jesus so that Father can be glorified.

The next thing we need to consider is soil. Hosea said: 10.12 Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you. Jesus addressed it in Mk. 4.1 He began to teach again by the sea. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land. 2 And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching, 3 "Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 "Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. 6 "And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. 7 "Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. 8 "Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundred-fold." 9 And He was saying, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." 13 And He said to them, "Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables? 14 "The sower sows the word. 15 "These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. 16 "In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; 17 and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. 18 "And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, 19 but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 20 "And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundred-fold." Who wouldn't want to have the blessings and fruitfulness mentioned in these verses? The key, then, is how do we receive them? All of life comes from the heart (soil). Changing the outside won't help, won't work. It has to happen on the inside!

First of all we want lots of contact with seed. Reading, hearing, memorizing, studying, singing, quoting, meditating are all obvious ways of obtaining seed (the word). In addition, God is always talking to us, but are we listening? This scripture doesn't limit the seed to what we can read (in fact in those days, there was no 'Bible'

and many couldn't have read it if there was). God talks to us through our friends, creation, circumstances, etc. in addition to His word. We need to be open to all of these sources. They are actually part of the softening process.

You see, the responsibility to prepare our hearts (soil) for the word (seed), i.e. keeping it soft, is ours. Part of that preparation is to be open to receiving the seed. As I was meditating on the idea of preparing our hearts to receive the word (i.e. being soft), I came up with these ideas. I don't claim to have the corner on this. I think there should be much discussion as this is such a key topic. Worship, forgiveness, waiting on God, confession, giving, and intercession are all keys to soil preparation.

Let's look at forgiveness and confession first. I heard an illustration more than 20 years ago that changed my life and has stuck with me ever since. The pastor used the scripture from John 7 about how rivers of living water were to come from us. This abundant flow of life, love, peace and power were to be the norm of the Christian life. He said that stuff in our lives can block this river, slow it down to a trickle, and eventually dam it altogether if we are not careful.

Any time someone hurts us in some way and we don't deal with it correctly, a boulder is thrown in the river. Until it is dealt with, it stays there. Each time it happens (potentially many times a day), the boulders mount up. The same thing happens with unconfessed sin. The longer we wait to deal with these things, the more the flow gets blocked. Another way to look at this is the soil illustration. The longer unforgiveness, bitterness, resentment, or unconfessed sin stay in our lives the harder the soil becomes, the more rocks abide in our field – Heb. 3.12-13 and 12.14-15.

Recently, I have begun doing something different. When I get hurt, in addition to forgiving the person, I lay my hand on my heart and ask God to heal any hurt that may be there. I may not feel anything wrong, but I don't want my river dammed. I don't want rocky or hardened soil. I also try to keep short accounts with God. Waiting until bedtime or morning devotionals doesn't cut it. That means a major chunk of the day can go by without a soft heart or free-flowing river. One of the main issues involved here is that the more time passes the worse the issues are. The hurts and sins become imbedded and the soil becomes much harder the longer we wait. Human nature is such that once the rocks or hardness come, it doesn't seem to matter much if additional rocks or hardness come. This also applies to the weeds that come up in our 'lot'. Weeds rob nutrients, space, water and light from the seeds we want to reap from one day. As we confess and repent, we pull the weeds up by the roots. If you've ever done much weeding, damp soil (Holy Spirit and the word) allows the weeds to come up much easier. Also, by not waiting long, the weeds also come up quicker. Have you ever tried to get the roots system of a full-grown dandelion or blackberry vine?

Just being in this world tends to harden our hearts as well. Its hardness just seems to rub off on us at times. This is where worship and waiting on the Lord come in to play. As we are grateful for everything, praising God for who He is regardless of circumstances, and worshipfully loving Him in reckless abandon, our hearts are softened. In this process we accept with openness whatever He sees fit to ordain to our lives. He never changes and is always worthy, regardless of what is going on around us. It is too easy to harden our hearts when every little detail doesn't go our way. This process of worship leaves us in the presence of the Lord. If we follow this time by waiting on the Lord, He is allowed to talk with us. There, our hearts open to Him; He is allowed to deal with anything that may be amiss. I believe this helps our soil to be plowed deeply; avoiding the scorching that comes with shallow soil.

How do we determine the state of our hearts? Jeremiah 17.9-10 states, "The heart is more deceitful than all else

and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds." For a long time I would try to figure out what was going on inside of me. Then I finally realized the truth of this verse. I can't figure myself out. As a good friend of mine preached that our hearts will either berate us or inflate us that is telling us we're worse off or better off than we really are. Only Holy Spirit can reveal what state our heart is in. That's why David prayed (and we would be wise to do this daily) Ps. 139.23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. Follow that with another of David's prayers, once Holy Spirit has shown us what is going on in our hearts – Ps. 51.10-12 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

We've dealt a lot with the rocky and hard soils. It is time to look at the thorn-filled soil. If we have become self-centered -- i.e. greedy or worried, confession is an obvious help. That will get the thorns out. But more importantly, how can we keep them from growing in the first place? This is where giving, intercession and ministry come in. Giving sacrificially to the Lord, pouring our hearts out in intercession and spirit-led ministry are some ways to help us combat thorny soil. As we are pouring out to others, it is more difficult to be swallowed up in being self-centered and self-seeking. There are always others who are much worse off than we are. Focusing on meeting their needs helps us from not focusing on our own. The river illustration comes in here as well. If the river has no outlet, it becomes stagnant like the Jordan River flowing into the Dead Sea. If those rivers of living water are not flowing out to others in ministry, it is like having a dam of another sort. That flow is essential for life. (See also my teaching "The Importance of a Softened Heart, portions quoted here). Certainly we have all seen plants overcome hard soil, some even growing in cracks in the sidewalk or out of a rock, but this is not the way for a plant to THRIVE!

Warmth is another thing plants need to grow. Plants sprout and bloom in spring, grow and produce fruit in the summer, and are harvested in the fall, but in the winter, nothing grows. I propose that the warmth that we need is passion for the Lord. Mt. 24.11-12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. Acts 18.24-25 Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. Rom. 12.11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Jms. 5.16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. We are to pray fervently. 1 Pet. 1.22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. We are to love each other fervently as well. Rev. 2.4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Is our love for the Lord as hot as it ever has been? If not, according to this verse, we have left it behind. We need to go back and live that way again for good crops. Rev. 3.15-17 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Some of our fervency for our Lord comes from recognizing our desperate need for Him. If it weren't for Him, where would we be? If we notice a lack of warmth for the Lord, in our prayers, and/or in our relationships with one another, we need to confess it to Him as sin (notice how many of the verses above were commands?) and ask Him to make us white hot, to light the fire, so to speak, in our souls. Fervency means: to boil with heat, be hot, used of boiling anger, love, zeal, for what is good or bad etc., said of zeal for what is good. To be fervent in prayer means: work, show forth (one's) self, wrought, effectually work, effectual fervent, be mighty, from the Greek word where we get energy, to be operative, put forth power,

to display one's activity. Don't neglect this, or any need that a plant may have. To neglect one area will lessen fruitfulness of any plant.

Light is a definite need of plants. Without it, they cannot make food (photosynthesis=made from light). How does this light relate to us living thriving lives and having luscious fruit? Light is a picture of truth in general, but I would define it further to revelation and guidance from our Lord. Holy Spirit dwells in our lives to show us the way we are to travel in our life. It is interesting that many plants will grow toward a consistent light source or actually physically follow the sun as it travels through the day. Leaves turn to follow the sun, one plant even closes its leaves at night when there is no light! Ps. 23 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies: you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. The Lord is our shepherd, He will lead us exactly where we need to go, exactly when we need to go there. Jn. 14. 26 But the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said to you. Jn. 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but whatever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. Holy Spirit helps us understand the Word He has inspired. Rom. 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. 16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. 1 Cor. 2:9-16 But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them to us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, even, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, except the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God; that we may know the things that are freely given to us by God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. Holy Spirit reveals to us what we need to know, when we need to know it. Col. 3.15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. The word rule in this verse literally means umpire. God's peace tells us if we are 'safe' or 'out', 'in or out of bounds', able to 'keep playing or not'. The analogies are obvious. 2 Tim. 3.16-17 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works. 1 Jo. 2.20 But you have an unction from the Holy One, and you know all things. 27 But the anointing which you have received from him abides in you, and you need not that any man should teach you: but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in him. God guides us by His Word, peace in our hearts, authority over us, circumstances - even nature and media, and by words from Him either directly to us or via another person. It is up to us to be ready to listen, discern His will and way and obey.

Every plant needs water to grow. Ps. 1.1-3 Tells us that being founded in the Word of God (meditating in it day and night) is the key to a flourishing, thriving tree. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. The Bible, itself, tells us of its nature to nurture and nourish us. It calls itself bread or manna, water, milk, meat, and honey.

Psalm 119 says over and over of the word's ability to revive or quicken us. In Psalm 19 we are told that it is better than honey. As we 'chew the cud', meditating on the word, playing it over and over in our minds, singing and praying it, quoting and hearing it, studying, memorizing and reading it, we are nourished. We are supplied with what we need to prosper, to promote robust growth in our lives. Hos. 6.3 Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth. Is. 55.10-11 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. Jer. 17.7-8 says something extremely similar about trusting in the Lord: "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit. Is. 44.3 For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring. Jn. 7.37-39 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

One of the reasons my times of dabbling in horticulture are not successful is my sporadic watering habit. I would often get sidetracked, undisciplined in watering plants, and they would show it. Or I might remember too well and over water, even trying to compensate for my lack earlier. When I am consistently, abundantly giving what my plants need, it is amazing how well they do.

Have you ever gotten too busy to eat or drink, or know someone who has? I am one who can stand to miss a few meals. But most of our metabolisms will not allow this kind of abuse for long. There will be consequences. We will not be thriving. We may even end up sick, even in the hospital if we aren't careful at times. When I have had health issues, one of the standard questions asked is, "How is your appetite?" If all is well, my usual response is, "too good", but when I am feeling out of sorts, my appetite usually wanes. Our spirits are no different. Often, they don't have the reserves our bodies do, because we don't feed or water them as well as we do our bodies. Spending times in the manifest presence of God, soaking up the Holy Spirit, meditating on the word, and trusting in the Lord will water and feed our spirits. This needs to happen consistently, even several times a day in order to thrive.

Similar plants need to grow near each other for prime growth. Many plants need the pollen from another plant to be able to produce fruit (cross pollination). It is easier for the master gardener to provide the specific needs of each plant when they are together as well. Similar plants need similar amounts of water, sunlight, pruning, fertilizer, etc. Ps. 92.12-13 The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. If you have ever visited a farm, orchard or vineyard you will notice that each field has its own type of plant. Likewise, we need each other's fellowship, living in close relationship with each other to flourish and be fruitful.

Plants also need fresh air. Jn. 3.8 The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Acts 2.1 When the Day of Pentecost had fully come; they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the

Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Eph, 5.17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit. If plants are in an enclosed container, without an animal to produce carbon dioxide, they will die. For the most part, plants breathe in carbon dioxide and produce oxygen. If they are exposed to open air, where the wind moves the air around, they will flourish. Like plants, we need our 'sails' continually filled with Holy Spirit in order to flourish and produce the fruit we want. How do we receive the infilling of Holy Spirit? In addition to the concepts mentioned in the section on abiding, we ask for it and wait in the Lord's presence to fill us, like the disciples did in Acts 1 and 2. Lk. 11.9-13 "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? 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!"

A plant that is only watered and never fed fertilizer will grow weak. Likewise, a plant that is fertilized too much and not given enough water, will burn. We need a healthy balance. Lk. 13.6-9 He also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'" Fertilizer provides specific nutrients that promote growth that are not automatically found in the soil and water. Plants can grow and produce without fertilizer, but not nearly as well. This aspect took some thought. I believe fertilizer is tied to the Word, but I believe it is more, that is, specific scriptures that we need as individuals. For example, some plants need more nitrogen, while others produce it. As we partake of the word, there are going to be specific promises, commands and direction that apply to us directly. You might even mention it to a friend and realize it doesn't impact them the same way. That may be because it is for you specifically. Other times we might receive a 'word' of wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophecy or discernment. Those are like the fertilizer I am speaking about. 1 Tim. 1.18 This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare. 2 Tim. 1.6 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. Paul charged Timothy to wage war and stir up things in himself that he had received from others. That's what this fertilizer can do for us. Certain scriptures can help us fight temptation. Some promises come against those voices from our past that proclaim our lack where GOD has declared our abundance in Him! Fertilizer is released over time and the best ways to partake of these specific words is to do deeper study on them and/or memorize them. Those two methods allow us to meditate (mutter aloud/chew the cud) on the words over and over again in order to get 'all the flavor' out (like chewing gum).

I've talked about chemical fertilizer, but what about the natural kind? There are many kinds, like: manure (we won't mention where that comes from), compost -- from decomposed vegetative waste, fish, and mulch -- again partially decomposed vegetative matter. The sources for all of these would normally be thrown away, left alone, burned, or used in another manner. So how do we apply this to our lives, you may ask? I believe there are things in our lives that God allows to stay there, even things we'd like to get rid of as quickly as possible, that fertilize us as 'plants'. Frankly, some of them stink to high heavens (as my mom says). You would never put them on fruits or veggies just incase they might cause them to smell or taste bad. However, the worse it stinks, the better the ability to fertilize, it seems. I have more knowledge of this than I'd care to admit. I have dealt with all kinds of it, and only the mulch is tolerable, trust me (mulch helps control weeds, protect from frost, and conserve moisture - all great benefits to healthy plants). So we need to tolerate and be grateful for some of these stinking things, so

we can flourish and so the fruit will be tremendous!

Did you know that stress is good for plants? If a plant lives in a hothouse all its life, it will not be strong. Winters with their cold, wind bending the stalks or trunks, drought forcing the roots deep all strengthen plants and force them to be tough. It is the same with Christians. If we never are tested, tempted and disciplined, we grow as we want, not as God wants. Gen. 8.21-22 And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. Then the Lord said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done. "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease." There are seasons to our lives, times when the light shines bright and times when there is dark. Horticulturists will tell you that plants need all seasons and light AND dark to grow best. If it were up to many of us, it would continually be summer with its heat and long days causing visible growth. Those ARE good times, no doubt about it! However a healthy plant needs it all. We need to learn the valuable lesson of contentment and gratefulness whatever the season of our lives. Paul said it best in Phil. 4.12-13 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. If you aren't seeing visible signs of growth in your life, check out the basics in this study. If you are doing what you need to, you may be in a season other than summer. Just keep on taking good care of yourself spiritually, and leave the rest up to God. Like Habakkuk said, 3.17-18 Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls— yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. If we are sensitive to the season, we can realize great benefits. Winter is for planning (seed catalogs!), care for frozen things, maintenance, etc. Spring involves planting, pruning, cultivating, fertilizing, etc. Summer demands watering, perhaps more fertilization, some harvesting, more cultivation, etc. Fall is definitely harvest time, but it is also time to prune (yes, again!), mulching, preparing for the coming frost of winter, etc.

One of the worst enemies of plants, and most worrisome thing to gardeners (other than human negligence) are pests. These run the gamut from most insects, mold, fungi, animals, etc. The farmer must be vigilant in watching for these vermin, and taking preventative measures before the damage is done if at all possible. Speaking of being vigilant, that reminds me of a verse (surprise, surprise), 1 Pet. 5.8-10 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. I'll not take the time to go into detail about spiritual warfare here. That's a book in itself (literally, Heart and Soul of a Warrior). However, some agricultural similarities do exist. Both scenarios have a variety of weapons available, as well as a host of enemies. Often you have to be creative in the warfare, since the enemy is deceitful. You also need to be more tenacious than the enemy is, because trust me, they are VERY tenacious, they never give up! You have to diligently fight until you get the last one, because they multiply faster than lightning. But, if we are vigilant, creative, tenacious and diligent, our victory in the battle is sure. We have already won the war, but each battle is up to us!

Have you ever paid attention to the different shapes of the same species of trees, how they vary depending on where they grow? Trees at the ocean's shore have very short branches on the windward side and long branches on the leeward side. They also tend to be short. This is all due to the strength of the wind. Tall trees with long branches facing the wind will soon break off. Trees high in the mountain tend to be tall and skinny. They need the height to get as much sun exposure as possible and they are skinny due to the weight of snow on their branches. In similar ways, we need to learn to adapt to where God has planted us. We may want height or

breadth that won't work where we are. The key is not to grumble and complain, but to accept and be grateful God can use us where we are, to 'grow where we are planted', so to speak. Speaking of that, most of us enjoy the mountain tops of life, when all is going well, the sun and wind are at our back, and the road is smooth. We don't tend to enjoy the valleys of life nearly as well. Anywhere we look is up; the days don't tend to be as long because of the mountain walls, etc. Guess what? Plants grow much better in the valley than on the mountaintop. On the mountain, the weather is much cooler, the soil sparse and the air thin. Not good conditions for plants. So, if you find yourself in a valley -- smile, you're in a good place for growth! While the next verse doesn't directly apply, it does seem to relate. 1 Kings 20:28 Then a man of God came and spoke to the king of Israel, and said, "Thus says the Lord: 'Because the Syrians have said, "The Lord is God of the hills, but He is not God of the valleys," therefore I will deliver all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the Lord.'" God is Lord of the hills and the valleys. We would do well to remember this and embrace the valley if we are in one!

Jam.5.7-8 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Our time of harvest is coming. Rom. 5.1-5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. 1 Pet. 6-9 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. We may have planted a seed for fruit trees or for squash. Squash grows quickly and is harvested quickly, whereas a fruit tree takes much more time to produce its harvest. However, that one seed for a fruit tree will provide years of return! Patience is the key for a harvest. We can't dig up a seed very much to see if it has germinated without damaging the newly formed plant. Likewise, we can't slice open buds to see what the new growth will look like without ruining the results. Green fruit never tastes as good as fully, vine or tree ripened fruit does. BE PATIENT! I have discipled various folks who wonder why God hasn't blessed them financially yet or why they can't quote scriptures like I sometimes am able to. I give them the vacant lot parable and let them realize I have been a Christian well over 30 years, reading, memorizing, singing and studying scripture. I *should* be seeing some harvest, no? We all long for an instant or drive-through Christianity, but that is not what our Lord promised us!

Speaking of harvest, Mt. 3:12 is an interesting verse: His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." When harvest-time comes, often a time of separation also comes. The grain grows full and fat and to be valuable for the market, the chaff needs to be separated from it. If the grain could talk, it might say something like this, "But that chaff has served me well, it has done nothing wrong. Why does it have to be removed? I liked its protection." All of this would be true. Chaff does protect the grain while it is growing. Without it, the grain would likely be damaged beyond repair. But the time comes when the separation is necessary. With the chaff, the grain would not sell nor be suitable for seed. This is true with our lives as well. There may be things God want to remove from us that once served us well, but now only hinder us and lessen our value. If this occurs, we must be willing to let go and allow Him to do what He wants with us because He knows the very best for us!

We want good, wholesome, luscious fruit from our tree, don't we? Rev. 22.2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. Eze. 47.1 Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. 7 When I returned, there, along the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other. 8 Then he said to me: "This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. 9 And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. 12 Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine."

These verses show what a fruitful, flourishing, thriving tree will produce. Not only will there be fruit of the Spirit: Gal. 5.22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. But there will also be gifts of the Spirit. 1 Cor. 12.7-11 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. There are nine of each, and God's desire is for all to be evident in every Christian as the need arises. Like the following verses all state, we are to seek both fruit ***and*** gifts, not just one or the other. 12.1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: 31 But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way. 13.1-3 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. 8-9 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. 14.1 Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. Eph. 3.17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love. Like Paul says, 2 Thes. 1.3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other. 1 Pet. 2.2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. *We're to long for the pure, unadulterated word of God that we may use it to grow!* Likewise, 2 Pet. 3.18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen. Pr. 4.18 But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. 19 The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble. If we find we are not growing, we need to see if we are following the principles of this study and as well, see if there is sin in our lives. Hos. 14.4 "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him. 5 I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall grow like the lily, and lengthen his roots like Lebanon. 6 His branches shall spread; his beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon. 7 Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall be revived like grain, and grow like a vine. Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon. Mal. 4. 2 But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. Eph. 2. 21-22 in Whom (Jesus) the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Eph, 4.15-16 but, speaking

the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Col. 1.10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

Not only are we to supply good fruit and leaves, we supply beautiful flowers with fragrance and shade or protection. Song 4.12-14 A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard, spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices. 5.1 I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones! This is how our bridegroom Jesus, describes us.

Eze. 17. 22-24 Thus says the Lord GOD: “I will take also one of the highest branches of the high cedar and set it out. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and will plant it on a high and prominent mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it; and it will bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a majestic cedar. Under it will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, have brought down the high tree and exalted the low tree, dried up the green tree and made the dry tree flourish; I, the LORD, have spoken and have done it.” Dan. 4.12 Its leaves were lovely, its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, the birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it. Mk. 4.30-32 Then He said, “To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it? It is like a mustard seed which, when it is sown on the ground, is smaller than all the seeds on earth; but when it is sown, it grows up and becomes greater than all herbs, and shoots out large branches, so that the birds of the air may nest under its shade.” We provide fragrance and beauty to our Lord, that is, we bring pleasure to His heart. At the same time, we provide protection and refreshing shade from the blazing sun for others.

One of the ways we bring pleasure to the Lord is through our thanks, praise and worship. Yes, the trees and all creation praise Him.... 1 Chr. 16:32-33 Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; let the field rejoice, and all that is in it. Then the trees of the woods shall rejoice before the LORD, for He is coming to judge the earth. Ps. 148.7-12 Praise the LORD from the earth...fruitful trees and all cedars...Let them praise the name of the LORD, for His name alone is exalted; His glory is above the earth and heaven. Is. 44.23 Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done it! Shout, you lower parts of the earth; break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel. Is. 55.12 “For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Like all metaphors or analogies, this one has broken down in a few places. We've gone from being a vacant lot and soil, to plants of various types and soon we will see ourselves in scripture as a branch on a grape vine. All of these have served us to look at our Christian life from a viewpoint where we might not get as defensive and be more objective. Just before we move to the grapevine analogy, I would ask your forbearance in one more transformation. It is equally important and vital for us as Christians, and we would do well to examine our lives to see if we measure up. It is the metaphor of a sower. You see, not only is our life ground to be sown into; we are also to be sowers who sow into other's lives. 1 Cor. 3.5-9 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. As we think about what Paul and

Apollos did in the Corinthian church, it encompasses all forms and levels of Christian ministry. It started with evangelism, miracles, deliverance, discipleship, and it continued with church discipline, intricate teaching and training, etc. We never quit being 'plants', needing all that spiritual plants need. But just as plants in themselves become sowers, by dropping their fruit and seeds, as well as leaves and branches for mulch and providing protection for the seedlings, so we do the same, by becoming sowers in other lots, ministering in every imaginable way to others. I am not going to go into detail here about ministry; there are other materials detailing that. But just as the life cycle of a plant is not complete without sowing into another, likewise, we must be actively involved as God gifts and directs, in sowing into others lives.

Abiding in the Vine

John 15.1-11 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch **cannot bear fruit of itself**, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, **bears much fruit**; for **without Me you can do nothing**. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, **you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you**. By this **My Father is glorified**, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in **My love**. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. “These things I have spoken to you, that **My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full**.

When I used to read about pruning, I related it to the many times I had seen my Dad pruning the fruit trees at home. (My brother and I were 'yard-slaves' growing up.) So when I thought of pruning, I thought about trimming off suckers, shaping the tree or plant, etc. Then I moved to Eastern Washington. One of my best friends at the time worked as a mechanic for a vineyard/orchard. When I saw grape vines pruned, these verses took on whole new meaning. The branch that was anywhere from five to twenty-five feet long was pruned to two to five inches long. On my Dad's trees and bushes, the branches still maintained much of their 'identity'. For a grape vine, a stub was left. Wow, what a difference. When the Master Gardener comes to prune us, we dare not run the other way, whine and complain or start crying. We need instead to yield, submit and surrender to His will, for He always knows best and knows what will ultimately produce the best fruit. Identity, hard work, pride are not factors for Him, fruitfulness is. If we want to thrive, flourish and be fruitful, pruning is in our future! Dead wood (which will not produce new growth nor fruit), rotted ranches (which can break and ruin the whole plant) and suckers (which will sap everything from good branches) need to go. Is there any of that in your life? Allow the Master Gardener to prune that away. His timing is best, because only He knows when it will cause the least damage to the main plant.

There is another practice used in agriculture that is similar to pruning, and that is thinning. Farmers often plant too many seeds, because one never knows for sure how many will germinate. When this common practice is done, once the seeds begin to sprout, a thinning process begins. It is difficult, because perfectly good plants are thrown on the compost heap to make room for fuller, more abundant fruit later in the season. The farmer tries to discern which of the plants looks hardiest, biggest, healthiest, etc. We need to do the same in our lives. Often we may have too much of a good thing going on. Ministering in too many areas, too many friends, too many church services, etc., etc. We cannot be effective aiming in so many directions. Many times Holy Spirit will tap

us on the shoulder and let us know we need to thin some things out of our lives. He knows us the best, knows exactly our optimum functioning level. The focus of this study has been more, more, more, simply because that is where most of us are at in our walk. But, lest we get out of balance, Holy Spirit, our Helper, comes along and lets us know what is best. It hurts to thin, but it is for the best!

What is abiding? It is being present with the vine, not leaving (because He isn't going to move). **Definitions** from the Greek: remain, dwell, tarry, endure, to sojourn, not to depart, to continue to be present, to be held, kept, to last, to wait for, await one.

Why abide, **what are the benefits from being in God's presence?** See the words in **bold** below and above in John...

- Ps. 16:8-11 I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I **shall not be moved**. Therefore my heart is **glad**, and my glory **rejoices**; my flesh also will **rest in hope**. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is **fullness of joy**; at Your right hand are **pleasures forevermore**.
- 2 Cor. 3:17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is **liberty**. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed into the same image from glory to glory**, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.
- Ex. 33:14 And He said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you **rest**."
- Ps. 65:4 **Blessed** is the man You choose, and cause to approach You, That he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be **satisfied** with the goodness of Your house, of Your holy temple.
- Ps. 89:15-17 Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O Lord, in the light of Your countenance. 16 In Your name they rejoice all day long, and in Your righteousness they are exalted. For You are the glory of their strength, and in Your favor our horn is exalted.
- Isaiah 61:3 To console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."
- Acts 3:19 19 Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that **times of refreshing** may come from the presence of the Lord,
- Gal. 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. *The fruit of the Spirit develops as the branch abides in the vine, no other way.*
- 2 Cor. 1:20 For **all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen**, to the glory of God through us.

In John 15 we are told that if we don't abide, we can do nothing, we will bear no fruit. Jesus said the same thing about Himself. (All references are in John) 5:19 Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. 20 For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel. 30 I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me. 7:16 Jesus answered them and said, "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. 8:28 Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. 29 And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him." 38 I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what

you have seen with your father.” 12.49 For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. 14.10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. 24 He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me. 17.7 Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. 8 For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.

Then He shows us what we are to do 14.12 “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. – even GREATER works -- the definition for greater is: greater, larger, elder, stronger, more.

Lastly He shows how we have the same source that He did. We will bear fruit just as He did. 14.13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. 16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. 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 things that I said to you. (See the verses from John 15 listed above) 15.16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. 16.7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. 8 And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: 9 of sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; 11 of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. 13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. 15 All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you. 26 In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; 27 for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

How do we abide? Keys: all, always, day and night, continue, etc. are *italicized and underlined*. The action is in CAPITALS.

- Josh. 1:8 GOD’S WORD is *not to depart* FROM OUR MOUTHS, we are to MEDITATE on it *day and night*.
- 1 Thes. 5:17-19 REJOICE *evermore*. PRAY *without ceasing*. *In every thing* GIVE THANKS: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Prayer is, among other things, committing, asking, intercession, confession, plus many of the other things listed here. Zeph. 3.14 SING, O daughter of Zion! SHOUT, O Israel! BE GLAD AND REJOICE *with all your heart*, O daughter of Jerusalem!
- Prov. 23:17 Let not your heart envy sinners: but be in the FEAR OF THE LORD *all the day long*.
- Ps. 34:1 I will BLESS the LORD *at all times*: his PRAISE *shall continually be* in my mouth. Ps. 86.12 I will PRAISE You, O Lord my God, *with all my heart*, And I will GLORIFY Your name *forevermore*.
- Ps. 25:5 Lead me in Your truth, and teach me: for You are the God of my salvation; on You do I WAIT *all the day*.
- Mark 12:30 And you shall LOVE the Lord your God with *all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength*: this is the first commandment.

- Ps. 105:4 SEEK His face *continually*.
- Ps. 62:8 TRUST in him *at all times*; you people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us. Selah. Prov. 3.5-6 TRUST in the Lord *with all your heart*, and lean not on your own understanding; *in all your ways* ACKNOWLEDGE Him (intimately), and He shall direct your paths.
- Joel. 2.12 “Now, therefore,” says the Lord, “TURN TO ME *with all your heart*, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”

So as we meditate on the word and not let it depart from our mouths, rejoice, pray, give thanks, fear God, bless God, praise, wait on God, love God, sing, seek his face, and trust we abide. Depending on your occupation, you may have to actively engage your mind at all times to be faithful to your employer, etc. The idea, then, is to make God a part of your work, asking for help, thanking Him for things, etc. Include Him in the conversations in your mind. When you have a break, discipline yourself to focus on one or more of the activities above.

Suffice it here to say that a branch separated from its life-giving source may look fine for a while, but it is dead, even while it looks alive. Even the hardiest branch will die if it is away from the vine for long. So why be separated at all? Stay in the closest, most continuous contact possible.

I don't know about you, but I can be a wandering vine at times. I think I can make it. So, I make short jaunts into the unknown. Don't look at me in that tone of voice. Don't make me feel like the only one who has ever ventured away! If I am really bad, I will try to stay away as long as I can, almost tempting God by seeing if He can revive this wilted branch. Again, don't look at me so piously! In the end, though, I come running back to be close, wondering why I ever left in the first place. There is nothing like the presence of God. Other times, thank goodness, I am not nearly so willful. I find myself disengaged from God by the busyness of this life. Though not as bad as doing it willfully, it is equally dangerous. Sometimes, it is worse because I am not aware of what I am doing. One day I just look down and wonder why I am so dry and hungry. Well, if you're not eating and drinking....

Verse six was a stumbling block to me. I always used to think of it as God's judgment and it seemed so final. It does imply both of those things. But if a branch *decides* not to abide in the vine, it *will* wither. The decision isn't whether to wither or not, it's in whether to abide or not. If we as vines decide NOT to abide, we WILL wither. Then, the ONLY thing to do with a dried out branch is to burn it (or in modern days, to make a wreath, but that's no life for a vine). The key here then is not move away from God, either purposely or neglectfully. It takes effort for a human vine to stay attached. We tend to wander!

As I mentioned earlier, our role in these analogies has changed. Don't let that get in your way. Whether we are a vacant lot, a seed, a plant, a sower or a branch on the vine, just focus on what our part is in producing as much for the Lord's glory as possible. Let's make sure we provide soft soil, lots of good seed, warmth, light, water, fertilizer and weeding out the weeds and all the other applications taught above. Then we will have as a result, the goal of this study, lives that THRIVE, and not just survive!

God's Love For Us & Our Relationship Together

I think that the greatest unmet need in our lives is strong, passionate, unconditional love. That is a love that loves us as we are, with all our stuff and that loves us deeply. No human can ever give us this love that we need. No human is built to love that way, apart from God. Even with God in our lives, there is still the flesh to overcome in all of us. We seek this love first from our parents, then from relatives and siblings, then from friends, other acquaintances and the like. Finally, we seek it from a spouse and even from our children.

No matter how good these relationships can be, no one can ever love us like God, like we need to be loved. It is impossible. I strongly encourage you to read, meditate, ponder and allow God to speak to you through these scriptures. Even better, have someone read them aloud while you visualize them. Allow God to fill in the gaps in your heart, the gaps left by love that was less than perfect. Perhaps the person one would seek this love from was not even there, or was so abusive that there was no remnant of love. Regardless, God loves you and seeks to fill in those holes in your heart. He grieves over the ways we are treated. He loves us so, and wants us to be loved here on this earth (He commands us to love so in all of our relationships).

We need this love desperately, we can't love without being loved first. It has been shown that babies and children who don't receive loving will have problems socially. We do not love naturally, if we don't receive love, we cannot give it. Those who have poor role models -- ones who do not love correctly -- have a difficult time loving others correctly. Children need to see their parents loving each other to know how to love their future spouses. They need to be loved and disciplined correctly in order to love and discipline their children correctly. We need to be shown how to love. Only God can provide for us this supreme love that we need, both as the perfect source of love and the perfect role model. All other sources and models fail. All.

1 Jn. 3.1-3 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

1 Jn. 4.7-11 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for

God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 19 We love Him because He first loved us.

{The scripture is in bold, my comments are in brackets {}, Greek or Hebrew definitions are in parenthesis () and italics.}

Luke 15:20-23 **And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him** {The father was anxiously anticipating, with great hopefulness, his son's arrival}, **and had compassion** (*deeply moved with pity and tenderness*), **and ran** (*Speaks of persons in haste, of those who run in a race course, to exert one's self, strive hard, to spend one's strength in performing or attaining something. The word occurs in Greek writings denoting to incur extreme peril, which requires the exertion of all one's effort to overcome*), **and fell on his neck** (*to rush or press upon, to lie upon one, to fall into one's embrace*), and kissed him (*to kiss much, kiss again and again, kiss tenderly, fervently*). {As someone had said, kiss his neck, one of the most tender and passionate places to kiss.} **And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son. But** {the father cut him off, wouldn't let him finish what he had planned to say} **the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best** (*first in time or place, in any succession of things or persons, in rank, influence, honor, chief, principal*) {the best robe was probably the father's own} **robe** (*a loose outer garment for men extending to the feet, worn by kings, priests, and persons of rank, robe of honor, festive*) {robe of righteousness}, **and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand** {signet ring denoting the same authority that the father had}, **and shoes on his feet** {slaves had no shoes, but this was his son, he would have shoes}: **And bring the fatted calf** {the – denoting one specifically set aside}, **and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry** (*revel, feast*) {all that the father had done was not enough, it was time to party!}

Zephaniah 3:17 **The LORD your God in the midst** (*among, within, inwards in, inner part, middle, inward part, as seat of thought and emotion*) **of you is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice** (*glad, greatly, joy, mirth, to exult, display joy*) **over you with joy** (*gladness, mirth, rejoice, gaiety, pleasure, glad result, happy issue*); **he will rest** (*peace, hold tongue, be speechless, keep quiet*) **in his love** (*human love for human object, of man toward man, of man toward himself, between man and woman, sexual desire*), **he will joy** (*rejoice, glad, joyful, delight, exult, be glad, to tremble*) **over you with singing** (*cry, rejoicing, joy, gladness, proclamation, shouting, songs, triumph, ringing cry, of entreaty, supplication, in proclamation, praise*). {This song is surely a love song, like a lullaby}

Song of Solomon 2:4 He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner {signifies victory} over me was love (*human love for human object, of man toward man, of man toward himself, between man and woman, sexual desire*). **6 His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me** {see the Lord's love for us!}. **9 My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he stands** (*set, stay, still, appointed, endure, remain, present, continue, withstand, waited, establish, endure, take one's stand, be in a standing attitude, stand forth, present oneself, be or become servant of, to tarry, delay, continue, abide, endure, persist, be steadfast, hold one's ground, to station, to cause to stand firm, maintain, to appoint, ordain, establish*) **behind our wall, he looks forth** (*to gaze, stare*) **at the windows, gazing** (*flourish, blossom, bloomed, shine, sparkle, gleam, make the eyes sparkle*) **himself through the lattice** {He looks at us with such love.}. **10 My beloved spoke, and said to me, Rise, my love, my fair one** (*beautiful, fairest, beauty, comely, pleasant*), **and come away.** **11 For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;** **12 The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land;** **13 The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.** {Who can turn down this offer of love?} **14. O my dove** {a term of endearment}, **that are in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for sweet** (*pleasant*) **is your voice, and your countenance is comely** (*seemly, becoming, beautiful*). {The Lord sees us as beautiful. How does that compare with the image we have of ourselves?}

Ezekiel 16:8 Now when I passed by you, and looked upon you, behold, your time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over you, and covered your nakedness: yea, I swore to you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine. {God marries us and then cleans, clothes and beautifies us!} **9** Then I washed you with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away your blood from you, and I anointed you with oil. **10** I clothed you also with embroidered work, and shod you with badgers' skin, and I girded you with fine linen, and I covered you with silk. **11** I decked you also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon your hands, and a chain on your neck. **12** And I put a jewel in your nose, and earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head. **13** Thus were you decked with gold and silver; and your raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and embroidered work; you did eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and you were exceeding beautiful, and you did prosper into a kingdom. {Look at all the gifts the Lord gives us.} **14** And your renown went forth among the nations for your beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon you, says the Lord GOD.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world {insert your name} that He gave {God so loved that He gave, Jesus so loved that He came and died.} **His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life** {John 17 tells us

that everlasting life is to know God, i.e. like Adam knew Eve. In other words, it is all about relationship, not about quantity or location}.

Romans 5:5-10 And hope makes not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength (*weak, sick, weakness, impotent, more feeble, infirm*), in due time Christ died for the ungodly (*destitute of reverential awe towards God, condemning God, impious*). For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners (*sinful, devoted to sin, not free from sin, pre-eminently sinful, especially wicked, specifically of men stained with certain definite vices or crimes, tax collectors, heathen*), Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies (*odious, or actively hostile, foe, hated, hateful, hostile, hating, and opposing another, used of men as at enmity with God by their sin, opposing God in the mind, the devil who is the most bitter enemy of the divine government*), we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. {I was a weak, sinful, enemy of God, yet His love for me was so strong that He came to earth and died for me.}

Rom. 8.31-37 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who **did not spare His own Son**, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him **also freely give us all things**? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? **It is God who justifies**. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ**? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. {We do these things to ourselves and our relationship to God more than anybody else. We dare not be against ourselves, bring a charge against ourselves, condemn ourselves, or separate ourselves (or do it to anyone else, either)! We are our own worst enemies!}

In addition to the scriptures above, look at this table and see the comparison of how God treated us with how we treated Him. It's pretty convicting, but His love for us shines brighter still in comparison with how we've treated Him. And He still wants us as friends!!!

Jesus emptied Himself of His privileges as God, even becoming a servant and dying on a cross for us. Phil. 2.5-8

We were filled up with pride and puffed up, not willing to recognize our sin. Ps. 10.2-6

Died for each of us. 1 Jn. 2.2

Our sin killed Him. Is. 53.6

He deserved only life, because He never sinned. 2 Cor. 5.21

We deserved death. Rom. 6.23

He created the world for our pleasure. Gen. 1 & 2

We ruined His creation. Gen. 3.13-19

He bought us back. Col. 1.13-14

We sold ourselves to Satan. Gen. 3.1-7

He is good to all. Mt. 5.45

None of us are good. Rom. 3.10-13

He deserved, but did not receive our thanks, praise and worship. Rom. 1.18-25

We thanked, praised and worshiped anything but the only One worthy. Rom. 1.18-25

He is absolute truth. Jn. 1.14

We were full of lies. Jn. 8.44

He is totally worthy. Rev. 4.1

We had to be *made* worthy. Col. 1.12

He saved, forgave, justified and sanctified us. 1 Cor. 1.30

We had done nothing toward our salvation, forgiveness, justification and sanctification. Rom. 5.6-11

How long has it been since you have thought of God's incredible love for you? Days, weeks, months or years? Don't let that much time pass again. Think of it often, for He loves you constantly, consistently this way. His love does not ebb and flow like others. Think of the extreme measures that God went to and goes to in order to reveal his love to us. He is extravagant in His love for us.

I was challenged recently by a man of God who was ministering to me to ask God to show me His love for me. Now, I know, the religious cackles went up in me as well. God has already done everything He needs to in order to show His love to me by Jesus dying on the cross. But I prayerfully (and half apologizing to the Lord) took up the challenge. It has made all the difference. God loves to reveal to us how much He loves us every day. Rom. 8.32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Jam. 1.17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights,

with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Every good thing we get each day is an act of Love on behalf of God Almighty. We just need to tune into it to realize it!!

Our Relationship With God

The Bible uses the most intimate of natural relationships and precious valuables to describe our relationship with our God.

Surely there is one you can especially relate to today!

My Father is My Vine-dresser who tenderly cares for me His fruitful branch and Jesus is My Vine Jn. 15.1, 4-5 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

He is My Master, Teacher, Leader – I am His Servant, Disciple, Follower Ps. 123.2 Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us. Jn. 13.12-17 So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

He is Abba Father and Jesus is my Joint-Heir Brother – I am His Adopted Son/Daughter, and Joint-Heir Brother with Jesus Isaiah 63:16 Doubtless You are our Father, though Abraham was ignorant of us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O Lord, are our Father; our Redeemer from Everlasting is Your name. Mt. 5.44-45, 48 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. Jn. 1.12-13 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of

God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Rom. 8.14-17 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. 2 Cor. 6.17-18 Therefore “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.” “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” Gal. 3.29 And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. Eph. 1.5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. Heb. 2.11-12 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: “I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.” 1 Jn. 3.1-2 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

He Seeks me – I am His Worshipper Jn. 4.23-24 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

We are Friends Closer than Brothers Prov. 18.24 A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Jn. 15.13-16 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

He is My Bridegroom - I am His Bride Song of Solomon 1:15, 4:1-14 Song of Sol. 4.10 How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love, and the scent of your perfumes than all spices! Is. 54.5 For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One

of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth. Hos. 2:19-20 “I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in loving-kindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord. Rom. 7:4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. 2 Cor. 11:2-3 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. Eph. 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. Rev. 19:7-8 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

He is My Prime Minister – I am His Ambassador 2 Cor. 5:20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.

He is my Shepherd – I am His Lamb Ps. 23 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Ps. 95:7 For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: Ps. 100:3 Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Jn. 10:2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. 11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know

My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone 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 My Father's hand.

He is my Creator, Maker – I am His Creation designed to give Him pleasure Ps.

139.13-16 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. Eph. 2.10 For we are His workmanship (*Greek poema, literally work of art*), created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Rev. 4.11 You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou have created all things, and for Your pleasure they are and were created.

He is my Potter – I am His Pot or Vessel Is. 64.8 But now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand. Jer. 18.3-6 Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! Rom. 9.21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? 2 Cor 4.7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 2 Tim. 2.20-21 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

He is my builder - I am His Building 1 Cor 3.9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. Eph. 2.20-22 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Heb. 3.3 For this One has been counted worthy of more glory

than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. 4 For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God.

He is my Commander in Chief – I am His Warrior, Soldier 2 Tim. 2.4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

He is Holy Spirit – I am His Temple, Bought with a high price, His Choice Place to Dwell 1 Cor. 6.19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. 2 Cor. 6:16 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Eph. 2:21-22 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

He is the King of the Kingdom – We are His Holy Nation, Citizen of Heaven Mt. 6.33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Col. 1.13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Heb. 11.13-16 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. 12.28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 13.14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. 1 Pet. 2.9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

He is the One Ministered to – I am His Priest 2 Chron. 29.11 My sons, do not be negligent now, for the Lord has chosen you to stand before Him, to serve Him, and that you should minister to Him and burn incense." 1 Pet. 2.5, 9 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim

the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Rev. 1.6 and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Rev. 5.10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.”

Jesus and the Holy Spirit are my constant Prayer Partners, are continually Interceding and Standing up for me. Rom. 8:26-27, 34 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Heb. 7:25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. 1 John 2:1 2 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

We are One Spirit together – Jn. 17.21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 1 Cor. 6.17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

He is the Head – We are His Body Eph. 1.22-23 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

He is the One Who Chose and Elected me – I am His Chosen and Elected One 1 Chron. 16.13 O seed of Israel His servant, you children of Jacob, His chosen ones! Jn. 15.16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. Eph. 1.4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. Col. 3.12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering. 1 Pet. 2.9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

He is my Writer - I am His Letter and He poured His heart out on me 2 Cor. 3.3
clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.

We are Fellow workers together 1 Cor. 3.9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. 6:1 We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

God also sees me as:

Apple of His Eye – Zec. 2.8 For thus says the Lord of hosts: “He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye.

Beautiful, Fairest, Lovely, Glorious, Wonderful, Marvelous – Ps. 8.4-5 What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels (*Heb. Elohim*), and You have crowned him with glory and honor. Ps. 139.14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. Song of Sol. 1.8, 15 If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the footsteps of the flock, and feed your little goats beside the shepherds' tents. Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove's eyes. 2.10, 13-14 My beloved spoke, and said to me: “Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. The fig tree puts forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away! “O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.” 4.1, 7, 10 Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove's eyes behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, going down from Mount Gilead. You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you. How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love, and the scent of your perfumes than all spices! 6.4 O my love, you are as beautiful as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners! 7.6, 8 How fair and how pleasant you are, O love, with your delights! Eze. 16. 9-14 “Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your

clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you,” says the Lord God.

Better than Wine – Song of Sol. 4.10 How fair is your love, My sister, my spouse! How much better than wine is your love, and the scent of your perfumes than all spices!

Near to Him – Ps. 34.18 The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. 148.14 And He has exalted the horn of His people, the praise of all His saints—of the children of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise the Lord! Eph. 2.12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Crown, a Royal Diadem, Jewels – Is. 62.3 You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. Zec. 9.16 The Lord their God will save them in that day, as the flock of His people. For they shall be like the jewels of a crown, lifted like a banner over His land. Mal. 3.17 “They shall be Mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”

Dove – Song of Sol. 2.14 “O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.” 6.9 My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her. The daughters saw her and called her blessed, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.

Inscribed on the Palm of His hand – Is. 49.16 See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me.

Fragrant Aroma – 2 Cor. 2.14 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

A Fragrant, Beautiful, Fruitful Garden – Song of Sol. 4.12-15 A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with pleasant fruits, fragrant henna with spikenard, spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices— a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon.

I ravish His heart – Song of Sol. 4.9 You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace. 6.5 Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me. your hair is like a flock of goats going down from Gilead. 7.6 How fair and how pleasant you are, O love, with your delights!

Like a Lily Among Thorns – Song of Sol. 2.2 Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

Rejoices, quiet me and sings over me in love – Zeph. 3.17 The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”

Treasured possession – Dt. 7.6 “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. Tit. 2:14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. 1 Pet. 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Unforgettable – Is. 49.15 “Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you.

As a beloved pet climbs into its owner’s lap to be loved and petted, so we, too, should climb into our Daddy’s lap. One of the definitions of worship is to lick the hand as a dog does His master.

God is a very personal and intimate God. He was often used the name of believers as part of His name. For example, He is called: God of Abraham, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God of All Flesh, Your God, God of All the Families of Israel, God of Daniel, God of David, God of Elijah, My God, God of the Hebrews, God of Hezekiah, God of Isaac, God of Israel, God of the Jews, God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, God of Shem. Have you ever thought of God as the God of _____ (your name)? Now that is something to meditate on!

Promises from the Word of God – "MY NEVER AGAIN LIST"

- ◆ **The problem:** there are many negative voices in our personal worlds can fill our minds with thoughts contrary to the word of God (these can come from family, friends, school, work, the enemy, the world (via any of the media or in person), even church, many times inadvertently). Our spirits have been reborn; our bodies do what our souls (minds, wills, and emotions) tell them to do. Therefore the battle remains in the soul. We need to reprogram ourselves to think how God thinks. Decide the God's word is more true than what I see, feel, think, experience, etc. In addition, it is powerful to change us. Is. 55.10-11 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. 2 Tim. 3.16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. Heb. 4.12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Prov. Pr. 4.23 Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. 18.21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit. 23.7 For as a man thinks in his heart, so is he. Col. 3.1-3 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Rom. 8.5-8, 13 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. Rom. 12.2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. 2 Cor. 10.4-5 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Eph. 4.22-24 Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Phil. 4.8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. Not mind over matter, but scripture over 'reality' or what our senses tell us.
- ◆ **How to use this list:** read, quote aloud, thank and praise God for, study, memorize, pray, meditate, and sing. In short, fill our minds on the word of God day and night. Josh. 1.8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Ps. 1.2-3 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper. Ps. 119.9, 11 How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. Your word I have hidden in my

heart, that I might not sin against You. I have access to all of the promises of God in Christ. God says, Yes and So let it be. 2 Cor. 1.20. By which, He has given to me exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these I may be partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust 2 Pet. 1.4..

- ◆ **Never again will I confess "I can't", never again will I confess weakness**, for I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me Phil. 4.13. The Lord is the strength of my life Ps. 27.1. I that know my God shall be strong and do exploits Dan. 11.32. Blessed am I who walk not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful; but my delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law I meditate day and night. I shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever I do will prosper Ps. 1.1-3. The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead, dwells in me, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to my mortal body through His Spirit who dwells in me Rom. 8.11. That He would grant me, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within me, He is able to accomplish infinitely more than I would ever dare to ask or hope Eph. 3.16, 20. Such confidence as this is mine through Christ before God. Not that I am competent in myself to claim anything for myself, but my competence comes from God. He has made me competent as a minister of a new covenant--not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life 2 Cor. 3.4-6. But I have this treasure in a jar of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from me 2 Cor. 4.7. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong 2 Cor. 12.9-10. But I have an anointing from the Holy One, and I know. As for me, the anointing which I received from Him abides in me, and I have no need for anyone to teach me; but as His anointing teaches me about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught me, I abide in Him 1 Jn. 2.20, 27. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and I am complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power Col. 2.9-10. For the weapons of my warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God for the pulling down of strongholds 2 Cor. 10.4. I trust in the LORD forever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH /s everlasting strength Is. 26.4. As my days, so shall my strength be Dt. 33.25.
- ◆ **Never again will I confess lack**, for My God shall supply all of my needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus Phil. 4.19. The Lord is my Shepherd I do not want [*Jehovah Rohi*] Ps. 23.1, Jn. 10.11. I have given and it is returned unto me -- pressed down, shaken together, and running over Luke 6.38. For I know the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for my sakes He became poor, so that I through his poverty might become rich. 2 Cor. 8.9. I have unsearchable riches in Christ Eph. 3.8. God will withhold no good thing from me as I live righteously Ps. 84.11. I receive abundance, more than I need; I am blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Eph. 1.3. He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for me, how will He not also with Him freely give me all things Rom 8.32? Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and am in health, just as your soul prospers 2 Jn. 3. I bring the whole tithe...and I see how God throws open the floodgates of heaven and pours out so much blessing that I do not have room enough for it Mal. 3.10. I who sow bountifully will also reap bountifully. So I give as I purpose in my heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves me, a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward me, that I, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have abundance for every good work 2 Cor. 9.6-8. And Abraham called the name of that place **Jehovahjireh**: as it is said *to this day*, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen [*The Lord my Provider*] Gen. 22.14. As His divine power has given to me all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of

Him who called me by glory and virtue 2 Pet. 1.3. I delight myself also in the Lord, and He shall give me the desires of my heart Ps. 37.4.

- ◆ **Never again will I confess fear or confusion, never again will I confess doubt and lack of faith, never again will I confess worries and frustrations**, for God has not given me the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind 2 Tim. 1.7. God has dealt to me the measure of faith Rom. 12.3. I cast all my cares upon Him, who cares for me 1 Pet. 5.7. In righteousness I will be established: tyranny will be far from me; I will have nothing to fear, terror will be far removed; it will not come near me Is. 54.14. I will fear no evil for You are with me, Lord, Your word and Your Spirit comfort me Ps. 23.4. I find peace of mind as I keep my mind upon God Is. 26.3. When I am afraid, I will put my trust in God. I will not be afraid of what man can do to me because I trust in the LORD Ps. 56.3, 11. I will not be afraid of bad news because my heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD Ps. 112.7. God is not the author of confusion, but of peace 1 Cor 14.33. I can rejoice in the Lord no matter what the circumstances are. I am anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, I let my requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding will guard my heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Phil. 4.4, 6-7. Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to me who has obtained like precious faith with him by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ 2 Pet. 1.1. *This from a man who walked on the water, saw the lame walk, whose shadow healed many and who walked out of jail bonds a free man!* I won't let my heart be troubled I believe in God, I believe also in Jesus. Peace Jesus has left with me, His peace He has given me, and not as the world gives does He give it to me. I won't let my heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful. John 14.1, 27. Therefore, having been justified by faith, I have peace with God through my Lord Jesus Christ. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in my heart by the Holy Spirit who was given to me Rom. 5.1, 5. Then Gideon built an altar there unto the **LORD**, and called it **Jehovahshalom**: unto this day it *is* yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. *[The LORD our peace]* Judges 6.24. But He was wounded for my transgressions, He was bruised for my iniquities; the chastisement for my peace was upon Him, and by His stripes I am healed Is. 53.5.
- ◆ **Never again will I confess supremacy of Satan or the world over my life, never again will I confess defeat**, for greater is He that is within me than he that is in the world 1 Jn. 4.4. God always causes me to triumph in Christ Jesus 2 Cor. 2.14. In righteousness I will be established; I will be far from oppression, for I will not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near me. No weapon formed against me shall prosper for my righteousness is of the Lord Is. 54.14, 17. Though I walk in the flesh, I do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of my warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God for the pulling down of strongholds 2 Cor. 10.3,4. And the God of peace will crush Satan under my feet shortly Rom. 16.20. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with me. Amen. The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom 2 Tim. 4.18. I overcome the accuser by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of my testimony, and not loving my life unto death Rev. 12.11. I take on the whole armor of God, that I may be able to withstand in the evil day. By faith, I am able to quench all of the fiery darts of Satan Eph. 6.13, 16. I am submitted to God and the devil flees from me because I resist him in the NAME of JESUS James 4.6. Christ has redeemed me. Christ has defeated satan, and satan no longer has dominion over me. I have been delivered out of darkness and placed into the kingdom of God Col. 1.13-14. Since I am born of God, I have overcome the world. I have victory over the world through my faith I am the one who overcomes the world, because I believe that Jesus is the Son of God 1 Jn. 5.4, 5. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over Ps. 23.4-5. In the spirit, I am seated with Christ Jesus in heaven far above all

the powers of the enemy. Eph. 2.6. I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in Him I will trust." Surely He will deliver me from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence. He will cover me with His feathers, and under His wings will I take refuge; His truth shall be my shield and buckler. I will not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at my side, and ten thousand at my right hand; but it shall not come near me: only with my eyes will I look, and see the reward of the wicked. Because I have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, my dwelling place, no evil shall befall me, nor shall any plague come near my dwelling; for He shall give His angels charge over me, to keep me in all my ways. In their hands they shall bear me up, lest I dash my foot against a stone. I shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent I will trample underfoot. "Because I have set my love upon Him, therefore He will deliver me; He will set me on high, because I have known His name. I will call upon Him and He will answer me; He will be with me in trouble. Ps. 91.2-15 Jesus says to me, "whatever I bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever I loose on earth will be loosed in heaven". Mt. 18.18 These things Jesus has spoken to me, that in Him I may have peace. In the world I will have tribulation; but I'll be of good cheer, He has overcome the world John 16.33. Who gave Himself for my sins, that He might deliver me from this present evil age, according to the will of my God and Father Gal. 1.4. For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more I who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Rom. 5.17. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it **Jehovah nissi**: [*The LORD my banner*] Ex. 17.15. Therefore says the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will rid myself of my adversaries, and avenge me of my enemies [*Lord Sabaoth*] Is. 1.24. 19 Behold, Jesus gives me the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt me Lk. 10.19. 8 For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil 1 Jn. 3.8.

- ◆ **Never again will I confess lack of wisdom or guidance**, for Christ Jesus is made unto me wisdom from God 1 Cor. 1.30. I have the mind of Christ. I have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God: that I might know the things that are freely given to me of God. But, as it is written, eye has not seen, nor ear has heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him, but, God has revealed them unto me by His Spirit 1 Cor. 2.9-10, 12, 16. I trust in the Lord with all my heart and lean not to my own understanding, in all my ways I (intimately) acknowledge Him and He directs my path Prov. 3.5-6. Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path Ps. 119.105. I let the Word of Christ dwell in me richly in all wisdom Col. 3.16. As I meekly engraft God's Word into my life, it saves my mind from thinking wrong thoughts, my will from making wrong decisions, and my heart from feeling wrong emotions Jms. 1.21. I am successful as I meditate on, speak and apply the Word of God in my life Jos. 1.8. And I follow Him, for I know his voice. Yet I will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for I do not know the voice of strangers." I hear and obey the voice of Jesus Jn. 10.4-5, 27. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide me into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell me things to come Jn. 16.13. God's Word leads me as I walk, keeps me as I sleep, and talks to me when I awake Prov. 6.22. God's Word builds me up and gives me an inheritance among those that are sanctified Acts 20.32. I am being led by the Spirit of God, for I am a son of God Rom. 8.14. Whenever I lack wisdom, I ask of God, who generously gives it to me without reproach Jms. 1.5. And He will bring me by a way that I knew not; He will lead me in paths that I have not known: He will make darkness light before me and crooked things straight. These things will He do for me, and not forsake me Is. 42.16. And my ears shall hear a word behind me, saying, This is the way, walk in it, when I turn to the right hand, and when I turn to the left Is. 30.21. Ps. 23.1 The Lord is my Shepherd - **Jehovah Rohi**

Never again will I confess sickness, for with His stripes I am healed Is. 53.5. Jesus Himself took my infirmities and bore my sickness Mt. 8.17. Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them Mt. 4.23-24. And as I go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' I heal *the* sick, raise *the* dead, cleanse *the* lepers, and cast out demons. Freely I have received, freely I give Mt. 10.7-8. But she came and *began* to bow down before Him, saying, Lord, help me! And He answered and said, It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. But she said, Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus said to her, O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish. And her daughter was healed at once Mt. 15.25-28 (*Healing is the children's bread and I am God's child!*) You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and *how* He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him Acts 10.38. And He Himself bore my sins in His body on the cross, so that I might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds I was healed 1 Pet. 2.24. Bless the Lord, all my soul and forget not all His benefits, Who forgives all my iniquities and Who heals all my diseases Ps. 103.2-3. He sent forth His word and healed me, and delivered me from my destruction Ps. 107.20. And said, If I will diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD my God, and will do that which is right in his sight, and will give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, He will put none of these diseases upon me, which He has brought upon the Egyptians: for He is the LORD that heals me [*Jehovah-Rophe*] Ex. 15.26. And I will serve the LORD my God, and He shall bless my bread, and my water; and He will take sickness away from the midst of me Ex. 23.25. God be merciful unto me, and bless me; and cause his face to shine upon me; that His way may be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations (that includes me) Psalms 67.1-2. Surely He shall deliver me from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. I will not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flies by day; nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness; nor for the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand shall fall at my side and ten thousand at my right hand; but it shall not come nigh me. Only with my eyes shall I behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because I have made the LORD, who is my refuge, even the most High, my habitation; There shall no evil befall me, neither shall any plague come nigh my dwelling Ps. 91.3, 5-10. But unto me that fear His name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and I will go forth, and grow up. Mal. 4.2. I do not let the word depart from my eyes; I keep them in the midst of my heart; for they are life to me who finds them, and health to all my flesh Prov. 4.21-22. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven Mt. 6.10. (*There is no sickness in heaven, so I pray for God's will in my life as well as other's, that there should be no sickness!*) The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead, dwells in me, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to my mortal body through His Spirit who dwells in me Rom. 8.11.

- ◆ **Never again will I confess loneliness** for Jesus said, Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world Mt. 28.20. He will never leave me, nor forsake me Heb. 13.5. And Jesus will ask the Father, and He will give me another Counselor to be with me forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But I know Him, for He lives with me and will be in me. He will not leave me as an orphan; He will come to me. Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love Him, and we will come to Him and make our home with Him. Jn. 14.16-18, 23. I am an adopted child of God Eph. 1.5. For I have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but I have received a spirit of adoption as a son by which I cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with my spirit that I am a child of God, and if a child, then

an heir also, heir of God and fellow heir with Christ, if indeed I suffer with Him so that I may also be glorified with Him. The Holy Spirit makes intercession for me when I don't know how to pray. If God is for me, who can be against me. The fact is that nothing can separate me from the love of God Rom. 8.15-17, 28, 31, and 35. I am in the hands of Jesus and in the hands God, the Father. Therefore, nothing is able to take me out of God's hands Jn. 10.28-29. In Him I live and move and have my being Acts 17.28! Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in my heart by the Holy Spirit who was given to me Rom. 5.5. I draw near to God and He draws near to me. Jms. 4.8. *It was round about eighteen thousand measures: and the name of the city from that day shall be, The LORD is there. [Jehovah Shammah] Eze. 48.35.* Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with me Mt. 1.23. And He will walk with me, and will be my God, and I shall be His person Lev. 26.12. You have beset me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me. Where shall I go from Your spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall Your hand lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me Ps. 139.5, 7-10. And even to my old age He is He; and even to gray hairs will He carry me: He has made, and He will bear; even He will carry, and will deliver me Is. 46.4. The LORD my God in the midst of me is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over me with joy; He will rest in his love, He will joy over me with singing Zeph. 3.17.

- ◆ **Never again will I confess curses or bad luck** for Christ has redeemed me from the curse of the law, being made a curse for me, that the blessing of Abraham might come on me through Jesus Christ; that I might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith Gal. 3.13-14. No evil will befall me neither shall any plague come near my dwelling. For the Lord has given His angels charge over me and they keep me in all my ways and in my pathway is life and there is no death Ps. 91.10. All these blessings will come upon me and overtake me because I obey the LORD my God: Blessed shall I be in the city, and blessed shall I be in the country. Blessed shall be the offspring of my body and the produce of my ground and the offspring of my beasts, the increase of my herd and the young of my flock. Blessed shall be my basket and my kneading bowl. Blessed shall I be when I come in, and blessed shall I be when I go out. The LORD shall cause my enemies who rise up against me to be defeated before me; they will come out against me one way and will flee before me seven ways. The LORD will command the blessing upon me in my barns and in all that I put my hand to, and He will bless me in the land which the LORD my God gives me. The LORD will establish me as a holy person to Himself, as He swore to me, if I keep the commandments of the LORD my God and walk in His ways. So all the peoples of the earth will see that I am called by the name of the LORD, and they will be afraid of me. The LORD will make me abound in prosperity, in the offspring of my body and in the offspring of my beast and in the produce of my ground, in the land which the LORD swore to my fathers to give me. The LORD will open for me His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to my land in its season and to bless all the work of my hand; and I shall lend to many nations, but I shall not borrow. The LORD will make me the head and not the tail, and I only will be above, and I will not be underneath, because I listen to the commandments of the LORD my God to observe them carefully Dt. 28.2-13. / *have victory over poverty, sickness, and spiritual death.* In the fear of the LORD *is* my strong confidence: and I shall have a place of refuge Prov. 14.26.
- ◆ **Never again will I confess discontent or depression** because I have learned, in whatsoever state or circumstances. I am content Phil. 4.11. He has borne my griefs and carried my sorrows Is. 53.4. With joy, I shall draw water out of the wells of salvation Is. 12.3. God will keep that which I have committed unto Him until the Day of Judgment 2 Tim. 1.12. I know that God is working all things together for my good and His glory. For I, whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover I, whom He

predestined, He also called; I whom He called, He also justified; and I whom He justified, He also glorified. Rom. 8.28-30. But the fruit of the Spirit (who is in me) is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law Gal 5.22-23. But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head Ps. 3.3. I have firmly in place the helmet of the hope of salvation Eph, 6.17, 1 Thes. 5.8. Now may the Lord Jesus Christ and my God and Father, who has loved me and given me everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort my heart and establish me in every good word and work 2 Thes. 2.16-17. Blessed be the God and Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Mercies and God of all comfort, Who comforts me in all my tribulation, that I may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which I, myself have been comforted by God 2 Cor. 1.3-4. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in my heart by the Holy Spirit who was given to me Rom. 5.1, 5. For God *is* not unrighteous to forget my work and labor of love, which I have showed toward his name, in that I have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And desire that I do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end. That by two immutable things, in which *it was* impossible for God to lie, I might have strong consolation, who has fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before me. Which *hope* I have as an Anchor Of My Soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters into that within the veil Heb. 6.10-11, 18-19. Now the God Of Hope fill me with all joy and peace in believing, that I may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost Rom. 15.13. 1 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope Jer. 29.11.

- ◆ **Never again will I confess unworthiness or condemnation** because He has made Him to be sin for me who knew no sin; that I might be made the righteousness of God in Him 2 Cor. 5.21. Because of the righteousness that I have in Christ, I am fully accepted of God Eph. 1.6. I am an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ. What the Father gave to Jesus also belongs to me Rom. 8.17. God's complete love for me casts out the fear of judgment 1 Jn. 4.18. I have bold access to the throne of God to find mercy and grace in time of need Heb. 4.16. I am confident that since God began his good work in me that He will continue that work until the day of Jesus Christ Phil. 1.6. There is therefore now no condemnation to me who is in Christ Jesus Rom. 8.1. Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified me to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in the light Col. 1.12. I sanctify myself therefore, and am holy: for He *is* the LORD my God. And I will keep His statutes, and do them: He *is* the LORD who sanctifies me [*Jehovah-M'kaddesh*] Lev. 20.7-8. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this *is* his name whereby He shall be called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS** [*Jehovah Tsidkenu*] Jer. 23.6. By which will I am sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. For by one offering He has perfected me forever that is sanctified. Heb. 10.10, 14. The Lord will perfect that which concerns me Ps. 138.8. Therefore, having been justified by faith, I have peace with God through my Lord Jesus Christ Rom. 5.1, Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over my sins that were previously committed Rom. 3.24-25, And such was I. But I was washed, but I was sanctified, but I was justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor. 6.11. For by grace I have been saved through faith, and that not of myself; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest I should boast Eph. 2.8-9. Not by works of righteousness which I have done, but according to His mercy He saved me, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit Tit. 3.5. But to me who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, my faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin." Rom. 4.5-8 Giving

thanks to the Father, who has qualified me, made me worthy to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light Col. 1.12 I fix my eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of my faith Heb. 12.2.

- ◆ **Never again will I confess lack of purpose or destiny** for the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound Is 61.1. Then Jesus came and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Mt. 28.18-20 And He said to me, Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. These signs will accompany me who has believed. In His name I will cast out demons, I will speak with new tongues; I will pick up serpents, and if I drink any deadly *poison*, it will not hurt me; I will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover Mk. 16.15-18. As the Father has sent Jesus, He is sending me." If I forgive anyone their sins, they are forgiven; if I do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Jn. 20.21, 23. But I will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on me; and I will be his witness in Jerusalem, **and** in all Judea **and** Samaria, **and** to the ends of the earth." Acts 1.8 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled me to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given me the ministry of reconciliation, and has committed to me the word of reconciliation. Now then, I am an ambassador for Christ, as though God were pleading through me: I implore others on Christ's behalf to be reconciled to God. 2 Cor. 5.18-20. I am the light of the world, giving off the light Christ. I am the salt that gives life flavor and the salt that preserves purity Mt. 5.13-14. 29 I let no corrupt word proceed out of my mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers Eph. 4.29. I am able to walk in the light as a child of the light Eph. 5.8. I am God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works Eph 2.10. I also, as a living stone, am being built up a spiritual house, a holy priest, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. I am a chosen person, a part of a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, and a God-possessed person that declares the praises of God who has called me out of darkness unto to his marvelous light 1 Pet. 2.5, 9. I am a sweet aroma of Christ unto God 2 Cor. 2.15. "I abide in Him, and He in me. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can I unless I abide in Him. "He is the vine, I am a branch; I who abide in Him and He in me, I bear much fruit, for apart from Him I can do nothing. God has chosen me and ordained me that I should go and bring forth much lasting fruit. Jn. 15.4-5, 16. I wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places Eph. 6.13. I fight the good fight of faith...to which I was called 1 Tim. 6.12. I endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. I don't entangle myself with the affairs of this life, that I may please Him who enlisted me as a soldier 2 Tim. 2.2-3. 17 Because as He is, so am I in this world 1 Jn. 4.17. So God sought for me among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Him on behalf of the land, that He should not destroy it Eze. 22.30. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to me for the profit of all: for to me is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, the word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, the working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, different kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues 1 Cor. 12.7-10. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to me, use them: if prophecy, prophesy in proportion to faith; or ministry, use it in ministering; teaches, in teaching; exhorts, in exhortation; gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness Rom. 12.6-8. And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. But, speaking

the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ (the head orchestrates where my place is in the body) Eph. 4.11-13, 15. As I have received a gift, minister it to one another, as a good steward of the manifold grace of God. If I speaks, speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever 1 Pet. 4.11-12. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking me to worship Him. God is Spirit, and I who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth Jn. 4.23-24." Such confidence as this is mine through Christ before God. Not that I am competent in myself to claim anything for myself, but my competence comes from God. He has made me competent as a minister of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 2 Cor. 3.4-6

- ◆ **Never again will I confess my old man's rule in my life, never again will I confess bondage** for I was spiritually dead to the things of God. I was actually dead in my spirit, but I have been made alive by the spirit of Christ Eph. 2.5. I am set apart from the world unto the living God; therefore, I am a saint I Cor. 1.2. God has predestined that I be formed into the image of Jesus Christ Rom. 8.29. God is working in me both to will and to do of His good pleasure Phil. 2.13. I have put on the new man, which is created in the image of God. I actually have the divine nature of God dwelling within me 2 Pet. 1.4. God has elected me to be holy and to receive His love Col. 3.10, 12. My inner man is renewed every day 2 Cor. 4.16. 20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. Gal. 2.20. I am washed, sanctified, and justified by the name of Jesus and the Spirit of God. My body is the temple of the Holy Spirit purchased with a price 1 Cor. 6.11, 19-20. I'm a new creation; I'm a brand new person. Old things are passed away, behold all things have become new 2 Cor. 5.17. In Christ, I am complete; therefore, I need nothing more Col. 2.10. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But I, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, am being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord 2 Cor. 3.17-18. For the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death Rom. 8.2. I have been made free from the power of sin and have become a servant of righteousness Rom. 6.18. It was for freedom that Christ set me free; therefore I keep standing firm and am not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. For I was called to freedom, so I do not turn freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love I serve others. As I walk in the Spirit, I do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh Gal. 5.1, 13, 16. And I know the truth, and the truth makes me free." Therefore the Son makes me free, I am free indeed. Jn. 8.32, 36. No temptation has overtaken me but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow me to be tempted beyond what I am able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape, that I may be able to endure it 1 Cor. 10.13. Put off, concerning my former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of my mind, and that I put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness Eph. 4.22-24. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God. 7.23-25. By which, He has given to me exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these I may be partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust 2 Pet. 1.4.

The Grand Gift of Salvation - What it contains

This study came unusually to me. I was interceding for the team of friends in India January of this year, and I found myself praying the contents of this study over them. I was to preach in a friend's church the next Sunday and I thought my message was settled. When I prayed this I knew I had a new sermon to preach...

Imagine Christmas morning...

My Christmas morning as a bachelor is pretty bleak. No decorations, I didn't give any cards, the gifts I gave consisted of 3 gift bags (all my choice). Imagine my shock if I should wheel out of my bedroom only to find an 4' x 4' x 4' box in the middle of my living room floor, beautifully wrapped and addressed to me. Upon ripping it open, I discover not one expensive gift (I was thinking new, large TV or computer!) but a box of boxes, all individually wrapped. Each gift inside was comparable in value as what the original might have been. One was a laptop, another the latest and greatest cell phone, there was a PDA, a 20 GB mp3 player, a brick of CD's I'd been wanting, etc. Everything a techno-geek like me would have wanted

The Grand Gift of Salvation - What it contains

This is a picture of our salvation, although a weak one, because salvation is far more valuable. It was given with much more love and caring. I was saved, by the way, at an early age, 8 years old. My brother and I went to a Child Evangelism Fellowship 5-day club which simply presented the plan of salvation using a 5 color wordless book. Day one was yellow for heaven - a great place to go while hell was to be avoided. Black represented the darkness of sin, red, the blood of Christ, white, a clean heart and green for Christian growth. This was my understanding of salvation for years. It's not far from what most Christians believe and it is wonderful as far as it goes. But only a few of the dozens of the packages of salvation are opened, the vast majority are ignored.

Here is the definition of the Hebrew & Greek - of course it means saved from every aspect of sin, but it also means: help, deliverance, health, welfare; prosperity, victory, preserved, avenging, defend, rescue, safe, to be liberated

Is. 53.3 He is despised and **rejected** by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs *(in addition to grief, means sickness and disease, see Mt. 8.17)* and carried our sorrows *(includes grief, mental and physical pain)*; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions *(everything to do with sin, including our rebellion)*, He was bruised *(pierced through)* for our iniquities *(doing our own thing)*; the chastisement for our peace *(well, peaceably, welfare, prosperity, safe, health, completeness, soundness, safety, soundness (in body, quiet, tranquility, contentment, friendship of human relationships, with God especially in covenant relationship)* was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

Rom. 8.32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? A dear sister in the Lord says at the end of her prayers,

Jesus Christ paid for this prayer, amen.

2 Pet. 1.3 as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, 4 by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The next time you read salvation in a verse, think about it differently. For example: Rom. 10.9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be **saved**. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and **with the mouth confession is made unto salvation**. - We receive all salvation has by confession... Eph. 2.8 **For by grace you have been saved through faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. - We receive all salvation has by grace through faith...

What would happen if the person who gave me that box came back and asked me about one of the presents and I said, "I never saw that." Then they told me it was on the fourth layer of gifts and I said, "I never got around to opening all the gifts." How would they feel? How would I feel? When we get to heaven, how will we feel when God asks us the same about His salvation? Illustration: Israel only took 10% of what God offered. Gen. 15. 17 And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. 18 On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates— 19 the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."

What is that one thing?

As I ministered this I asked the congregation to think what was that one need that they were asking God for, the main thing.

God is and doesn't just have...

Then I shared with them that God doesn't just have those things, He IS what we need.

Compound Names

Jehovah Jireh - The Lord my Provider - Gen. 22.14 - Abraham was willing to sacrifice that which was promised to him by God for 25 years. God, in turn, was willing to provide for Abraham.

Jehovah Rophe - The Lord my Healer - Ex. 15.26 - God healed the waters at Meribah so that Israel wouldn't perish in the wilderness, what do you need Him to heal in your life?

Jehovah Nissi - The Lord my Banner - Ex. 17.15 - The Amalekites were a treacherous enemy to Israel. God caused Joshua to win the battle while Moses interceded on the mount, sitting on the rock (Christ) while Aaron and Hur held up his arms for victory. What is your battle? God will raise up a standard (He already did in Jesus) when the enemy comes in like a flood!

Jehovah Sabaoth - The Lord of Hosts (Armies) - 1 Sam. 17.45 - David faced Israel's Goliath, who

had challenged the nation to a fight. He won the battle in the name of the Lord of Hosts, Jehovah Sabaoth. We can do the same, whether the battle is ours, our church's, our community's, nation's or whatever.

Jehovah Shalom - The Lord my Peace - Judg. 6.24 - Midian was keeping Israel from bearing arms and harvesting their crops. In short, they could not fulfill their calling. God revealed Himself to Gideon in the midst of this situation as the Lord of Peace and then lead him to lead Israel into battle to win their peace. He will do the same for us!

Jehovah Rohi - The Lord my Shepherd - Ps. 23 & John 10 - Think about what a shepherd does for his sheep. He leads and guides, feeds and provides, He shelters and protects, heals and watches over. These two scriptures will help with other ideas. That's what Jesus does for us!

Jehovah Shammah - The Lord Who is There - Eze. 48.35 - The New Testament reveals Jesus as Emmanuel, the God who never leaves nor forsakes us. He offers us relationship that no one else can, no matter how good the intentions.

Jehovah Tsidkenu - The Lord my Righteousness - Jer. 23.6, 33.16 and Jehovah M'kaddesh - The Lord my Sanctifier - Ex. 31.13 - Even in the Old Testament, God's message was, "You can't be right or holy enough on your own, you need Me." God is Himself our righteousness and our sanctification. Yes, we must cooperate, but without God, it is impossible to live rightly. All God requires of us, He has provided in Himself.

Jehovah Elohim - The Lord our Creator - Gen. 1 & 2 and Jehovah Asah - The Lord our Maker - Ps. 95.4-5, 100.3, Is. 51.13, 16 - Have a need not listed yet? Have a need not created yet? No matter, our God creates out of nothing or out of what He's already made to meet each and every need we have.

Jesus - Hebrew is Yeshua, literally Jehovah Saves - also translated as Joshua in Old Testament. After studying the facets of salvation, it gives a much broader depth to His name, no? Mt. 1.21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

I AM Statements of Jesus

John 6:35 And Jesus said unto them, **I am the bread of life:** he that comes to me shall never hunger; and he that believes on me shall never thirst. 41 The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, **I am the bread which came down from heaven.** 48 **I am that bread of life.** 51 **I am the living bread which came down from heaven:** if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. *What nourishment, what sustenance are we in need of? It's all in Jesus!*

John 8:12 Then spoke Jesus again unto them, saying, **I am the light of the world:** he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. John 9:5 As long as I am in the world, **I am the light of the world.** *Do we need understanding, discernment, revelation? Again, it's all in Him.*

John 10:7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, **I am the door of the sheep.**

9 **I am the door:** by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

John 11:25 Jesus said unto her, **I am the resurrection, and the life:** he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: *Jesus' revelation to Mary and Martha is the same to us, He is what we need, what we are looking for, not some future event, something He can give us apart from Himself.*

John 14:6 Jesus said unto him, **I am the way, the truth, and the life:** no man comes unto the Father, but by me.

John 15:1. **I am the true vine,** and my Father is the husbandman. 5 **I am the vine,** you *are* the branches: He that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing. *What does the branch need that it doesn't get from the vine or from God (sunshine & pruning)?*

Hopefully it is quite clear that everything we need is in the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. The fulfillment of our needs is not apart from them. This final part is where it gets exciting...

In us, Upon us, All Around us

Lastly I shared that God is in us, upon us, and all around us. Jn. 14.23 Jesus answered and said to him, If a man loves me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode with him.

1 Cor. 3:16 Know not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses to me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth.

Acts 17:27 That they should seek the Lord, if perhaps they might grope after him, and find him, though he is not far from every one of us: 28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Therefore, whatever we need is in us, upon us, and all around us as well. Eph. 3.20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, **according to the power that works in us.** Wherever we are, wherever we go, God is, and our need is. We are literally bumping into it all day long.

& Through us

From the beginning God has wanted to not just meet our needs, but the needs of those around us as well. He wants to flow through us to everyone within our reach and around the world.

2 Cor. 4.7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. What's a vessel good for - filling up & pouring out, filling up & pouring out, filling up & pouring out?

Zec. 4.3 Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left." 4 So I

answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?" 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." 6 So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.

So to conclude the service, I had everyone come together, lay a hand on the person to the right and left and we prayed for each other, for that one need. I then encouraged each one to wait on the Lord for a moment to see if God had anything else to share with each one they were praying for. It might be a picture, a few sentences, a word, or scripture or a combination. This is something we can do daily, on the street, in the store, at work or school, everywhere we go. One question that is usually the least offensive is, "What can I pray for you about?" Then just grab a hand, pray right then and there and wait for God to speak. Even if the person is not a Christian, they will soon want to be once they have experienced God in a real way!

What Do You Want?

Before going on, answer these questions as honestly as possible. The more honest you are, the better this study will apply.

1. If I didn't have to work for a living, what would I just love to do?
2. If I were given five million dollars, lump sum, tax-free, how would it change the way I live?
3. If I learned that I have only six (healthy) months to live, confirmed by all sources, what would I do with the rest of my life?

What is it that you want more than anything else in life? How you answered the questions listed above reveals much of that answer. What do you really want? One of my favorite quotes is, "You can have anything you want, just can't have everything you want."

You may think that is preposterous. Many of the rich and famous can get what they want, when they want it. Yeah? How about real peace of mind, love, truth and joy, or a good marriage or other relationships, or health?

What do people really want – blessedness, Kingdom of God, true comfort, the earth – materially and in authority, satisfaction, see God, called children of God, reward -- things all promised in the Sermon on the Mount. If we really took seriously the claims of Jesus and the Bible – we'd be different people. We'd live and think differently. Let's turn to God's word and see what He says about it...

1 Chr. 1.7 On that night God appeared to Solomon, and said to him, "Ask! What shall I give you?" 8 And Solomon said to God: "You have shown great mercy to David my father, and have made me king in his place. 9 Now, O Lord God, let Your promise to David my father be established, for You have made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. 10 Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this great people of Yours?" 11 Then God said to Solomon: "Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches or wealth or honor or the life of your enemies, nor have you asked long life—but have asked wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge My people over whom I have made you king— 12 wisdom and knowledge are granted to you; and I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings have had who were before you, nor shall any after you have the like." *Solomon's priorities were good, and the Lord blessed his request with much more than he asked for.*

Matthew 6:19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust corrupts, and where thieves break through and steal: 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrupts, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. 24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. 25 Therefore I say unto you, "Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? 26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they? 27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? 28 And why do you take thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? Or,

Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. 34 Take therefore no thought for tomorrow: for tomorrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof.

We **cannot** serve two masters, not, don't serve two masters -- like a commandment. Jesus here is stating that it is an impossibility to have two masters. In reality, we can follow, serve, obey only one master. Eventually, one master is going to ask you to do something that contradicts the other. And, it is an oxymoron to say, "No, Lord?! The word Lord or Master implies someone you will obey without question.

Each one of us has a limited amount of time, money, thoughts, and energy. We must **choose** how to spend these valuable resources. They will get spent, rather wasted, if we don't actively make correct choices.

What is eternal, what lasts forever? **Word** Is. 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades: but the word of our God shall stand forever. **Love** 1 Cor. 13:8 Love never fails. **People** Rev 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake, which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death. **God** Dt. 33:27a The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Let's spend ourselves on what will last forever. The more we pour out our time, money and energy on the eternal, fulfilling God's priorities, the better off we will be. Like Solomon, we will have pursued what is right.

Something I receive in an email illustrates this perfectly:

The Big Rocks and The Jar

A high school science teacher wanted to demonstrate a concept to his students. He takes a large-mouth jar and places several large rocks in it. He then asks the class, "Is it full?"

"Unanimously, the class reply, "Yes!"

The teacher then takes a bucket of gravel and pours it into the jar. The small rocks settle into the spaces between the big rocks.

He then asks the class, "Is it full?"

This time there are some students holding back, but most reply, "Yes!"

The teacher then produces a large can of sand and proceeds to pour it into the jar. The sand fills up the spaces between the gravel.

For the third time, the teacher asks, "Is it full?"

"Now most of the students are wary of answering, but again, many reply, "Yes!"

Then the teacher brings out a pitcher of water and pours it into the jar. The water saturates the sand. At this point the teacher asks the class, "What is the point of this demonstration?"

One bright young student raises his hand and then responds, "No matter how full one's schedule is in life, he can always squeeze in more things!"

"No," replies the teacher, "The point is that unless you first place the big rocks into the jar, you are never going to get them in. The big rocks are the important things in your life ...your family, your friends, your personal growth. If you fill your life with small things, as demonstrated by the gravel, the sand, and the water...you will never have the time for the important things.

So, what are the "Big Rocks" in your life? Carefully select your big rocks, because there is only so much room for them. You can't have as many as you want! The other stuff of life will fill in the cracks.

Author Unknown

Check out the words used in the following verses. They are active, passionate words, full of pathos. This is what is required to reach any goal before us, especially if we want eternal things as our objective. Once we choose a goal, no matter what it is, to reach it, it will take all we have. God and His Kingdom are no different.

Seeking:

Dt. 13.4 You shall **walk after** the Lord your God and **fear** Him, and **keep** His commandments and **obey** His voice; you shall **serve** Him and **hold fast** to Him.

Josh. 22.5 But take **careful heed** to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, to love the Lord your God, to **walk in all** His ways, to keep His commandments, to **hold fast** to Him, and to **serve** Him **with all your heart and with all your soul.**"

Ps. 27.4 **One thing** I have desired of the Lord, that will I **seek**: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple. 8 When You said, "**Seek** My face," My heart said to You, "Your face, Lord, I will **seek.**"

Ps 17.15 As for me, **I will see Your face** in righteousness; **I shall be satisfied** when I awake in Your likeness

Is. 26:9 With my soul have I desired you **in the night**; yes, with my spirit within me **will I seek you early**: for when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

Ps. 145.19 He will **fulfill the desire** of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and

save them

Rom. 6.4 Therefore we were **buried** with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should **walk in newness of life**. 5 For if we have been united together in the **likeness of His death**, certainly we also shall be in the **likeness of His resurrection**, 6 knowing this, that our old man was **crucified with Him**, that the **body of sin might be done away with**, that we should **no longer be slaves of sin**. 7 For he who has **died has been freed from sin**. 8 Now if we **died with Christ**, we believe that we shall also **live with Him**, 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be **dead indeed to sin, but alive to God** in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 Therefore **do not let sin reign** in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And **do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness** to sin, but **present yourselves to God** as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For **sin shall not have dominion** over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

Rom. 8.6 For to be **carnally minded is death**, but to be **spiritually minded is life and peace**. 7 Because the carnal mind is **enmity against God**; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

Phil. 3.12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I **press on**, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, **forgetting** those things which are behind and **reaching forward** to those things which are ahead, 14 I **press toward the goal** for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Col. 3.1 If then you were raised with Christ, **seek** those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 **Set your mind** on things above, not on things on the earth. 8 But now you yourselves are to **put off** all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. 10 and have **put on** the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, 12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, **put on** tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, **do all** in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. 23 And whatever you do, **do it heartily**, as to the Lord and not to men.

1 Tim. 4.14 **Do not neglect** the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. 15 **Meditate** on these things; **give yourself entirely to them**, that your progress may be evident to all. 16 **Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine**. **Continue** in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

1 Tim. 6.11 But you, O man of God, **flee** these things and **pursue** righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. 12 **Fight the good fight** of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

1 Thess. 4.1 Finally then, brethren, we **urge and exhort** in the Lord Jesus that you should

abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; 10 and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we **urge** you, brethren, that you **increase more and more**.

Heb. 10.22 let us **draw near** with a **true heart** in **full assurance** of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us **hold fast** the confession of our hope **without wavering**, for He who promised is faithful. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has **trampled** the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a **common thing**, and **insulted** the Spirit of grace? 35 Therefore do not **cast away your confidence**, which has great reward. 36 For you have need of **endurance**, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 39 But we are not of those who **draw back** to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Heb.12.1Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us **lay aside** every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us **run with endurance** the race that is set before us, 2 **looking** unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For **consider** Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 4 You have not yet **resisted** to bloodshed, **striving** against sin.

To seek means: require, request, seek -- (out, to find, to secure, the face, with care, in prayer and worship, with application, early, diligently, earnestly, in order to find, for, [in order to find out] by thinking, meditating, reasoning, to inquire into, after) ask, begging, desire, get, inquisition, procure, exact, request, demand, search, to resort to, frequent (a place), (tread a place), to consult, to investigate, to practice, study, follow, consult, look early or diligently for, aim at, strive after, to crave, scrutinize.

Let's pursue the things of God like we would pursue things in the world. Think of how someone driven to obtain fame, fortune, power, drugs or alcohol acts, what their priorities are. We should be no different toward the things of God. In reality, because they are infinitely more valuable, we should pursue them much more than the world does its things.

Thinking about someone addicted to a substance, what do they do? They:

1. Keep it close by.
2. Partake often.
3. Know where their sources are.
4. Do whatever it takes to have plenty.

We should do no less in striving after the priorities God gives us and that we have embraced.

Hungering and Thirsting:

Ps. 42.1 As the deer **pants** for the water brooks, So **pants** my soul for You, O God. 2 My

soul **thirsts** for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? 3 My **tears** have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, "Where is your God?"

Ps. 63.1 O God, You are my God; **Early** will I **seek** You; My soul **thirsts** for You; My flesh **longs** for You In a **dry and thirsty land where there is no water**. 2 So I have **looked** for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory.

Ps. 107.9 For He **satisfies the longing soul**, and **fills the hungry soul with goodness**.

Is 41.17 "The **poor and needy seek water**, but there is none, their **tongues fail** for thirst. I, the Lord, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.

Is 44.3 For I will **pour water** on him who is **thirsty**, and **floods** on the **dry ground**; I will **pour My Spirit** on your descendants, and **My blessing** on your offspring.

Is 55.1 "Ho! Everyone who **thirsts**, Come to the waters; And you who have **no money**, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Amos 8.11 "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord God, "That **I will send a famine** on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of **hearing the words of the Lord**."

Luke 1.53 He has **filled the hungry with good things**, and **the rich He has sent away empty**.

Lk. 9.23 Then He said to them all, "If anyone **desires** to come after Me, let him **deny** himself, and **take up his cross daily**, and **follow** Me. 24 For whoever **desires** to save his life will lose it, but whoever **loses** his life for My sake will **save** it. 25 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? 26 For whoever is **ashamed** of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.

Lk. 14.26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not **hate** his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and **his own life** also, he **cannot** be My disciple. 27 And whoever does not **bear his cross and come after Me** cannot be My disciple. 33 So likewise, whoever of you **does not forsake all that he has cannot** be My disciple.

Mt. 5.6 Blessed are those who **hunger and thirst** for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

John 4.14 But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will **never thirst**. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." 34 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.

John 6.27 **Do not labor** for the food which perishes, but for the food which **endures to everlasting life**, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him."

John 7:37 In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and **cried**, saying, **If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.** 38 He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, **out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.** 39 (But this he spoke of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)

Do you hunger after God like someone who hasn't eaten for weeks? Are you thirsty for His presence like someone who has hiked miles in the desert without fluids? Do you long and yearn for Him like the scriptures declare? Me either, but I want to! What do we do about it?

1. Don't fill up on other things.
2. Ask for it.
3. Hang out with folks who are not satisfied with their Christian life.
4. Have people who are hungry for God pray for us.

Some definitions of hunger and thirst... Strong's: to suffer want, to be needy, to crave ardently, to seek with eager desire and thirst painfully feel their want of, and eagerly long for, those things by which the soul is refreshed, supported, strengthened. From Webster's: crave vehemently, eager, avid, strongly motivated, barren, famished, peckish, ravenous, starved, rapacious, voracious, urgent need, uneasy sensation or a weakened condition occasioned by the lack of food, eager desire, long, ache, hanker, lust, pine, sigh, yearn, yen, ardent desire, dehydrated, parched, itch, dry, anxious, breathless, impatient, keen, wild, not full, glutted, gorged, sated, satiated.

Some questions to ponder:

1. Have you ever been truly hungry or thirsty in the natural, or known someone who has? What was it like?
2. What are you hungry and thirsty for?
3. How deep is your hunger and thirst?
4. Is hunger or thirst a matter of choice?
5. Do we have any control over it?
6. If so, how?
7. How does smell or taste affect hunger? How can we apply this to our Christian walk?
8. How does sickness affect hunger? How does this apply to us?
9. How about fasting? Apply this to your walk with God.
10. Have you ever woke up because of hunger or thirst?

11. How do you satisfy or quench hunger or thirst?

How does hunger and thirst rearrange your priorities?

Loving and Longing for:

Ps. 84.2 My soul **longs**, yes, even **faints** For the courts of the Lord; My **heart and my flesh cry out** for the living God. 4 Blessed are they that dwell in your house: **they will be still praising you**. Selah. 5 Blessed is the man whose strength is in you; **in whose heart** are the ways of them. 6 Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also fills the pools. 7 They go from strength to strength, **every one** of them in Zion appears before God. 8 O LORD God of hosts, **hear my prayer: give ear**, O God of Jacob. Selah. 10 **For a day in your courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.** 11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: **no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.** 12 O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusts in you.

Song of Sol. 1.4 Draw me away! We will **run** after you!

Psa 87:5-7 But of Zion it shall be said, "This one and that one were born in her"; And the Most High Himself will establish her. The LORD will count when He registers the peoples, "This one was born there." Selah. Then those who sing as well as those who play the flutes shall say, "**All my springs of joy are in you.**"

Ps. 119.20 My **soul breaks with longing for Your judgments at all times.**

Ps 37.4 **Delight yourself also in the Lord**, and He shall give you the desires of your heart

Rom. 12.9 **Abhor** what is evil. **Cling** to what is good.

2 Cor. 5.14 For the love of Christ **compels** us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died.

Phil. 1:9 And this I pray, that your **love may abound yet more and more** in knowledge and *in* all judgment; 10 That you may **approve things that are excellent**; that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.

Col. 1.10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, **fully pleasing** Him, being **fruitful in every good work** and **increasing** in the knowledge of God.

Jam. 4.4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that **friendship** with the world is **enmity** with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a **friend** of the world makes himself an **enemy** of God.

1 Jn. 2.15 **Do not love** the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the

world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Rev. 2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against you, because you have **left your first love**. 5 Remember therefore from whence you art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto you quickly, and will remove your candlestick out of his place, except you repent. *The church in Ephesus left their first love. This is not an emotion that is waning, this is an act of the will! They had their act together doctrinally, but their heart was not where God wanted it to be! Leaving first love implies an act of the will, not just an accident. Have we left it behind, choosing something in its place?*

Rev. 3:15 "I know your works, that you are **neither cold nor hot**. I could wish you were **cold or hot**. 16 So then, because you are **lukewarm**, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that you art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: 18 I counsel you to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and that the shame of your nakedness does not appear; and anoint your eyes with eyesalve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. 20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

(This next part is borrowed from Bill Gothard.) Think about your life with God right now. How would you rate yourself, your love and your works for Him, from 1-9.

Freezing, ice cold -- 1

Cold -- 2

Chilly -- 3

Cool -- 4

Neutral -- 5

Warm -- 6

Heating up -- 7

Red Hot -- 8

White Hot -- 9

God wants us to be a 1 or a 9. I'm neither one, how about you? What can we do to get there? This is not an option, unless we want to be rejected into God's 'barf bag'!!!

Part of the clue to this whole process is realizing how desperate we truly are for God's presence and His work in our lives. (Like what God told the church in Laodecia.) I have come to realize that if I don't get close communion with God each day, many times a day, I will soon be in bad shape. I am a mess. Without God, I would be on the streets, in jail or dead. Honestly. I know this to be true. This is an addiction I need.

Again – how do we get here? We need to realize our need. We must ask for it. "More,

Lord", I need you, Lord" Hanging out with those who are seeking the same thing can help. Get prayer, i.e. hands laid on by those same folks will also help. Mostly, we need to recognize our desperation and cry out to God for His mercy, increased hunger and thirst, and increased capacity for Him.

To sum up, we need to carefully choose what we are going to spend ourselves on in this life. If not, we may get what we really **don't** want. After we choose those priorities, we need to go after them with all our heart, soul, life and strength. Again, if we don't pursue them with reckless abandon, **we may not get them at all.**

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