

**Know
What
You
Believe**

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Introduction

I was talking to a young man. He grew up in church, but he is not going now. He is having a tough time. He hasn't lived what he believed, and his life is a mess because of it. He tries to talk himself into thinking that there is nothing to serving God. He looks at his life and he knows he is wrong. Trouble is, he can't fix his life. Only God can. He wants to believe, but even though he grew up in church, he really doesn't know what he believes. That's what got him in the mess he's in. His only hope to fix his life is to believe. To do that he has to know what he believes and act on that faith.

I know an older couple whose lives are filled with fear. (Matter of fact, I know bunches of people like that, young and old.) They worry about everything. It has been so long since they had peace of mind that they don't even know what that really means. Not only do they worry about what is going on in the world, but they also worry about what they are going through physically. They worry most of all about dying. They know their time can't be too far away because of their age, and that scares the life out of them. Sad to say, even though they have spent most of their life in church, they have no idea what they believe. They are not sure of their relationship with God. They don't believe that you can have a relationship with God, so He isn't there to help them in this hard time of their lives. They don't realize it, but because of their tradition of faith, they have pushed God away. They don't have faith and they don't know what they believe.

I know a young couple who is going through a rough time. He is out of work. They struggle every day taking one day at a time. Until a little while ago, he was drinking and his life was a total wreck. His family fell apart. He turned back to the Lord, and he is back in church. His family is back together. Even though things are going bad, every time he talks about the Lord, his face lights up. They have come really close to losing it all, but day by day, miracle by miracle, things are holding together. It is all going to be all right, and he knows it. He worries some, but when he does he just remembers what all the Lord has done for him. He knows what he believes.

I know a couple who are straddling the fence. They know about God. One of them used to preach. They are living in sin, doing a bunch of things that are messing up their lives majorly. They make excuses for why they live the way they do. They are miserable. Because they are miserable they are doing drugs and drinking. They talk about God. They believe in Him, but they aren't acting on what they know. They don't want to make a commitment to Him. He can't help them change their lives because they won't obey Him. When you talk to them just a couple of minutes, you walk away shaking your head after they tell you all their emotional and mental problems. They are a wreck waiting to happen. They don't really in their heart know what they believe.

I know some people, lots of them in fact, who know that the Lord is coming back. They aren't doing a thing about it. They don't want to commit to God, and they don't want to do things His way. Their lives are a mess because of that. They sit around partying and talk about how they know He is coming back. They excuse everything they do. They are scared to death about the Lord coming back and they are afraid that they will get left behind, but they won't admit it to themselves or to anybody around them. They don't really know how to fix their lives and come to God. They don't know what they believe.

I know some young people that love to talk about the Lord coming back. They are tired of how things are in the world, and they know the only hope that the world has to get any better is when He comes back. With joy they wait for Him. They know what they believe.

I know a couple who are facing one of the greatest trials in their lives. He was in a serious accident. He won't be able to work for months. Bills are piling in. They worry some about that, but mainly they are praising God for sparing his life through what sinners even call a miracle. Instead of the stress of the situation tearing them apart, they have their hand in each other's hand and the other in the Lord's hands trusting Him to see them through. They know what they believe.

Do you know what you believe? What is your life like? Is it like those people whose lives are filled with fear and problems because you don't know what you believe? Is your life filled with worry because you don't know what you believe? Is your life a mess because, even though you believe, you aren't committing to God and acting on what you believe? If there has ever been a time when people need to know what they believe and act on it, that time is now. The only way that we can make it through is to know that we know that we know what we believe. The Bible, in Matthew 7:24-27 talks about a man that built his house on the sand. It also talks about a man who built his house on the rock. Jesus told the story. "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him to a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house: and it fell: and great was the fall of it." What was the difference between the two men? One heard the words and acted on it and the other didn't. One watched his life fall apart, while the other praised God for keeping his life together. Which one are you? Do you know what you believe? Is it important that you do? Keep reading to find out how to know what you believe, and what that can mean to your life.

Chapter 1.

Who Do I Believe In and Why?

People constantly ask me how I know that Christianity is real and all other religions false. They ask me how do I know what to believe, who do I believe and why. Christianity is the only religion that claims that the main person their religion is founded on died, rose from the dead, and can live in your heart, changing you from the inside out. I mean after all, isn't that kind of far out. No wonder they can't say that. If it isn't true, then that is a way out thing to claim. Why can't they claim it? Because their god isn't real and ours is. Because other religions are based on other gods. Their god couldn't raise their main figure from the dead because their god isn't real. If their god is really a god, then he could do that easily, and why didn't he? If I am going to dedicate my life to God, then I want to serve one who is real, one that can take care of me, and one that loved me enough to send His own Son to die for my sins. I also want to serve one who is able to come into my heart to help me to live. Don't give me a cheap imitation. How do we know that the God of the Bible is the right one to believe in and serve? Because when you get to know Him, when you ask Him into your heart, He will prove His Word to be true every day of your life. By the way, you hear people say all the time that there is only one God. The Moslems worship Him in their way, the Christians worship Him in their way, and the Indian religions worship Him in their way. Each religion worships Him in a different way. That is such a lie. The God of Christianity is a God of love. The God of the Moslems is not. Is God schizophrenic, a split personality? The God of Christianity requires holy living. Does the God of these other religions? Does the God of each religion require of their people the same things? If He doesn't then He is a weirdo that can't make up His mind. That isn't the kind of God that I serve. You can get to know God; you can have a relationship with Him that is real. He will guide you into truth. The truth is the truth, and there is only one truth. That is the nature of the truth. I want to serve a God that is true, not a schizophrenic liar. How can everybody that has a totally different belief be serving the same God that is guiding them into truth?

Christianity is the only religion in the world that has historic proof that the main person in their religion was raised from the dead. How could a religion say this if it wasn't true? There had to be proof that it was true before something so out of the ordinary could be accepted as the truth. To start with, Jesus appeared to over 500 people after He rose from the dead. He spent 40 days on the earth, teaching people after He came back from the dead. His death was on public record. Hundreds saw Him die. When He came back from the dead you can be sure it caused a stir. It was talked about all over for years. It was written down and recorded as historical fact, not only in the Bible, but also in lots of other historical documents. That is the key thing that Christianity is based on. Jesus. Jesus said about himself in John 14:6, "...I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Without believing in Jesus, and without

accepting Him as the Son of God, and asking Him into your heart, there is no way that you can be saved. That is what salvation is all about. We'll talk more later about what it means to be saved.

How do you get to know God? How do you find out what is true and what you believe in? You can get to know God through His Word, the Bible. Sure you can read the Koran, but will that introduce you to the one true God? You can read a lot of things, but will that tell you what the one true God is like?

How do you know that the Bible is true? First, let's read what the Bible has to say about itself:

Psalm 119:89 says, "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." From the beginning of time to the end of time, God's Word will stand.

I Peter 1:25 tells us, "But the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

Jesus said this about the Bible in Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

Psalm 119:105 tells us, "Thy word is a lamp unto feet, and a light unto my path."

Psalm 119:47-48 says, "And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved: and I will meditate in thy statutes."

The main reason why the Bible was written is found in John 20:31, "But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

God's Word will last forever, even though from the beginning of time there has been a battle against it. Even though many have tried through time to destroy it, it still stands as a number one best seller. Why? Because God said in His Word that it would. So it is and so it has been. What other book comes with that kind of guarantee? Why can the Bible make the kind of promises that it does? Can another book say what this book says about itself? What makes the Bible different from other books? The main difference has to do with its author. The Bible was written over a 1,500 year span for over 40 generations by over 40 authors from every walk of life. Yet every part of it from start to finish agrees. All of the separate parts of it that were written by all those authors agree just as if one author had written it. It is written about controversial issues. Churches today can't even agree on the issues discussed in the Bible. Yet all of those authors from all those thousands of years agreed. The neat thing about this is that most of them didn't

have the rest of the Bible to read before they wrote their part. The Bible as the whole book that it is today didn't come about until most of the different authors wrote their separate parts. Then it was put together later. So each author wasn't looking at what others had written and adding to it. How could it be that their part agreed with what was already written?

Even though there were several men who helped write the Bible, God is the author. That is why throughout the Bible it is referred to as being God's Word. The book of Jeremiah is a part of the Old Testament. Jeremiah 36:2 tells how the Bible was written. In this verse God tells Jeremiah to get a scroll and write down the words that God spoke to him. That is how it was written. God told people what to write, and they wrote it. Ezekiel 1:3 tells how the book of Ezekiel was written. "The Word of God came expressly unto Ezekiel, the priest...and the hand of the Lord was there upon him." Acts 1:16 tells us about something that happened in Acts, "Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus." The Holy Ghost will speak through and to people. In II Peter 1:21 we read, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." God's Spirit told people what to write and they did. That is why the Bible is such a different book.

I've had young people ask me this. Anyone can say that God told them to write something, and then just write anything. How do we know that this is what happened? The hundreds of prophecies that are in the Bible prove that God's Spirit led people what to write in the Bible. What are prophecies? Prophecies were written about an event before it happened. They tell that something is going to happen sometimes hundreds of years before it happens. There are hundreds of prophecies in the Bible. There are over 300 prophecies that are just about Jesus, His life on earth and how He died. We can even read in the Bible about things that are happening today. How can this be so? God knows everything. Time means nothing to God. He is so big that in the past He could see the future. He knows your future as well as He knows the day you were born. He knows all the details about you. He even knows how many hairs are on your head. Matthew 10:30 says, "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." He is different than us. In Isaiah 55:9, God tells us, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Time, future or past, is all the same to God. He knows everything. So thousands of years ago He was able to tell the Bible's writers what is going to happen even today.

Let's talk about some of the prophecies in the Bible that were written about Jesus. Here are only a few of them. Keep in mind that these verses were written sometimes hundreds of years before Jesus was even born. Micah 5:2 said that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. We read in the Christmas story that this was so and how that came about. I am sure that the king that declared that they should

go to their families' birth city to be taxed didn't read the scriptures and decide to make this decree so that this Jesus would be born in Bethlehem and make this true. Isaiah 50:6 says that they would spit on Jesus and pluck his hair. We read in Mark, written hundreds of years later, that is what happened. Isaiah 53:5 tells us that Jesus would have stripes on his back. Hundreds of years after that was written the Roman soldiers whipped Jesus with a whip leaving stripes on His back. Psalms 69:21 says that they would give Jesus vinegar to drink when He was on the cross. We read in the book of John that they did. In Psalms 34:20 it says that not any of Jesus' bones would be broken. At the time when Jesus was crucified, it was customary for the Romans to break the legs of those who were hanging on the cross. The Bible says in John that the soldiers didn't break Jesus' legs. These are only a few of the prophecies about Jesus in the Bible that came to pass. Remember, there were over three hundreds prophecies in the Bible concerning Jesus and all of them were fulfilled.

The prophecies that were written about Jesus aren't the only prophecies in the Bible. There were prophecies about who would be King, which country would be the most powerful, which countries would fall, which countries would try to overthrow other countries, cities that would be destroyed, and much more. There are even prophecies about certain things that are happening overseas and to America today that were written about in the Bible. Through all this we can see that it is easy to know that the Bible was written because God told the people what to write. How else could all these prophecies have been true?

I can tell you about how delicious strawberry banana cream pie is, but if you haven't tried it, you really won't know. I can tell you how much the Bible can help you, but if you never read it, you will never know. I can tell you about all the exciting things you can read there, but if you never read it, you won't ever find out. A student at our Christian school was telling me that he couldn't understand the Bible at all when he read it. He kept trying. Then one day he came and told me that he had started being able to understand it. It started making sense to him. What had happened to make things change? He had in the meantime gotten saved. He had asked Jesus to come into his heart. The Holy Spirit came into the boy's heart. The One who wrote the book had come into his heart and mind. Who better can explain what a book means than the author? The Bible tells us that the Spirit of God can explain what the Bible is saying. He is your teacher. That is another way we know that Christianity is the one true religion, because we can experience salvation. Coming up we'll talk about what it means to be saved.

Chapter 2.

What Does It Mean To Be Saved?

What does it mean to be saved? When you get saved, you ask Jesus into your heart. He really comes in. He makes a change when He comes in. You know that He is real because He is in your heart. What other religion can say that the main person their religion was based on came back from the dead, still lives, and can come into your heart today? If you have asked Jesus to come into your heart, if you have been saved, then you know that this is true. It really does happen. I know Jesus is alive because He is inside of me. I know him personally. I walk with Him every day. I am not worshipping a memory of some dead guy. I am serving a living, loving Savior who died because He loves me, who came back from the dead, and now lives inside of me. He helps me to do what I am supposed to do because He is in my heart. That is certainly proof enough for me. I know that Jesus rose from the dead. He is my best friend today. I know Him. He is not just a figment of my imagination. I have seen evidence of His presence in my life for over 30 years.

We've already talked about how we can get to know God through the Bible, God's Word. We can also get to know God through being around other people that know Him and through listening to them talk about Him. The most important way to get to know Him is to get to know Him personally. We already talked about God as being the author of the Bible. I'll give you an example. Let's say you read a book by a famous author. The book was an autobiography, a book that the author wrote about his own life. You would know a little about him, whatever you could learn about what kind of person he was by reading that one book. Then let's suppose you talked to several people who knew this author. Maybe some of them knew him really well. Some of them might just say that they knew him well, but they really didn't, they just acted like they did. You would start to know this author even more through them, but you wouldn't really know what he was like until you met him yourself. Then let's say you finally got to meet him for yourself. At first you might just casually meet him. Then maybe as time went on you spent more time with him. As time went on maybe you got to be close friends. Then you really could say that you knew that author for yourself. Getting to know God and Jesus is a lot like that. At first we read about them in the Bible. Then we hear about them from other people. It might be preachers, or Sunday school teachers. It might be through a song on a gospel radio station. Then God begins to deal with your heart. Then you open up your heart and let Him into your heart, mind, and soul. As time goes on you get to know Him more. You grow closer to Him. A relationship is not made over night. A close relationship with someone doesn't happen in an instant. Good friendships, good relationships, take time to build. You may not know those friends that you have only just met. (Just a note here, before you become close friends with someone, take time to get to know them.) When you build a relationship with God it is the

same way; the longer you know Him, the better you get to know Him. His is a friendship that you can trust never to let you down.

God says in His Word that if we seek Him we will find Him, that is if we seek Him with all of our heart. David told his son, Solomon, in I Chronicles 28:9, "And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever." In this verse David is teaching his son, Solomon, how to find a relationship with God. David told his son that if he would seek God with all of his heart, then God would find him. Proverbs 8:17 tells us something that God says, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me." If you seek God He will find you. Isaiah 55:6 says, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near." If God starts dealing with your heart to give your heart and your life to Him, answer Him while He is dealing with you. Jeremiah 29:13 tells us that we are to seek Him with all our heart. We need to seek for Him with a made up mind that we want to serve Him. When we seek Him, the Bible promises that we will find Him.

When God deals with your heart, you will know. He will convict you. He will lead you to repentance. I was talking with someone who told me they didn't like to go this certain church because every time they went there, their chest hurt and they felt like they wanted to cry. The devil was trying to convince them that something was wrong with that church. What was happening is that God's Spirit was convicting that person. They just needed to go to the altar and repent of their sins and ask Jesus into their heart. It is a wonderful thing when this happens. When God deals with our hearts, it is important never to turn Him away. Respect this. Act on it. Repent and get saved. When we repent that means that we feel sorry for what we have done wrong. We admit it all. We ask God to forgive us. We do this when we get saved. We have to do this after we get saved too. We do this every time we sin. Jeremiah 31:19 says, "Surely after that I was turned. I repented: and after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." Repenting means to be that sorry. Then when we do, we are ashamed for having done wrong. That is repentance. Then God forgives us and starts us over. He makes us new. It is a wonderful thing to be forgiven. We become new in Christ. Old things pass away and He makes us new. We don't have to feel bad any longer for the wrong that we've done. Jesus shed His blood so that we could be forgiven. He died and took the punishment for our sins so that we could be forgiven. We don't have to carry the load of our sin any longer. Not only does God forgive us, but we can also forgive ourselves. If we aren't willing to see that we are doing wrong and admit that we are doing wrong, we will never know God and we won't know His forgiveness.

There are a lot of churches today that teach that you shouldn't feel sorry for what you do, that God won't make you feel uncomfortable by convicting you for what you are doing wrong. We live in a world of spoiled children that never grew up. When I was growing up, my mother made sure that she taught us right from wrong. Today's parents are too busy with their own lives and world to discipline their children. We were an important part of my Mom's world. You might say that she focused on her children. She knew that there was a wrong and there was a right, and she knew that if she didn't teach the difference to us she would grieve when we grew up making wrong choices that tore our lives, our hearts and minds, into. Believe you me it was a constant battle with me. I was the hardheaded one who wanted my own way. I couldn't see why I couldn't get by with doing what I wanted to get by with. After all it was my life, why couldn't I make the choices as to what I wanted to do? In my mind she was just hampering my creativity. Buddy, she used some unconventional methods to change the direction of how I thought and acted. But I grew up knowing right from wrong. I had instilled in me the habit of doing what was right, and the habit of doing my best. I did get off in the wrong path for a short time in my life, but what my Mother instilled in me never left me. It held me. If I would not have come back to the right, I would be dead today. I can say that without a doubt. I see parents today who let their kids by with anything. They are too busy to stand toe to toe with them, too afraid of hampering their creativity to discipline them in a way that changes their direction and put what is right into the fiber of their being. Parents come to me and say, "I need your help. I need you to talk to my child. They are heading in a wrong direction and I can't get them to listen to me. I can't get them to turn around. Please help me." They have seen too late that their child raising methods didn't work. They are beginning to weep and there will be more tears later. I do what I can and sometimes through the grace and help of God kids turn around. But sometimes it is just too late. If you can't get hold of your own kids then who can?

OK enough meddling. Hey, calm down and hold on. There really is a purpose in this discussion that has to do with the topic that we were on. We were discussing how some churches teach that God is a loving God, that He doesn't convict us of our sins. They say that God doesn't want to make us uncomfortable for the wrong that we do. They say that no matter what we do, it is fine, because God won't hamper our creativity. Sound familiar. God is not like human parents. He will not have any regrets that come from watching us destroy our lives with sin because He has failed to show us the right way, or because He has failed to instill in us what is right. He will have no regrets because we didn't know that we were on the path to destruction by what we were doing and He stepped aside and didn't let us know. Conviction is precious. Because God makes us uncomfortable, we will avoid traps in our life that will destroy us. Yes, there is a definite right and a definite wrong. If we do wrong continually we will be destroyed. Ask the young mothers whose lives are tilted because of sin. Ask the alcoholics that started drinking in their teens, who are watching their own children be destroyed with

alcohol. We could go on and on but won't. Thank God that He convicts us of our sin and shows us when we do wrong. Then He forgives us, starts us over, and puts His Spirit in our heart to help us to do right.

Getting saved, asking Jesus to forgive you and asking Him to come into your heart is the first step to take in getting to know God. When we ask Jesus to come into our heart, He does through His Spirit. He comes into your heart and takes up residence there. How can He do that? Our hearts are made like a container to hold the Spirit of God. That is why we feel so empty if we don't have Him in our hearts. Jesus explained to someone who asked Him what it meant to be saved, and He explained it this way. The wind blows everywhere. If you open your window, and I open my window all the way across town, the wind can blow into both windows at the same time. God's Spirit is like the wind. If we open our heart, he can move into our hearts and live, in all of us at the same time. God will come into your heart if you ask Him to. When that happens, you will know that He has come in, because there will be a change in how you feel and how you think. He will help you to change how you live. There will definitely be a difference in you. Getting saved means that you repent of your sin, and you ask Jesus to come into your heart and He does. Well, if it is that easy, how come there are people who say that they have been saved, but they are not living like they have been? If it is that easy, how come you know people who at one time were in church serving God, but now they aren't? Salvation is a gift. What we do with that gift once we receive it is up to us. We can allow it to change us, or we can go our way and reject Him from working in our heart and lives. That choice from that point on is ours.

What are we saved from when we are saved? We are saved from spending eternity in hell. But there is a lot more. We are saved from a lot of things. One thing that we are saved from is loneliness. Loneliness drives a lot of young people into doing stupid things just to have friends. Have you ever been there? Loneliness drives us into doing anything just so we can fit into a crowd. Who cares what the crowd is doing, just as long as we fit in. When I first got saved, one of the things that I noticed right away was that my loneliness was gone. God is the best friend you can ever have. He is always there. He knows you better than anyone else can, and loves you like you are. He sees all your weaknesses and still loves you. The Bible says that we are precious to Him. We are loved. Jeremiah 31:3 says, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." God loves you with an everlasting love. He will never let you down. God's love is the reason why we can be saved in the first place. We can be saved because God sent His son to die for our sins. John 3:16 tells us, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." We had to be forgiven to be saved. Part of what we are saved from is our sin, our wrong, our messes that we make in our lives when we don't do right. We know what a good feeling it is to be forgiven. Some times we

still do wrong even after we give our heart to the Lord. The Bible says that He grieves over our wrongdoing. God convicts us, and when we repent and turn from that sin He forgives us. But He doesn't leave us there. When we read the Bible He strengthens us, and His Spirit living in us helps us. Step by step, through that process, we overcome what causes us to sin.

Before we get saved, God starts dealing with our heart. What does that mean? He starts showing us that He is real. He starts showing us that we are doing wrong. The Bible says that we are all so bad that we really can't naturally by ourselves do anything good. Just naturally, on our own, if God doesn't show us what is right and what is wrong, then we can't know it on our own. It isn't in our nature to know the difference. It is our nature to want it our way. It is our nature to make excuses for the wrong we do so that we can keep on doing it. Doing things our way won't give us a peaceful victorious life on earth, and it certainly won't lead us to heaven. God shows us what is wrong when He convicts us. Then He starts leading us to give our heart and our life to Him. We start to feel his love. Somebody will say something about Him, and we start to feel lonely for Him. We start to want to have His help in our lives. Then we might be at church or talking to one of His children, or just lying by ourselves in bed at night and it happens. We start to feel God's presence. We feel His love just like He is there wrapping His arms around us. Nobody has to tell us He is real because we feel Him there with us. We may start to cry. Our heart hurts because of the wrong that we have done. He is dealing with our heart. We know that He is asking us to make a decision to give our heart and life to Him. We do. We say yes. We pray, "God I give you my heart and life. I ask You to come into my heart. I confess my sin and repent. I am sorry for all I have done wrong. I give my life and my heart to You. Please come into my heart." Our heart breaks because we can feel his love and we are sorry that we ever hurt Him by doing wrong. Then we ask Him to forgive us. Maybe we remember John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." We know He will forgive us if we ask, and we ask. Then we feel a load lift up off us. We know somehow that we have been washed clean from the inside out. We feel His love in a mighty way and we know that we are forgiven. We ask Him to come into our heart, and we know that He does. We feel different. New and changed. We become God's own children. We are special. We fit into a crowd that is the best crowd that anyone could ever belong to, God's family. It doesn't matter after that what anyone thinks about us or says about us. It doesn't change how we feel about ourselves. We are loved. No we aren't perfect. No matter. That doesn't change His love. God's love will love us like we are, but it is a love that will change us. There is a little song that says, "He's still working on me. To make me what I ought to be". That is how we are. We are a work in progress. We can be proud of who we are, even if we know we aren't perfect, because we know that God is working on the things that aren't

perfect. Most of all we have peace with Him, because we know that we have been saved.

God also saves us from ourselves. I was a mess when I came to God. I had been saved when I was in the 6th grade. But when I was in college I left behind everything I had learned about God and headed out to find out what the big, bad world was all about. It didn't take long for me to wreck my life. I was an alcoholic by the time that I was in my 20's. I was a reject from the 60's. I had tried every kind of drugs there was to try. I had done all the sinning there was to do until I was a total wreck. Like I said earlier, I had been saved when I was in the 6th grade. I knew right from wrong. My parents had taught me. I read the Bible when I was young. I went to church. Then one day I decided I was tired of being good. I wanted to know what it was like to be bad. I found out. It only took me a few years to wreck my life to the place that I couldn't fix it. I didn't care because I had messed up for so long that I thought there was no hope for me. I am thankful that God kept me safe and kept me alive because I know that without a doubt if I had died in those days, I would have gone to hell. Then God opened up my eyes so that I could see again. He started dealing with me about coming back home to His love where I belonged. When He saved me, He saved me from myself. You might be like I was. If you have left God and you have paid a price because of that, then don't give up hope. God still loves you. He will take you back home. One of my favorite stories is the Prodigal son. It is a story Jesus told to teach about God's love. A son left home with his inheritance. Partied it all away. Had a big time. Then reality hit. He found that when his money was gone, so were all his friends. He found himself working in a pigpen, feeding the pigs, so hungry that he ate the pig's food. He decided to go back home. He was afraid his father wouldn't welcome him home. As he went toward home, he saw his father, standing on a hill looking for him, where he had been every day since he left. Your heavenly father wants you to come home. When you come, you'll find His love for you just like it was before you left. Come home to His love. That is what I did, and I have never regretted it. God helped me to get my life together. He gave me hope, and saved me from myself.

Some people tell me that they know they are saved because they go to church. The Bible tells us there is only one way to heaven and that is by having a real relationship with God. It is important to go to church. The Bible tells us to do that. It strengthens us. It puts us in the middle of the right crowd, and we need that. But church can't save us. We have to be forgiven, ask Jesus to come into our heart, and serve Him with our whole heart to be saved. Jesus says in John 14:6, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Then in verse 15 He says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." How many people do you know that go to church on Sunday, and go out during the week and act like the devil, cussing, drinking, smoking, partying, and doing whatever. Then they go back to church on Sunday. Do they really know Jesus? Do they really love Him? Are they keeping His

commandments? Are they really saved? Going to church can't save you. It can help keep you, but it can't save you.

Some people say that they have been saved because they have been baptized. You can't be saved just by getting baptized. These are two totally different things. If you could be saved just by getting baptized then you wouldn't need to ask Jesus into your heart, and He wouldn't have had to die on the cross for your sins. Salvation is more than being baptized. You get baptized to show that you have been saved, not because baptism saves you. There is an old saying, if a sinner goes down into the water and doesn't get saved first, he will come up a wet sinner. Water doesn't wash away your sins. The blood of Jesus washes away your sins. When Jesus shed His blood on Calvary, He did that so that He could cover your sins, so that you could be forgiven. He did that for everyone, but not everyone accepts the gift that He gave. If you don't accept that, and ask Jesus to come into your heart, then water won't make a bit of difference. Water can't wash away your sins. What can wash away your sins? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Some people say I'm saved because I don't drink or party. I'm a good person. The Bible tells us that accepting Jesus is the only way to be saved. We can't earn our way to heaven. No matter how hard we try, we can't be good enough. The Bible tells us that our best is just filthy rags in the sight of a holy and perfect God. We can't be perfect and holy. We are saved when we repent and ask His forgiveness. When we ask Him in our heart, then we start to take on His holy nature. That is the only way that we can ever be good enough to get to go to heaven.

The saddest thing that I've heard people say is "I am too young to make that choice. I don't want to decide that right now. There are other things that I want to do. I will put off being saved so that I can do those things." Then something happens and they die and go to hell because they put off the most important decision that they could ever make.

Then there are the people who get saved. They do all the right things to get saved, they are convicted, they repent, they ask Jesus into their heart, then they go out and keep doing the same things that they were doing before they were saved. They don't find a relationship with God that is real. They don't love Him. He isn't their best friend. They are too in love with the world and the crowd to love God enough to give them up. They act one way with the crowd and another with God, but God sees them in both worlds. This world is hard to live in. There is an enemy, the devil, who wants to destroy you and keep you from serving God. There will be people around you who don't know God, who will try to pull you down. Being saved is something we have to live every single day of our lives if we want to stay strong to overcome all this. It isn't like a new suit of clothes that we can put on when we want to, and take it off when we don't want to wear them. It is a change that takes place in our lives for real. It is a heart's commitment to serve someone Who we love with all our hearts. We have to care enough that we want to do what is right because we know that pleases Him. You won't be perfect.

You will mess up. But the Bible tells us that we have an advocate with God, like a lawyer pleading our case. His name is Jesus. Jesus died to forgive us so you can be sure that He will forgive you. If you repent and you ask His forgiveness, He will forgive you. But some people take this way too far. I had one girl tell me, "I can drink, I can smoke, I can do whatever I want to, because I have been saved. Jesus will forgive me" Something is wrong with this kind of thinking. When I think back to my years when I left God, I did just that. I left Him. It is like I moved away from God's love. I moved out of His grace. I no longer obeyed Him, and I didn't care that I didn't. I stopped letting Him convict me. I stopped asking Him to forgive me. I was not forgiven. If I had died then, I would have died in my sin. I know without a shadow of doubt that I would have gone to hell. We have to make up our mind who we want to serve. We can't act like the world and say we are God's children. It doesn't work that way. Revelations 3:15-16 tells us how Jesus feels about people who are neither cold or hot, but they keep things in the middle of the road, trying to have it both ways. He says, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

You can be saved. You can know that you are saved. Some young people tell me that they don't know if they are saved or not. Make up your mind. Commit your heart to the Lord. God will meet you more than halfway. If when you read this chapter you feel Him dealing with your heart, don't turn Him away. If you feel Him talking to you, if you feel His conviction, don't shove it away or ignore it. It is precious. If you haven't been saved, don't ignore that feeling that He is knocking on your heart's door. Open wide your heart. Let Him in. If you have been saved, and you feel His conviction, that feeling that lets you know that you are not where you should be in your relationship with Him, that you are doing things or having attitudes that aren't according to the best that you can be in Him, don't run from Him. Repent. Ask for His forgiveness. Ask Him to help you change through the power of His Spirit that is in your heart. He loves you so much and you need that love more than you'll ever know. Run to Him. I know that He will be there. When you experience salvation, you will know more than ever before what you believe. When you do that, then you will know that you have been saved. When you do that though, the devil will be there to try to talk you out of your salvation. He will lie to you to try to make you think that you really didn't change, nothing really happened. Well, according to God's Word you did what was required, if what you did was heart felt. Then according to the book, you are saved. You then accept God's Word in faith. You then know that you were saved. Yes, you will feel different. But it is based on more than a feeling. It is based on the truth of God's Word.

You can know that you are saved and that you are going to heaven. Asking God to forgive your sins and asking Jesus to come into your heart is how you have that life changing experience of being born again. In II Corinthians 5:17 we read, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed

away; behold all things are become new.” When this happens, you can know that you are saved. You don’t have to think so. You don’t have to hope so. You can know so. God wants His children to know Him in the free pardon of sin. He doesn’t want us to guess we are saved. He doesn’t want us to doubt it. He doesn’t want us to fear that we are not saved. In II Peter 1:10 we read, “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.” God loves us so much that He tells us all through His Word how to live for Him, how to believe in Him, how to work for Him by loving and ministering to others, how to know Him, and how we can be sure that we are saved, and that we are one day going to heaven.

Chapter 3. Faith and Obedience

What is faith? The Bible says in Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” What does that mean? We talked earlier about the wind. We can’t see the wind. But we know that it is real because of what it does. When I have to go out in the field by my house to pick up my front porch rug, then I know that the wind has been blowing. When I have to run around the parking lot grabbing papers that have blown out of my hand I know that the wind is blowing. It would be stupid to say that I don’t believe in the wind because I can’t see it. I can see what it does. Believing in God is that way. When I see people who I love find a new life, a new look, new hope because they have found a relationship with God that is real, then I know God is real. When my mother was healed from lymph cancer, I knew that God was real. Everyday when I see answers to my prayers, I know that God is real. Even though I can’t see Him, I still know that He is real. That is faith. The things that God does is the substance of things that I hope for. That is the evidence of the things that I can’t see. Without faith we can’t even be saved. We have to believe in God and believe in salvation to be saved. Everything that God does for us has to come by faith. If we don’t believe and trust in God then we can’t have a relationship with Him.

How do we get faith? The Bible says this in Romans 10:17, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” When we read God’s Word then we know what we believe. I can tell how often someone reads the Bible by how much faith they have. If they have a lot of doubt and worry, then I know that they aren’t spending much time reading and studying God’s Word and taking it to heart. Without faith we can’t please God. Doubt, fear, and worry are really sin. God is our Father. He loves us. He provides for us. How do you think He feels when you spend more time fretting and worrying about what is going on in your life than you do praising, worshipping, and loving Him. That is another thing that will increase your faith. If you praise the Lord every day for all that He has done for you, you will find out that your worry, anxiety, and fear just fade away in His

presence. Keep your eyes on Jesus, and the things of this world will grow dim in the light of His glory.

Reading God's Word will strengthen your faith. The Bible tells us in Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart: and lean not unto thine own understanding." That is just one of the thousands of promises that you can find in God's Word. Don't worry. Just believe.

Another way to encourage your faith is by going to church. Surrounding yourself by people who believe and hearing the Word of God is important. The Bible tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. It is important that we find a church that believes right. Let God lead you to a church. The worst rule that you can use is whether or not the people are nice. I had to run into a church that didn't believe right. I had to be there for a business reason. That church believes that there is no hell. They preach that you can't be saved, that God's Spirit can't come into your heart to live. They were really nice people. Because they were so nice, even though I knew that what they believed had really messed up some friends of mine, I was tempted to visit a service at that church. Don't let the fact that the people in a church are nice be the guide that determines where you go. We'll talk more about denominations and churches in a chapter that is coming up.

Some people teach that all you have to do to get to heaven is to believe. They teach that everybody that believes gets to go to heaven. That isn't entirely true. The devil believes in God, but we can sure know that he won't get to go to heaven. It takes more than faith. The Bible says in James 2:17-18, "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, thou shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." How do we show our faith? By what we do and how we act and live. We have talked a lot about how some people act one way in church, then live like the devil on Monday. Do they really believe in God? If you believe in God's Word for real, then you won't do the things that aren't pleasing to Him. You won't be on a one-way track to destroy your life by the wrong choices that you make. You won't be sinning your life away. Sin will take you further than you ever want to go. Sin will cost you more than you ever want to pay. Sin will keep you longer than you ever want to stay. Sin destroys people's lives. When God says to stay away from certain things, He means it. If we are determined to wreck our lives by doing those things that He tells us to stay away from, then are we showing that we believe in Him? I have had people tell me, young and old, that they couldn't get saved right now because there were some things that they wanted to do. They still wanted to drink, party, have sex outside marriage, and do the things that the wild crowd does. That is sad. What is even sadder is that those people who are doing all those things tell me that they believe in God. They tell me that they are Christians. I don't believe them. It takes a commitment to have faith. They have to make a commitment to serve God for real. You can't have both worlds. Some of the most miserable people that I know are ones that try to live that way. They have all sorts of mental

and emotional problems. They aren't living in the way that they know they should and it is splitting them in two. They won't have peace until they make up their mind which they want, and live that way. You have to show your faith by your works. Show me your faith by your obedience. Show me that you are God's child by what you do and how you live.

I know someone who is having terrible problems in their life. They go from one mess to another one. They know about God and believe, but they do the opposite of what they are supposed to do according to God's Word. They are almost ready to quit trying. I worry about them trying to commit suicide, they have lost hope so. God can help them if they will just do it His way, but they want their way and won't give in.

I know someone who loves God with all their heart. They have a relationship with God that is real. They are serving God, their wife is, and their children are. There is peace in their home. He makes the right choices. I am sure that there are many times when he's tempted to do wrong things. He knows what that can bring to his life, and won't go there. God's Spirit is a real presence in his home. He knows God's joy. He has learned the value of showing his faith by his works and his obedience. Which of those two people do you want to be like? Which one has a life that you would like to have? Do you want peace, and joy, or do you want turmoil in your life? You can't get by with sin. It doesn't work that way.

Some people teach that no matter what you do you can still go to heaven, even if you never repent, even if you are never sorry for your sins, and you don't change in what you do. We have seen how that is wrong according to God's Word. Some people teach that there are certain things that we can do to get to go to heaven. If we dress a certain way, that is what we need to do to get to heaven. Or if we are good people, that is all we have to do to get to go. If that is true then why would Jesus have had to die? Salvation came because He died for our sins, and we accept that in our lives. Then we change in what we do because of that salvation, because when He comes into our hearts He changes who we are. He changes our want to. We don't want to do wrong things any more. He is inside of us helping us, strengthening us to be able to what is right. That is how we know that we have been saved, because of the change that is in us. Then we change in what we do because we have changed in our heart. Salvation doesn't come because we do certain things. Salvation comes because we believe and receive, and because when we do that, God changes us. We can't work or earn our way to heaven by being good enough. We can't be good enough. The Bible says that our righteousness is as filthy rags in God's sight. The best that we can do isn't good enough to earn salvation.

Some of the saddest people I know are people who don't realize that they can know if they are saved or not. This thing doesn't happen to us by chance. God is smarter than that. Is that how you would run heaven? Would you tell people that there is no way that they can know if they are going to make it to

heaven or not? That just steals away people's hope. It takes away their strength and their vision. Why should they even care about anything if they can't even know that? Why serve God at all? You can know whether or not you can go to heaven. You can know that you have a relationship with Jesus that is real. When you get that relationship, then you know that He will keep you. He will guide you. He will walk with you and help you to do the things that you need to do. He will strengthen you in your heart. His hand will wrap around your hand and He won't let go. The only thing that can take your hand out of His will be you. His Spirit comes into your heart to live so that you can be strengthened. With all that going on, how in the world can you not know whether or not you are going to heaven? You don't have to just hope so. You can know. In I John 5:18 we read, "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. And we know that we are of God..." We can know that we are born of God and that we belong to God. Because of that knowledge, we keep ourselves away from wrong things and sin. Because we do that, the wicked one can't touch us. If we don't have the assurance that all that is true for us, then what is to stop the devil from having his way in our lives destroying us and all we love? We are clean because we allow God's Spirit to clean us up from the inside out. His strength from the inside out helps us to stay away from sin. We are no longer in the devil's territory. We can know that for sure. The Bible constantly mentions assurance, and knowing. There is a verse that says that if we only had hope we would be miserable. But we have more than just hope. We don't hope so. We can know so. We can know where we stand in God. We had better know, and we had better stand there steadfast.

We mentioned that going to church is important to be strengthened. A question that people ask a lot when thinking about choosing a church is how do you know what church to go to? There are so many different denominations and beliefs. Why is it that way and how do we choose a church? Keep reading to find out.

Chapter 4.

Why Denominations, and What Church Is My Church?

I constantly have people ask me why there are so many different denominations and beliefs, and how do we know which ones are right and which are wrong. Some people tell me that they are afraid that they will get in a wrong church that will mislead them, so they have decided not to go to church at all. We have to remember that God set up the church. He commands us in His Word to go to church. He made the church so that we could be strengthened and renewed, so that we could find strength in fellowship with others. We know what a pull peer pressure has on people to get them to do wrong. How much more so does peer pressure work for the good if the crowd is good, and going God's way. The right church will strengthen you. You will learn God's Word from preachers and teachers. You can worship God in a group of people who are worshipping Him. His Holy Ghost moves in the midst of His people when they gather together to worship Him. All those things are what you need to look for in a church. The church will become your family, as all the churches are part of the family of God. It is very hard, if not impossible, to serve God for real if you don't have a church that you are committed to and that you are a part of. Some people tell me that they don't have a certain church, that they just visit around to different churches. It is important to stick with a church. It is important that you make a commitment. If you can't commit to a church, how can you sell out in your commitment to God? Also, if you visit around and hear all the different things that all the different people say, then it can cause you to become confused. It is better to have a home church that you are a part of.

People ask me how do you pick a church and how do you know which ones believe right. There are certain things that you have to believe in. One is that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. Some churches teach that He is only one of the sons of God. Some churches teach that He is not the Son of God but that He was only a good man, a prophet of God. John 3:15 tells us, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Another thing that you have to believe in is that He died on the cross and shed His blood so that you could be forgiven of your sins. That is important. Some churches don't teach this. Some churches act like it is terrible to mention Jesus' death on the cross and He shed His blood for us. It isn't terrible. It is a wonderful thing. Hebrews 9:14 tells us, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" Verse 22 closes with "...without shedding of blood is no remission." Remission means doing away with our sin. If Jesus would not have died on the cross there would be no hope for us to be forgiven, no hope for us to be able to be saved or ask Jesus into our hearts, and no hope of us ever going to heaven.

Some churches don't teach that you can be saved, that you can ask Jesus to come into your heart. They don't teach that the Holy Spirit can come into your heart. Ephesians 5:18 says, "...be filled with the Spirit."

Some churches don't teach that when you are saved you're changed, that you are made new, born again. They don't teach that your life style changes. They believe that you can still go on the same way that you were before. They say that there is no need for you to separate yourself from sin and stop doing wrong things. The Bible is filled with scripture that teach that this is wrong. One such verse is II Corinthians 6:17, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you." Romans 6:13 says, "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."

Some churches teach that there is no right and wrong. Some churches teach that what is wrong for you might not be wrong for me. That what is right for you might not be right for me. That there are no absolutes. That we don't need to make people feel uncomfortable for what they do. They don't believe that the Holy Ghost will convict us by making us feel uncomfortable. They believe that there is no need for us to repent and feel sorry for what we do. That there is no need for us to ask for God to forgive us, because He has already forgiven us. In II Corinthians 7:10 says, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." God's Word makes us uncomfortable. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

Some churches teach that we can't receive anything from God, that God is way above us and we can't reach Him. They teach that the only people who can reach God are certain priests who are the only ones who are holy enough to do this. They teach that we can't ask for forgiveness ourselves, but the priests have to ask for forgiveness for us. In I John 1:9 we read, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." It doesn't say that the priest has to do this. It says "If we confess, He is faithful to forgive."

Some churches teach that there is no hell. Some teach that hell is not a place where people's souls will be in torment in fire for eternity. They teach instead that God is a God of love who wouldn't send people to hell. We know from the Word of God that God created hell for the devil and His angels. We know that God sent His Son to die to stop us from going there, but if we choose to ignore His Spirit, His Word, and all He does to stop us from going there, then that choice is ours. We read in II Thessalonians 1:7-9 says, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and

that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.”

These are some of the main things that we need to find out when we are looking for a church. Find out if they believe in those things that I mentioned above. Most of all ask the Lord to lead you to the church that you need to be a part of. He can lead you. He knows all about you and He knows about the churches around you, and He knows how to lead you in the right direction. Choosing the right church is important.

Everywhere I go I talk to people who have been hurt in a church and they have stopped going to church because of that. That is sad. But no matter how hurt you have been, it doesn't change the fact that you need to go to church. After I talk to these people for a while, it is easy to see that serving God is no longer a priority in their life. It is evident that they have backslid on God because someone in a church hurt them. God didn't do the wrong thing to them that hurt them so. They left serving God and obeying God because some person messed up. They will wind up going to hell and spending eternity there with the person who messed up. Isn't that sad. If you have been hurt in a church, and you are no longer going think about that. Is that person worth you losing your soul over? You need to forgive them and forget about it. God can help you to forgive them. You need to ask God to lead you to the right church and you need to commit yourself to it. People aren't perfect and people make up a church. Believe it or not, you aren't perfect either. You may have hurt people in the past yourself. If you have been hurt get over it and get on with it. Or go to hell carrying that hurt on your back.

People ask me why there are so many denominations and so many beliefs if there is only one Bible. People have made denominations, not God. I remember a church that had a beautiful building and a huge congregation. They had a disagreement over something that they believed. The congregation split into. One half of the church moved out and set up a church in a little building down the road. The church pews in the original building were huge. The half that moved into the little building took part of the pews, and had to cut them in half to get them in their little building. Who were the losers there? Sad to say both sides were losers. So was the body of Christ as a whole. When things like that happen everybody doubts the church as a whole. How much better would it have been if they had worked out their disagreements and had stayed together in the victory. You can bet that the devil was the one behind that disagreement and that he laughed at what happened. That kind of thing is what has brought about so many denominations. A lot of times petty human nature causes churches to split. Some spoilt person doesn't get to be the center of attention so they get their way by causing a problem. Sometimes somebody gets hurt and stomps off mad to start their own little thing. If people would walk the way the Bible tells us to walk, in the Spirit and not in the flesh, then these things wouldn't happen. But we want our way and not God's way. We don't want to do it the way the Bible tells us to, so we want to

change how we believe to make our way OK. That is another thing that starts so many denominations. We want an excuse to sin so we change our beliefs to excuse our sin. We don't want to have to obey the truth so we change the truth. Then as time goes on, nobody remembers the truth. That is the scary thing about it all. Think about how powerful the church would be if it were the way it was when it first started. Think how powerful it would be if there was only one huge group working together as one under the leadership of God, led by the Holy Spirit. Wow, what a church. That is how the church is supposed to be according to God's Word. One body, the body of Christ. When we get to heaven we won't have all these different little groups of people. We will all be one.

There was once a lighthouse on the coast. It lit rocky cliffs that the ships sailed past. Without its light, the ships would crash on that rock coast. This is a true story. The people who owned the lighthouse stopped taking their duty seriously. They started partying at the lighthouse. In those days, the lighthouse keeper had to physically light the light in the top of the lighthouse, and keep it filled with fuel. They were all too busy partying to keep the light lit. Ships began crashing into the cliffs. Somebody else decided to build a lighthouse so that the light could keep on shining. Believe it or not, the same thing happened in that lighthouse that happened in the first one. After a few years they stopped taking their job seriously. They lost their focus. They stopped being committed to keeping the light lit. Again ships crashed on the coastline there. This is a true story. If you go to that coast town today, it is dotted with lighthouses all down the coast. I think that is another reason why there are so many churches and so many denominations. At some point a church lost its focus. It lost its commitment. It no longer shone a light to a lost and dying world. When a group of people in that church realized this, God led them to leave the church to start another group. Then they lost their focus and lost their way. Another group would start up. This kept on until we have all the different groups that we have today. How much better would it have been if the original lighthouse had kept the victory, had kept their light shining.

Find the church that is right for you. Make a commitment that you will do all you can to obey God in that church so that the churches' light shines like a beacon to a world that is lost and dying without hope. Do all you can to keep that light shining bright. Avoid at all cost being part of anything that would cause that church not to stay united together, working together in love as the body of Christ is supposed to. Protect the unity that the church has as the family of God. Respect everyone who comes and love them with the love of Christ. If we all do that, then there won't be any need for any more lighthouses. The one we are in will be shining bright. Matthew 5:13-16 says, "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted: It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick: and it giveth light unto all

that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

Chapter 5.

What About The Baptism of the Holy Ghost?

I did not even hear about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost until I was in my 20's. Like I said before, I was saved when I was a young girl. In my older teenage days, I rebelled against God and got tangled up in drugs and alcohol, and you name it. By the time I was in my early 20's, I had totally destroyed my life. When I rededicated my heart and life to God, He was my only hope. I needed help and fast. I needed power to withstand my past. I needed the power to stand against the enemy who was trying to destroy me. I needed all I could get. Praise God, when I heard about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, I definitely didn't run away from it. I was hungry to receive anything that I could, and I opened up my arms and ran toward it. If you haven't received the power of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, remember that it is for you. I pray that through these pages you run to it just like I did.

Trying to walk in the Spirit without having the Baptism of the Holy Ghost is like trying to race a 2006 sports car with a model T engine. You just won't have the power to win the race. I grew up not hearing about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. I grew up in an area that had been blinded and bound to think that this gift of the Spirit was not real. I was taught that when you were saved, you got all of God's Spirit that there was. I was taught that after salvation, you had it all. I grew up not knowing a thing at all about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. Through a miracle, God brought me into contact with a church that believed in the Baptism of the Spirit. After I received it for myself, no one could tell me that it wasn't real. It was the key that brought me victory over a life that had been bound by sin, drugs, and alcohol. The devil had worked overtime in much of my life to destroy me because he knew that I would one day serve God. Maybe you are going through the same thing. Maybe it seems like every time you try to get up, you get knocked back down. You know in your heart that you should walk up-right before God, but every time you take one step forward it seems you get knocked three back. You may be about to give up in defeat, which is exactly what the devil wants you to do. It may be that he sees that up ahead, you will bust his little kingdom wide open in some area. You may be sitting there thinking that it is hopeless. That there is no use to keep trying. You won't make it. The devil has you where he wants you. You think it is because you are worthless. It may be because you are getting ready to rise up and be what God has chosen for you to be. It is your choice. If you give up now, you will never know. Maybe the key for you to overcome is the same as it was for me-the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. When I first learned about it, I got it. I grabbed hold and didn't let go. I knew that this was the key for a victorious life and I turned it. Even though I had grown up hearing

that it was not right, when it came time for me to accept it, I knew I needed it. That settled that. Don't read about this and talk yourself out of thinking that it is real, and that it is not for you. God said it is, so let that be the end of that.

Now over 25 years later, I can say that no wonder the devil tried to keep me blinded. I have been working for the Lord full time for 25 years, and will continue to do so. Not in my own power, but in the power of God's Spirit. I had to be hungry enough to submit myself to allow God to do things His way. I had to take Him and His Word at face value. I had to receive the gift that He had for me. I have never regretted it. God will allow His Spirit to control only the things that we allow Him to control. When we say, "God, I have decided to do it your way. Come and fill me up to the brim". Then we are ready for the Baptism of God's Spirit. He fills us up all the way with His Spirit. We submit all of our flesh to God and we let His Spirit rule in our lives completely. That is what the Baptism of God's Spirit is all about. Here is what God has to say about it in His Word. We first read about it in Acts Chapter 2. Here we read that the disciples were all gathered in one mind and accord. In verse 4 it tells us, "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." What was the outcome of this? These few who were hiding in fear after the crucifixion, became bold enough and so full of God's Spirit that they turned the world upside down. Without the Baptism, they would not have endured to start the church, and keep the Gospel that was committed to us today. Verse 41 tells of the outcome of that day, "Then they that gladly received His word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." This didn't stop here. We read about this throughout Acts. In Chapter 8, verses 14-17, these men received the gifts of the Holy Ghost. In Chapter 10, verses 44-48, the Holy Ghost is again on the scene filling the Gentiles. In Acts 19: 1-6, these men also received the gift of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Ghost since they had believed. These men were already saved, but they had something in addition to salvation that they were about to receive. They answered, "We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost." In verse 6 the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues and prophesied. I think of myself when I read their answer to Paul, "We have not so much as heard whether there be a Holy Ghost." I hadn't heard, but God found me anyway.

How do you receive the gift of the Holy Ghost? I was blessed to find a church that believed this way. The congregation laid hands on me and prayed for me in the same way that Paul laid hands on the men in Acts 19:6. But I still didn't receive it that night that they prayed. Several nights later, when I was by myself, the Holy Ghost fell on me and I was filled. I prayed in tongues for the first time that night. You can receive it through the prayers of others, or you can receive it through your own prayers. It is a gift of God that He has given us to empower us against the battle of satan. It is a gift that gives us boldness in our witness, like it did those on that first day. It is for you. I have heard many people argue against

the Baptism of the Holy Ghost being real. They argue that it is not for us today. When I hear this I know several things about those people. I know that they are ignorant of God's Word. In Acts 2:38-39 we read, "Then Peter said unto them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." I would say that means us too. I also know when I hear people argue that the Baptism is not for us today, that these people do not know God. I know that He wants the best for His children. He wants us to overcome and be victorious. I also know that we live in the last days, which has to be one of the hardest times to live on the earth. Why would God give a gift to help the early disciples, tell us about it, and then deny us the right to have it or make it so that it is not available to us who need it the most? That is not the God I know.

I think that one of the things that hinders people in receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is that it comes along with the gift of speaking in tongues. For many, that is a stumbling block. This is because the devil wants to scare people away from our being able to pray in the Spirit, or pray in tongues. What it means when we pray in tongues is that the Spirit of God prays through us in His own language. He is praying directly through us using our vocal chords. We may not understand what He is saying, though sometimes He will allow us or others to interpret. Whether or not we understand, the devil knows when we start praying that something is being done to bind him and to loose the power of God on the scene. No wonder he works overtime to confuse people about this powerful gift. Have you ever wanted so badly to pray for someone but didn't know how to pray? All you could do was to say a general half way prayer, when you know you needed to do more. The Holy Ghost knows exactly how to pray in God's perfect will. When He prays through you that is a powerful prayer that will get the job done. Also, when we pray in the Holy Ghost it strengthens our inner man, Who is the Spirit of God in us. (Jude 20, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.") When we are filled and consumed with the Spirit of God, and we allow Him to pray in us, we are submitted to His Spirit in a way that nothing else can do. We strengthen His Spirit in us. We submit our flesh and our flesh man takes second place in our life. With all that going on our flesh doesn't stand a chance. God's Spirit rises strong in us and we take on His likeness.

Now you may interrupt me here to say, what about the people who receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit and wind up turning their back on God, or they sin in a big way and take on a life of sin instead of a life with God? Just because you have the Baptism of the Holy Ghost it doesn't make you perfect. You still have your flesh man. If you have the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, but the Holy Ghost is still not allowed to control your life, then flesh will. That is why it is important to allow the Holy Ghost to move in you. Pray in the Holy Ghost daily. Don't hinder the Spirit of God when He starts to move in or through you, whether it be in

church or at home. Allow God's Spirit to control. Then He will be there when you need Him. To learn more about what it means to walk in the spirit, read my book titled, *Walking in the Spirit*.

One of the greatest stories I have ever heard about the power in the prayer of the Holy Ghost is this. The Holy Ghost moved on a man and began interceding through him. The man had no idea why, but he obeyed and yielded. God spoke to him to take note at what time this had happened. The next day he heard about a close friend who had been stabbed. That had happened at exactly the time that the man had prayed. The other man's life had been miraculously spared. I heard about a man on a plane who had interceded through the Holy Ghost. After they landed, they were told of a mechanical failure that had nearly caused them to crash, but miraculously the failure had corrected itself. The man who had prayed had no idea, but God knew. Thousands of times I have heard stories about how the Holy Ghost had interceded by speaking in tongues through those who had the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. The situation was corrected, the life was saved, the soul was saved, the person was delivered, or whatever need there was, it was met. There is no prayer that is more powerful than the prayer of the Holy Ghost Himself. If you do not have the gift of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, ask God for this. Seek it. The Bible says that when we seek God, or His gifts, we will find them. Who says so? Jesus. Luke 11:9, "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Read this section of scripture through verse 13. In verse 13 we read, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

If you haven't received the Baptism, ask for it. It is a gift, and God would love for you to have it. If you have received it, realize that just receiving the Holy Ghost doesn't mean that you have arrived. We still have to day-to-day walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. We have to let the Holy Ghost rule and reign in our life daily. We have to walk in the Spirit to find the victory that God has promised us.

When your church believes in the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, and you welcome His Spirit in your midst, then the anointing of God will be there. The anointing of God, the presence of His Spirit, will deliver people from what is binding them. It will heal them. It will set them free. There will be victory in the congregation. It is important to find a church that believes this way. A church that doesn't believe this way will often excuse sin. They don't believe that God's Spirit can give you victory over sin. So they don't tell you that it is important to overcome it and have victory in your life. You don't have to give in. The Baptism of the Holy Ghost will give you the power you need to overcome. Find a church that teaches this.

You can also let God's Spirit bless you in your own house. I have church all the time at home. I have Holy Ghost filled services right here in my office. I'll start praising the Lord and lifting up my hands, rejoicing in Who He is and what He has done for me. I'll get to shouting in the victory. The Holy Ghost falls here

and in my house. I've seen the Holy Ghost fall in Hardees and we'd have church in Hardees. I've seen the Holy Ghost fall in WalMart, believe it or not. I'd be talking to someone about how wonderful the Lord is, and before long we'd all be rejoicing and praising the Lord. The Holy Ghost would fall and we'd have church. The wonderful thing about that Baptism of the Holy Ghost is that you get to take it home with you. Everyday, you can feel His anointing and the blessing of His Spirit. Problem is, most people don't let God have 5 minutes of their day. Let God's Spirit fill you up. Let Him baptize you with His Spirit. Be hungry for His presence. Let Him fill your heart, your mind, your flesh, your spirit, your time, your life. Let Him fill you up and live and walk in the victory that will bring you.

If you want to learn more about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, read my book titled, guess what, *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost*.

Chapter 6. Tradition

I was talking to someone who was genuinely trying to sort out what they believed. The problem was that they had always believed a certain way. Come to find out they didn't know why they believed that way according to the word of God. It was just the way they were taught when they were little. It was the tradition of the church that they went to growing up. It was not at all the way that the Bible taught, and they had started to realize that. That was why they had come with questions. It was hard for them when they realized that how they had believed about this one certain thing was wrong. But instead of just ignoring the truth, they wanted find out the truth.

That is what happens to a lot to people. They grow up learning a certain thing. They just assume that what they were taught was true. That can only happen when we fail to do two things. When you have a relationship with God that is real, when you have been truly saved, the Bible says that God's Spirit will lead you into truth. John 14:26 tells us, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name (Jesus is talking here), He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." In I John 2:27 we read, "But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." That means that the anointing of God's Spirit can teach us. There have been so many times in my life when I didn't understand something that I read in the Bible. I prayed that God would show me what it meant. All of the sudden I'd understand what it meant. Two things have to be in place, like we said earlier in this chapter for this to happen. You have to be saved. You have to have God's Spirit in your heart. You have to be living an obedient life. If you are sinning then you will want to find every loophole you can to allow you to continue to sin and still get to go to heaven, and still call yourself a Christian. When you live this way, then you are open to every lie that the devil has. If you have been saved and you are sincere in wanting to learn the truth so that you can walk with God and obey His Word because you love Him with all your heart, then you can ask God to reveal His Word to you. He will do so through the anointing of His Holy Spirit. You can know the truth.

Why is it important to know the truth? In John 8:32 we read, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." You can know from that verse, too, that if you don't know the truth, then you won't be free. I know so many people whose religion binds up their whole life. One example is the Hindu people. They believe that a cow is a sacred animal. They allow them to roam around in their cities. They let them go into houses and destroy what they own, and mess all over everything. What is the problem with that? They are starving. They eat rats. They won't touch those cows. How bad is that? Look at the Moslems in their

beliefs. They believe that it is a mandate from Allah that they take over the world. Some of them believe that they are to do this violently and countries world over pay for that. Some of them believe that they are to do this peacefully. Whichever way that they believe they should do it, they are doing it. In the middle of a war with the Moslems, when our country voted in a president with Moslem ties, you surely wonder if they aren't being successful. They not only are bound in lies but want to spread their lies to the world. So you say, Christians do the same thing. Are Christians bombing and killing? Is the doctrine of Christians based on hate? Is their God a God of love or is He like the Moslem God? If you know the truth it will set you free. If you don't, then you will be bound.

What about the Christian churches with their various doctrines? Does the same hold true for them? I heard a young lady make this statement. "I am saved so I can do whatever I want to and God will forgive me. I can drink. I can do drugs. I don't have listen to my parents. I can do anything I want because I have been saved." Now what trouble is she heading for with that kind of belief? Is that a truth that will set her free?

I had someone tell me that they couldn't get saved. They were afraid that they couldn't live a perfect life after they were saved. They told me that when they were able to live a perfect life, then they would get saved. They had grown up in a church that teaches that you have to do this thing on your own. They hadn't learned that you come to Jesus just as you are. He saves you and His Spirit comes into your life, helping you to do the things that you need to do. They hadn't learned that the Holy Ghost could fill them giving them power over their flesh. They hadn't learned about walking in the Spirit and how God could help them to overcome sin through His Spirit in them. What is the problem with waiting until they were perfect to get saved? They will never be perfect enough to do so. If they don't see the truth, they will never get saved and they will go to hell because of their wrong beliefs.

I know some people who don't believe in the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. They believe that all the Spirit of God that you can get, they got when they were saved. They are struggling to make it. It gets harder to stand up for the truth as time goes on, especially if you are trying to do it on your own. They are ready to give up. If they would open up their hearts and let God's Spirit fill them, and if they would learn what it means to walk in the Spirit, letting God's Spirit live through them, not only would they stop being defeated, they would become victorious and a fire ball for God. No wonder the devil wants to hide that truth from them.

I know some people who believe that they can't know if they are saved until after they die, and somehow by some means, who knows what, God will sort out then whether or not they get to go to heaven. These people have no hope. They are blind to what they need to do. Salvation really holds no meaning. Their life is a spiritual wreck. They have no faith because they aren't taught that they can have a relationship with God that is real. They don't know the love of God.

They don't know His Word and they don't have the peace that brings. What a way to live. They only know the traditions that their church has passed on to them, and that is what is keeping them bound. That is what will cause them, if they don't find the truth, to lose out on heaven.

I know some people who don't believe that there is a hell. They don't think that God will put people in hell because He is a loving God. I only tell them this one thing. If they live like there is a hell, and they want to do all the Bible tells them to do to avoid that, then if one day they find out there isn't one, they will be fine. If they find out that there is one, then they are safe. Either way, living like there is one is a win-win situation. If they live like there isn't one, and one day they find out that there is one, then it will be too late. My advise is to live like there is one. Then you won't find out when it is too late. Some people like to believe that there is no hell. But hell is a real place. If there was no hell, then there would be no heaven. If you look in the Bible in the New Testament in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) you will see that Jesus mentions hell 25 times. He gave illustrations of it. He told us how to avoid hell. God wants us to live a good clean, sinless, holy life. In I Peter 1:16 we read, "Because it is written Be ye holy; for I am holy." If you don't live for God, you will go to hell. As we said earlier, God doesn't send people to hell, people send themselves by wanting to live the way they want to live, not how God commands them to live. You can't follow the crowd, (or the easy way) because most people are going down the broad path that leads to destruction. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." You can be one that finds the narrow way, the Holy way, the way to heaven. Let's face facts here. Someone's doctrine is going to be wrong. Wouldn't you rather live a holy life and be sure that you are going to heaven or are you going to believe that you can live anyway you want to, after you repeat a prayer, and God is going to clean you up before He takes you into heaven?? I have never read that in the Bible, but this is what some people tell me is going to happen to them. It is the devil's job to try to deceive you into believing lies about how you should live.

There are a lot of ways that people's beliefs can blind them. It is time to be hungry to read God's Word. It is time to determine in your heart that you want to know the truth, even if the truth tears down some of the traditions that you hold. If you don't, then one day, whether you are ready or not, you will find out the whole truth. Isn't it better to be safe than sorry? The worse thing that you can do is settle into what you believe and let it rock you to sleep. There are so many people who, when the Lord comes again, will be sitting on the church pew the next Sunday wondering what happened to a few of their members. There are so many people who will have a rude awakening when they stand before the Lord at judgment. That will wake them out of their sleep. Why? Because the truth made them uncomfortable, and they didn't want to hear it. Because the tradition they were

taught was all they wanted to take time to learn. Because they didn't put a priority on the condition of their soul, and their relationship with God. The Bible says in Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

This doesn't mean that you should give up in despair. Actually when you are in the truth, it is easier to serve God. Straddling the fence, justifying your sin and making excuses for it is hard. Admitting it, letting God convict you and repenting is so much easier. Knowing who God is and getting a relationship with Him is so much easier than not knowing whether or not you are saved. Falling in love with Jesus, putting your hand in His, trusting Him to lead you and guide you is so much easier than stumbling in the dark. Psalms 119:105 says, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Isn't it much better to have the light of the Word of God than to go around stumbling in the dark, with no one to direct you. The truth can indeed set you free.

Chapter 7. About Prayer, Faith, and the Power of God's Love

We think of prayer as being asking God for things that we need. Really it is much more than that. Prayer is communication with God. Think of it this way. If you never spoke to someone you loved (wife, husband, best friend, etc.) except to ask them for something, what kind of relationship would you have with that person. It would certainly be rocky. Picture this conversation at the breakfast table. Husband-“Dear, fix me some breakfast.” Wife-“Good morning. How are you today?” Husband-“I want some eggs and bacon.” Wife-“Yesterday something really wonderful happened.” Husband-“Get me some coffee.” Wife-“I really love you.” Husband-“After you get that done, I really need you to get out my clothes and decide for me what I should wear.” Wife-“You really mean so much to me.” Do you get the idea? Our conversation is the basis of our relationship with someone. Lots of marriages fail because there isn't any conversation. We like to talk and we like to be heard. Isn't that conversation I quoted above how a lot of us see prayer? Prayer is more than just asking for things. Prayer is conversation with God, the basis of our relationship with God. I remember one time I read a book about prayer that gave a formulae for how we should pray. It said that to be able to pray in a way where God would hear us and answer our prayer we had to use that formulae. First you had to praise the Lord. Next you had to ask for forgiveness. Next you had to pray for others. Next you had to pray for yourself. Now, they were on the right track. But they missed one very important point. The point was that they should never have come up with a formula. What if to have a conversation with someone you love, you think that you have to go by a certain formula. What kind of conversation would you have? It certainly wouldn't be one that would build a relationship. The idea behind what they were trying to say is fairly good though. We do need to take time to praise the Lord. We need to put others first, then our needs. But we don't need to go by a formula. We just need to talk to our heavenly Father.

One way to sum this up is that we need to pray **to God**, not **at God**. I am a teacher. If I am not careful, I can talk **at** people all day long. If I don't make sure that someone is listening, then I am just saying words with their not being a connection there. When I connect with someone and I begin to talk to their heart, when they are receiving what I am saying and responding, then I am talking to them, not at them. Sometimes, in our heart, we don't really expect God to be there and listen. We just talk at Him. We don't talk to Him like we would to someone who we love with all our heart who we know is connecting with us and responding to us. We need to talk to God, not at Him.

How often do we need to pray? I guess that depends on what kind of relationship that you want with God. I know some people who only pray when they need something. That may be only at crisis times. How strong is their relationship with God? I know some people who pray when they feel guilty

because it has been a long time since they prayed. How strong is their relationship with God? I know some people who remember to pray every day, but they only pray before they fall asleep at night and mostly they fall asleep in the middle of their prayers. How strong is their relationship with God? Some people carry on a day-to-day conversation with the One that they value as the center of their life. They constantly seek His advice, His attention, His help. When they wake up, they thank God for keeping them through the night. They praise Him for His love spontaneously through the day. They praise Him and thank Him for His help when He answers their prayers. They praise Him for being as wonderful as He is. How strong is their relationship with God? In answer to the question, how often should you pray I could ask this, how strong is your relationship with God? The Bible says in I Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray without ceasing.” Isn’t that the kind of relationship that you would like to have with God? One that was without ceasing.

What are some of the conditions for powerful prayers? Obviously from the first paragraph we see that a continual relationship with God, and putting a priority on that relationship is one condition. We read in Jeremiah 29:13, “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” Some people are not serving God with their whole heart. They are not in love with God. They do not have a priority on being obedient. They have an on and off relationship with God. Then when something goes wrong, He is the first one they run to. I don’t know why we think that we can get by with doing God that way and we expect Him to be there in an instance, when we can’t get by with doing someone we love that way. We need to have a relationship with God that is real and right, then when a crisis comes, we can trust Him to be there for us just like He has been every day of our lives. I know some people who never go to church. They mock Christians. Every other word out of their mouth is taking God’s name in vain. But when something happens bad you hear them say, “Oh God help me.” Why in the world should they trust and have faith that God would hear their prayer?

Trust comes from faith and faith comes from our relationship with God. Faith also comes from reading God’s Word, and from prayer, spending time with God. John 15:7 says, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” Abiding in Him means that we live in Him. There is a scripture that says that we live in Him and have our being in Him. He is our life support system and when we unhook ourselves from that we can die. If we live in Him, then we can have an abundant life. We can expect our prayers to be answered. It also says that His Words have to abide in us. We can see from that verse that reading our Bible is also a key to having powerful prayer. When we read our Bible, it builds our faith. It tells us how God answers prayer. It talks about people whose prayers He answered. It talks about what He is like and through that it builds our relationship with Him. Reading the Bible is a key to having powerful prayers.

Another key to powerful prayers is obedience. In I John 3:22 we read, “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” Is God more likely to hear and answer the prayers of those who are obeying Him, living in a way that is right, and doing what He leads them to do? We act like that isn’t so, but what do you think from that verse. Hey, there are a lot more verses like that.

Some people believe that God is way up there in heaven, and we don’t need to expect that He will answer our prayers. Wow, I am glad that I don’t believe that way. What a rough way to live. I need God to be there in my life every day. He helps me every day. I would hate to think that God wouldn’t help me. Psalm 91:15 says, “He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble: I will deliver him, and honor him.” You have God’s Word that He does hear our prayers and answer them. Luke 11:9 says, “And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” Isaiah 65 24 says, “And it shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.” The Bible talks about how precious the prayers of God’s children are to Him. Revelations talks about how the prayers of the saints are saved in precious vials. Revelations 5:8 says, “And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints.” Don’t ask me how He saves them, just take His Word for it. Our prayers are that precious to God.

You might ask me, if they are that precious to Him how come He doesn’t always answer our prayers? You may ask what about this time, or that time when something awful happened and you prayed and prayed but the situation didn’t change. He always answers our prayers. It may not be in the way that we think He should. I can’t even tell you all the times that I was glad after the fact that God didn’t answer my prayer the way that I prayed. He is a lot wiser than we are. Just the other day I was praying hard for God to move in an area of my life. I didn’t want to admit it at the time, but my prayer was based on desperation. I thought I couldn’t stand a situation any more the way it was, and I wanted God to change that situation in the way that I thought He should. Boy, did I find out later how wrong that prayer was. Sometimes God’s answer to our prayers is just ignoring us in our ignorance.

Here is an example of when an answer to prayer was “wait”. I remember the story of Mary and Martha and Lazarus in the Bible. It is found in John chapter 11. They were good friends with Jesus. When He was in their area, He would stay with them. They were brother and sisters. Lazarus was sick. His sisters sent for Jesus. When He heard about it, He stayed where He was for two more days. During that time, Lazarus died. Can you imagine how his sisters felt? They had sent for Jesus, and they were bound to have known that He had ignored their request. Then He told the disciples, “I am glad for your sakes that I was not there.” How sad was that? When He finally got there Lazarus had been in the

tomb for 4 days. He told the sisters that He wanted to go see Lazarus. They had no idea just what Jesus meant from that. He got to the entrance of the tomb and told Lazarus to come out of there. Guess what? Lazarus did just that. He walked right out. You can believe that people talked about that for years later. What if Jesus had answered the sisters' prayers in the way that they thought He should have? They would have missed out on a miracle that shook the world, and when we read about it today it still builds our faith thousands of years later. Jesus knew what He was doing.

Like His answer to Mary and Martha, sometimes God answers our prayers by saying wait. Wait, because a better thing is coming. Sometimes His answer is wait because the timing isn't right for this to be resolved. We had a situation at the ministry and we were holding on by the skin of our teeth. We needed God to move right then. But for years the answer didn't come. Or so we thought. Day to day, miracle by miracle, we were able to survive the way we were. Then when it was time for Him to move, when all the things were in place in just the right way, He moved and changed the situation. It was just like dominoes. He had lined up all kinds of situations in a way that when He moved one, the rest fell into place with perfect timing. While we were going through that we wondered why God wasn't answering our prayers. All the while He was busy at work.

I remember praying for my aunt who had lymph cancer. Now I knew what God could do to answer that prayer. He had healed my mother of a similar kind of cancer a few years before that. I watched my aunt's health deteriorate day by day. It was really hard. I just knew that it was God's will to heal her like He had my mother. I wondered why God didn't answer my prayers. He did work in her life. Lymph cancer causes a lot of pain. Up until the time that she died, she didn't have to use anything but pain patches while most people have to use morphine. Even when she couldn't eat, and she was so weak that all she could do was take in drips of water from off a straw, she would raise her hand and praise the Lord for the water. She died with victory and ran to the arms of the one she had served all her life. Some people asked me if that harmed my faith, God not answering my prayers. I can say truthfully that it actually built my faith in a powerful way. God let me know that it was her desire to die and to go to be with Him. Her victory in the face of cancer let me know that death has indeed lost its sting. It let me know that God is God, even in the face of cancer, and that there is nothing to fear, if we don't even have to fear cancer. I saw if we have victory in the face of this, then we can have victory every day of our lives. Now you decide. Did God answer my prayers?

I guess you could sum this chapter up by saying there are three ways that God answers prayers. One is by immediately answering them. One is by saying wait until the time is right, and He will help you to hold on until He does. One is by saying no, that isn't right for you.

This is just a note I am adding in here. Some people get really hurt at God because someone they know has been really hurt by a terrible situation, or maybe

they themselves were hurt. They blamed all this hurt on God. We have to remember that we live in a world where most people are not doing what God wants them to do. There are a lot of evil people in this world. There will be a lot of hurt caused by these people. Is that God's fault? Also, we have to remember that sometimes we bring hurt on ourselves. I know a girl whose sister was killed in a car wreck. She blamed that on God and was mad at God for years. She finally admitted to herself that her sister was killed because she was at a party and got in a car with a drunk driver. Was that God's fault? Disobedience and not living right, and not listening to God and doing it His way brings a lot of people hurt.

What is the part that we play in all this? Our part is to believe. It is to have faith and trust God. A little saying that helps explain faith is this. Faith stands for **Forsaking All I Trust Him**. When we let go of everything and everybody else, and trust God, that is what faith means. It also means that we have to let go ourselves. Sometimes we can go to the altar and pray and before we even get up from the altar, we are worrying again. Before we get out of the church doors, we have made up our mind about what we are going to do about the situation. We wrestle with it in our self-will until we turn it into a mess. We can't turn loose of it enough to give it to God to even find out what we should do. How can God move in that situation? We need to let it go. We need to place it in His capable hands and step back and let Him have it. Until we let it go, He can't really take it. I have waited on God to move, and just when He was ready to fix it, I would do something that would mess it up worse so that it was harder for Him to fix. Let it go. Give it up and give it over to Jesus.

Here are some verses about faith and trust. Reading them will build your faith:

Psalms 37:3, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."

Psalms 37:5, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass."

Psalms 118:8, "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man."

Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding."

Psalms 31:19, "Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!"

Proverbs 29:25, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.”

Isaiah 26:3, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee.”

I John 5:4, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

Ephesians 6:16, “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.”

And for those times when our faith is weak, we can pray like the disciples did in Luke 17:5, “Lord Increase our faith.”

One of the greatest tools that the devil is using against God’s people today is fear. Fear is the opposite of faith. People are so bound by fear that they are physically sick, and mentally and emotionally a wreck. We need to realize where fear comes from. The Bible tells us that fear comes from satan. Over 366 times in the Bible we are told to “fear not”. We don’t have to put up with fear. We don’t have to be bound by fear, stress, or worry. In II Timothy 1:7 we read, “For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” I have been through situations that were bad. What I did, day to day, determined whether or not we were going to make it. Fear and stress threatened my physical health and clouded my mind where I couldn’t think. I had to realize that this fear was of the devil and I had to realize that I had the power to bind it and tell it to go and leave me alone. When I did, no more fear. I was able with a sound mind to hear the voice of God and follow His guidance. Everything turned out fine. It wouldn’t have if I hadn’t realized what was going on. We need to be aware that we don’t have to accept fear and worry. When your mind is going on and on about a certain subject and you can’t quiet it, that is probably a spirit of worry and fear that the devil is bring against you. The Word of God says that you don’t have to accept that. Bind it and God will deliver you. Another key to binding up fear is to remember the love of God for you. When we wrap ourselves in the blanket of God’s love fear has a hard time getting through to us. In I John 4:18 we read, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” When I went through the battle with fear that I mentioned earlier, it was a lot because the devil had made me doubt my relationship with God. I had been through one of the deepest valleys I had ever been through and it made me doubt God’s love for me. The devil knew this and right away started causing a bunch of things to happen where I felt condemned, not deserving God’s love. That was the thing he used to tear up my faith. God just kept shining His love on me until I got my head

unwrapped from that junk to be able to see it. We don't deserve God's love. We can't earn it. But we can allow sin and the devil to separate us from it. The difference between God's love and man's love can be compared to a man with a glass of water standing beside the ocean. God's love is a lot bigger. When we see God's love for us it is a lot easier to trust Him and have faith.

I have put here a chapter from my book, ***You are Beloved and Longed For.*** It talks about the power of God's love.

Ephesians 3:16-20 tells us," That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

Picture this for a moment. There is a very wealthy man who has a son and an adopted son. The adopted son left home at an early age and separated himself away from his father. The man dies. He leaves his unimaginable riches to his son. His son gives all of it to the adopted son. The adopted son receives notice of the passing of his father and is notified that the son has passed the inheritance to him. He can't believe that this has happened. He can only think of all the time that he failed his father and his adopted brother. He can only think of the time that he was separated from them both. He is sure that the notice of his inheritance couldn't be real. He never claimed it and lived as a beggar the remainder of his life. We have an inheritance, children of God. Our older brother inherited a multitude of promises and blessings. We are His adopted brothers. Our elder brother died to be able to give us His inheritance. (Romans 8:17: "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ..."), (Titus 3:7: "That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs, according to the hope of eternal life."), (Galatians 4:7: "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.") When He died He named us sole heirs, beloved sons of the Father. The Bible is full of the promises we inherit as children of God, but just like the adopted son in the story we refuse to read and believe the will (God's Word) and accept what Jesus died to give us. We never comprehend what the love of Christ is for us, or what riches He has laid in store for us. We never know the power that can work in our lives. We never allow the fullness of God to be formed in us.

Romans 11:28 tells us that we are beloved for the Father's sake. God doesn't call us and choose to show His love on us for our sake. He doesn't call us because we are perfect, talented, smart, religious, but He calls us beloved for His sake, because He chooses to love us. He wants to love us. He seeks the world over searching for those that He can pour His Spirit on. He searches for those hungry for His love and seeking His face. II Chronicles 16:9 tells us, "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him....." He wants to love you.

He wants to show Himself strong in your behalf. You are beloved.

You belong. You are a part of the greatest thing anyone on earth can belong to, the love of God and His family. When we know we are a part, it can change our whole nature. People who are the most miserable with themselves don't often fit with anyone as a part. They can't submit and let go of their way enough to fit in with others. When they finally see that they belong to something, it can change their nature. We all need to belong. How often have you felt that you didn't belong anywhere, that you were a misfit? How often have you thought you didn't want to belong, because you were afraid to? Well beloved, you belong to something and someone you can trust. Romans 9:25 tells us, "...I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved." We were once not a people. We once didn't belong to anybody. Now, praise God, we not only belong, but we are beloved.

We live in a world that is full of hurt. Satan specializes in burying scars in our hearts and minds that keep us from being able to love and receive love. Just like Lazarus who was still wrapped in His grave clothes when he came out of the tomb, we are made alive, born new in Christ. But the bondage of a life of sin, the world, and the pain it caused still holds us wrapped up away from the freedom we can find in the love of God. Just like He spoke to Lazarus, Jesus is saying to us, "Come forth". "Come forth out of sin, its bondage that separates you from the love of God. Come forth out of the scars from yesterday. Come forth out of fear and failing to trust that I will be there for you. Come forth out of doubting that I love you. Come forth out of the grave clothes of yesterday. Come forth out of the bondage of feeling that you aren't good enough for my love. Come forth out of the bondage of fearing that I don't accept you as you are. Come forth out of the bondage of thinking that I can't use you for my work. Come forth. Come forth."

The truth of God's Word tells us that He has made us accepted in the beloved. Ephesians 1:6 says, "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved." We have not made our own selves to be accepted. He has and will make us accepted by the work that He has done and will do in us. It is done by His grace. We need to submit to His grace and love, be filled by His Spirit, obey His Word and let Him be formed in us. We need to be drowned in His Spirit, baptized in it and filled to overflowing. It is hard for us to submit to His will and His Word so that He can work in our lives. It is hard for us to submit to His Spirit that wants to work in us. But when we come to the realization of the greatness of God's love toward us, that very knowledge will break our self wills so that God can work His perfect will in and through us. The truth of the Word of God says that you have been made accepted in the beloved. The truth of the Word of God says that you are beloved for the Father's sake. The truth of the Word of God says when you have confessed your sin, repented and turned away from it, when you are determined to follow God's Word because you love him with all your heart, then you are beloved of God. Accept God's truth about who you are. Let this truth sink into your mind and spirit and transform

how you think of yourself. Let it sink into your heart and transform how you love others around you. Until you love yourself you will never be able to really love those around you. Let this truth set you free. God's Word has the power to set you free. John 8:32 says, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." You are beloved. Know it in your heart. It will change your whole life.

Knowing God's love for you will unwrap your faith and it will put power behind your prayers. One of the greatest things that we can do for one another is pray. I hear this all the time. All I can do for you is pray for you. Hey, I love to hear those words. I need all the prayer I can get. Prayer is powerful. When we pray for one another it is the most valuable thing that we can do. Don't underestimate your prayers.

Closing

God once showed me this picture to illustrate what people do when they fail to walk in the fullness of His Word and all of His truth. I saw a couple of people who were crawling around on the ground. They were picking up pieces of crumbs. They were showing one another their crumbs. They were so excited about each piece. They were showing off the bigger crumbs. They were crawling around everywhere busily picking up these crumbs. Then God showed me a sad thing. Just over their head was a table. Since they were on the floor, too afraid to stand up and look, all they could see was the bottom of the table. On top of the table was a banquet spread out for a King. If they would only stand up, they could feast at the table. When we are too afraid to reach beyond our traditions to find the truth, we settle for the crumbs. The feast is there ready for you? Will you stand up and eat? God welcomes you there.

KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE. Find out the truth and stand in it. The truth will set you free.

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