

There Is Hope

© 2012 Sandy Haga

Table of Contents

| <i>Chapter</i> | <i>Page</i> |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|
| Introduction | 7 |
| What Is Hope | 9 |
| Bad News | 11 |
| Getting to Know Hope | 15 |
| How to Get to Know God | 18 |
| Christ In Us Our Hope of Glory | 24 |
| Trust | 29 |
| God's Word-The Key To Unlock Our Hope | 32 |
| God's Promises | 39 |
| How You Live Can Affect Your Hope | 43 |
| Hope's Hindrances | 47 |
| To Parents | 53 |
| Hearing God's Voice | 58 |
| The Promise of the Holy Ghost | 61 |
| The Hope That Comes From Being Loved | 65 |
| The Terrorists Among Us | 68 |
| Depression | 70 |
| More Terrorists | 74 |
| Encourage Yourself | 79 |
| What Is Coming Ahead | 81 |
| Occupy Until I Come | 88 |
| An Eternal Hope | 91 |
| Closing | 93 |

Introduction

I am writing this book in the middle of what is being called the worst economic time since the depression. Every time you turn on the news it is full of nothing but bad news, world over. Our eyes and ears seemingly hear only bad reports with promises of worse coming. When you ask people even in casual conversation how they are doing, it takes a while to hear their replies. They answer with telling about their financial woes and go from there to tell about all the sickness that is happening in their families. There is so much sickness. People are dying with heart attacks. So many people have cancers of all sorts. We hear of new diseases that seem like the plagues out of the Bible. Every day we hear of record-breaking natural disasters: earthquakes, tornados, heat waves, and it goes on and on. On the International scene, violence is destroying cities. The terrorists cause the fear that they use to control others. They use it to grip our hearts in fear in the safety of our own homeland. World over, their terror shakes hearts. If we aren't careful and on guard even our faith in God can crumble and that is what these terrorists want. That is one of their main goals. You see, they hate Christians and hate our nation because in their minds we are a Christian nation. They want to destroy our faith using fear. If you are in a country where the Moslems rule, or where there is violence on every hand, you know what I mean as well.

Both young and old fight fear. Both young and old fight the feeling that there is no hope. The suicide rate among both adults and teens is at an all time high. I believe it is because we are losing our hope. The sea of bad news that is all around us is drowning us in despair. Young people live in a world where never before have there been so many deaths. Your friends and people that you know are dying from suicide, accidents, drugs, and sickness. Every month someone comes into our school office telling us about a friend that has died. I am sure that some young people even worry if there is going to be a tomorrow. I see so many young people who are sick and when doctors tell them what is wrong, they sum up the diagnosis in one word. "Stress."

Now when you read this you are probably thinking what a disastrous way to start writing a book about hope. But isn't it during times of darkness that we need to hear more about hope than ever before? Isn't during times like this that we need to hold on to hope because it is more important than it has ever been? This book will help pastors, teachers, and those who work with young people to be able to understand what they are going through, and to be able through God's Spirit to help people through these hard times. The ministry of encouragement is needed today more than ever before. The ministry of encouragement brings hope in troubled times. Stress breaks up marriages, destroys people's health, and can even destroy churches when uptight people allow their stress to cause them to be out of hand. We need to know how to help people deal with the stress of these last days, and to help them to find hope.

I went through a time in my life when all I heard was bad news. On top of this something happened that caused me and my husband to find ourselves in the middle of what was one of the worst financial times that we'd seen in our 20+ years of marriage. Because of a situation and an illness we nearly lost everything we owned. Right in the middle of that, the world got even darker. I know what it is like to lose hope because I nearly did. It's like settling down into mud along the river and when you try to get out it sucks you down like quick sand. Everybody around me tried to help pull me out, but it took God to give me the life rope that I needed. He was the only One who had the strength to pull me out and the only One who had the ability to fix the situation that I was in. That was when I first started thinking about writing this book. That is when I realized how powerful a force hope is and what it means to lose it. Never before has the message of hope been more needed. Without hope, it is easy to drown and to be pulled down to the place that you just don't care anymore. Hope changes our focus and lets us realize that all is not lost. Hope causes us to remember that there is a God and He is still able to keep us.

There is hope. I don't care how bad things look. There is hope. There is something that we can hold onto that will keep us through the bad times, something that will anchor us through the storms. You don't have to lose. You don't have to lose hope just because other people around you lose hope. You don't have to lose hope just because there is bad news. There is also Good News and that Good News has held people down through time and kept them when things looked bad. Keep reading this book. I have put a lot of God's Word into the book. Read it and take it into your heart and into your mind. God's Word has helped billions of people through time to be able to overcome. Not only can you have hope, but you can also rise up and bring hope to those around you. God is real and He can be there for you. He has given us treasures to help us to be able to be overcomers. One of these treasures is hope.

One of the keys to being able to encourage others is that you have faith and hope yourselves. If you are constantly down and depressed, you won't be able to encourage others. One of the devil's tools to destroy is causing people to lose hope. It is my prayer that if this is happening to you, that this book encourages your heart, and better helps you prepare to encourage others.

Chapter 1. *What Is Hope?*

The best way to begin a book about hope is by talking about what hope is. Webster's dictionary defines hope as being, "a feeling that what is wanted will happen, or wanting and expecting something." Proverbs 29:18 says it this way. "Where there is no vision the people perish." If you can't see something ahead of you that is good, then you can perish. If you can't see anything ahead of you that is worth hanging on for, then you have lost your hope. If you think that things are worse and won't ever get any better, you have lost your hope. If you think that there is no need to get your expectations up because nothing good ever comes of it, then you have lost your hope.

If we have hope then we will keep on expecting something good. If we have hope we will keep on keeping on because we know that just around the corner things will get better. If we have hope, then we know that we have something to hope in that will keep us, no matter what happens, and that something or someone will take care of us until things are better. When we have hope then we will care about ourselves and about others around us. When we lose our hope it is easy to settle into ways of thinking that lead to depression. That can lead us to not taking care of ourselves and that can lead to bad health. Not having hope can cause us to do stupid things because we don't care about others or ourselves. Why are so many people dying from accidents that are drug or alcohol related? Why are so many people killing themselves? Because they have stopped caring about what happens to themselves and to the people that they love. They have lost their hope. They no longer expect anything good to happen, so they just give up.

So we can see from all this how valuable hope is. It is really a treasure that we need to hold on to. We can see why the devil tries to steal our hope away from us. By stealing our hope he can take our drive to do what is right. He can take our strength to stand for what is right. When we think, what is the use, we don't try to make a stand for God. When we think, what difference does it make if I witness or stand up for my beliefs, then we stop doing what is right. We need to get our hope renewed. There is a reason to go on. There is something to hope for that is better than what you have now. There is something ahead that we can look forward to. There is something to get excited about. There is hope. No matter how gloomy it looks right now, no matter how bad a picture the world is painting, there is a reason to get up in the morning and face the day with victory. There is hope.

The Bible talks about how important hope is. Job 11:16 says that when hard times come, we can forget our misery and remember it as waters that pass away. Verse 18 says, "And thou shalt be secure because there is hope." The Bible tells us in Romans 5:2 that we have hope and we can rejoice in that hope. We live in a time when you are almost looked at as being weird if you are happy. Some of the most popular crowds are built around misery. Even as adults, it is more common to find people who are depressed, than people who are happy. Just because the world is miserable, it doesn't mean that we have to be. We just need to find our hope.

Read this book and take it to heart. There are some things to grab hold of that will help you through these bad times that the world is going through. There have been bad times all down through time, but God has helped His people through them all. There have been people who have faced things that are a lot worse than what you are facing, and God helped them. He will help you, too. God is no smaller today than He was in Bible days. He is able to take care of you.

We will talk in the chapters ahead about what we can hope in. We can talk about how we can strengthen our hope when it is weak. We will talk about people who have had their hope in God and how he delivered them. We'll talk about how He took care of them, lifting them up over the situations that they faced. We will also talk about things that will rob us of our hope, and how to avoid them. We will also talk about how to find a relationship with God that is real, and that is

the foundation of our hope. We will read a lot of scriptures that will lift you up, renew your hope, and guide you into finding a better life. There is hope, and you can find hope.

Chapter 2

Bad News

We are surrounded with bad news. More than ever before it is important that we keep our eyes on some good news. If we aren't careful we can get so caught up in bad news that we can't see the hope of ever hearing good news. It is easy to lose hope when everywhere we go somebody is telling us about something bad that is going on. There is good news. Matter of fact, there is lots of good news. There is a reason, as the old saying goes, to get your hopes up. There is something to hope in, even when it seems there is no hope.

If there has ever been a time when bad news is popular that time is now. Isn't that a weird thing to say? Let me explain. Everywhere we look: on the TV, on the radio, in the newspapers, in magazines, we see bad news. Why? Believe it or not, bad news sells. We live in a country where bottom dollar, people do what they do in the media because it sells. The more sensational the story, the worse the news, the more magazines or newspapers, etc, they can sell. The more dramatic they make the story, the more people will listen to it. That means they will make more money. That is more important to most of the media than telling the truth. Let me give you an illustration. I'm sure you remember the news stories about the Virginia Tech massacre. It was one of the largest massacres in the history of colleges. Even though you may not be reading this here in the US, you probably heard about this where you are, it made international news. We are in the state of Virginia. We knew students that went to the college. My niece was a part of the Virginia Tech police force at that time. She was right in the middle of every thing that went on. We listened to the newscasts from Virginia Tech about what was going on during the crisis. All the major news channels were broadcasting "play by play action" of what was going on. So were the local stations. We needed to hear the truth about what was going on. The only way to hear what was happening was through the news media because people were banned from entering the campus. It was bad. The truth wasn't what we got. While we were listening to all the different stations broadcasting, we began to notice the discrepancies between all the different stories. The local stations were giving out different stories from the larger syndicated news stations. There was a lot of confusion. My niece to this day refuses to listen to most of the larger syndicated news channels. She later told me that there was little truth in the coverage of the incident. That coverage lasted for days. Why? It was all pumped up to sell. It was glamorized and made worse than it was so that the stations could sell that prime time. The reporters were not concerned about the people who needed to hear the truth. They were caught up in sensationalizing everything so that their channel would be turned to the most. They made it all worse, and it was bad enough to start with.

This is how it is. Even the weather is done that way. Have you ever noticed how the news and weather channels make every little winter storm into a major event? They build the suspense up until a skiff of snow or ice is dreaded as bad as a major storm. We listen to all this bad news and it becomes the talk of the town. By the time it is all repeated a few times, human nature makes it all worse. We can get all caught up in bad news. We need to be aware of what is going on, but we need to be sure that all the bad news doesn't get us down. When you get all caught up in hearing the bad news, it is good to remember stories of people who have heard the worst news anybody could hear. In the middle of it, though, they heard about the best news possible. Here are some such stories.

In John, chapter 11 we read the story of Lazarus. Lazarus had two sisters, Mary and Martha. They were all Jesus' good friends. Lazarus got very sick. We are not sure how long he was sick. We do know that Mary and Martha tried to find Jesus, but couldn't. They knew that He would be able to help Lazarus. Watching people get sick and die is a hard thing. That is hard to go through. Not being able to find help for them makes it even harder. I had an aunt that had lymph cancer. I stayed with her for a month while she was dying. Nobody could help her. Doctors told me just to make her comfortable until she died. There was nothing else anybody could do. There wasn't any hope that she could get better. That was a really hard time. I know what Mary and

Martha went through. Bad news. When they couldn't find Jesus there wasn't any hope of any good news.

Lazarus died. In those days, in that place, they buried people in caves hewn out of rock with huge stones to seal it up like a door. The ground was so hard and rocky in this part of the world that they couldn't dig graves the way we do here. Lazarus was sealed in the tomb for 4 days. Bad news altogether.

We don't know exactly how old Lazarus was, but you get the feeling from the story that this was not an expected thing. We get a feeling that it was sudden and devastating to his family. Just like cancer is to families today. When my aunt died, it wasn't easy. It isn't ever easy to lose people that way. There wasn't much hope during the last part of her sickness and during her death. We may go through times like this that seem really dark with little hope. We just have to hold on and keep on going. Things will get better. They certainly did for Mary and Martha. How could that be? Lazarus had died. How can you find hope after something as bad as this? They hadn't forgotten their best friend. I'm sure Jesus was in their thoughts during this time. There was something though that puzzled them. They had sent a messenger to Jesus telling Him how sick Lazarus was. I'm sure that the messenger told Jesus the bad news just as it was. Jesus did something that puzzled them all. Even though He knew that Lazarus was dying, instead of going right away, Jesus stayed where He was for two more days. Then He told His disciples that they were going to Bethany because Lazarus was dead. Then He made the statement that He was glad for their sakes that it was so. He said that. Wow. You might think, with friends like this, who needs enemies. Nobody had a clue of what was going on, but God had a plan. God was getting ready to turn some really bad news into good news. When Jesus got to Bethany, which was Lazarus' hometown, first Mary and then Martha ran to Him and they both said the same thing. "Jesus if you would have been here my brother wouldn't have died." Jesus had been their last hope, but Lazarus had still died.

When my aunt was sick with lymph cancer, a lot of people prayed that God would touch her and make her well. That wasn't hard for us to believe because our family knew what God could do. God had healed my mother from the same kind of cancer several years before that. With Jesus, there is always hope. My Mom was healed and from that time on has been cancer free. She was totally and completely healed. God is good. That has been many, many years ago. Mary and Martha knew that Jesus could make a difference. I think too that they knew for some reason Jesus had purposefully not come back in time to help Lazarus. They had to know that the messenger they had sent had found Jesus and delivered the message to Him. I'm sure nobody understood why Jesus did what He did, but you could tell from their conversation that they still trusted and believed in Him and what He could do. We see this in John 11:21-27. "Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou are the Christ, the Son of God which should come into the world." Even though she had some bad news, she still trusted in Jesus. That is a key. When the news is bad, it doesn't change the fact that we can still trust in the Lord.

What about my aunt? It was really hard to watch her die and not be able to do anything about it. We couldn't understand why God hadn't healed her like He had healed my Mom. We don't always understand it all. Her pain wasn't so bad that she couldn't bear it. Usually cancer patients with this kind of cancer suffer a lot worse than she did. God gave her strength and peace until the day that He took her and gathered her up in His arms to be with Him. It was hard to let her go. It was a bad news time all around. Or was it?

You've got to agree with me. This chapter has been filled with bad news up to this point. I guess I named it right. So, why start a book about hope with a chapter that is filled with bad news? We talked about how we are living during a time when bad news is all around. We are living during a time when it is easy to lose hope. Mary and Martha did too, but they knew some-

thing. Or rather I could say that they knew Someone. Thank God that during the time when my aunt died, I knew someone too. That someone was the same someone that they knew. Isn't that cool. The same one that comforted them that day was the same one that comforted me. The same words that they heard at Lazarus tomb were the same words that I heard at my aunt's funeral. John 11:25-26 tells us how Jesus answered Martha. "Jesus saith unto her; Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" Jesus went to the tomb where Lazarus was buried. He didn't even have to go in. He just stood at the entrance and cried out, "Lazarus, come forth." And Lazarus did. Plainly and simply put, Lazarus just got up and walked right out. Can you imagine all that rejoicing that went on? Even though things looked bad, they kept their hope. When Jesus came on the scene, things got better. The Bible defines faith in Hebrews 11:1 as being, "The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Looking at Lazarus' tomb, Mary and Martha didn't have much hope. That was until Jesus showed up. When Jesus got there, they saw something to hope for. They saw evidence of God who they couldn't see. They knew that some how things would get better. When Lazarus walked out of that tomb, it wasn't just something that they hoped for. It became something that was real, something that they could see. That is what faith is. It is faith that gives us hope. Faith means that we believe and trust in God through the bad news knowing that it is going to get better.

What about my aunt? Did God bring her back from the dead like He did Lazarus? In a way no, in a way yes. There was a reason why the preachers at her funeral quoted the same words that Jesus told Mary that day. "I am the resurrection and the life: He that believeth in me, though He were dead, yet shall He live." Those words weren't spoken just to comfort Lazarus' family, but they have also been a comfort to God's people down through time as they stood at the gravesides of their loved ones. Jesus is still the resurrection. Not even death is final. If you could ask my aunt today, she could tell you Lazarus' side of the story. She was dead, but now she lives. She could tell you how wonderful heaven is, everyday spent in a perfect place with Jesus, the One who met her when she died. The One who cried out, "Come Forth". The One who took her by the hand and led her to her promised land. Dying and death is some of the worst news you can hear about. But even death isn't the final bad news. As long as we keep our eyes on Jesus, our hand in His hand, and our faith in Him, we have hope.

In the definition of faith according to Hebrews that we read earlier we see that hope is the evidence of things not seen. Have you ever seen the wind? What color is it? Describe what it looks like. If you haven't seen it, how do you know it is real? You could come and visit me at my house to answer that. I live on a hill that has some beautiful scenery, but boy is it windy. Sometimes it makes you feel like you are in a helicopter that is just about ready to take off. I have no doubt that the wind is real. Even though I can't see it I can see what it does. I can feel it. When I have to pull my front porch rugs out of the bush in my front yard, I know that the wind has been by. When I hear the house shake at night and I hear that howl, I know the wind is blowing. When I step out into my front yard and have to hold onto whatever I have in my hands or I know it will be blown to the next county, I know that the wind is real. Faith in God works the same way. What we can see is the evidence of what we can't see. When my Mom was healed of cancer it was evidence of God who we can't see. When my aunt faced death with joy and peace, it was evidence of God who we can't see. When her family faced her death with His strength, peace, and hope that they would see her again, that was evidence of God who we can't see. We can't see God but we can surely see what He has done. We can feel His peace, joy, hope, and love in our hearts and we know that He is real. We can see how He changes lives. We can feel His hope in the middle of those times when bad news is all around. If you don't know him, you need to get to know Him. He can be as real to you as your best friend. Matter of fact, He can

even be your very best friend. The next chapter tells about how to get to know God and what it means to do so. This is the first step in finding hope.

Chapter 3.

Getting to Know Hope

Mary, Martha, and Lazarus found out that when they got to know Jesus, He was their hope. The verse I Timothy 1:1 puts it simply like this, "...the Lord Jesus which is our hope." The more that we get to know Jesus, the more we know that we have hope. The more we get to know God and walk in His light, the more hope we realize we have. Psalms 31:24 says, "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord." David wrote a lot about hope in the book of Psalms in the Bible. He knew what it was like to go through some hard times. One of the hard things that he faced was running for his life from a king who was jealous of him. He had to give up family and friends and spend years running from King Saul whose main goal was to kill David. David had to live on the run, living in caves and out in the open just to stay alive. His hope, though, was in God.

How did God help David? When Saul died, David became the king of Israel. If you could have asked him if it had been worth it all, he would probably have said, oh yes.

If you look up the word hope in the concordance, which is a list of all the words in the Bible and the verses where each word is found, you will find a lot of references to the word hope in the book of Psalms. Psalms is mostly songs that David wrote. In Psalms 43:5 we read something that David wrote, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him for the hope of His countenance." Psalms 71:5 says, "For thou art my Hope, O Lord God; thou art my trust from my youth." From the time when he was a young person, David had trusted in God. He knew God and walked with Him. When he was a young person he learned that God was there for him. Then when he was older and hard times came, he knew that he could trust in God. He knew what He could do. When bad news got worse, he knew that he could hope in God. Parents, in Psalms 78:1-7 we read something that we need to remember. This is David speaking here about something that is very important. "Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed law in Israel. Which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments." In Proverbs we read something that David's son, Solomon, wrote to his son. In Proverbs 11:28 we read, "The hope of the righteous shall be glad." We know that David taught his son Solomon that he could find hope in the Lord. Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs to his son. Throughout the book of Proverbs we read verses telling that hope is found in the Lord. Are we teaching our children that hope can be found in the Lord? Are we leaving with them a message that they can teach their own children? Your children will know that they can find hope in God because of the life you live before them, and the relationship that you have with God. Because of the faith and hope you have, they will know that they can have that same faith and hope. We can get to know God and have a relationship with Him that is just as real as the relationship that David had with Him.

Paul was someone else who learned to trust in God. He lived thousands of years after David lived. He wrote most of the books in the New Testament. He knew about hard times, too. He knew how to overcome. He tells what he went through in II Corinthians 11: 23-27, "Labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own country men, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." He was a preacher during the time when the Roman Empire ruled when persecution was really bad. He learned, though, that his hope was in God. He wrote about this in Romans 5:1-5, "...We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; By whom also we have access by faith into this grace where in we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope..." Even in the middle of all he went through, he didn't lose site of his hope. He knew God. He walked with the Lord Jesus. He knew that he was in the palm of God's hand. He wrote in Hebrews 6:19 "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast..."

Here is a story about Jesus that will help you to find hope in the middle of whatever storm that you are going through. It is found in Matthew 14:22-33. (Please get your Bible out and read it. All during reading this book, if I give you a scripture, read it in your Bible. I usually won't

give the whole scripture reference. It is good to get in the habit of opening the Bible and reading the references given when you are reading a book.) Jesus had just been preaching to the people in a desert place. There was nothing to eat for the huge crowd that was listening to Him. He took 5 loaves of bread and 2 fishes and He prayed and blessed it. With those they fed them all. They not only fed those people, they took up 12 baskets of leftovers. (By the way, I have seen God bless and multiply food so that a little food fed a crowd of people. That is awesome.) Then after Jesus did that, He told His disciples to go to the other side of the sea and wait for Him while He went to the mountain to pray. While the disciples were in the boat on the sea, a storm came up. Their boat was literally tossed around. They were afraid that they were going to sink. They felt like you feel when you look at the things going on around you and you think how in the world am I going to make it. That storm was shaking them like all those problems shake you. They thought that they were lost, but they had hope. I guess one of the things that made them more afraid was that Jesus wasn't with them in their boat. They had left Him behind. They knew what He could do. He had calmed the storm before. One time before this, when they were in a terrible storm, He just spoke to it and the storm stopped. But this time He wasn't there for them, or so they thought. They looked past the storm and saw something on the sea walking toward them. They got even more afraid so much so that they were crying out for fear. Then they heard these words that calmed all their fears, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." They knew that it was all going to be OK.

I think that the disciples were so afraid because they left Jesus behind. Sometimes we can leave Him behind in our lives. We get so caught up in our day-to-day lives that we forget Him. We don't take time to read our Bible. We take more bad news in than we take in Good News. We don't spend time fellowshiping with Him in prayer. We don't let His Spirit deal with our hearts and bless us. We leave Him behind. Then we start looking at the winds and the waves and we become afraid. Then we see Him walking toward us with His hand outreached to us. We remember His love. If we hadn't left him behind, He would have been there all along.

Then Peter did something that seems kind of crazy. He said, "Jesus, if you tell me to walk to you on the water, then I can." Jesus told him to and Peter jumped out of the boat into the water in the middle of that storm. Guess what? He didn't sink. He walked out on the water right over to where Jesus stood. How could he do that? Because Jesus told him to. All it takes is God telling you to do something and you obeying Him for you to be able to do the impossible. But then Peter looked past Jesus and saw the waves and the storm. For a minute he lost hope. He took his eyes off Jesus and started to sink. That is what can happen to us when we take our eyes off Jesus and we start to concentrate on the storm, on the battle, on the circumstances. We forget Jesus and His promises and we begin to sink. So was Peter done for? Just as he was sinking he felt a hand close around his. A hand that was strong enough to pull him back up and to hold him safe until he got to the boat. A hand that didn't let go until he was safe. Jesus was there just in time. Will He be there for you, too, when you feel these waves close over your head because you have taken your eyes off the Lord? He will be there for you, too, just in time. He'll do a miracle for you just in time. He will walk out into that impossible situation and it will almost take care of itself. Just in time, the money to pay that bill will be there and you won't even know how it got there. Just in time that family member will be OK. Just in time, that healing will come. Just in time you will find Jesus' hand close around yours. Just in time it is all going to be all right.

Can you imagine the relief that the disciples had when Jesus was finally back in the boat? What happened to the storm? We don't hear about that any more. It didn't really matter. Jesus was there, and it was going to all be OK. What are the lessons to be learned from this story? Keep your eyes on Jesus. Don't concentrate on the storm. Seeing nothing but the storm will only get you down. Keeping your eyes on Jesus will keep you walking on that water. Another lesson is, whatever you do; don't leave Jesus out of your boat.

The Bible is filled with stories of people who trusted in God and through these stories

your hope can be strengthened. The Bible is filled with words of hope to strengthen and encourage your heart. The Bible is filled with the knowledge of God, which helps us to know what God is like and how to find a personal relationship with Him. It is filled with teaching about Jesus, what He is like and how we can get to know Him. If we never read the Bible, we won't know these things in a personal way. The Bible tells us about salvation and what that means. If we never read about it and do the things that the Bible tells us to do, we won't ever possess it. We won't ever find the hope that can bring us. What does it mean to be saved? How can that bring hope into our lives? Keep reading to find out.

Chapter 4.

How To Get To Know God

We've already talked about how we can get to know God through the Bible, God's Word, and we've talked about how that is the foundation for our hope. 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 get 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. 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. Don't assume that you do. Before you become close friends with someone, take time to get to know them. Building a relationship with God 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. 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." We have to be instructed. We have to learn the difference between right and wrong. We have to learn to know the difference. We have to let God convict us so that we know that we have done wrong. 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. We will talk more about that later, what it means to be forgiven and what a great thing that is. 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.

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, 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.

Let's talk more about what it means to be saved. Even that is being confused in some churches today. One of the most important questions that I ask young people is this one. "Have you been saved?" I try to make it a point to ask every young and old person that comes in my office if they have been saved. I do this because there have been times when young people connected with the school have died. I remember one particular young man who came to enroll in the school. He was killed in a car wreck just a few weeks after he came to my office to enroll. I never asked him if he knew the Lord, and I always felt bad because I didn't witness to him. That is why I try to be careful to ask that question. I know without a doubt that there is a real heaven and I know that there is a real hell. We'll talk more about this later, how we know this is so, how to avoid hell, and how to make heaven your home. I want to help as many people find their way to heaven as I can. When you really love people, you'll get serious about this subject. I know a lot of young Christians who say, "I love my friends and family." But at the same time I hear them say, "I am afraid to witness to people because I am afraid of what they may think about me if I do." Do you really love them? Do you want them to go to hell? Then you have to get serious about directing them toward heaven. I care. That is why I try to ask that question a lot. Have you been saved?

When I ask that question, I get a lot of answers. Some are a little strange. Some look at me and say, saved from what? That is a good question. What are we saved from? 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 for you. He knows you better than anyone else can. He 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 loving kindness 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. Have you ever done something to someone that hurt them really bad? Maybe a friend or someone in your family. Maybe it made them so mad at you that they wouldn't have anything to do with

you. They shut you out of their world. It hurt. You knew you had done wrong and you were sorry. Then one day they forgave you. Everything was OK then. That is how it is with God. Before we give our hearts to the Lord, we do stuff that is bad. 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 doesn't shut us out of his world like people do when we hurt them. But He does turn away from our sin. We have to turn away from our sin to turn back to God. We can't have sin and God in our lives. They don't mix.

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 the difference between the two of them. 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 live 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. 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. We ask Him to come into our heart. We confess our sin and repent. We tell Him that we are sorry. 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. We know He will forgive us if 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. And we aren't lonely any more.

We don't have that empty feeling inside of us any longer. We know that we are loved with a great love. The greatest love we could ever find. We know that we are precious in His eyes. 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 that He has for each of us. 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. We also know that we have God's Spirit inside of us. Because of that, we are precious.

Another thing that we are saved from is hopelessness. We don't have to be hopeless. God is our Father. He spoke and made the whole world. He made it right. It is a mess because we messed it up. If He can speak and create the whole world, then we know that He can take care of us. No matter how big your problems seem, or how bad the world seems, you have hope that things will turn out better. Romans 8:28 tells us, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." You might go through bad things, but even those will be turned into good. The Bible says plainly that you don't have to be afraid. You don't have to worry. 366 times in the Word of God it says to "fear not". If I look at the world and all the bad situations my heart will fail me with fear. If I concentrate on all the bad things around me, I will feel bad all the time. Some people actually are sick because all they think of all the time is the bad things around them. If I think on things that cause me to be afraid all the time, I will have panic attacks and health problems. If I think about God and his

Word, His love and His promises to me, I will be all right. No fear.

Another thing that we are saved from is having no direction. There are lots of kids who come into my office that have totally messed up in school. Maybe they are only in the 8th grade and they are 16 because they failed so many times. Some kids have quit caring about school because they don't think that there is any point in going. They just drift through life, not caring about anything. Maybe they do this because they failed so many times. That has made them afraid to care. Maybe they don't see how important it is to care. For whatever reason they don't have a reason to do their best. Because of not having a reason, they don't try. (I may even be talking to some of you adults here, too.) The easiest way to drown is to get caught in an undercurrent in the ocean that pulls you down and you just drift with it. It will eventually pull you down. How do young people (and older ones) get in trouble and mess up their lives? They just drift. They don't get up one morning and purposefully say, "Today I am going to mess up my life". They just drift down into it, just like you drift into that rip tide in the ocean. The people who have a purpose for their lives are the ones who stay out of trouble. Their life and their future is valuable, so they try not to do stupid things to mess them up. They are swimming strong, headed in a definite direction. They don't get pulled down as easily as the drifters. When you are saved, you get a new direction for your life. God calls us according to a purpose. He creates us with that special purpose in mind. He works on us getting us ready for that purpose. Yes, God calls preachers, evangelists, missionaries, singers, songwriters, people who work in churches and ministries. But He also calls teachers, mechanics, dentists, accountants, computer specialists, and more. This world is full of people without God who don't have hope or a purpose for their lives. Because of this it is filled with people who don't know right and wrong. They don't care. When they do their jobs, they do them poorly. Because they don't know right from wrong, you can't trust them to be honest. Where would we be without Christian workers doing their jobs in the world? Find out God's purpose for your life. You have a reason to be alive. To help you to find your purpose in life, read my book titled, *Who Am I and Where Am I Going*. I wrote this book for teenagers, but it is also important for adults to find out the direction God has for their lives. I know so many adults who are failing because they have never sought God for direction for their life.

God also saves us from failure. We talked about how in the last paragraph some people give up because they fail so many times that they are afraid to try. When God comes into your heart, and helps you, you no longer have to be afraid to try. He gives you the strength to make it. We can't face life on our own. It is impossible. We can't overcome all there is to overcome on our own. We will fail, time and time and time again. But with God, when we fail, He will pick us up. When we keep trying, we will get it right, with His help. We don't have to stay a failure.

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 were 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. It is a story that He 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.

When I started this chapter, I mentioned how I always try to ask people if they have been saved. I do it because I know who I was when He saved me. I don't want them to go through the things that I went through. When I ask people this, I get all kinds of answers. 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 acting like the devil, cussing, drinking, smoking, partying, and 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 is important, but it can't save you. It can help keep you, but it can't save you.

The saddest thing that I've heard people say is "I am saved because I am too young to make that choice. I am too young to decide now. 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. I know adults who know that they need to be saved, but they are caught in a lifestyle that they aren't willing to give up. They have little hope because they know they aren't right with God. What a sad way to live. Is it really worth it?

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 life 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. We have to care enough about ourselves that we do what is right for our own selves, so that we do what is good and sound, so that we can have health and peace of mind. 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."

Some 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. If 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 you can be, don't run from Him. Run to Him, let Him set you free.

Chapter 5

Christ in Us Our Hope of Glory

I have talked to a lot of people through the years who refused to get saved. Why? They knew about God and God's ways. They had a very high respect of these. They knew that they would have to change to be able to live right. They were afraid that they couldn't change and be perfect and live up to the standards that God's Word sets. They didn't have hope that they could do that. So they just did nothing. We have talked about before how a lack of hope can cause us to do nothing. There is another group of people who look at things a lot different. They are the ones who confess salvation and nothing is changed. There is no evidence that God, through His Spirit, has come into their hearts. These people don't stop doing the things that they shouldn't do according to God's Word. There is no evidence that it bothers them to continue doing those things. God's Spirit is not present in their lives convicting them. They don't have any change going on. I wonder if they really are saved at all.

Between these two groups of people, I can say that I have a higher respect of those that respect God's Word and His ways, but they don't commit because they are afraid that they can't live up to those standards. However, both are dead wrong. As far as the second group goes, the Bible says in Revelations 3:15-16, "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 you out of my mouth." I know we read that verse earlier, but it is worth repeating. God hates lukewarm. This is found in a section of scripture where God was talking to different churches that existed at the time, and it gives us a picture of how we should and should not be. He says here that we need to be either in all the way or we are out all the way. There is no room for compromise. We can't serve God on Sunday and dance with the devil the rest of the week. It won't work. When you try to please people that is what will happen. If you love God, you won't want to hang around with the crowd that is doing all the things you aren't supposed to do. When you are saved for real, the Spirit of God comes into your heart. Jesus comes into your heart. That is what it means to be saved. When that happens there will be a change. You won't want to go where you went before that happened. Your "want to" will change. When you go to the places where you went to before, you know that you will be taking Jesus with you, and you won't want to go there any more. When you do the things that you shouldn't do, He will be inside you. He will let you know when you are doing wrong. Not only that but His Spirit inside you will give you strength to say no when you need to say no, and His Spirit will give you the strength to stand against your own flesh which doesn't always want to do right.

Christ in you is your hope of glory. Colossians 1:27 says, "to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you the hope of glory." We are called Gentiles in the Bible because we aren't Jews. To all of us, Christ in us is our hope of glory. I am writing this chapter to both of the groups of people that I mentioned earlier in the chapter, those that are too afraid they can't serve God so they don't, and those who take it lightly not changing at all. To the first group I say this. Jesus brings about a change. When He comes into your heart through the power of the Holy Ghost, there will be a change in you. We sang a little song in Sunday school that says, "Jesus on the inside, working on the outside, bringing forth a change in our lives. Oh, what a change, a change in our lives." You know, to be honest, not one of us can live this life on our own. We just aren't that way. We are all flesh and bones. The Bible says that there is no good in us. Job 5:7 tells us, "Yet man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." Paul wrote about all this in Romans 7 and 8. Remember Paul. We talked about him earlier. Remember all the things that he went through. He started most of the earlier churches fanning a revival fire that swept around the world. He wrote most of the New Testament. Let's see what he says about himself and how good he considered himself to be in Romans 7:18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would

not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He is saying here that when he tries to do good, he can't because he isn't good. He says there is war going on in him between what he knows to do and his own flesh that isn't good and can't do good. It is such a war that he calls himself a wretched man because of it.

Does that sound familiar? How many times have you felt that? How many times have you felt like giving up because you just can't do it any more? You may be thinking that if a man like Paul felt like this, what hope do you have? We know from the story of Paul that he didn't give up there. Look at all he did for God. You see, Paul didn't just stop when the going got rough. He kept on trying and he found the same hope that you can find. Let's read about it. To answer this question on how we can find hope to overcome ourselves, our flesh, we need to read the whole chapter in Romans, chapter 8. I am only writing down part of it here. Verse 2-5 says, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." What is this saying? God sent His own Son so that we could be forgiven when we sin. But He did more than that. Through this He sent His Spirit to live in our hearts to help us overcome the things that our flesh wants to do, to overcome the feelings that our flesh has, to overcome the thoughts our flesh thinks. His Spirit is in our hearts and our minds. If we let His Spirit control us, and live through us, then we can overcome our flesh. That is how we are able to do, think, and feel the things that we should do, think, and feel. God changes us from the inside out.

Christ in us is our hope of glory. We don't have to stay wretched because we can't do the things we are supposed to do. Paul didn't. He found his deliverance. He found his hope. When we get saved, God's Spirit comes into our heart and changes us. That isn't the end of it. He continually, every day, is there to help us to do what we need to do, to be who we need to be. His Holy Ghost empowers us to be able to walk in victory. There is hope. If you haven't made the commitment to get saved because you are afraid that you can't, you don't have to be afraid any more. God has made a way for you.

If you are someone from the other group we talked about earlier in the chapter, the ones who have not changed anything in their life, but they say they are saved, then there is hope for you as well. Let God's Spirit convict you. Repent. Make a commitment to serve God for real. Fall in love with Him. Get to know Him. When you do, you won't want to continue in the way you are going. You won't want to let Him down continually the way that you do. The Bible warns us against being double minded. James 1:7-8 says, "For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways." We have a saying around our church, get in, get out, or get run over. That is how it is. The hardest thing that you can do is to be double minded about where you stand with God. I talked to a lady the other day. She was telling me that she was having trouble with depression. She is mentally and physically a wreck, a walking disaster. What is her problem? She is not doing what she knows to do and it is literally driving her crazy. She grew up in church and knows right from wrong. Somewhere in her life she got off on the wrong road. Her life style is totally against what she knows is right. It is literally tearing her in two. Is there hope for her? Yes, she needs to get on the winning team and run from the losing side. She needs to realize that she needs to change over and

stop being double minded. Then she will be able to receive something from God. She needs to realize her sin isn't even worth it.

I hear a way of thinking quite often, more and more as time goes on, that people wouldn't have this sort of problems like the lady in the last chapter if church people, Christians, and the Bible didn't talk about how sin is bad and how it will destroy you. Those people who have this way of thinking say that we are all free to be whatever we want to, and no one should put on us their understanding of what is wrong or right. No one should make us feel bad about our life choices. Well, if you feel that way about things, then you need to be quiet about my life choices. If I choose to have peace of mind because my decisions lead me into a life that is sin free, then that is my right. If my life choices lead me into having a healthy, whole, and complete life style that leaves out the junk that can destroy me, then I certainly have that right. If I choose to live in a way that stops me from partaking of things that God has determined from the beginning of time to be destructive to me, then I have that right. I also care enough about the people around me that I will let them know about how they can find peace and freedom in their lives as well. When you love others, you want to guide them away from the things that can harm them. Those churches that hide the truth about sin don't need to tell that they do this with the motive of loving those who come inside their walls. The church is to be a haven where people are guided into a good life, an abundant life full of peace. If you don't warn people about the damage that sin can do to their lives, then you won't be a haven. Don't say you love others, and then hide from them the truth that can stop them from living in hell both here on earth, and in eternity.

There is an old saying, "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." The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. Think about it. How many people, young and old, do you know who have died because they were doing things that they knew they weren't supposed to do. They drank or drugged themselves to death, or committed suicide because they had wrecked their life and thought they had no hope, or died in accidents because they were doing things they knew they shouldn't do. People play a game with sin until they mess up their lives to the place that they believe that there is no hope, and then they stop caring. They lose hope that things can be better for them. They need to realize that Christ in them can be their hope of glory. They just need to give Him that chance. After all, what do they have to lose?

How do I know about all this? If you have read any of the other books that I have written, you already know the answer to this. I have also hinted earlier in this book about my testimony. I'll share more as we go along. I was an alcoholic by the time I was 18 years old. I did every drug there was to do. Over 30 years ago, I asked Jesus to come into my heart. God delivered me from the old way of life and made me new. It took a while. It was a process. I didn't change over night. I had spent years messing my life up. I wasn't fixed in a day, but it was a process that made a lasting change in me. The verse II Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Jesus in us will make us a new creature, a new person. There is hope. You can change. You can live life the way you are supposed to live it. You can live in victory. God isn't an evil God. He loves us. He doesn't demand us to live a way that we can't live, then sends us to hell because we don't. The verse in II Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." John 3:16-17 tell us in Jesus' own words, "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. For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." Well, I've talked a lot about how there will be many who will perish. If God doesn't want them to perish then why will they? It tells us in verses 18-21 why there will be people who won't make it, who they are and why. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the

condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” What is this saying? Some people would rather do what they want to do even though they know it is wrong. They love doing evil more than they love God. They have no hope in doing better. But those that run to the light because they want to do right are those who will make it.

Why does God tell us in His Word to stay away from certain things? Why does He set a standard of what is right and wrong? The world acts like anything is right. It acts like it is wrong to say that there is a right and wrong. Who is right? Look at the people you know who have wrecked their lives through drugs and alcohol. Look at the people who have aides through homosexual stuff. Or those who have unwanted pregnancies or STD's from sex? Or those who are pregnant with a baby they really aren't ready to have? Or those whose bodies and minds are damaged from drugs and alcohol, or from accidents that they had because of these things? Or those who have a record because of doing something stupid that will affect their whole lives? Or those who messed up their lives to the place that they thought there was no hope and they took their lives? What about those who were caught up in affairs whose families were wrecked and torn into? What about those who through wrong choices wrecked their lives and their families' lives, tearing hearts into? I can go on and on and so could you. Who is right, those people who say there is really no right or wrong, that say whatever you want to do is right and good? Or God who gives us His Word to keep us so that He can bring us peace of mind, and a successful life, Who also invites us to inherit an eternal life of hope? Who is right? Is it so bad to have something to go by to tell us right from wrong when those things protect your life and your physical and mental well being? It is human nature to want to get your own way. It is human nature not to want anybody to tell you what to do. It is human nature, though, to do the very things that destroy us. We are without a doubt our own worst enemies. God gives us hope so that we can overcome ourselves.

The easiest thing to do is just to go halfway and settle down halfway in comfort. A lot of people go halfway with their commitment to follow God and then stop there, settling into a comfort zone. After all, what is wrong with half way? Halfway is better than all the way, right? Who wants to go overboard with things? Picture this scene for a minute. It is early morning. Jesus has already had one trial with false witnesses testifying against Him. He has been spit at and beaten. All his disciples have run away in fear. He has another trial. Jesus is stood up before the people who cry out, “Crucify Him”. These were the very people who had honored Him as King of Kings and Lord of Lords when He entered into the city just days before. Then after this He was whipped with a whip made of lashes of leather with pieces of glass and metal tied on them. When people were beaten this way, after just a few lashes the skin was torn away. After just a few more lashes, the muscle is torn. Jesus was whipped 39 times. The bone was even exposed. Then they put a crown of huge thorns on His head that was slammed into His skull. They mocked Him, spit on Him, and beat Him until you could not even tell what His features were like. He was such a bloody mess. Then they hung Him on a cross. The cross was such a cruel punishment that it was against Roman law that a citizen of Rome be hung on a cross. Why did Jesus go through all this? The Bible says that He didn't have to. Scripture tells us that he could have called 10,000 angels to come rescue Him. Why did He submit to this kind of torture? He wanted to make a way for you to be saved. He wanted to make a way for you to be forgiven. He wanted to make a way for you to have a life that is full of good things. He did this because He loves you. Someone had to die for your sins. That is just how things are. Jesus was the perfect one who came and died for your sins, for all the wrong things you will ever do. He did this so that you could be forgiven. His blood was shed for you to cover your sins so that you could go free. Without the blood of Jesus, we could not be forgiven. Hebrews 9:22 says, “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.” Jesus died for you. It is that personal. I used to think

that He died for the whole world. That is true. But it is just as true that He died for you. If you would have been the only one He would have suffered and died just for you. He gave it all for you.

Before we started talking about all that Jesus went through we asked the question, what is wrong with going halfway. We asked the question, why can't we just go halfway in our relationship with God and in our lives and settle there in a comfort zone. Why do we have to get committed and give God 100% of our life? Why? Did He do that for you? Jesus went all the way for you. We need to set ourselves aside and go all the way for Him. So many people play games in their relationship with God. They think this thing is all one sided. They think that it is all about them and what they want, and what they can get out of it. They think that it is all about wanting to be prosperous, and a way to be successful, a one-track way to heaven on earth, with no commitment and no requirements. It doesn't work that way. This thing isn't that cheap. Also, He definitely paid the price to tell you what is best, and He is the only perfect one who is qualified to be able to do so. We need to give Him no less of ourselves than He gave us. The only way to find peace of mind is to give God our will, our way, our lives, our hearts, our minds. Commit and submit to His will and His way. Then things will work out in our lives and we will find a life full of good things, good things in Him.

If we really want to find the victory in our lives that comes in serving God, then we have to give up our stubborn, hardheaded self will. It is easy to want it our way. Too often though our way won't work. We don't want to submit. When we don't, we don't find the release that we can find by giving up our flesh, our sin, and all of our junk to God. He can't really clean us out and clean us up. We are too busy holding onto those things that we want to keep. When we were kids, we were all notorious about keeping a mess in our rooms. The way that my mom got us to clean it was by telling us that unless we cleaned our room, we couldn't go to something that we wanted to go to. Well, that meant that we had to clean it in a hurry. The easiest way that we cleaned it was to throw it in the closet and under the bed. That worked for the time. Needless to say our closet space was a jungle, and it was scary under our bed, not because of monsters, but because of all the junk. That was so at least until our mom figured out what we were doing. Then it didn't work any more. Until then, we kept our trash. We kept our clutter. We kept our junk. We didn't get rid of the useless things that weighed us down. Some Christians live that way. They throw it in their closet. They forget that Jesus is Lord of the closets of their lives, too. They forget that those things that they are stashing back and holding onto are things that will eventually destroy them. Things like that can turn into hooks in our jaws that the devil can use to reel us in and destroy us with. Sometimes we hold onto things that are wrong in our lives because we don't want to give in and sometimes we hold onto things because we don't take time to allow God's Spirit to convict us. He tries to but we are too busy running our rat race lives to pay attention. All these things just collect on us like weights. When we let that happen, it is like a runner trying to run a race with huge concrete blocks tied around him. Is he going to win? Is he going to overcome?

When we get saved, God keeps us through His Spirit that dwells in our hearts. We have hope. Christ in us is our hope of glory. The Bible gives us keys throughout the New Testament to unlock being able to obey God's Word. A lot of people don't because they don't realize that they can. When God's Spirit comes into their hearts and lives, and they yield to His Spirit, His Spirit can bring about a change. When God's Word is taken into our mind and heart, His Word can bring about a change, a daily strengthening to be able to do what is right. When we yield our flesh to His Spirit and to His Word, we can live a victorious life in Him. Our part is to put ourselves, our wills, our ways, our thoughts, our selves on hold and yield to God. That will bring a change in our lives. Through prayer and fellowship with God, we take on His likeness. When we receive the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, it is the complete filling of His Spirit. This gives us added strength. We will talk more about this later. All these things enable us and empower us. Christ is in you if you have been saved. He is your hope of being able to live in a way that pleases God. He is your hope of glory in this flesh, and your hope of glory for eternity.

Chapter 6.

Trust

We have hope in God, in His Word, His Spirit, in Jesus, in Christ in us our hope of glory, because we trust them. Trust is important. When I think of trust, I think of that Geico commercial. The president of the company is telling the Geico gecko the importance of trust in a company. The president tells him that he thinks they need to do that exercise in trust where you fall down and trust the other person to catch you. Well, there is only one problem. This guy probably is around 5'9" while the gecko isn't even 9" tall. This guy is definitely putting his trust in the wrong thing. We are as guilty as this guy. We can put our trust in everything that can't catch us and we wonder why we have lost our hope. We need to find out what things are trustworthy and put our trust in those things.

One thing that we often put our trust in is our friends and in other people around us. The Bible warns against putting our total trust in people. Nobody is perfect. Psalm 41:9 gives an example of what often happens when we put our total dependence on people. "Yea, mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." I have no way to count the number of people, young and old, who told me that they couldn't live for the Lord because they were afraid of what their friends would say. They trusted in their friends more than they did God. Their hope was in other people instead of God. Then something would go wrong in their relationship with their friends and they would lose their hope. Don't build your life around other people. Put your trust in God. He is your hope. Friends will come and go, but God will never leave you. I can remember praying and asking God for help when I was just small. I left God for a season, but He has never left me. He is still there for me. What about my friends that I had when I was young? They aren't there. I have moved away from the place where I grew up. I have no idea where most of them even live. Who did I need more in my life, my friends or God?

I know a lot of people who put their total trust and dependence on their pastor, on their youth leader, on the other members in their church. They have a stronger relationship with them than they do God. They aren't really relying on God, but on other people. They are propped up on the shoulders of those around them. Then maybe their pastor, or people in the church fail them and let them down. They give up on their relationship with God because somebody messed up. I talk to people every day that have stopped going to church because somebody in a church hurt them. Well, I'm here to tell you, when you go to church with imperfect people, somebody will let you down. Get over it. Get on with God. Keep on doing what you are supposed to do and keep on living the way you are supposed to, or you will lose out on God. The saddest thing about hell will be the number of people who are there because they got their feelings hurt. You need church. God made the church to help us, to lift us up. We find fellowship there that strengthens us. God said Hebrews 10:25 says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together..." God set the church up and commanded us to go because He knew how much we need it. We cannot serve God completely and wholly without being a part of a body. God set us up to serve Him as the body of Christ. We need to be part of a certain church. I have been around this thing most of my life, and those people who hop around from church to church without having a home church are weak Christians and they have trouble keeping things out of their life and heart that don't belong. If you can't make a commitment to a home church, then it is very hard to make a genuine sold out commitment to the Lord. After all, He is the one in His Word who commands you to go to church. He is the one who created it to start with. Evidently He thinks it is important.

Another thing we put our trust in is ourselves. That is what we do when we think that we don't need anybody, or anything. That is what we do when we think that we really don't need God. The Bible says in I Corinthians 1:25, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men". We need God whether we are smart enough to recognize our need or not. The Bible talks in Romans about people who think themselves to be wise but they become as fools because they don't consider God and His ways. It is foolish to think that you don't

need God. We are not able to save ourselves. We can't put our trust in ourselves. We will eventually fail.

Another thing that we can't put our trust in is our money, or our property, or things that we own. I am writing this book during one of the worst economic slumps that this country has seen since the depression. The government is trying to do what it can to pull things out of the slump, but we have all learned that we can't trust the government to do what is right and reasonable. More people are out of work and more are losing their jobs. People are losing their homes. During hard times, it is easy to see one thing. It is easy to see the people who have their trust in the Lord. Those are the ones who have hope. They are the ones who have peace in spite of it all. They are resting in the knowledge of God and they trust Him. They know that no matter what happens God will take care of them, and He does. They know that it is foolish to put their trust in their riches, but they are standing firm in the Lord. They have hope no matter what is going on around them.

Then there are the people who have their trust in a lie. There are all kinds of lies out there to believe in. There are all kinds of beliefs. How can you know what to believe in? How can you know the truth? Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Jesus is the truth. When we know Him and ask Him into our heart, He leads us to the truth. The Bible is true. We can trust in God's Word. No other religion claims that their main person, the one their religion was built around, rose from the dead and can come into your heart and live. Why can't they claim this? Because it isn't true. If this didn't really happen, it would be a foolish claim to make. We can put our trust in God and in His Word because we know that it is true. We don't have to put our trust in some false God, or in some lie. We don't have to put our trust in dead people. I have been to countries where the people worshipped dead saints. I tell you something that is heart wrenching is to see people who are clearly in great need crying out begging a dead saint to help them who had been lying dead in a casket for centuries. There was no help there. Their hope was in the dead instead of the resurrected and living Savior.

I heard a story a missionary told who had visited a country where the people worshipped an idol, a statue. There was a great storm there that totally wrecked the little island country. The statue of their idol fell over and broke during the storm. The people were begging their god to get up and help them. He didn't. He couldn't. We have our hope in a God who is real. Jesus is the only one who rose from the dead. Over 500 people witnessed this. If the Buddhists or Moslems could claim that Buddha or Mohammed came back from the dead, don't you think that they would try to claim this? Why can't they? Because it didn't happen. Why do you think that Buddhists, or Moslems can't claim that Buddha or Mohammed can come into their heart to help them to live? Because it doesn't happen. The biggest proof I have that the Word of God is real, that salvation is real, is because it happened to me. My hope is in the truth.

What do you have your hope in? Are you hoping in your friends? Are you hoping in your pastor or the people who go to church with you? Is your trust in your own self? Do you think that you really don't need anybody? Do you think that you don't need God's help? Is your trust in a God who isn't real?

I went through a really hard time not long ago. My husband found out that he had Parkinson disease. That was a hard thing to find out. He eventually got to the place that he could hardly walk without a cane. Doctors told him that they had not seen this disease progress as rapidly in a younger person as it was doing in him. They tried every kind of medicine and none worked. He was in and out of doctor's offices, hospitals for tests, neurologists. All these were very expensive. Long about that time, his work place let him go. We were stuck with nearly \$20,000 of doctor bills. We had several credit cards. We had a house payment of \$1,200 a month. I wasn't making enough to pay all this by myself. He didn't have any income coming in for nearly a year. We nearly lost everything that we had. I couldn't trust in my friends because even though my friends helped what they could, they couldn't do enough to get us out of this. I couldn't trust in my pastor, or the people in my church. Even though they did what they could, they couldn't change the situation. I sure couldn't

trust in my riches because I didn't have any. I couldn't trust in myself because there was nothing I could do. I had to trust God and put my hope in Him. I am not sure how this situation got fixed. That may seem like a strange thing to say, but it is true. God fixed it day-to-day, step-by-step. Now on the other side of it all, not only are we doing ok financially, we are almost debt free. During this year we were able to pay off \$70,000.00 worth of debt that we owed. How? By trusting in God. He did not fail. What have you got your trust in? What is your hope built around? In these troubled times we need to know that our trust is in something that will stand. Matthew 7:24-27 talks about a man who put his trust in something that didn't keep him. Jesus is telling this story to teach us about what we can put our trust in. "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto 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." Where have you built your house?

Psalms 31:24 says, "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord." Psalms 33:18 says, "Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, and upon them that hope in His mercy." Psalm 39:7 says, "And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is thee." Psalms 146:5 says, "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God." Jeremiah 17:7 says, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is."

We know how important it is to put our trust and hope in the Lord, but how do we know absolutely that it is something that is true? How do we know that all this is trustworthy? We have talked about it in previous chapters but it is important enough to deserve a chapter all by itself. Coming up. Let's look at the most important book that has ever been written. It is the book that tells us about our hope.

Chapter 7.

God's Word- The Key to Unlock Our Hope

How used is your Bible? I have a friend that tested this out. She gave Bibles to her grandchildren one Christmas. At least that was the most obvious gift. The not so obvious gift was the check that she hid in its pages. It was a long time before those kids got to cash their checks because it took months for them to open up their Bible to find it. The Bible is the most valuable book and the most remarkable book that has ever been written. It is full of riches that are more valuable than monetary riches. In its pages are written keys that can help us to have a happy, peaceful, and prosperous life. In it are keys to unlock our hope. Keys are only good to us if we take them out, stick them in the lock, and turn them. A lot of young people (and older) have Bibles, but they never read them. Some people just read them on Sundays, but they don't read them the rest of the week. When they read them, they never take to heart what they read. It never becomes a part of them. Or they read it and never act on what they read. That is like having a key, knowing that it works, but never taking it out to put it in the door. I am convinced that a lot of people who are losing their hope are doing so because they are not reading the Bible, taking it to heart, and acting on what they read.

There is a steady stream of bad news that is pouring out not only from the news media but also from the mouths of people around us. The TV pours out junk that can pollute us to the point that it takes away our victory as Christians. The world's music is another place where we can take things into our spirit that gets us down. With all of that going on, we need something that will lift us up. We need something that will encourage our hope. We need something that will strengthen us. That something is the Word of God.

I am going to get a little side tracked here, but bear with me. This is an important subject to tie in here. I want to take time here to talk more about the music that most people listen to. I have touched on that before but it is so important that I'm going to talk about it again. Why are there so many young people who have gotten into cutting, drugs, drinking, homosexuality, suicidal thoughts, and all that other stuff that goes with all this? Why are there so many Christians who can't keep the victory that God intends for them? They get the victory on Sunday, but by the middle of the week they are down again. If you are caught in this kind of stuff, you need to honestly take a look at the music that you listen to. Music was originally created by God and used for His worship. Music is a spiritual thing and it creates a spiritual connection. There are two spiritual beings. If something is a spiritual connection and you aren't connecting to God's spirit, then it is the devil that you are connecting to. Whether you think this is true or not, the devil runs the show in most of the music that people listen to. If someone is having a problem with depression, unnatural stress and worry, or the things we mentioned earlier, if they are caught in their lifestyle from the past and can't give it up, the number one thing I ask them is what kind of music are you listening to.

Music has always been important to me throughout my life. Matter of fact, I majored in music in my first year of college. I have always played music instruments and sung all my life, and I still play the piano and sing in church. I have always had music around me. When I first got saved after having messed up my life, the first thing that God told me to do was to get rid of all the music that didn't lift Him up. Now I was a rock and roller of the worst kind. I really had a hard time with giving up my music. So at first I ignored God. That is easy to do, but a very dangerous thing. When I got saved and started to turn the direction of my life around it was necessary that I change. It was life threatening if I didn't change. There were some things that I just couldn't give up besides my music. I had trouble at first giving up drugs. God showed me that the real problem that I had was the music I heard. The only way to give up this lifestyle was to stop listening to the music I was listening to. I finally was convinced. But I did it halfway. I stopped listening to secular rock, and switch over to Gospel rock. I still had trouble keeping my victory. God told me

to stop listening to Gospel rock because it had the same beat, the same feeling that secular rock had. When I stopped listening to the music I had been listening to, I was able to make that final change in my life. I am convinced that if I had not given up my music, my life would not have changed. I would not have made it and I probably would be dead today. Wow. That is a mouthful to say. Why is that so? The music that I listened to was written and performed by people who were in the life style that I was trying to get out of. They were writing and singing about things I was trying to leave behind. This kept these things constantly in my mind. Also, the devil was behind most of the music I was listening to. I have mentioned this before. We know some people who work in a coliseum. They told us that when many rock groups come in, they have to open the coliseum early for them to be able to have séances so that they can ask the spirit of the devil to come into their midst. They count on this. That is how many of them have become popular. They have sold their soul to the devil. They confess openly, and I have heard some of them actually say this, that they are doing what they do to be able to “convert” young people to think like they do. When you listen to their junk constantly, like most young people, you are opening up your spirit to this stuff. It doesn’t matter whether or not you can understand the words, or listen to them; it is still going into your mind and heart. Most of the groups today are so messed up on drugs and alcohol that they don’t even know where they are. Their life is a depressed mess. They are a wreck. Their music reflects this. If you want to be strong in serving God, the first step you need to take is getting rid of all this music. It won’t be easy. If you are trying to do something that the Lord has put in your heart to do, and it is really hard to do, you may as well know that this is something that the devil is using to bind you and he will try to do everything he can to stop you from doing what you need to do. You need to call his bluff, square your shoulders back, and say, “Devil, get behind me in the name of Jesus. I know what I need to do and I am going to do it.”

So did I have to give up music? Sure didn’t. Just changed what music I listen to. Now I listen to good gospel music. Music that talks about God and how wonderful that He is. Music that talks about how He can lift me up over my problems. Music that gives me hope. Music that strengthens me instead of getting me down. Music that is positive and not full of all the junk.

What about rock and contemporary Gospel? I heard a well known artist make the statement, “Why do we need to use the devil’s beat to preach the Gospel? He has a good point. Why do we need to sound like the world, and in most cases with most of the groups, look like the world, and act like the world? Do you know that secular musicians perform a lot of the music recorded in recording studios? The same ones who play for the devil when they aren’t doing a little gig with gospel musicians. That is not the kind of message that I want to hear. The Bible says to come out of the world and be a separate people. Why sound like you are still in it?

Is music the only thing that the devil can use to get to you to mess up your life and steal your hope? What about gaming? Try searching in Google for Dangers of World of Warcraft. This is just one example of a game that has messed up hundreds of young people. There is a worldwide class action suit against this company for how this game is affecting people. By the way, you would be amazed at the number of kids (and adults) that get into gaming to the point that it steals their desire to do anything else and when you tell them these dangers, they all say, that happened to so and so, but not to me. Gaming is another thing that the devil can use against you. Another thing is the crowd that you hang around with. If people who are not Christians surround you, then they will eventually pull you down. All this stuff is some of the world’s static, the stuff that the devil uses to steal your hope.

While we are off on this kind of topic, let’s talk a little about social networking. I am talking here about Face book, texting, etc. How many people do you know who are addicted to both? I deal with young and old people weekly whose lives are in constant turmoil and drama because of this sort of thing. I know parents who are neglecting their children because they can’t lay their phone down for texting. I know young people who lay their phone down long enough to sleep, then pick it up first thing in the morning. One of the things that I hear young and old people talk

about is the problem of drama. Drama is wrecking the peace of mind of so many people. There is something constantly going on, some sort of junk. It is constantly up close and personal and in your face. Young people especially, but adults as well, even become suicidal because of the constant pressure of all this drama. How many marriages do you know have split up because of the drama of Face book and texting? How many marriages have split up because of the Internet. All this drama is out of the pits of hell. It never stops because they are addicted to it. Anything that is addicting is usually demonic. Boy has the devil found a way to wreck lives using these tools. Stay away from it.

What does all this have to do with the theme of this chapter? We are all agreed that there are all kinds of bad influences that can strip us of our peace of mind and our hope. This stuff is like junk food. If all you eat is junk food, how strong will you be? If all you take into your mind, heart, and spirit is all the devil's junk food, how strong a Christian will you be? If all you eat is junk food, eventually you will get so weak that you will die. If you add one meal of good nutritious food a week, you will feel some better, but you will still be awfully weak, and unhealthy. If you add more nutritious meals, but still go on junk food binges, you will still be weak. The only way to become strong and healthy is to eat healthy. And, wow, if you add exercising into your daily routine, you can be really something. This is all true with our physical part of us. It is just as true with the spiritual part of us. When you fill up your mind and heart with this world's junk food that the devil has created, you'll have a lot of problems like: depression, anxiety attacks, stress, worry, fear, even physical problems. You will be a weak person. You will be a weak Christian. You will have a lot of problems. You will make wrong choices, because the loudest voice that you hear will not be God's voice, but the voices of all the junk around you that you are absorbing. You will eventually lose your hope.

Or you can start eating some good healthy food. Start by reading God's Word. Go to church regularly. There you will be surrounded with good food, and good fellowship, people whose fellowship will strengthen you in God. But is just church on Sunday enough? That is just like saying one meal in the middle of a junk food diet is enough. You need to read God's Word more than one time a week. You need to make a commitment to read the Bible every day. Make a commitment to try this and see. I have known people who did this, and it not only changed them, it changed the direction of their lives, and it changed the lives of people around them. Read your Bible.

We have talked about how the Bible can give you hope. Let's talk more about why and how. The Bible isn't just another book. It was written thousands of years ago. It still changes lives and hearts today. A more powerful book has not been written. You see, it wasn't just written by people. God's Spirit inspired people to write what they wrote. How do we know this? Let's talk a little about how we know that God's Spirit told people what to write.

There is one book that has been around since the beginning of time. It has been on the best-seller list for thousands of years, and if you'll check it out, it is still on the bestseller list today. For real. It has a unique history like no other book that has ever been written. What are some facts that prove the Bible is the Word of God? The Bible was written for over a 1,500 year span for over 40 generations by over 40 authors from every walk of life. It was written in many different places, and at many different times. It was written on three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe. It was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Its subject matter includes hundreds of subjects. Subjects that now can't be agreed on when mentioned or discussed. Yet there is an agreement between the writers that could only exist because God's Spirit inspired them. They agree as if one author had written what they wrote. There is a continuity that runs throughout the book. (Just as an added bit of information, the scrolls had to be written by hand for thousands of years, but every copy agreed. Those who copied it were especially chosen for that task. They kept tabs on every letter, syllable, word, and paragraph. These men even counted the syllables to make sure that it was copied correctly.) Another fact that proves the Bible is the Word of God is this. No other book has been

attacked like the Bible, yet through time it has stood every test and still stands as the Word of God today. These are only a few of the reasons why we know that the Bible is God's Word.

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."

In II Timothy 3:16 we read why the Bible was given to us. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."

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. As we mentioned before, 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. 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." Here are some more verses that tell how the Bible was written. 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. That is how the Bible was written. 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 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 might be what happened? The hundreds of prophecies that are in the Bible prove that God's Spirit led people what to write. What are prophecies? Prophecies were written about an event before it happened. They tell sometimes hundreds of years before an event what is going to happen. 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. 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 or a thousand 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 verse would be true. Psalms 41:9 tells us that Jesus' friend would be the one to betray him and deliver him to the soldiers to kill him. We know this is true because Judas was a friend of Jesus. 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. 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. Do you think that they did this because they read the scriptures and the Bible told them to? Remember, they were against Christians and even against the Jews. They wanted to prove that Jesus was a lie. They wanted to prove this as much as the Jews did. Later on, the Romans were totally against the Christians. They even burned them at the stake. Yet what they did on that day proved the Bible to be true. These are only a few of the prophecies about Jesus in the Bible that came to pass. Remember, there were three hundred prophecies in the Bible concerning Jesus.

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 in our country 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 have all these prophecies have been true?

Just think about this for a second. The Bible was written thousands of years ago. God's Spirit inspired people what to write. God's Spirit, the same one that told them what to write, came into your heart when you get saved. That same Spirit can help you to understand what is written in the Bible. That is really cool. What other book can you say that about? Thousands of years after it was written you can have a personal relationship with the author and invite Him into your heart to change your life. What a powerful book. It is certainly worth reading.

So what does the Bible have to do with hope? Let's find out. One of the ways to strengthen your hope is by reading stories of people who went through hard times, even harder times than those you are going through, and reading how God helped them. When we read how God kept

them and helped them, we know that He can and will do the same for us. When we read how they overcame with God's help, then we know that we can do the same. The Bible is full of such stories. Here are just a few. I am a pretty good storyteller. I love to tell the stories that are in the Bible. But this time I am not going to tell you the story. You need to get your Bible out and read about it for yourself. I will tell you where to find it. You do the rest. I promise, you will get a blessing. I am going to tell you the names of the people and where their stories can be found.

| | |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Abraham</i> | <i>Genesis Chapters 12-25</i> |
| <i>Moses</i> | <i>Genesis Chapters 37-50</i> |
| <i>Joshua</i> | <i>Joshua</i> |
| <i>Samson</i> | <i>Judges chapters 13 to 16</i> |
| <i>Ruth</i> | <i>The book of Ruth</i> |
| <i>David</i> | <i>First and Second Samuel</i> |
| <i>Esther</i> | <i>The book of Esther</i> |
| <i>Daniel</i> | <i>The book of Daniel</i> |

These people's stories are filled with adventure, romance, and all the things that make up good movies. But more than that, they all faced bad situations, and God not only helped them to overcome, but He also changed their bad situations into blessings. Most of these are found in the Old Testament. The books of the New Testament are filled with stories of the most exciting character that there is in the Bible. The most exciting thing about this character is that you can get to know Him today. To read about His days on earth the Gospels are a good place to start. The Gospels are the first four books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They tell the story of Jesus' life on earth. John is my favorite. It is a good place to start reading about Jesus.

The book of Acts is another good book that builds faith and hope. It tells how the early church got started and how God helped them to overcome great persecution. The whole Bible is filled with stories about how God is faithful. In reading these stories we are reminded that He will take care of us as well.

No other book has been fought against like the Bible. Millions of people through the years have given their lives because they owned a Bible, because they read it or taught it or preached it. Even today in many countries people die because they have a Bible. Our ministry works with pastors and ministries overseas. We have extension colleges around the world. We are in contact with people from many different countries on a day-to-day basis. Every day we hear of some one who was killed because they became a Christian. Moslems are killing people around the world because they are Christians. They are sworn to rid the world of Christians. They collect Bibles and burn them. Even with all of this going on, do you know what the number one request is that we get from people in these countries? They want Bibles. They know the value of God's Word. It has changed their lives so much that they are willing to give their life to be able to read it. They know how it has influenced their lives and they are willing to die to be able to have it. In its pages they have found hope. Like Paul in Philippians 2:21 they say, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." That means that if they live or if they die, they still have hope.

How important is God's Word? How important is it to you? That same hope that has kept all these people whose stories you have read about can help you today. That same hope that keeps them encouraged in foreign countries where they are facing such persecution, can keep you today. Here are some more scriptures that tell how God's Word can bring us hope. These verses are from Psalm 119. If you look at it you will see that Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. This one chapter has 176 verses in it. The entire chapter is about God's Word and how it is our hope. Here are some verses from that chapter.

Psalm 119:49

Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused

me to hope.

Psalm 119:81 My soul fainteth for thy salvation; but I hope in thy Word.

Psalm 119:114 Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.

Psalm 119:116 Uphold me according unto thy word, that I may live; and let me not be ashamed of my hope.

Psalm 119:145-147 I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O Lord: I will keep thy statutes. I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies. I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy Word.

The Word of God is full of promises that will build up our faith, trust, and hope. Coming up next, a whole chapter full of God's promises.

Chapter 8

God's Promises

Picture this for just a minute. You are getting ready to go on an ocean cruise. Let's say that you are going to Alaska. Now everybody who has seen the movie Titanic knows this can be a problem. You hope that the captain of the ship is trustworthy. You hope that the ship itself will be trustworthy. If you do something as bizarre as hitting an iceberg (who would think that) you hope that there would be enough lifeboats. You would hope that there would be an efficient rescue plan prepared in case you would need it. Now I am not one just to base everything on hope. Believe me, if I were to go on such a journey I would go with an ironclad hope. What do I mean by that? I would definitely check out the situation. I would meet the captain in charge before I set foot in the ship. I would look everything over. I might not know all I need to look for, but I would definitely do a lot of research. I would find out all I could about the whole situation.

Let me give you another instance. Bear with me and I'll tie it all together in a minute. Let's say for the sake of this chapter that I decide to go skydiving. Here are some things that would definitely have to happen first. I would certainly hope that I could do it. I would hope that my instructor knew what he was talking about. I would hope that the plane we were going in was safe. I would hope that my parachute was in good working order. I would hope that there was a back up plan if it wasn't.

Can you guess where I'm going with all this? Let's go back to the ship. We are going on a cruise. We aren't just here taking up space. We are traveling. The most important thing that you can do in this life is to reach your final destination. You can't afford to put your hope and trust in something or someone that will fail you. You can't afford to climb into a ship that isn't sea worthy, with a captain that will bail out in a storm leaving you with a sinking ship. Hope is only good if the thing that you are hoping in is trustworthy. I can tell you that God is a trust worthy captain. Why? Because He has been the captain of my ship for most of my life. I grew up in church. (By the way parents, don't underestimate the value of raising your children in church. I see kids every day who have no hope at all because they have no understanding of God at all. Their parents didn't make them go to church. They grew up not knowing what the Bible was all about. They have no idea who God is, let alone how to put their trust in Him. They lose the battle before they even get started. Teach them about God and His ways. The worst thing that I can hear a parent say is, I don't make my children go to church. My mother made me, whether I liked it or not. Today I am so glad that she did.) Like I mentioned, I grew up in church. I knew about what it meant to have a relationship with God. I didn't have one in my teen years. I had started to have one, but I had moved away from it. I knew about it, but I didn't possess a close relationship, one that could hold me through the storms of my life. That is why I got drawn away from God. I wandered around in sin, wrecking my life. When I wised up, I knew the way home. I knew where I could find hope. I knew the Word of God. What caused me to backslide and fall away from God? I knew about God but I didn't know Him personally. I hadn't learned that I could put my faith and trust in Him. I hadn't gotten to know the captain. When He reached down His hand and caught me in the debris of the sinking ship that had been my life, I found His love and found what it meant to be able to trust Him. I gave my life to Him completely. Then I started studying His Word. It was all different then. I had always read it, but it started making sense. It started opening up to me. I asked Him to write it in my heart and make it real. I started doing the things that it required me to do. I found direction for my life. I found words that strengthened me. They gave me courage and hope. They gave me joy even in the middle of my tears, and there have been tears. They gave me peace of mind in the middle of turmoil. They gave me a sound mind in the middle of a world filled with confusion.

You need to know the captain. You need to get to know His ship-the Word of God. It can get you where you are going. It can help you get to your destination. You can trust it to be

sea worthy. It has carried thousands before you. You can hope that the captain and His vessel will carry you, and that hope will be a sound hope founded in reality. It will be a hope founded in trust that comes when you know, that you know, that you know, that you know that you can trust God and His Word to keep you. I can tell you all this but what is the number one thing that you have to do to be able to know what you know for yourself? You have to read it. When you do you will meet the captain and check out the ship and you will have hope of your own.

The harder the bad times, the stronger my hope becomes. Why? I guess it is because it has to be that way. The harder the times have been in my life, the more afraid I was to let go of God. The higher the waves and the harder the storm grew the less likely I was to jump out of the ship. Then after we got through that storm, the next one wasn't so bad. I knew the Captain was able and the ship seaworthy because we had made it through in spite of the storm. I was ready for the next storm when it came. We grow through the storms of life. It is the fire that makes a diamond out of a lump of coal. If things never get hard, we will just stay an old lump of coal. Without going through the fire, we will never grow. Our faith will be weak. God puts us through the fire. There He purifies us. Job 23:10 says, "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Psalm 66:10 says, "For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried." In I Peter 1:7 we read, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Paul once asked God to take away something that was hindering him, something hard that he was going through. When he asked the Lord to take it away, the Lord answered him in II Corinthians 12:9-10, "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ' sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong." What in the world is this saying? How can bad things be good for us? When we realize that we can't do it on our own, that we are weak, and this only happens when things aren't going good, then is when we really, really, really learn that God's strength is sufficient. Then is when we really learn how to rely on Him.

Let's go back to the parachute example. Remember the first thing that you'd want to hope is that you'd know that your instructor is trustworthy. We have a wonderful instructor, the Holy Ghost, God's Spirit. He definitely knows how to teach. He has been teaching people for a very long time. We need to get out the instructors manual that He has written, the Bible. It is one thing to know that there are promises in God's Word that we can hope in, but it is another to know what those promises are. This is the parachute that will carry you. Find out if it will hold. Get your Bible out and see. Your first thought is probably, I just don't have time. How much time do you spend watching TV? How much time do you spend on different hobbies or video games, or other extras? Are these as important as the parachute that is holding you up?

Here are just a few of the promises that are found in the Bible. Don't just read the verses here in this book. Get out your Bible. Look up the references. Read the scriptures around the verses that I give. The first promise that we'll talk about is found in Matthew 6:25-34. I am not writing the whole thing here. Please read it. It will definitely give you hope. When it feels like the financial situation in the world is crashing down around you, this is a good promise to read. Just like many other promises, this promise has a condition. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Then verses 25-34 talk about how God will take care of you. What is this saying? To put it simply in my words, I'd say that this means that you can't straddle the fence and get God's promises to work in your life. You can't serve two masters. You have to serve God all the way, not half way. When you do you can know that God will take care of you. You can have this hope even when you lose your job. Even when the bank is coming for your home. Even when there is seemingly nothing left

to hold on to. You still have hope because God's Word says that He will take care of you. He has promised it. This is part of a section of scripture called "the Sermon on the Mount". Jesus here is preaching to the people a sermon that starts in Matthew Chapter 5 and goes through chapter 7. It is a wonderful sermon full of hope. Read it.

Here are some more promises about how God will take care of us. Psalms 68:19 tells us, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation, Selah." Philippians 4:19 says, "My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Malachi 3:10 tells us, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Tithes are the part of our money that we make that we give to God. The Bible says a tithe is 10%. If you give to God, He will return what you give with a huge blessing added to it. When we give, we release a blessing. You can't out give God.

God promises us protection and safety. We live in a world where it is good to know this. We can hope in Him to keep us safe. We don't have to be afraid. He can and will take care of us. Psalms 91:4 and 9-11 tells us, "He shall cover thee with his feather, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most high, thy habitations; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." Read Psalms 121. It has a lot of promises for our safety.

We have promises of healing. The same God who made our body can fix it when things go wrong with it. Just recently one of the schoolboys had a four-wheeler accident. His arm was broken. Not only was it broken, but the bone was jammed back in his arm separating from the other part of the broken bone. The doctors said that he would need serious surgery. His parents refused to accept this, and they took him to their church for prayer. The next time that they went to the doctor, there was no need for surgery. The bone had come down into place. Praise the Lord. God can heal us. Exodus 15:26b, "I am the Lord that healeth thee." Psalms 103:2-3, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." I Peter 2:24, "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed."

We have promises that God will guide us in the right direction when we don't know which way to go. Psalms 48:14 says, "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death." Isaiah 30:21, "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."

We have promises of eternal life in heaven with God. We have promises of a future life filled with the best that God has. Isaiah 25:8, "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces..." Revelations 21:4, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nether shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." Heaven is definitely one of those conditional promises. If we want to get to go to heaven there are some things that you have to do first.

I have a little study Bible that has a list of promises. There are probably 100 verses or more that have promises in them, and I am sure that this isn't nearly all there are in the Bible. Nothing can encourage your hope more than reading these promises. This little book has nothing but Bible verses in it. It is called *The Bible Promise Book* published by Barbour. It is a good book to have. You could probably find it at Amazon.com. There are promises for: answers to our prayers, forgiveness, blessings, cleansing, comfort, deliverance, health, mercy, protection, strength, wisdom, and more. There are promises for all that we need and promises for things we can't even think of that we need.

I can just hear some people saying this now. If all these promises are true, then why is all

this bad happening? Why do people go through such hard things, if the promises in the Bible are true? When people say that they go through something, think about what they are saying. When you go through something that in itself is saying that you are going to come out on the other side. That is our hope. Hope that when we do go through something, it won't last forever. Hope that if we lose it all, God will restore it. Hope that when we're sick and we die we have something better ahead of us. We live in a world that isn't perfect. The Bible tells us in Matthew 5:45 that the rain falls on the just and the unjust. The bad things in this imperfect world affect us all. The Bible tells us in Psalms 34:19, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." That is our hope. We will have afflictions, but the Lord will deliver us out of them all. We will have trouble. Our hope comes because we know the Lord will strengthen us and bring us out of our trouble. We know that God won't put on us more than we can stand. We know that we will have temptations, but I Corinthians 10:13 tells us, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptations also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

If we never went through anything we would not know what God could do. Our faith would be weak. Also, it is when we go through hard times and we come out with the victory that is when we shine like a light for the Lord. Then is when the people around us that don't know God will be able to see what He can be for them in their lives. They will know by our testimony what God can do for them. They will find out for themselves that His promises are true.

What are some of the hindrances that can hinder you from receiving God's promises, and what are some hindrances that can hinder your hope? Coming up next.

Chapter 9

How You Live Can Affect Your Hope

We talked about how important it is to keep our hope. It is important to talk about things that cause you to lose your hope. Picture this for a minute. A young couple has just gotten married. Their eyes are full of that new, just married love. Their greatest joy is spending time with one another just gazing into one another's eyes. Things go really well for a season. Then something begins to happen. He starts talking with another woman. His wife senses the change. He no longer wants to spend time with her. She knows her presence is no longer a delight to him. That look has gone out of his eyes. Time goes on and the other relationship goes from infatuation to physical. The love light has gone out of this young man's eyes all together. He makes every excuse to himself that he can think of, but none of them are good enough. Guilt begins to haunt him. There is always this something else, someone else standing in between them. They begin to argue. Then they drift apart. Sin has separated them. Guilt has come between them. Those first months of love and soul sharing and delighting in one another's presence is long gone. Love is there still but it is so covered up with so many other things that it is barely felt. Then she finds proof of his infidelity. That is the final straw. She walks out the door.

There are many churches that teach that it is OK to willfully sin. They say that it is OK to do what you want because God is love and He won't judge you. There are more and more churches that even teach that there is no hell, and if there is one, a loving God won't send us to hell for doing wrong. How does all this affect our hope? God is love. He loves us with a great love. The price that He paid to be able to love you is the life of His precious son. Jesus died so that you could be forgiven. God knew from the time that He created man that man would do what he did, and that the life of His Son would be required. Still He created us to fellowship with Him. We are beloved and longed for. We are precious in His sight. Remember that first love you had when you first got saved. Everything looked different. You found God's love and it was so precious. You just wanted to spend time with Him basking in that love and in the presence of His Spirit. You rejoiced in fellowshiping with Him. When the church doors were open you were there, the first in line wanting just to do anything to be a part of His house. You hungered and thirsted after His Word. Then something else caught your eye, or someone else caught your eye. Little by little they began to steal your time. Then little by little you began to lack the strength to stand up against the world and against your flesh. You stopped praying and stopped reading your Bible. You stopped fellowshiping with God. You stopped going to church and gaining the strength that you needed to make a stand. You began to slide into doing things that you knew you shouldn't do. You began to do things that you knew disappointed and hurt the Lord. After a while, it didn't bother you any more. Other things came between you and the Lord and you began to totally lose that first love, that precious feeling you once had. You lost your peace and joy and strength that this brings. You began to lose your trust, not because He is not trustworthy any more, but because you are not where you should be, so you can't trust Him to be there. God's love didn't change. You lost fellowship with Him because you no longer sought to fellowship with Him. Then sin moved in and began its final separation. His Spirit convicted and dealt with your heart, but you silenced His voice and His Word. Eventually you didn't hear it any more. What would happen to you if the Lord came back, or if you died when you were separated from the Lord by your sin?

Don't start down this road. The end is never good. Don't turn away from His precious love. When you do these things, you will lose your hope. His love is so precious. It is that love that can give you hope. Jesus told about a precious pearl in Matthew 14:45-46, "Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Nothing is worth losing that precious pearl, the love of God.

We have touched on this topic throughout the book so far, but this is something that is so important today. A lot of churches are teaching things that aren't right. A lot of churches have slid into teaching these things:

1. God loves us the way we are so we can do anything we want to and be whatever we want to be, and He will still love us.
2. Some churches teach that whatever is right for you might be wrong for me, and whatever is wrong for me might be OK for you to do.
3. Some teach that we need to be tolerant of everyone's lifestyles, no matter what they are.
4. Some teach that you don't need to ask God to forgive you when you do wrong.
5. Some teach that God does not make you feel bad about what you do, and no one has the right to do that.
6. Some teach that it is wrong for anyone to make you feel bad about your sin.
7. Some teach that everybody, regardless of whether or not they believe in God will get to go to heaven.
8. Some teach that a loving God would not send anyone to hell. Some even teach there is no hell. That there is no judgment at all.

What gives me the right to say that a lot of churches are teaching things that are wrong? What authority do I have to be able to say that? Can't everybody believe what they want to believe? Where do we go to find out right and wrong in how we believe? The best place to go to see if something is right or wrong is to go to the Bible. Also, we need to study God's nature and when we understand Him better by His Word, we can then decide whether or not He would do the things listed above. Let's look at each of these. I list with each some scriptures that talk about them.

1. God loves us the way we are so we can do anything we want to and be whatever we want to be, and He will still love us.

Psalms 103:17-18, "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep His covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them."

John 15:10 and 14, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

Who does God love? Who does He show His mercy to? Those that love Him with all their heart and those that keep His commandments.

2. Some churches teach that whatever is right for you might be wrong for me, and whatever is wrong for me might be OK for you to do.

Proverbs 11:6, "The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them; but transgressors (sinners) shall be taken in their own naughtiness."

I Peter 3:11-12, "Let him eschew evil, (run from it), and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil."

God clearly teaches throughout His Word that there is a right and there is a wrong and those

that continue to do wrong will be “taken in their own naughtiness”. The Bible clearly says throughout its pages that it is God who decides what is right and what is wrong, not man in his imperfection.

3. Some teach that we need to be tolerant of everyone’s lifestyles, no matter what they are.

Proverbs 14:12, *“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”*

Joshua 1:8, *“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, and thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”*

Romans 1:22-32 (Read this section. I didn’t write it out.)

If we want to have a prosperous and happy life with peace of mind, accepted by God, then we need to keep God’s laws. If we don’t, and we do those things that seem right to a man, but they aren’t right to God, the ways thereof are death. God’s ways work, our ways don’t.

4. Some teach that you don’t need to ask God to forgive you when you do wrong.

Ezekiel 18:31, *“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions so iniquity shall not be your ruin.”*

Luke 13:3, *“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”*

5. Some teach that God does not make you feel bad about what you do, and no one has the right to do that.

Proverbs 28: 13, *“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”*

I Corinthians 7:10, *“For Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”*

I John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Hebrews 12:7, *“If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons.”*

6. Some teach that it is wrong for anyone to make you feel bad about your sin.

Ezekiel 3:17-21, (I’ve only put part of this here.) *“Son of man I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way; to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.”*

7. Some teach that everybody, regardless of whether or not they believe in God will get to go to heaven. Some teach that a loving God would not send anyone to hell. Some even teach there is no hell. That there is no judgment at all.

II Peter 2:4-6, "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment, and spared not the old world but saved Noah the eighth person....The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

Matthew 13:41-42, "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and those which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

It is important to know the truth. It is important to live and walk in the truth that you know. There are so many people who have slid into believing the lies that we have talked about above. If you are one of those people, and reading this has made you realized your mistake, is there hope for you? Yes. God will welcome you back home with open arms. You just have to realize your need to repent, and run back to His love for real. There is hope.

Chapter 10.

Hope's Hindrances

Keep in mind when you read this chapter that this book was also written for young people. Through reading this you will find ways to help counsel the young people that you minister to. Also, you will find more knowledge about their world to be able to reach them. It isn't the same world you were in when you were a teenager. There is an old story that has been passed down for generations. You've probably heard that story yourself. It is the story about the tortoise and the hare or what we would call the turtle and the rabbit. Hey, you know it is a famous story when they even make commercials about them. If you've heard the story you'll remember which one wins the race. It is not the one that you think should. The turtle wins. Now, it is no guess at which is the fastest. Just for the sake of fun I looked up in the encyclopedia how fast a rabbit can run. They can run 18 miles an hour and leap up to 10 feet jumps. Wow. Not bad for a short legged fellow. I couldn't find how fast turtles travel. That may be because they go so slow nobody has had the patience to see how fast it takes them to go a mile. If you don't know the story you may wonder how the turtle won. It was because the rabbit got hindered. There are lots of different versions of the story, but in all the versions the rabbit got sidetracked. Or something or someone stopped him and got him tangled up with things that were somewhere else besides the finish line. He hopped forwards a while, then he'd run off to the side after something. Then he'd fly over to the other side because something or someone got him side tracked. Then he'd fly all the way back to the start line just to start over. Guess who won? The turtle. The turtle was slow, but he kept his eye on the prize and he won it. He didn't let anyone or anything turn him to the right or left. He was slow, but he was steadfast. He was committed to the race. It was a priority for him to win. It didn't matter what his natural ability was. His heart caused him to win.

So what does that have to do with hope? The Bible talks about our walk with God as being a race. In I Corinthians 9:24-27 we read, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." Paul talks about how you have to be single minded, just like a runner in a marathon. You have to put your eyes on the finish line and let nothing stop you, sidetrack or hinder you until you reach that goal and win that prize. Just like the turtle. What is the prize that you are reaching? Eternal life with God in heaven. Now eternity is a very long time. Like forever. Our whole life down here is just a blink of an eye compared to eternity. Nothing and nobody is worth losing heaven for. I repeat this. Nothing and nobody is worth losing heaven for. Some people do anything just to be accepted by others. They do anything to be accepted by other people who are doing anything just to be accepted. Wow, talk about the blind leading the blind. That is why everybody falls into the ditch. And that old saying, "It may have happened to them, but I'm too smart to let it happen to me." Well, you know what? That is exactly what they say to themselves just before their life shipwrecks.

Some people are like the rabbit. They are nothing but losers because they run here and run there looking at everything but the prize at the finish line. The rabbit was confident. He knew that he could win. So did everybody else. But his potential to win didn't matter. It is the choices that he made that caused him to lose. The Bible talks about this in Galatians 5:7, "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" You have great potential to win. You have hope. Don't let hindrances stop you.

What are some of the hindrances that can get you stopped or side tracked. The most obvious ones are drugs, alcohol, sex, and homosexuality. At least there was a time when you could say these were the most obvious ways. Today I hear people arguing that there is nothing wrong with

these things. Everybody has a right to do what they want to. Right? Or that's what I hear a lot. Well, I guess that is OK. If you want to get in the line for those things let's say that is fine. Sure you have a right to do so. But let's get real about what you are really getting in line for. Some people are racing towards these things. They get in the line marked finish but the cover sheet falls off the finish sign and this is really what the sign says. "Stand in line for these things, definitely to be given out to those who participate: addiction and the physical and mental destruction that will bring. Things like liver disease, brain damage, loss of immunity to diseases, and I can go on and on and on and on. Loss of your self worth. Loss of those you love who care for you for real. Loss of your future. Bringing home a baby, which isn't as cute a thing to do as some disillusioned young people make it out to be. Bringing home an STD or aids. Hopelessness and loss of peace of mind. Death from any of the above." That is the real line that you are standing in. Sounds fun, doesn't it?

What are some of the other hindrances that can get you stopped or side tracked? The most common one is other people. The verse that we just quoted said, "Who did hinder you?" Not what but who. I think that other people will be the most quoted reason in hell for why people went there instead of heaven. Are there people in your life who hinder you? Are there people that draw you away from being the best you can be? Are there people in your life that are costing you God's love and the best that He has for you? I know someone who is living with a man that she is not married to. She is an adult and she grew up in church so she knows better. She knows that this is wrong. She is not in church and not serving God because she knows it is wrong to do these things. She knows that the Lord is coming back soon and she knows that since she is sinning willfully that she won't go when He comes back. She knows that if she dies now in her sin without repenting she won't go to heaven. She doesn't want to give this up so she is not repenting. She is willing to lose it all for this person. I don't know, but I just don't think that this guy is worth it. He used to be a Christian. He can't get his life together to serve God the way that he knows he should, so he pretty much is a mess himself. He has a lot of problems. I wonder if he treats her right. I wonder if he doesn't drink. I really don't think he loves her, but I probably wouldn't be able to convince her of that. Why do I think so? They have lived together for a while. Both of them know better but won't get married. When that happens, it is usually because somebody doesn't want to make a commitment. Hey, if I am choosing to go to hell, or choosing to get left behind because of someone, I want a commitment. Hey, wake up. If someone doesn't love you enough to commit to you and marry you, but they want you to be faithful to them, they don't love you. I don't care what they say. Real love by its very nature demands commitment. Now lust is a different thing. Using people to get their lust off is a different thing. That involves no commitment at all. If you are in a crowd that thinks sex is just some kind of exercise, you are dead wrong. If you think that sex is harmless, you are dead wrong. I heard someone who works with middle school aged young people say that the main thing that these 14-16 year olds, yes I said 14, are missing heaven for and losing all their self worth and taking chances on STD's and getting pregnant for is sex. Wow. That was an eye opener. Her class told her that they don't think that serving God is worth it. It is too hard because they are missing out on too much. OK. Let's miss out on heaven so that we can wreck our lives. If you think that having sex and not being married is worth it, you need to talk to hundreds of young people who have come into my office telling me that their future is wrecked. Get real. I see young people who are dressing the part. They come in looking like they are street walkers trying to be noticed by some guy, any guy, and I want to shake some sense of reality into them. This is not the way to get loved. This is not the way to find friendship. This is not the way to get accepted and to have self-esteem. This is not the way to get someone to make a commitment to you. This is the way to lose all the above.

What about this lady that I was talking about earlier? She is a walking emotional wreck. She can spend ½ hour telling you all the emotional problems she has. This is the list: anxiety attacks, heart problems, a split personality, and I could go on. Why? She has lost her hope. She has lost her peace of mind. She is not doing right and she knows better and this is a constant

struggle in her. Her life as a whole is a mess and so is her boy friend's.

I know people who act any way just to fit in with a crowd. It doesn't matter if that crowd is doing things that they know is wrong, they just want to fit in with somebody, anybody. They will talk and walk and dress the part no matter how weird that is, just so they can fit in. Then on Sunday they will walk God's walk and talk that talk. How much do they love God and how committed are they to Him? About as committed as those friends that they are compromising for are committed to them. If you can't change your life style, get your act together, care about your future, care about yourself and keep your friends, are those people really your friends? Think about it. If you make a commitment to serve God you are right, you will have to change your crowd and you will have to change your friends. You will have to change what you are doing. **Isn't that wonderful?** That is what God does. He brings about a change in your life. Commit to belonging to that crowd. It will change your life for the better.

Someone came into my office that had been involved in the Gothic crowd. That is a really bad crowd. Most of the kids that I have met over the last 10 years or more who have been in that crowd have had major problems with depression and suicidal thoughts. They often get into the cutting scene which, even though people kid themselves into thinking differently, is as bad as drugs and maybe more dangerous. Who has bled to death doing drugs? This girl was having major problems in her life because she had gotten into this crowd. When she first started hanging around with this crowd, she told me she had just wanted to be accepted by someone, anyone. She got into the crowd not even knowing much about what it really was, or where it could take her. She wound up having to spend time in a mental hospital because of depression. If you ask her now if it was worth it, just being able to belong in a crowd, she will tell you definitely not.

When I first got saved I quit doing what everyone else in my crowd was doing. Most of that crowd no longer had anything to do with me. Know why? They weren't really my friends. They didn't really care about me. If they would have been, they wouldn't have stopped being my friends because I got my act and my life together. True friends will love you enough to help you to change your life for the better. People who use you for their own little good time will call you their best friend as long as you go in their direction. When your direction changes, they won't care about you any more. With friends like that, who needs enemies? I did have a few friends though who really cared about me. When I stopped drinking and partying, they were glad because they had worried about how I was wrecking my life. It was these friends who really helped me to get it together. How? It took me a long time to decide to make a commitment to God. When I did, He helped me to be able to see reality and He changed my want to and delivered me from the things that had my life so bound up and messed up. Until I made that commitment, I was like the rabbit, running in and out, not getting anywhere. I think that the main reason I was like that was because I was afraid that I couldn't serve God. When I made that commitment, though, God made a change in me. While I was in that running in and out stage though, several of my close friends died. I knew that they died without God in their lives. I knew that I could have said or done something to change that but because I wasn't living where I knew to live, I didn't say anything to them. I knew I had the truth that could have kept them from dying, that could have helped them to get their lives together, that could have kept them from going to hell, but I had been too busy compromising to tell them about that truth. I compromised for my friends. I found out that I really didn't love them either. At least not real love. If I loved them for real, I would have done something to prevent them from going to hell. That helped me to turn around and commit my heart and life to God. When I did, He did, and we got my life together. Then I led my friends to the Lord and helped them to get their lives together, or at least the ones who wanted to, and there were several who did. Matter of fact, there was such a change in me that a lot of my old friends saw it and knew that if I could change as bad as I was, then they could too. I found out that some of the friends that I had compromised for really wanted to change their own lives, but didn't know how. We had a little revival going on for a while. That is what friends are really all about. After that, I have been working with young people for the

last 30 years doing the same. I had lost my hope, but God gave it back to me and helped me to help others to find it.

I am convinced that another of hope's hindrances is addiction. Addiction can literally steal our lives. If you are a young person and you are using any kind of drugs or drinking, then the devil is stealing your life away from you and laughing. Now adults, before you start thinking that you can skip the rest of this because it is for young people, guess again. What about those pills that you are taking to calm your nerves and ease your anxieties and stress? If that isn't a drug then I don't know what it is. It is just legal ones. Why do you think that drug pushers get these and sell them to kids if it isn't a drug? Can you tell your child that drugs are wrong when your medicine cabinet is full of this stuff? Can you lead your children in finding peace with God and hope and faith, when you are relying on these drugs to get you through instead of relying on God? I'll go a step further. What about those churches that can't hold Sunday school and preaching back to back without a smoke break in between because their people are so addicted to cigarettes that they can't sit in church for two hours without lighting one up? There is such a cloud of smoke outside the church at break time that people might think there is a fire in the church. Sad to say, it sure isn't the fire of God's Spirit with all that going on. It will take the fire of God's Spirit in our churches to deliver our young people. We need to get delivered ourselves so that we have something to give them. We need to get the fire of God in our own lives so that we can lead them. We want to help them. We hurt because we see how they are destroying their lives. To do this we need to fix some things ourselves. We tell young people how wrong drugs are and how they destroy lives when they are stealing our nerve pills and getting hooked on them. We tell them that God can deliver them from drugs and alcohol when we can't sit in church without a smoke break. We get angry when our kids wreck our car because they are drunk, but it was our alcohol that they slipped that started them drinking in the first place. What is going on in churches across America? It is time we get real and we get a relationship with God that will clean us up. It is time that we clean out the hindrances in our lives so that we can light the way for our kids. Their lives may depend on it.

I guess the worst feeling that I had when I was messed up in this kind of life was the feeling that nobody loved me. It was the feeling that nobody cared about me. That was an awfully lonely feeling. That was the feeling that led me to try to commit suicide. Thank God that I didn't succeed. I can understand how bad that feeling is. Young people talk to me a lot about having that feeling. So many young people today have it. Now when I look back on why I had that feeling I can shed a little light and maybe help you to get over feeling that way. You see I had chosen a way of life that was not good for me. I thought I was having fun but that was before I watched my friends die. Before that happened, I wasn't willing to listen to anybody who told me that I needed to change my life. I didn't want anybody around who tried to tell me that I was heading in a wrong direction. I shut out of my life anybody who tried to tell me all this was bad. I risked it all for my friends. Then I got a real look at my friends. I found out that they really didn't care for me. Then I looked around. There was nobody there or so I thought. I had pushed away my parents and my family and those people who really cared about me. When I figured out my so-called friends, I had nobody and that was a horrible lonely feeling.

If you start pushing out God who loved you enough to send His Son to die for you, and you push out the people like your family who have been there for you from the time that you were born and you start building your life around people who bottom line don't care for you even though it seems at the time that they do, then don't be surprised if one day you are left with that horrible lonely feeling. There is hope if you have found yourself to be in that place. God's love is still there for you. He isn't the one that moved away. You are. Just run back home to Him. He will definitely run to you. Your family hasn't gone anywhere. If you will run back to them, they will still love you. They will be there for you whether you are 14 or 41. If you have a mom or dad who isn't there for you, then there are others in your family just as important who are there. Don't push them away. It is easy to take those closest to us for granted, and even use them to get what we want. Family is

so important. They are worth holding onto. They are worth treating with respect. No matter what happens they will be there. Don't take that for granted.

What else can hinder you? You have an enemy. He is out to destroy anybody who is serving God. He already has destroyed those who aren't serving God. He already has them on the road to destruction. He doesn't worry about them. Just those who are starting to serve the Lord and those who are. That enemy is the devil. He hates anyone that God loves. The Bible compares Him to a roaring lion. In I Peter 5:8-9 we read, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith...." We see several things in this verse. We see that the devil does have power to destroy us and he is walking around just waiting for his chance like a lion walking around his prey. We also see something else. We don't have to be afraid of him. This verse says that we can resist him in faith. We can stand up to him and win. He will hinder you in whatever way he can. He will steal your hope, your life, and your soul. He will use whatever and whomever he can to get you sidetracked. Here is one example. I have seen this happen a hundred times. I have known people to commit their life to God and get on the right track. Here would come a best friend that they hadn't seen in a dozen years to get them turned back to their old way of life. How did they know? The devil sent that person. Can he really do it? Sure can. The devil eats up our time keeping us from serving God. He eats up our finances keeping us in financial struggle. He comes against our family causing problems between them. He comes against our parents, against our children and steals their peace of mind. He will steal your hope every chance he can get because he knows if you lose that, you are closer to giving up. What is our hope in standing against something so powerful? James 4:8 tells us, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinner; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." Because when you do that you can do this-verse 7, "Submit yourself therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Wow. Do we have to worry about the devil? Do we have to be afraid of the devil? Not if we stop sinning and make up our mind which side we are on and we submit to God doing it His way. If we do these things not only do we not have to be afraid of the devil, we can tell him where to get off. We just have to refuse to settle for his junk. We have to identify his tricks and stand against them and refuse to put up with it. God helps us to be able to do this.

God actually gives us a suit of armor to protect us against the devil. We read about it in Ephesians 6:10-17. I have added some things in () "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might (it doesn't matter how strong we are, we can stand in the strength of the Lord). Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (Notice it says the whole armor. If we only put on half of it we can still get beat up pretty bad.) For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Pretty scary stuff huh? Not really. Not if you put your armor on.) Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth (that's why it is so important to know the truth about God and His Word, that is the most important protection that you have against the devil), having on the breastplate of righteousness, (That means doing right. If you are doing what you know you should do and letting God help you to do this. If you are repenting when you fail God and getting His forgiveness, then your heart is protected from being turned away from God.) And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace (If you are doing what you can to tell others about God then your feet are going in the right direction) Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. (We don't have to be afraid of the devil because we have faith in God that He is able to keep us and He will keep us because He loves us.) And take the helmet of salvation (The helmet protects our brain. If our thinking gets out of whack, and I know lots of people whose thinking has gotten weird, then the devil can really wreck our lives. Possessing salvation for real protects our mind from getting weird.) And the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (This is the only part of the armor that is offensive instead of defensive. It is not only protection but it is also a

weapon. The truth in the Word of God is one thing that the devil is afraid of. It not only provides protection but it instructs you in how to go after the devil and defeat him.) You don't have to be afraid of the devil. Matter of fact, you can go after him and defeat him. You can stand up against him and keep him from destroying your life, and you can keep him from destroying the lives of those you love.

Besides being hindered by other people, and by the devil, there is another hindrance that we all face. You have heard the old saying, "My worse enemy is myself." There is a lot of truth in that. We have talked about this in earlier chapters. When we let Jesus in our heart and we let God's Spirit rule in our lives. We have the ability and the power to overcome ourselves. Our flesh is weak and prone to trouble. We don't have to go along with it. We have God's help from the very inside of us to help us overcome. We just have to want to.

We have had a little sermon to parents in this chapter. Coming up is a whole chapter dedicated to parents. Hold on young people. Don't think that you can get out of reading it. It might help you to understand parents better. After this is a chapter about how we can learn to hear God's voice.

Chapter 11.

To Parents

In the last chapter, I touched on how parents can make or break their kids. That subject is important enough to deserve a whole chapter. We need to find our hope in Christ, and we need to live in a way that our children can find their own hope. Like I said earlier, kids, don't think that reading this won't help you. It will. To begin this chapter we are going to go back in time to the days just before the children of Israel finally made it to the land that God had given them, the land that later became the nation of Israel. For 40 years these people had wandered through the desert. Finally, they were home. Moses gathered them together to give them instructions in what they were to do and how to live in the new land so that they could possess the land that God gave them and so they could keep it. Deuteronomy 6:32-33 tells us part of these instructions that God through Moses gave the people. First He gave them commandments, instructions to follow. Then He said, "Ye shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God hath commanded you; ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. Ye shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God hath commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess." This was why the Lord gave them certain commandments to follow. That is why God says to do what He says to do. He then said in chapter 6:1-3, "Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: That you mightest fear the Lord thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's sons, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey." If they wanted to possess the land that God gave them, and if they wanted to prosper in it, then they would have to keep God's commandments. Why? Because God is smart. A lot smarter than we are. He knows what we need to do. Then if they really loved their children, they were to teach these things to them so that they could do the same. Verse 25 tells us, "And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us." We can't become righteous on our own. But if we do what God commands us to do with His help, it will be counted as our righteousness. One of the things that God commands us to do is teach these things to our children. One of the main ways that we can teach it is living it before them.

I am so thankful for my mother. She lived a life before us that pointed us to God. My Dad wasn't a Christian. It was hard for her because of that. We had a double standard in our home that could have undone all the good our mom taught us. She was strong enough that it didn't. While it could have been easy for her to stay out of church because Dad did, or to let us stay out of church with him, she held to her guns, and not only did she go, we did too. Matter of fact, we knew that we didn't even need to argue about it. The subject was not open to discussion. For all the years we lived in her house, we went to church not only on Sunday, but any time else something was going on. I hear parents say today, well I don't think that it is good to make them go when they don't want to because it could make them rebel against God and against church. Well, I can say this. If you don't make them go you will have a worse rebellion in your home and you will pay a dearer price than you are willing to pay. While it would have been easy for Mom to go along with some of the things that Daddy did, she didn't compromise. She lived an example before us that pointed us to God. She lived an example pointing us to His Word. We heard the Bible not just at church but at home too. We heard prayer not just at mealtimes but we heard her when she was praying for us and she didn't know we were listening.

Why did she do all this? Why was it important to her? Because this is how her Mom and Dad lived. When we went to Gran's and Pa's house that is how it was there too. Why did they live

this way? Because that is how their parents raised them. Do you know what the biggest blessing was that came out of my Mom's dedication? I have three sisters. Today, all of them are serving God. So are their husbands. My sisters have families of their own now. Most of their children are serving God. Their children have children now. They are raising them by these same principles. Their children are in church. They hear prayer and the Bible read in their homes. Five generations that I know are serving the Lord. One of the generations I didn't know. I didn't get to know my great-grandmother who died before I was born. I did know her prayers. My grandmother told me that my great-grandmother prayed often for her children, for her children's children, and for their children, the ones who weren't even born yet. That would have been my generation. There may be some of us in our family who aren't serving the Lord with all their hearts. You can know one thing for sure though, they have a lot of people praying for them. And when they decide to do so, they will definitely know the way home. Do you know what another blessing was that came from my Mom's dedication? A couple of years before he died, my Dad gave his heart to the Lord. I know that without a doubt that he is in heaven today.

I have had kids come into the school who had no idea about God. They had weird ideas about religion. They had no understanding of what it meant to live a Christian life with morals. They had not heard the truth. They had heard plenty of lies though and they were warped by those lies. Everywhere else they went they had heard those lies, from the school system as a whole, from their friends, from people around them who didn't know God. What about their parents?

I have heard parents tell me that they knew that it was important for their kids to go to church, so they sent them. We used to have a bus ministry. The bus was filled with children whose parents knew they should be in church. These parents didn't commit themselves to God enough to make a change in their lives. They didn't commit themselves to God enough to go themselves. They expected the church to teach it to them. That isn't how it works. The footsteps that your children follow will be those footsteps that are the closest to them. It will be your footsteps. Proverbs 22:6 tells us, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it." Ephesians 6:4 says, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture, and admonition of the Lord." We know that the children of all Christians aren't Christians themselves. So what is this saying? Is it saying that if we serve God our children are guaranteed to be Christians? It is saying that this truth that we put into them will never leave them. If they do depart from the truth, they will know the way home. If we don't put it in them, then how will they ever find the way?

Who is going to teach your children? What are they teaching them? We get too busy tied up in things that in the end don't even matter. Then we get too tired to do the important things. Then we wonder why our kids have such problems. It takes strength and energy and dedication to teach. You have to be consistent. You have to stay at it. Kids are masters at getting their own way. How many have figured that out? Children have to be trained. They have to be led. They have to be taught. These truths have to be put in them. Then when they are old enough to choose to serve God, they will. That truth will be in them. If all you put in them is the world's junk (TV, movies, friends that aren't Christians), then don't be surprised if all this drowns out the truth you put in them.

Have you ever seen a potter's wheel? The potter puts a blob of clay on the wheel. He beats it until it is soft. He then begins to shape it. Little by little it takes shape. In the end there is something that comes out of that blob of clay that is not only beautiful, but also useful. Our kids are like that. We teach them. We live an example before them. We require them to do the things that we know they should do. We do what the Bible calls chasten them. The Bible says that if we don't love them then we won't correct them. We teach them the Word of God. All of this shapes them into becoming something that is beautiful and useful. Another important thing is to open up our homes to the Spirit of God. Let the Spirit of God come into your midst when you pray. Let Him know that He is a welcome guest in your house. His presence will chase out the devil and the junk he brings with him. It will also teach your kids how to open up their own lives and their heart and it

will teach them how to let the Spirit of God rule in their lives.

Too often parents don't correct their children when they are small. The Bible says that God chastens us, which means the same as He corrects us. For whom the Lord loveth he chaseth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Have you ever had God whip you? He will convict you in your heart so that you literally feel like your chest is exploding, like you will nearly die. He will cause circumstances that literally tear your hide off to keep you from going in a wrong direction. He will send people to tell you the truth even if part of you doesn't want to hear it. When they tell you what you need to hear it makes you uncomfortable. It makes you so uncomfortable that you may get mad. But you hear it and receive it and do what they tell you and it changes the course of your life. I am so glad that God does chasten us. It is not in our nature to do what is right. We have to be taught to do so. Even then, we will get off on some hardheaded direction that will mess us up if we are left on our own. If left alone, we can bust hell wide open. God loves us. He loves us enough to correct us. Do we love our children enough to correct them? Do they need this chastisement less than we do? How will it affect the direction of their life if you don't correct them and teach them?

As a note here, there have been times in my life when I was determined to do anything and everything but what was right. I was determined to do my own thing and I didn't want to listen to anybody. God never gave up on me. Today I am serving Him. There was a time when I didn't want to hear anything my parents had to say. I was terrible. I was torture. My mother never gave up on me. On the good side, I was only terrible for about 5-6 years of my life. The last 20-some years of my life I have been different. Don't give up on your kids. Don't stop loving them because they are going through a hard time. Don't stop correcting them and chastising them. You might stop caring just before they break through. Don't give up and give in either. That is worse than not caring at all. If you are on and off, or double minded about things, that will do more damage than good. Ask God to give you the strength that you need to hold in there for the duration. I know a lot of homes where God has made a difference changing a child that was heading in the wrong direction. These are blessed homes indeed. I'm sure there have been many parents who quit caring and quit trying right before the change came.

Here is a note for kids that I am putting in here. You may be a Christian trying to serve God in a family that isn't. Don't give up trying. You never know the difference that you make even if you don't see it at first. There have been many, many parents whose testimony of how they got saved starts like this, "It all started when my daughter or my son started going to church. Now we all go."

I see parents all the time coming into the office and I wonder how old they are because they act like kids. They are dressed in outfits that look ridiculous because you can tell that they are trying to look like teenagers. These are the parents who have the philosophy that they need to be their teenager's friend to be a good parent. Now I mean best friends down on their kid's level. I see two things. There is no correction. I hear them say, oh I am this way because I want my kids to like me. If you are being a good parent, really concerned with how they are going to grow up to be, you will correct them. That means that they won't always like you. If you are trying to win a popularity contest with them, not only will you not be able to correct them, you will lose their respect. Kids know what parents are supposed to be like, even if they act like they don't want it to be that way. Even if they argue that everybody else's parents do something else. What they need isn't always what they like, but they still know what they need. If they don't respect you then they will find someone else that they respect and they will follow them. Be a parent. Not a friend. They have lots of friends. They only have 2 parents.

Children need love. They need security. This world is shaking and rocking. Children need to be able to wrap their families around them like a big warm security blanket. Parents, if you are rocking and reeling, how can you be this security to your children. If all you do is whine and fret and worry about all that is going on in the world, how can you be security to your children? Direct

them to the light of the world so that He can light up their world. Be a light pointing them to the One Who can give them the hope and peace they need.

Most of all, loving your children doesn't mean giving them things. Love is a commitment-not things. There is more to being a parent than giving them stuff. That is copping out. It takes a lot more effort than that. You can't show your children how much you love them by buying for them. As the economy gets worse, we aren't able to afford as much as we used to. If all your children know about your love is what you give them, then when you can no longer give them things, they will think that you don't love them. For the rest of their life they will follow whatever and whoever can buy things for them. This will set them up for some miserable relationships.

Another of the mistakes that a lot of parents make is buying name brand clothes so that their kids can be popular at school. I have known parents to sacrifice to the place of not being able to put food on their table so that their kids can have name brand things so that they would be accepted at school. Just so they could fit in to some certain crowd. Let's say your child wants to fit into the skater crowd, so you dress him up in clothes that fit that crowd. They start fitting into that crowd and become accepted by it. If you don't know what skaters are, then ask your kids, they will know. Do you know bottom line what the glue is that keeps a lot of these crowds circulating together? If you don't know what keeps the skater crowd circulating together asks the town cops who police the skateboard parks. They will tell you drugs are a major problem. This happens so many times. We buy our kids clothes to have a certain look to be able to fit into a certain crowd and we don't bother to check out what that crowd is like. Then we wonder what happened to change our children into the monsters they become. They start having problems. Why? Because they did fit into that crowd. There are a lot more crowds with a lot of looks. We think that our children are doing things to be able to have their own identity. Guess again. Take a look at the crowd they are trying to fit into.

The most unpopular crowd in the public school is the Christian crowd. You won't find people standing in line to fit into that crowd. This is the crowd that wants to serve God. This is the crowd that believes in having morals and standards. That crowd wants to do their best and achieve because that is what God wants for them. This is the crowd that has found their identity in God. They don't have to dress weird or do weird things to fit in, because they know who they are and they can have the peace that comes when we know that we can just be ourselves. Like I said, this isn't the popular crowd. Staying out of drugs and homosexuality and sex, isn't popular. Staying away from the things that wreck lives isn't popular. The Bible tells us that there are two roads. One is very well traveled. Everybody knows about it. The other is narrow. Matthew 7:13-14 tells us about these two roads. "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." ***Which road are you helping your children to be on?***

This next chapter is written for both the parents who want to learn how to be better parents, and for young people. This next chapter is written for those people who feel like they can't do what they want to do, and don't really know what it is they are supposed to do. It is the key to having a blessed and prosperous life in the middle of hard times. It talks about more ways to find and hold on to your hope. Read on.

Chapter 12. *Hearing God's Voice*

God can speak to your heart. Listening to His voice and obeying what He tells you to do is one of the number one ways to be able to hold onto your hope. I was blessed to be able to spend several summers in Russia and Romania. This was just a couple of years after communism fell. During communism, you couldn't own anything. The government owned it all. Because of this, there weren't any fences. Everybody shared all the land under the government, so you couldn't fence your part off. If you had herds of cattle or sheep there was a big grassy place in every village where all the cattle and all the sheep, geese, pigs, whatever else, would go and graze. Some of the children would watch the flocks, just like children did in Bible times. (Remember David was a shepherd who became king.) Just before dark, the kids took all the animals home. I asked how the kids could keep up with where all the different animals belonged. There were probably a hundred animals or more. You wouldn't believe the answer to that one. The kids didn't need to know where each animal belonged. The animals knew themselves, and each one would go to their own homes. As the kids drove the animals down the village streets, the sheep and goats, geese, ducks, and cows would all turn in at the house that they belonged in. They knew where they belonged. I am sure that there were some who would get stubborn from time to time. But after wandering around the streets with an empty belly, it wasn't too hard for them to decide to go home.

Seeing all this helped me to understand this scripture, John 10:1-15. It tells us about following a good shepherd. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: And he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of the strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them...then said Jesus unto them again. Verily, Verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep...I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep...I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." Jesus is the good shepherd. Throughout the Bible He is called a shepherd. Shepherds took care of the sheep. They protected them. They wouldn't let them go into dangerous territory. They made sure they were fed. Psalms 23 talks about the good shepherd. Read it for a blessing. If you know that you belong to the good shepherd, you can trust Him to lead you. You will be able to hear His voice and know His voice.

I can tell the people who are listening to God's voice. They are the ones who, even though the world is falling down around their head, are walking out of it all on top of the situation. They have a way of doing just the right thing that they need to do to turn it all around even if everybody around them is telling them that isn't what they need to do. God's ways are above our ways. He is a lot smarter than we are. God knows what we need to do in every situation we face. We just have to be willing to listen to Him. We have to hear what He says to do and do it. The being willing part comes when we figure out that our way won't work and we admit that we need God's help to lead us. Then we have to be willing to accept Godly advice. We can't do where we feel like we have to prove everything. That is when we can't listen and take advice. Hey, I am not just talking to teens here, but to adults too. How willing you are to listen to good, Godly, sound advice will be how willing you are to listen to God's voice. On the other hand if you are someone who runs around listening to everybody, but you never take the time to listen to God's voice, your life will be in a constant state of confusion and a perpetual wreck. Choose carefully the people who you listen to.

Where will you be five years from now? What will your life be like? Will you be a success in the things that you do, or will you be a failure? Will you be happy? Will you have peace of mind? Will the people around you be strong people who encourage you and cause you to be a better person? Will you be able to fulfill your dreams? What about 20 years from now? If you listen to

God's voice and let Him lead you, the whole picture of your life will be a good one. It won't be perfect. We live in a very imperfect world with lots of imperfect people. We ourselves are not perfect. But if we listen to God, He will lead us in how to make good things out of the imperfect things. He promises that He will work all things out for our good if we obey Him.

What does listening to God's voice have to do with hope? I heard these stories not long ago. It was at a time when my own hope got dim. I was letting my eyes get off God and onto the problems in the world. I had started getting down. I heard a preacher preaching on the radio about Daniel. Daniel had lived at a time when the world was falling down around his head. Not only did he come out on top time after time, but he also became a person that was very important in his world. He did so because he listened to God's voice. Daniel made the statement that God was very aware of the affairs of man. He raises up kings and puts them down, raises up kingdoms and puts them down. God is a just God. When a nation forgets Him and becomes evil in its thoughts and intents, then God judges it. But in the middle of judging the evil in that nation, He doesn't forget His people. That is what is going on in our nation. God has warned us to turn to Him and not forsake His ways, but our nation as a whole has become one of the most evil nations. We are going through God's judgment. His people, though, are still held in the palm of His hand. This same thing happened in Daniel's time. Daniel testified of this. The sermon that I heard by the first preacher spoke about this.

Then a second preacher came on the radio. He told the story of a man who had an orange grove. God spoke to the man to spray his orange trees to protect them against a frost. He did it even though there was no suspicion that there was going to be a frost. It wasn't even the time of year for that sort of thing. Everybody laughed at him for doing this. The next night a killing frost came. It killed all the orange trees around this man's groves. His were not touched. You could drive along for miles around and see nothing but dead trees. Right in the middle of it was this man's beautiful, healthy trees. This is how it is when times are hard. If you listen to God's voice, no matter what is happening around you, your life can be like these orange groves. Everyone will know that you have done something different.

I guess that God wanted me to learn this lesson for good, because after I heard these two preachers preach these messages, a friend of mine called me. He told me that several years ago, God told him to start a business. He followed the Lord's instructions on how to do it. Everybody laughed at him at the time, because it was something that there wasn't much of a demand for. He told me that now that the economy was bad, there was a demand for his services, and his business was booming even though a lot of businesses around him were going under. He made the statement that he was certainly glad that he had listened to God and obeyed Him.

If you are going through a hard time, the only hope that you have to be able to work your way out of it is to listen to God's voice and do what He says to do. God can speak to us in a way that we can hear and understand. He doesn't often speak out loud in a voice we hear with our ears, though He can. He speaks to us in our hearts. He can also speak to us through His Word. He can speak to us by using His people. We need to get to know His voice. Someone came into my office the other day. She said that she had a medical condition and one doctor was telling her that if she didn't do this certain treatment she would die. Another doctor was telling her that if she did this certain treatment she would die. She was really frustrated about what she should do. Her life was on the line. All I could tell her was that she needed to listen to God and do what He said to do. I don't think that she knew how to do this because she said, "What does that mean? Do you do what you get into your mind to do?" That is a really dangerous thing to do. There are three different things that we can hear in our minds. God speaks to us, yes, but so does the devil. And we have our own thoughts. And we have the thoughts that people put in our minds. How do we sort it all out? Jesus said in the parable about the good shepherd that His sheep hear His voice. We can know for a certainty that it is God's voice that we are hearing. If we never listen to His voice, and obey it, then when we go through a time like this lady is facing, it is really hard for us to be able to do so.

When I first started learning how to hear God's voice, God used a picture to teach me. He

showed me someone who was upstairs in their house. Someone that they didn't know came in downstairs. They didn't know who it was even though they could hear their voice, because the voice was not familiar to them. The next time that person came, they recognized it. The more the person came, when they heard that voice, they automatically knew who it was. That is the way it is with hearing God's voice. The more we hear it and the more we obey, the easier it gets to sort it out from the other voices. The more we fellowship with Him, the more we pray, the more we spend time in His presence in church, the easier it gets to recognize Him.

One of the keys to being able to recognize God's voice is knowing His Word. If you hear what you think is God's voice and He is telling you to do something that is against His Word, then that is not God telling you that. For example, I knew a lady who told a preacher that God told her to tell him that he should leave his wife and marry her. Now, we know that isn't what God's Word says to do. We can discern between God's voice and the voices of those who aren't God by comparing it to God's Word.

It is important to hear God's voice. It is important to hear His Word. Most important, it is important to obey it and do what He says to do. If we only listen and we don't do it, what good does it do? God can tell us how to fix our situation, but if we don't do it, that situation won't get fixed. His Spirit will enable us to do what He tells us to do. I have had God tell me to do lots of things that I knew I couldn't do. At first I would rebel and refuse to do it. Then I would get hurt because, if He loved me, why would He ask me to do something that I knew I couldn't do. Then after I got over that, I listened to Him. He would tell me that He would enable me to do what He had asked through His Spirit who was in me. His Spirit in me would help me to do whatever He said to do. God's Spirit gives us the power to be able to overcome and to do great things.

This is just a time for your own reflection. Obedience isn't something you do once in a while. It is a condition of your heart. Are you obedient? Are you hearing God's voice, submitted to God's Spirit and yielding to His will for your life? Is your life evidencing this obedience or lack of it?

Chapter 13.

The Promise of the Holy Ghost

We have talked about the importance of living a life that is free from sin. We have talked about how it is important to obey God. We have talked about how we have hope to be able to be free from the things that cause us to be bound up so that we can't serve God and have a full life. We have talked about things that hinder our hope and how important it is to run from all that. We have talked about how the devil tries to destroy us and about how we have to stay free from his tricks. We have also talked about how this is all hard to do on our own. Now when you read this you may feel a little hopeless. You may think, "I know I need to do all that, but it is too hard. I can't do it". I have a question for you that will help you to figure this all out. Why would a God who loves you, one who sent His Son to die for you, expect you to do something that is impossible and send you to hell because you can't do it? Why would He require you to do something that is impossible?

Some people see God like this contractor. Let's say a contractor contracted a building crew to build a multimillion-dollar shopping mall. Let's say that the crew shows up to work on the first day and they find the tools that have been laid out for them. They have been given a handsaw, a couple of screw drivers a piece, a wheelbarrow and a hoe, a hammer and 5 nails. Can you imagine how mad this crew would be? They are given a job to do that they have to do, and all the wrong tools to do it with. Your life is a lot like a building. God is your contractor. He is the One who is responsible to give you all the right tools. He will show you how to fit the building together and how to use the tools that He gives you. You just have to follow His instructions. He loves you and wants your building to be just right. Why wouldn't He give you what you need?

Some people get saved. The first minute that things get hard, they give up. They say it is too hard for them. They don't even get to know the contractor let alone the tools. Don't cop out on God and tell Him that you can't do it, because He has done everything to enable you to be able to do it. He has given His Son who died for you to be forgiven when you fail. That is true, but some people see that as the only tool that they need. They stop there. They think, well, I don't have to try really hard and I don't have to make any commitment to this thing, because God will forgive me if I mess up. If all a building crew had to count on would be the construction bosses forgiveness, what kind of a building would they build? It probably would be a mess. God didn't just stop with forgiveness. He gave you these tools to help you to overcome and do your best. He has given you His Word to keep you. He has given you His Spirit to live in your heart to help you from the inside out. Because His Spirit comes into our heart to live, we have what the Bible calls the fruits of His Spirit. They are listed in Galatians 5:22, "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance..." An apple tree has apples because it has in it the ability to make apples, so it does. It has apples in its being, so it makes apples. It doesn't have to try to, it just does. It doesn't try to make pears. That isn't what is in it. God's Spirit does the same thing. Those things listed are characteristics of God's Spirit. When His Spirit is in us, we have those characteristics. Now we also have our characteristics that may be a lot different from those. But if we let God have His way in our life, and we stop ourselves from getting our way, we will demonstrate those characteristics, just like the apple tree has apples. We have these things because God is in us and that is how He is.

Can you build your building strong? Romans 14:4 says, "...Yea he shall be holden up for God is able to make him stand." II Corinthians 9:8 says, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work." In I Timothy 1:12 we read, "And I thank Christ our Lord who hath enabled me..." Isaiah 40:31 says, "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint." Isaiah 41:10 says, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." In II Corinthians 12:9

we read, “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

There is another tool that God gives us which is the most powerful tool that we can have. It is a tool that a lot of people don't even know exists. Many people fail because they don't have this tool, even though it is given freely. Some churches don't even teach about this tool. Because they don't understand about it, if people hear about it, they don't think it is important to have. Some people are even afraid of it because they don't understand it. It is kind of like one of those huge power saws. I am afraid of one of those big saws. I have never used one, and at this moment I don't plan on learning. I don't understand how to use it and that makes me afraid of it. I am not afraid of it because it is something bad, but because I don't know about it. If I were to get a job on a construction site, believe you me I would have to learn how to use it. Especially if I wanted to get my building done. I would have to first realize that the tool was there for me. Then I would have to learn how to use it. Then I would have to pick it up and use it. After I got familiar with it after practicing and using it a while, I would probably never again start a building without it. I would probably get to the place where I would shake my head at those people who were afraid of it. This gift is a lot like that.

This gift is the key to having a life full of victory especially in these hard times. We need all the power that we can get to be able to stand up and be the men and women of God that we need to be in these last days. We need to be free and full of fire to be able to be a light in this world of darkness. God gives us this fire and this power through His gift of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. It is like the saw, though. If you haven't heard of it, be willing to learn about it. Be willing to ask God about it and hear what He says about it. Be willing to learn about it, and be willing to use it. It will change your life. It may be just the tool you need to build your building straight and true. I am putting here a chapter from my book *Walking in the Spirit*.

The Baptism of the Holy Ghost

Trying to walk in the Spirit, live in victory, or live with hope without having the Baptism of the Holy Ghost is like trying to race a 2003 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. You may be thinking 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. There was none of that intellectual twisting around that a lot of people do. 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 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 serving Him full time for over 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. 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 bbargue 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 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 to interpret, or He will use 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 it 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 turn 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 is in church or at home. Allow God's Spirit to control. Then He will be there when you need Him. This is one of the greatest stories I have ever heard about the power in the prayer of the Holy Ghost. 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 miraculously spared. Another time 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?"

Chapter 14.

The Hope That Comes From Being Loved

In an earlier chapter we talked about how terrible the feeling of loneliness is and how it can affect people. We have talked about how the suicide rate is up among both teens and adults. When you talk to friends and family of these young people who gave up on life, you see a common ingredient. They felt like they had lost all hope. And they felt like nobody cared for them. They felt like they were all alone and no one loved them. I am convinced that these feelings are all related. When you don't think that anybody loves you, and no one really cares what happens to you, it is easy to lose hope. I often talk to young people who feel this way. They feel like they aren't important to anyone. They feel lost and empty inside. They do anything just to get people to love them, but when they do this, they find out that this love that they get isn't enough. They sacrifice everything just to have someone to love them and when that person lets them down, because their life was built around that person, their whole life falls apart. I know a cure for all that. It is falling in love completely and wholly with someone who is perfect, someone who will never let you down. Someone who loves you so much that He died for you. Someone who loves you with a perfect love. I am putting here a chapter from another book that I wrote titled, ***You Are Beloved and Longed For.***

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.

You are loved. That brings hope. When my world felt like it was crashing down around me, I knew that the One who loved me would keep me. My trust was in Him. My hope was in Him. I not only knew that He was able to make a way for me to be OK, I knew that He would. Find God's love for you. Find that hope that it can give you.

I want to add a note at the end of this chapter to anyone who has given up hope to the place that you are considering ending it all. If suicidal thoughts have been in your mind, thoughts of not being able to endure it all, don't stop trying to live. Don't give up. Like I've mentioned before, there was a time in my life when I tried to commit suicide. I thought that there was no hope, that I had totally wrecked my life. I thought that no one cared. It seemed that there was no way out. All these things were lies. That has been over 30 years ago. You know what? I'm still here. I have found out that there is always hope. I have found out that I am beloved and longed for. I have found God's love which has given me hope for the last 30 years. I have found the love of people

who care for me. I found out that all the reasons that I thought I couldn't make it were all just lies. There is hope for you. You may be giving up right before it all gets better. You may have just been trying to find hope in all the wrong places with all the wrong people. Just because those people have let you down it doesn't mean that there is no hope. Put your hand in God's hand. You can trust Him. You are too precious for your life to be wasted. You are precious even if you don't feel like it. Let God love you. Let Him work in your life and bring about His change. Then when He has reached out to you, you will be able to reach out to someone else who feels the same way that you do.

Another reason to hang on is the people who love you, even if you think that no one does. You will affect someone if you aren't there, even if you think that you won't. Even if you think that the people who love you would be better off without you, think again. What will their lives be like without you tomorrow, or the next day, or the next year, or the next 5 years? What will it be like for them to try to overcome the shock and trauma of your death? Some people never get over having someone they love kill themselves. They often wind up doing the same thing. I have seen this happen so often. I have known of parents that took their own life. Years later, their children took their lives sometimes in the same way that they did. Or a teenager took his life, and a brother or sister, or friend did the same. This is a hard thing to go through, having someone you love take their life. Don't do that to the people who love you even though at the time you may feel like nobody cares.

Another reason to hang on is this. If you are tired of this life, don't be in such a hurry to rush into the next one. After all, it is eternal, and you can't take it back after it is done, no matter how much you may regret it. You may be going through a hard time now, but it is nothing compared to the eternal suffering you will have if you miss heaven and spend eternity in hell. Don't take that chance. It is not worth it. It is a very common teaching that people who commit suicide will spend eternity in hell. I tend to agree for this reason. If someone has given up on life and has given up on God helping them, then they have taken their hand out of His hand and they have become separated from Him. If they do this and die, then what guarantee do they have of making it to heaven?

God's love will bring you hope. No matter how bad things appear, think about how much He loves you. Think about how He is able to work things out for you. Think about how you can trust His love for you. Hope that comes from love is a wonderful thing.

Do you know that there are terrorists among us? Coming up next. Let's find out who they are and how they can steal our hope.

Chapter 15. *The Terrorists Among Us*

If you ask even the middle school kids what a terrorist is, they know the answer. Until September 11 happened we had a sense of security in our country. After the attacks, we knew we were no longer invincible. We had been attacked from inside our country. Fear settled down on us all and it is still a fear that we deal with years later. That fear shook us all. We became afraid to fly. We felt we weren't safe in our own cities and stopped traveling. Many things including our economy suffered. Why? That was the whole point behind what the terrorists do. That is why they are called terrorists, because they use terror to control. They use fear to manipulate people. They have learned the power of fear and they have learned how to use it to their advantage.

It is kind of like the bullies at school. They beat you up and steal your lunch money. You start fearing them. Your life is changed because of this fear. Even when they aren't around, you are always looking for them, expecting them to come up behind you. You lose your peace. You miss out on other things because you try to avoid them. They control your life through fear. Have you ever been there? Well, terrorists aren't much different than schoolyard bullies.

Then one day something happens to turn a light on. You realize that this is not worth it. You realize that it is time to stand up for yourself. You get tired of being pushed around and you do something about it. You say, "NO MORE" and you make a stand. And wonder of wonders the bullying stops. You realize that it was really the fear that was destroying your life more than the bully. That is how it is with the terrorists. We stood up to them and they backed down. Even though they have made threats, there have been no more 9/11's.

What am I talking about? The fear that the terrorists left behind has destroyed a lot of people. People have all kinds of problems, health wise and emotional as well, because of this fear. The Bible says that in the end times men's hearts will fail them with fear. Young people are stressing out and having heart problems, anxiety attacks. Stress is causing people to stroke out. All those words, (heart problems, anxiety attacks, strokes), are just another word for fear. One of the things that can steal your hope quick is fear. It is a terrorist among us.

What can be done to stand up against this bully, this terrorist called fear? Remember the schoolyard bully. Remember, to be able to stand against him, you first had to realize that you were tired of putting up with him. That is the same way with fear. We have to learn to recognize what it is, and we have to recognize that we are tired of it. We then have to realize that we don't have to put up with it. Fear doesn't help things. It just makes it all worse. It makes our minds dull. When we are afraid we can't think right. It messes up our health. Fear and worry act the same way. Both of them are useless. Neither of them can change a thing for the better. Realize that they are useless, and that you are tired of them. Make up your mind you are not going to allow them to push you around any longer. Stand up. Rebuke all of that. Tell it to get away and leave you alone.

The Bible says in II Timothy 1:7, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." God hasn't given us a spirit of fear, so who is causing this? Who wants to destroy you using fear? It is the devil. We have talked before how we don't have to allow the devil to come against us. We have talked about how we can stand up against him and rebuke him in the name of Jesus, and he has to listen and leave us alone. After all, the devil is just like a schoolyard bully. We just have to make up our minds that we aren't taking his junk any more and we are going to stand against it. The Bible tells us that if we resist him, then he has to go.

The Bible has a lot to say about fear. It uses the words "Fear Not" 366 times. Some people say that there is one for every day of the year and one more. It must be really important that we not let fear control our lives. Here are some of the verses:

Psalms 118:6, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear..."

Isaiah 35:4, "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you."

Matthew 10:30-31, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."

Romans 8:15, "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of Adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

I John 4:18, "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. We love Him, because He first loved us."

Revelations 1:17, "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen: and have the keys of hell and of death."

We don't have to be afraid. That is one terrorist that we know how to get rid of. There are more. Keep reading.

Chapter 16.

Depression

There is a sickness that is sweeping our country. It is striking both the young and the old. It takes those who are sound and strong in their bodies and makes them totally disabled. It takes people who are able to turn their world upside down, and cripples them. It takes the willing and drives all willingness away. I think that, besides fear, this is one of the devil's number one tools he uses to destroy us. It drives away hope. It even steals our relationship with God and with others around us. It locks us in a bubble away from love. Depression is a terrible thing. Depression is becoming more and more prevalent. I think this is true because people are sinking down into stress and worry. They are losing sight of hope. There is so much bad news that people's hearts are melting with all this turmoil. There is a reason why times of economic problems are called depressions. It is not just because the economy is in a state of depression, but it is also because people get in a state of depression. It is because the people's morale begins to drop and they fall into depression. With God, there is no need for this, but people forget this.

I guess a picture that gives us an example of what depression does is this. Picture yourself in a dark, dark room. There is only a glimmer of light. You can't always see the light because it is just a pinpoint. If something isn't in that light then you can't see it. Because it is so dark, after a while you become numb and you stop caring about things. Everything that is in the dark loses an interest for you and since most things are in the dark you stop caring about most things. Soon there isn't much to get you out of bed. Just like a plant that doesn't get sunlight, your health starts to fade. You don't take care of your physical self because you don't care, so you start having health problems. This makes the emotional part even harder.

It is so easy to sink into depression and stay there. There is a commercial on TV that says these lines. "Who does depression hurt? Everybody." Then it switches to show all the people who are being affected by a person's depression. One of the main keys to being able to unlock depression is realizing that we have it. Then we have to realize what it is. Then we have to realize that we don't have to keep it. Then we have to make up our mind that we aren't going to let it bind us. Then we have turn to God for deliverance. Then we can get rid of it. If we can't get out of it because we don't care about ourselves, then we need to look around us at the people that it is affecting. We have to come out of it for them.

We can, like the commercial says, turn to doctors and drugs that only deal with the physical side of things. Like the commercial says, these have so many side affects that ½ of the commercial is a list of the side affects, and some are really bad. Or you can go past the outside symptoms and deal with the inside issues. Depression isn't just physical. It is spiritual and it is mental. It roots itself deep in how we think and how we feel, and who we are inside. Until these are fixed, depression can never be cured. Who has the key to fixing us up from the inside out? Who is the one that lives inside us? God does. God can set you free from depression.

We have to first identify it then we have to realize what depression is. We have to realize that depression is a spiritual battle just as much as it is a physical battle. It is a lot like fear. Just like we talked about how to overcome fear, we can overcome depression. We don't have to be lost in its darkness for forever. We need to know that God can deliver us. The power of God can unlock us. The devil can cause depression. He can use it to destroy you. But you don't have to let him.

Depression is just another terrorist. It is just another schoolyard bully. You have to make a stand and decide that this is enough. You have to rebuke the devil and make a stand against him. You have to go through spiritual warfare. You can overcome. God's Spirit can literally knock the devil away from you. The anointing of God, the Spirit of God, is something that the devil can't take. If you go to a church where you can feel the anointing of God's spirit, you are blessed. If you don't, then you need to find one and you need to get prayed for. The quickened power of God can set you free and fix whatever ails you.

Another key to getting set free from depression is finding your joy. Don't let the devil steal your joy. That means that even when you don't feel like it, even when the world is falling around you, even when there is nothing to be joyful about, you can have joy. You can have it because it is an attribute, a part of God's character, and God is in you through the power of His Spirit. Our flesh may be depressed, but if we have it under subjection, then we can concentrate instead on the joy of the Lord that is inside of us. We can concentrate on His promises. We can concentrate on His Word. We can concentrate on His love for us. We can find joy in the middle of depression. When we can do that, then depression loses its hold.

These are some scriptures about joy. I won't write these out, but you can look up these scriptures and read them for yourself. This is important.

Nehemiah 8:10 *Psalms 16:11*
Psalms 126:2 *Isaiah 12:3*
Isaiah 35:10 *Isaiah 61:10*
Jeremiah 15:1

Another key to help set you free from depression is good Gospel music that is anointed with God's Spirit. When you are listening to songs like, *Love Lifted Me*, and *Victory in Jesus, My Savior Forever*, and *Amazing Grace* "how sweet the sound", it is hard to stay depressed. When you tune into the songs that talk about how God delivers and sets us free, it encourages your spirit. Listen to the songs that tell how the Lord has lifted someone up out of the battle that they were going through. Listen to songs of victory. These will fill your mind and your spirit.

Another key to being able to overcome depression is to stay close to the Lord. Don't let anything separate you from God's love. Stay at the feet of Jesus. In his presence there is joy. His Spirit brings you joy. Let His Spirit touch you. If praying is the last thing that you do before you fall asleep at night, and you usually fall asleep in the middle of your prayer, then there is no joy in being in the presence of the Lord. If the only prayer life you have is asking for things, without fellowshiping with the Lord, then there is no joy in your prayer life. Prayer is part of your relationship with the Lord. Sometimes I'll be walking through the house, and I'll hear a song on the radio that lifts me up. I'll lift up my hands and start praising the Lord. I'll rejoice in Him. Sometimes I'll catch a glimpse of a prayer that was answered, or a battle won, and I'll lift up my hands and my heart and mind to praise Him. Sometimes I'll remember a time when everything was against me, but the Lord came through and the victory was won. I'll get that rejoicing feeling in my heart. The Bible says to rejoice in the Lord always. If you do that often, depression will lose its hold.

Here is another thing that will help. The television is a little like a drug. When people are depressed, it becomes their hiding place. They just want to sit in front of the television and zone out. The problem is, this only makes things worse. The TV is full of bad news. Think about it. How many programs feature people who have emotional problems, people who let everything get to them to the point that they freak out, or people who have nothing but bad news. It is full of stories about people who have such terrible situations. How can that help in times when you are depressed? Use your time more productively. Use it to read your Bible. Use it to listen to Gospel music. Use it to pray. Instead of pushing you further down, all this will lift you up.

Another key to being able to overcome depression is to hear testimonies of people who have gotten delivered. I use the word delivered here because they have been set free from it. Here is the story of someone who for two years did little more than sit on the side of the bed. Here is the story of how God delivered them.

Paxil. Zoloft. Prozac. Welbutrin. Cymbalta. Antidepressants. Been there-done that. I've battled depression most of my adult life. It is something that family and friends can't understand, unless they have had to deal with it themselves. "Stop feeling sorry for yourself." Those words don't help

anyone, they just make people feel that they can't talk to you or depend on you. Depression is like being under water. It envelops you, it invades every part of you. It weighs you down. It devours you most of all, it immobilizes you. You can't or don't want to move because of the crushing hopelessness.

I sat on the side of my bed for two years. Hopeless and helpless. The television was on, but I wasn't watching it. The radio was on, but I wasn't listening. My mind would wonder around on all subjects, mostly about what I should be doing around the house. Sweeping the kitchen, dusting a shelf, cleaning the toilet. I was so overwhelmed I didn't know where to start, so I didn't do anything. Fundamental things didn't mean anything.

I have been a Christian for 29 years. I added guilt onto myself and shame for my depression. I mean, Christians aren't supposed to be depressed-right? I felt like I had failed God. But God let me know that He sustained me through that time. I believe in my case that God finally said "enough" and the devil had to leave me alone. I am coming out of my depression and God's sunlight sure looks good.

God loves us so much. He never leaves us. We leave Him. If your mind is wondering everywhere, go back to the place where you left God and let Him restore you. II Timothy 1:7 says, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." See, there is a scripture for everything that is happening in our lives. That is why it is so important to study the Bible, so you can find help and find answers. When you say God's name you get His attention. He is right there with you. Call Him right now. Turn to Him. Love Him and let Him love and help you. He did it for me and I know that He can do it for you.

I have written this chapter so that people can overcome depression through the power of God's Spirit and with His help. Depression is like one of those classic symptoms, though, that the world has landed on and has dwelt on until it is one of those "popular" things that everyone has. Just like a lot of illnesses, we can hear about it and think we have it. Then we begin to think about it a lot. Then we begin to have its symptoms. Then we are bound in the devil's lies and have no idea what has happened. If you think that you have symptoms of depression, you can do what the world does. They freak out and let the thing overtake them. They dwell on the fact that they have it, even though they might not. They start the trek to the doctor, and wind up getting on medication that causes them to have more problems than depression. Or you can take a different path, you can take the Biblical, Holy Ghost path. The first step is saying, "I am not going to tolerate this thing in my life. I refuse to accept it. This is not God's will for me. God wants me to have a sound mind. I do not have to be bound by fear. God's Word promises me this. I refuse to let the devil bind me. I refuse this." The devil will take you as far as you let him. If you let him get a foothold in your life, he will stomp all over you. You have to draw a line and refuse to go any further. That is the first step in getting God to work. If you are double minded about the thing, He can't work. If part of the time you want to be depressed and you accept it and part of the time you wish you weren't that way, then you can't stand against the devil, and you won't have God's help. When you make up your mind that you are not accepting it any more, that you are tired of it and you refuse to tolerate it any longer, then God can and will help you. When you realize that you don't have to put up with it because God says so, then you can overcome it. When you realize that it isn't just a physical battle, or an emotional one, but it is a spiritual one too, then you have the key to unlocking yourself. Turn the key.

Can you overcome depression? Let's go back to the picture that we painted at the beginning of the chapter. Remember the dark room with only a pinpoint of light. That is how depression makes you feel. Reread that part of the chapter. Feels awful doesn't it. Like it is something that can trap you in, that dark room. Then let's change the focus. Let's say instead of being the person who

is trapped, you are someone else who is looking into the room seeing the depressed person sitting there so trapped and blinded in the dark. You wonder why that person sits there so lost and alone. You see, the room isn't dark at all. It is full of light. The person in the dark has a blindfold on. In that blindfold is one tiny hole. That is why there is only a pinpoint of light getting through. Then wonder of wonders the person in the dark realizes that they don't have to stay in the dark. They reach up and through God's help and through the power of His Spirit they tear that blindfold off. They can then see the light that everybody else sees. It was there all the time. They can see the people around them who love them and they can once more feel their love. Yes, you can be set free.

One of the ways to avoid depression is to learn how to encourage yourself in the Lord. In a future chapter, we'll talk about someone who lost it all. I mean they lost everything they owned and everybody they loved. We'll talk about what they did. They didn't just sit down and fret and worry. They didn't sink down. They didn't let depression get hold of their life. They held on to their hope. They stood up and encouraged themselves in the Lord. They went out and gained it all back. That is a chapter that is coming up soon. Next we will talk about another terrorist and how it can steal your hope.

Chapter 17. *More Terrorists*

There are more terrorists besides depression and fear that can steal our hope, our joy, and our peace. We've talked about compromise and how it can steal our joy and hope. You see, God is a righteous God. He hates evil. He knows evil and how it destroys us. There is a definite right and wrong. Wrong will destroy you, and right will bring you peace, hope, joy, love, and all those things. God does not compromise with evil. He is not a wishy-washy God. He doesn't change His standards just so we can like Him. He doesn't change His standards just to make it easier on us. He doesn't change His standards just so we can do what we want to like indulgent parents do for their children. He knows what is right and what is wrong. Not only that but He hates evil and He will judge evil. He is a righteous judge. Where do we stand in all that? We can line up to His standards or we can be judged. We can line up to His standards or we can suffer the consequences that we bring on ourselves by not doing right. Why do we change all this around to suit ourselves? Why are there so many different ideas of what is wrong and what is right? Because, bottom line, we want our way. We don't want to line up to anybody's standards. We want to do our thing, or nothing at all. The idea that a righteous judge will judge us if we don't line up to right standards isn't something we like at all. But that doesn't change the truth. What is good for us is good for us and what is bad for us is bad for us. God says stay away from certain things, from certain lifestyles, from certain attitudes because they have the potential to destroy us. When we fail to listen, we go through the pain that doing these things bring into our lives. I know someone who used to tell their children, if you don't listen, then you have to go through the pain that the consequences of your actions bring you. They put it simple. They told them, "If you don't listen, then you will have to feel."

We have spent several generations trying to change this way of thinking and look what a mess we have made. Today you can't tell the standards of the church from the world. Today the church is a mess. It is more the joke of the world instead of the light of the world. Our kids are growing up not even knowing what is right and what is wrong. I run into a lot of kids who have grown up in church who actually don't know that it is wrong to have sex before you are married. They think that it is fine to be homosexuals. Why? It may be because there are so many people in the church who have winked at sin and have taken the attitude that we don't want to make anyone feel uncomfortable just because they are doing wrong. We don't want to make anyone feel uncomfortable just because they are different. It is a different story though when our kids come home and tell us that they are gay, or our kids come home with a baby and they aren't married, or our kids come home to tell us they are dying because of aches. Then we have to see up close the tragedy that all these things bring to their lives and ours. We finally wise up then, but we have paid the price already. Our kids are paying the price for our compromise. They are growing up not knowing right standards. Since they are not standing for anything, they are falling for everything and it is destroying their lives. We need to make a stand against evil as a church and as individuals.

Going to hell can't be related to someone taking definite steps to get there. Going to hell isn't a journey that someone plans to take. Going to hell can be best described as a general slide downward. God has put stops and blocks to keep us from sliding. He has given us His Word with its standards to guide us. He has given us His spirit to keep us from the inside out, to convict us and lead us to repentance, and even to help us to have the strength to change. These are the blocks and stops that keep us from sliding. How do we remove all these? We get the idea that there is no right and wrong, that we don't want to make others, or ourselves feel uncomfortable by bringing this up. The step to sliding into hell is compromising. This is a terrorist that not only can steal our hope, but also our salvation.

Another terrorist is rebellion. Rebellion is the general attitude that has created compromise.

What is it? It happens when we say, “Hey, I want my way or no way. I am not willing to do it God’s way, but I want to change it to be my way. I don’t want to listen to, hear, or do sound advice. I want to listen to what I want to listen to and that is all.” Sound familiar? Rebellion is one of the basic parts of human nature. It happens because our flesh, bottom line, doesn’t want to give in. Most people that are stuck in rebellion don’t even realize they are stuck, and have no idea how to get out. Keep reading for help on overcoming this terrorist.

I guess you would say that I am a master on the subject of rebellion. When I was a teenager the 60’s were just ending. If you weren’t rebelling about something, everybody wondered what was wrong with you. It was right about then that I began “finding myself”. Plus, at that time, I didn’t have God in my life. He was there, but I had started shutting Him out. I have an inborn stubborn streak too, that I have to give God. My mother used to tell me that I would go out and argue with a fence post if there wasn’t anybody around to argue with. I had to find a different way to do everything. If someone told me to do a certain thing a certain way, I would find another way to do it. That caused a lot of problems in my life. When you don’t listen to good sound advice, you are setting yourself up for trouble. I knew right from wrong, but I was making up my own rules as I went along, and doing it my way. When you are doing it your way, or a new way, then you leave behind the old ways. The old ways have been tried and true, so leaving them behind is not always a smart thing to do. It was hard for me to see that experience means something. When people have been there and done that, they know about how it works. I thought that I was smarter than everybody who had been there and done that. I thought that older people were all stupid and I was a new generation with new ideas. So I knew more than then they did with all their old ideas. Since the rules they were playing by didn’t always work, I thought it was a good idea to make up my own. I was like that until God came into my life. When I read His book and started to understand it, I realized that it was the wisest book that I’d ever read. And it was really, really old. It had stood the test of time. Then when God saved me, He started setting me free from rebellion. I began to see things in a different way. God sets people as elders over us to teach us so that we can grow by what they know. We can learn by their example. I saw that there are certain rules and guidelines to follow that are tested and true. I learned which ones to follow. Because I was willing to follow, I could follow God.

One of the reasons I think that it was hard for me to follow is because I thought I had to prove that I could do it better. I also had to prove that I could do it on my own. When we try to prove ourselves, we are only setting ourselves up for failure. Usually when we do that, we won’t listen to anyone else, since we are trying to prove ourselves. Usually when we do that, too, we will try too hard. That doesn’t work either. I was too afraid to do it by anyone else’s plan. Number one I was afraid I couldn’t do it at all. I was getting ready to face an adult world, and I was scared to death. I was scared until the time Jesus came into my heart and I found God’s love and His peace. I learned that I didn’t have to be afraid any more because I had His help. There is a verse that tells us that perfect love casts out all fear. When we find Jesus’ love for us, and we know that we can trust Him to keep us, which does away with fear. When we know that He loves us, then we don’t have to try to prove anything. We are OK because His love makes us OK. Number 2, I was afraid to trust anybody or anything else enough to come down off of my high horse and do it someone else’s way. I didn’t know where to go. I really didn’t know which direction to take. I didn’t have a clue. To obey, you have to submit. I was afraid to submit and go someone else’s direction. When I found God’s love for me, I wasn’t afraid to follow Him and do it His way. I knew that He loved me and wanted the best for me. I knew that His will would work. Then I had to admit to myself that I didn’t know what was best for me. Then is when I could obey God and do it His way. I gave up and gave in. Still sometimes today, I have to do the same.

People, young and old, will come to talk to me about the problems that they are having. I’ll tell them to “give up and give in”. For God to help you, that is what you have to do. To be able to do it God’s way, you have to give up your way. Have you ever had a hardheaded argument with

someone to the place that you were nearly butting heads? You wanted your way, and they wanted theirs and nobody was giving in. That is what rebellion does. It causes us to be hard headed about doing it our way. It causes us to refuse to give in and give up to anybody, including God. Just like when you had that hardheaded argument, nothing gets done, nothing gets settled until somebody gives in. With God, you always have to give in, because bottom line, your way won't work when it conflicts with His way. There can be no peace when two people argue until somebody gives up and gives in. We can't have peace with God until we give up and give in to His Word and to His way. When we do we can find peace with Him.

Sometimes it's easy to try to do God like you do your parents. Or if you are older, like you used to do your parents. Here are some of the ways that we can do God if we aren't careful. I heard a young person say, "I don't know right from wrong. Nobody told me so I can't be responsible for my actions." That is one excuse that some people try to make. What about that? Is that true? Just because we fail to learn something is wrong, does it keep us from having to pay the consequences of doing it? It doesn't work that way. Another excuse I've heard not to do right is, "I don't believe the way that you believe. I think that everyone should determine for themselves what is right and what is wrong. Everyone is free to make their own standards for themselves. Why should I be forced to live by someone else's standards?" Is this true? We've talked enough about that one to be able to answer that.

I've heard young people (and older ones) say, "I know that this is wrong, but just this once won't hurt?" Have you ever heard anyone say this, or have you ever thought this to yourself? Then you wished that you had never done it that one time? Do you know how many times that it takes to get addicted to crack and meth? Just one time. Do you know how many times it takes to get pregnant from having sex? Just one time. Do you know how many times it takes being with someone who has aides that forgot to tell you before you are infected yourself? Just one time. Do you know how many times being stupid behind the wheel of a car can cost you your life? Just one time. How many times do you have to get in trouble to mess up your life for good? Just one time. My question to you is, why do it at all?

Another excuse to do wrong is this one. "What will people think if I don't do it? They will think that I am not cool if I don't go along with what everyone else is doing. My parents say no, but I'd rather have them disappointed in me than have my friends disappointed in me." Who really loves you most? Your parents who want you to keep from messing up your life, or your friends who are trying to get you to go along with something that can destroy you. Think about it. If you really love someone you won't try to get them to do something stupid that can wreck their lives, their future.

Another thing that I've heard young people say is, "So what if I do it. I can do it just once and nobody will know." I knew someone who came from a long line of alcoholics. Their dad's grandfather drank. Their dad's dad drank. Their dad drank. Guess what? They drank too. All of them had a bad problem with alcohol. Some of them have even died from diseases caused by drinking. Some things are hereditary. That means we pass it down to our kids. That is until someone gets hold of God and God sets them free from it. I am sure that when the first person in that family started drinking they probably thought, if I do this just once it won't hurt anybody but me. How will anyone else know? What we do isn't done in a corner. If we do something that hurts us, it eventually will hurt our family and the people we love. (By the way, social drinking is accepted in a lot of churches. In the light of this, what is wrong with that idea?) When we choose to rebel and do wrong, it hurts everyone around us. Some of the greatest tragedies that I've seen families go through happen because someone said, this won't hurt anybody but me. We don't live on an island. We are never really all to ourselves. For the rest of your life, the decisions that you make will affect others.

I hear people, young and old say, "It is wrong to set standards. I want to show people that they can be free from all this stuff. I want to be someone who is my own person without any rules

to live by. I want to be a leader in making people realize they are free to do whatever they want.” You know what in reality is the next statement that should follow that one. “I want everyone to watch me crash and burn.” Why are there rules? To keep us from crashing and burning. What is so great about everyone watching us do this because we have made such a big issue of doing wrong? Think about it. How great is that?

Rebellion is common today with young people even more than it was when I was young and, wow, that is saying a lot. Hey, at least we didn’t poke holes in ourselves all over and stick things in them. We did pull our pants up. We did get dressed before we went to school. We didn’t just get up and go to school still in our pajamas without even combing our hair. We didn’t think that one of the biggest ways to get high was to cut ourselves. Our rebellion was a little different. Our rebellion was because we believed that we could make things better, (even though what we did was basically mess it all up worse.) I think that the rebellion most young people has today is because they have lost hope. They think that they can’t do anything to make things better. They really feel that the world is falling apart, and they are falling apart with it. They don’t think there is any reason to care, and they have stopped trying. They have begun to rebel against trying and against having hope. If you are reading this and you are not a young person, then don’t act like this paragraph is just about young people. Today we even rebel in the church. We want a new way, one that doesn’t have any rules or restrictions. We don’t want a church that tells us what is wrong, or right. We don’t want to listen to God, His Word, or His Spirit, so we ban them all out of the church. We are the ones who are losing. So are our children.

Do you remember the contractor with the work crew that we talked about earlier in the book? The work crew came in to build a multimillion-dollar shopping mall. They arrived the first day of work to find their tools: a hand saw, a couple of screw drivers a piece, a hoe and a wheelbarrow, a hammer and 5 nails. If that work crew cared at all about doing a good job, they would be mad the first day. They might try really hard for a few days to do their job, but eventually they would rebel. Why? Because they knew that the job before them was impossible. The more they cared, the more they would rebel. If the situation kept on, they would eventually just stop caring.

If you asked most young people today, do you have hope for your future? Do you think that you can make a difference? Do you think that the world as a whole has hope? Do you think that things will get better? If you asked them these questions, I believe that most of them would answer, NO. If you ask older people today these same questions, I believe that most of them would answer, NO. I believe that after reading this book, you have realized that you can find hope and that you can make things better, with God’s help and with His Spirit in your heart and life. With God’s Spirit in your heart, you can always make a difference. With a vision of heaven in mind, there will always be hope. You can build the building. You have been given the right tools. There is hope to be able to finish it and to do a good job when you do it. You just have to pick up the right tools and use them.

Are young people the only ones who are giving up and sinking into rebellion? Do you know why I think that the church is compromising? It is because they feel like there is no hope for the future. They feel like they aren’t going to be able to make a difference, so why try. They think that things will not get any better. They may not realize that they are doing so, but they have given up and they are sinking into compromise, which is nothing more than rebellion against God and against God’s ways. That is why many churches are so dead. God’s Spirit has left them. The church as a whole is no longer the light to the world. The salt has lost its savor, and it can no longer season. All this has happened because we have forgotten what God is like. God says in Jeremiah 2:32 a statement that I believe applies today as much or more than it did in Jeremiah’s day, “...yet my people have forgotten me days without number”. We have let all these things separate us from God to the place that we have forgotten what He is like. We have forgotten that He would never give us a job to do and not give us the right tools. We have forgotten that because we have stopped working and we have forgotten our job. It has been so long since we have actively participated in God’s work that we no longer recognize the tools that He has given us. We have given up doing the job

because inside our hearts we really think it is hopeless. If we aren't careful, we can even get mad at God for asking us to do an impossible job and that further separates us from Him. But it is really our fault that we failed because we didn't find and use the tools He has given us. Don't rebel or settle for compromise because you feel like you have been given an impossible job to do. Who will pay the price? Both you and your children.

You will come out on top of things with the victory no matter what the world is going through. It will be step by step, but when you do it His way, it will work. Don't be afraid to try. Not only can you come out on top but also you can recover everything. Coming up is the story of someone who lost it all. They lost their family, their home, and their friends. They lost everything, but they did not lose their hope. They did something that helped them to be able to gain it all back. Coming up.

Chapter 18.

Encourage Yourself

Here is a story that talks about how as long as you keep your hope, you can overcome. Can you imagine coming home one day to find out that your whole hometown had been burned up completely in a fire? What if the people who had burned it had stolen all the wives and children in your whole town? We think that we have problems, but nobody is facing anything like that. I can tell you how these people felt about it. The Bible says that they wept until they couldn't weep any more. This story is found in I Samuel Chapter 30. It is one of the great stories about David. David was a real story inspirer. There are lots of neat stories about David in the Bible. Most are found in I and II Samuel. Read these stories. There are a lot of stories there about how David faced the worst and overcame. This is only one of the things that he went through.

David came home from fighting a war to find exactly the things we talked about at the beginning of the chapter. Believe it or not, things even got worse. David's army got mad at him because this had happened and they tried to stone him. He had a reason to just sit down and give up. He definitely had a reason to lose hope. What did he do? The Bible tells us in verse 6, "And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of the people was grieved, every man for his sons, and for his daughter: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." When everyone else was grieving and freaking out, David just simply encouraged himself in the Lord. He thought about the times that God had been there for him. He thought about all the times that God had seen him through when everything looked impossible. He thought about how he knew that he could put his trust in God and how his hope was in the Lord. He thought about how things looked, but he remembered, too, that how things look isn't always how they turn out to be in the end.

Then after he had encouraged himself in the Lord, the Bible tells us in verse 8 what he did next. "And David enquired at the Lord..." In other words he asked the Lord what he should do. David didn't go to his counselor for advice. He didn't read his horoscope to find out what to do. He didn't check out with the news stories to get guidance. He didn't run to all his friends, or to his pastor, or to his church members. He enquired of the Lord what he should do. God told him that if he would stand up, square his shoulders back, he could go out and recover all. "David enquired at the Lord, saying, shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them? And He answered him, pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all." When God told him to pursue and recover all, he did. Verse 18-20 tells us how things turned out. "And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away and David rescued his two wives. And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor anything that they had taken to them: David recovered all."

First David encouraged himself in the Lord. When he was encouraged, he was able to stand up and get on about his business. He was able to do the things that he knew to do. When we are down and depressed, we can't do these things. When the devil steals our faith and we think what's the use, we don't do anything. When we encourage ourselves, then we have the strength to say, this is enough. I am going after what is mine and I am taking it back. We have to stop listening to the sound of all the crying around us and we have to listen for the joyful sound of God's voice. We have to get our eyes off all the bad news and onto the promises that God is making us. We have to hear His Good News instead of all the bad news. We have to let His Word encourage our hearts. We have to let His voice speak to us to give us instructions to follow. That in itself gives us hope. When God tells us how it should be done, then things will turn out OK. We have to listen to the instructions, then we have to follow them. That is why it is so important to listen to God's voice every day and obey Him. Then when the battle comes, we are in the habit of following Him. The only way that David was able to recover all was by listening to God's voice and obeying Him.

That is the only way that we can make it through the valleys, overcome the battles, and find victory in the worst of times. We have to obey Him. We also have to refuse to let the enemy steal from us and we have to chase him instead of letting him chase us. We can then recover all that he has stolen from us.

So we haven't had the enemy burn our hometown, steal the wives and children, but do we face times such as this when we feel hopeless, like everything is crashing down around us? When we face such times, will this only work for David? Or will God do the same for us as He did back then? God will be there for you no less than he was for David. Try it and see.

How does the story end? David lost it all. Then he recovered it. But that wasn't all that he gained. If you keep reading in his story you will see that not too long after that David was made king of Israel. God's way works.

Chapter 19.

What Is Coming Ahead

We hear a lot about the end times. We hear a lot about things about the rapture, about how the Lord is coming back, about the end of time, about Armageddon. Even Hollywood has picked up on some of these events and made movies of them. This only confuses the whole thing. I can tell you that these will be some of the biggest events this world will be able to attend. Talk about sold out tickets. Do you remember a race, or a ball game that you really wanted to get to go to but the tickets had sold out? Well this will be one event that even though everybody is required to participate, there will be plenty of tickets. Everybody through time will eventually get to be there at part of the event. There will be two sections, the cheering section and the booing section. The cheering section will be for the home team. The booing section will be for the visiting team or what I call the away team. You know how that goes. When the game is over, the cheering section will have a different destination to travel to than the away team will have. You won't be able to miss the event and you won't be able to avoid either going home with the cheering team, or off with the away team.

Let's talk about the first big part of this event, which is the next main event coming up on schedule. I guess with any great event, if I were a reporter I would tell who, what, when, where, how, and why. Let's start with *who*. The star in this event is Jesus. He is really what the whole thing is about. Revelations 1:5-7 tells us, "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindred of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, amen." Here in verse 7 we get a glimpse of both the cheering and the booing section. Or the booing section might be called the boohooing section, or the wailing section. Jesus is the price paid that gives us the invitation to this event. He loved us enough to die for us so that we could be made ready. It is a very expensive event and to be able to attend, He had to pay a dear price. We are required to do some things, too. You see, in this event there are no benchwarmers, only participators. Jesus is able to make us winners. One of the things that most sport participators worry about is falling. That could mean falling flat on your face, or just plain failing. God is able to make us winners. Jude 24 tells us, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

Now the problem is that not everybody will make it to the cheering section. A dear price has been paid to invite us all, but not everybody will accept that invitation. Not everybody will choose with a whole heart to be able to go in the cheering section. Who will be the ones who will get to go? Of course the only way to attend the event is to accept the ticket. The ticket has been paid for at Calvary. Jesus died to give you the opportunity to go to heaven. You have to accept that by asking Him into your heart and life. His Spirit comes into your heart when you ask Him to. You have to repent and ask God for forgiveness. But does it stop then. Is that all that is required? Someone asked Jesus what is the greatest commandment that we should keep. He answered in Matthew 22:37, "Jesus said unto him, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." John 14:15 adds, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." How do we know if we really love God? With all our heart we will try to keep His commandments, and with God's help we will do so. Who is invited to the rapture? Those that love Him with all their heart and those that keep His commandments. Does that mean that we have to be perfect? The Bible says that none are perfect, no not one. So if we have to be perfect, we are all out of the picture. We don't have to be perfect, but we do have to be sold out and trying with all our heart, and with God's help to keep His commandments. We can't earn our own way, but we have to try with

all our heart. It isn't all about doing. Grace had to pay the price. Faith is important. But we show our faith by our works. Who will get to go in the rapture? Those that want to go. Those that love God more than everything the world has for them. Those that want to spend time worshipping Him and praising Him and loving Him here. If those things aren't important to you now then you won't want to spend time doing them for forever. Those who love His appearing will get to go. II Timothy 4:8 says, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them those that love his appearing." Who will go? Those who want to please Him and keep His commandments more than anything else because they love Him. Those who let His Spirit move in their lives convicting them, washing them, and ironing out the wrinkles. Those whose priority in life is pleasing Him. Those who love righteousness and who hate evil. Those who love to do right, and who hate doing wrong. These are the ones who will get to go in the rapture. Why? These are the people who are cheering for the winning side.

Now we'll talk about the *what*. The rapture is also called the calling away of the saints, the catching away of God's people. God is literally going to snatch His people away. We won't die. We will see Jesus in the clouds and we will just be caught away. God's Spirit will quicken us and we will be caught up to be with Him. I Thessalonians 4:16-18 says, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." Notice these verses close with "wherefore comfort one another with these words". When you talk about the Lord coming back, it often has the opposite effect on people. They begin to get all-uptight and worried that that they might not get to go. How should we react? We need to talk about it and get a peace that this is all in God's hands and in His perfect plan, and we can put our trust in Him.

Now we will talk about the *why*. Why is the rapture coming? Because if we think that things are bad now, they are only just starting to get bad. Worse is coming. What will it be like? The Bible says that it will be so bad that people will cry out for the rocks to fall on them. Revelations 6:16-17 says, "And said to the mountains and the rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand". When I started this chapter I used the illustration of a game. I used it because it is something a lot of people can relate to. But it is not a game. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is no other event that can change your life and your destination more than this event. You won't have a last minute opportunity to change things to get ready. In I Corinthians 15:52 we read, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound; and the dead shall be raise incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

A lot of people, young and old, come to my office and tell me that they are afraid of the rapture. I tell them, why be afraid. I am excited. I can't wait. This world is getting worse and worse. I am tired of the sin of this place. I am sick of the junk that goes on. I can say like Paul said, "Come Lord Jesus come quickly". Let God make you ready. Trust Him to keep you ready. Then you don't have to be afraid. You too can be excited. What about the people who aren't ready? Do all you can to talk to them. Obey God. Let Him use you. Reach out to those you love. Don't presume that people won't listen. Let God be God. Do what He tells you to do, and then if they don't listen, you won't be to blame. If they don't hear you, then they chose their own destination. It is sad, but it is a fact that most people don't want to go. They want to miss the bad, but they don't want to go for the good. Just wanting to miss the bad isn't a good enough reason to be able to go. But remember this, just because there are people who won't get to go, that does not mean that one day we won't get to. Be ready regardless of what the rest of the world is doing.

The next thing to look at is the *when*. When is this going to happen? The Bible answers this in Luke chapter 21. Here is part of that chapter. Verses 10-11, "Then said he unto them, Nation

shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall be from heaven.” Then 29-31 says, “And he spake to them a parable; behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your ownselves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.” The Bible tells us about many things that will happen before this takes place. Every day we see more and more of these things taking place. The rise of homosexuality, people not caring about what is right, the turmoil in the Middle East, what is happening in Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan, the way people have become, the way the church world as a whole has become are all signs of the last days. I could go on and on. All these are signs that the Lord could come back even before I finish this book. We need to be ready. I know that some of you are thinking, “I’ve heard this before and nothing happened.” Does that mean it is not going to happen? Do you know that people saying this very thing is one of the signs of the end times? In II Peter 3:1-14 we read about this. Read this scripture. I haven’t written it all here. Here is a part of it. “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

Matthew 25:1-13 also talks about this time. We mentioned this earlier but it is important enough to mention again. “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying not so; lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh.” In the Bible, the spirit of God is often referred to as being the oil. When I originally wrote the last paragraph I asked this question. What do you need to do to get yourself ready? I had to go back and rewrite that statement. There is nothing that we can do to get ourselves ready. We just have to run to God and let Him get us ready. We have to run to His love. Most of all we have to let His Spirit deal with our hearts. We do have to listen to His voice and do what He commands us to do by His Word, and we have to let His Spirit work in our lives.

But what if you get left behind and you don’t get to go in the rapture? What if you are not ready and waiting for the Lord when He comes? What if you aren’t letting His Spirit clean you and keep you spot free? Won’t it be OK to get by with that? Won’t you still be able to get saved then? If you miss out on the rapture then you will be in the middle of the most horrible time that this earth has ever seen, and it has seen some bad times. We think we are going through hard times now; it isn’t even a shadow to what will happen then. Jeremiah 12:1 says, “And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time....” Jeremiah 30:6, “Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child; here fore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, and all faces are turned into paleness?” Do you really think that if you can’t make it today and server God now, that you will be able to do so then?

Why is all this going to take place? Is God this vengeful? Is He this terrible that He would bring about such a bad thing? Jesus told a parable in Mark 12:1-10. Parables are stories that explain

things. Jesus told this to explain to the people who were getting ready to kill him just how bad a thing it was that they were doing. "A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head and sent him away shamefully handled, and again he sent another and them they killed, and many others beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore one son his well beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the Lord of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others. And have ye not read this scripture, "The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner." That stone is Jesus.

Throughout time God has sent His messengers, His preachers, His teachers to tell us about His love, about what is right and what is wrong, about His power to overcome. Sure there have been fakes, people that did it all wrong, but there have been ones that God sent. They have killed them, beat them, stoned them. Even today in some countries there are people being tortured and killed because they are standing up for the truth. Besides all that, look at how they did Jesus? So why should the whole world have to pay for what someone did to Jesus? Why should you have to pay because they hung Him on a cross thousands of years ago? The best answer to that is a question. What have you done to Jesus in your life? Hebrews 6:6 says, "... they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." We still crucify Jesus today. When we don't love Him and obey Him, when we do what we want to in spite of His guidance, when we refuse to let His Spirit dwell in our heart and life, we crucify Him over and over.

Look at how evil the world is. People are losing sight of what is good and what is bad. The Bible says that the last days will be like the days of Noah. Genesis 6:5 says that, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." Verse 11-12 says, "The earth also was corrupt before God and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." Things were that bad. God could have directed more than one man to build an ark. There could have been thousands of arks. Why weren't there? Because after Noah preached for over 100 years, there was no one who wanted to hear the truth. There was no one who wanted the righteousness of God. Nobody wanted to do right except for one man. Can you imagine how evil the world was? How awful a place to live in? What if God hadn't destroyed the world, and things would have kept getting worse? What would things be like now? The Bible says that the last days will be like the days of Noah. It is almost that bad now. No one wants to hear the truth. Few people are willing to give up their sin. People choose everything above serving God. I have heard people say that if God lets the world go on the way it is going, then He would have to apologize to Noah. God isn't that kind of God.

God is a just God. He is a righteous God. He is a loving God to those who love Him, but he doesn't mess around with evil. He has given His own Son to the world so that the whole world could be saved. II Peter says, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." But there will be a day when the world will pay for its wickedness. Is that fair, or what? After all, for thousands of years God has tried to get man to do right. He has done all He has done to strive with man, to work with Him. That section of scripture goes on from God's grace to talk about His judgment. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,

the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and Godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" There is another reason why God's judgment will come. He is getting ready to make a perfect place. Before He does this, He has to sort out those who really want to go and those who don't. When we see Jesus in the rapture, the Bible says that we will be changed to be like Him. We will be perfect like He is. This is what we have to look forward to. "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." A perfect place for eternity. That is God's plan for you.

After the rapture, God's judgment will be poured out on the earth. I have talked to people who have the idea that if they miss the rapture, they can still be saved and get to go to heaven. There is a series of Christian movies and books called the *Left Behind* series. They have been very popular books and movies. Millions of copies have been sold. Of all the books and movies put out about the rapture, I believe that this series of books is the most damnable, especially the first few in the series. Wow, that is probably not what you expected me to say. Why do I say that? I believe that this series of books will be responsible for thousands of Christian who will miss the rapture and face God's judgment eternally. How do I know that they are dangerous? One reason is this. Watch out for those things that are popular. If it is a best seller, then it usually isn't the truth. If it tickles people's ears and they love to read it, it usually isn't the truth, it isn't God led and inspired by God's Spirit. If it isn't the truth, then it is a lie, and it is from the devil and there is a reason why he has blown it into popularity. So it can deceive many. The truth is not the popular thing. The Bible says that broad is the way to destruction and narrow is the way to eternal life and few there be that will find it. The vast majority of people in this world are not going to spend eternity in heaven. Most people want their own way. They are led by what they want to do instead of by the Spirit of God. I am talking about Christians here, too. The truth is hard to take because it isn't comfortable. God's conviction isn't comfortable. Hebrews 4:12 says that, "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 discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." If God never made things uncomfortable, then we all would go to hell. We need discomfort before we will even listen. It is like I heard one mother tell her children. "If you don't listen, you will feel." If it takes being made to feel uncomfortable, if it takes my soul and spirit being ripped apart to keep me from going to hell and to keep me from missing the rapture, then I pray that God rip me apart.

I say all that to say this. If something isn't tearing us apart then it probably isn't the truth. If something is popular then it probably isn't the truth. So when things come around that are so popular I suspect them right away. Even if it is the church world that makes them popular. What other reason do I have for saying that the *Left Behind* series is not the truth and that it is dangerous? To find that answer let's talk about why so many people want to read these books and watch these movies. The devil is a master at spreading lies. He knows human nature. He knows how to paint a lie so that it is delicious to us, so that we will risk it all for that one bite. (If you don't believe me, ask Eve.) He can take a lie and put the right twist on it so that it seems that it is the most awe-inspiring truth that you could ever hear. Then he will make it a popular thing because he knows that we are suckers when it comes to popularity. If he can make it a popular thing with the church world, then everybody thinks that it is OK. Wow. He is tricky. He knows that if he can slip a lie in, add some truth to disguise it, and then decorate it with something that pleases the flesh, we will swallow the whole package and call it yummy. We won't know we have been deceived. What is the lie that the devil is pushing in the *Left Behind* series?

Most of the series is about what happens after the rapture. The world after the rapture is bad in the series (but hey, it is bearable). The series is about a group of people who are heroes. They have church. People are constantly getting saved. God's spirit is there dealing with people's hearts.

These people are keeping the truth alive. God's Spirit is there guiding them, and they do great things. They even conspire against the beast himself and win upon occasion. After all, he is just the devil in flesh, and people are a lot smarter than that (does that sound right?). In the movie, if the heroes die, they die gloriously and grandly.

Do you know why disaster movies are so popular? Because the whole world gets blown up, but the hero and his sidekicks still survive and everything comes out rosy at the end. That gives us a warm cozy feeling that if the world gets blown up, we can still overcome and make it. Do you know what's the problem with those movies? It is all Hollywood. It is not real. Even the suffering and blood and guts aren't real. It isn't our family or our loved ones who are suffering. It isn't us feeling the pain. We are removed from the devastation. It isn't real to us. We like to see movies that give us a feeling that no matter what happens, we can still come out on top. That is what the Left Behind series does. It makes you feel like, hey, after the rapture, if we do miss it, things will be bad, but it will still be OK. I have even talked to some people who have swallowed the lie that it is God's will for them to miss the rapture so that they can help people after the rapture. This all sounds good. But what is the problem with all this. It is just like those disaster movies. It is not reality. It is a lie. Answer me these questions. We have God's Word freely now. We have the Spirit of God to deal with our hearts and convict us and draw us to Him. We have preachers and teachers who preach God's Word inspired by the Holy Ghost, The Spirit of God. We have churches with people who want the truth and want to go in the rapture because they love God and want to do what is right even if it is hard. We have God's people around us talking to us, encouraging us, loving us. If you can't get things right here with all that going on for you here, you can forget getting it right after the rapture takes place. If you can't live for God now, do you really think that you will be able to live for God when the devil takes over the world, and God has turned it over to him for a season for the world to be judged? Picture the world the way it will be. You will not hear the truth of the Word of God. His Spirit will draw back and it won't deal with people's hearts. That is why it is called God's judgment. There will be no true churches with the Spirit of God operating in them. There will be no truth, no love, no peace, no joy, no hope, and the other things that God's Spirit brings us. In the middle of this will be a time so horrible that people will cry out for the rocks to fall on them wanting to die. In the meantime there will be a time so horrible that grown men will crawl on the stomach weeping like a woman having a child. If you can't do it now, you can forget doing it later. There won't be a little crowd of people valiantly fighting against the beast. The devil will walk in the body of a man and you won't have God's Spirit to lead you in overcoming him. There will be a very, very, select group of people who will go through this and overcome, and if you aren't select now, you won't be then. Don't play games with your eternal soul. This thing isn't a game like those movies and books suggest. Things will be far worse then people could imagine, let alone find words to write. Don't swallow the devil's lies.

Do God's people have to be afraid? God knows how to keep His people who are sincere in their hearts. He knows how to polish us up and keep us clean, ready and waiting for His coming. He knows exactly when that will be. He wants to take us to be with Him. He has done everything to make this happen. He has prepared a way for us. He is the way. It is His way or no way. If you want it with all your heart, and you have your hand in His hand, He will hold it and keep you as long as you keep your hand in His. He loves you with a love that you could never imagine. There is hope for you. You don't have to be afraid.

What a glorious day it will be when we see Him in the clouds. In an instance we will be changed to be like Him. We will be perfect like Jesus. We will step into a perfect world that he has spent thousands of years perfecting for those who love His appearing. This world will last for forever. The Bible compares us to being His bride. We are the brides of Christ. We are that precious to Him. He loves us with an everlasting love. Put your hand in His. His love will certainly keep you. If you aren't ready to go, there is a thought though that keeps coming to me. It is the question, now that you know, what are you going to do about it? We can know the truth, but until

we do something, it will do us no good.

Even though this may be the time leading up to the end of time, to the coming again of the Lord, there is still hope for you. There is still peace to be found in the Lord. Trust in Him. He will see you through. He loves you and He will keep you in His love.

So what do we need to do while we are waiting for the Lord to come? Do we need to sit in the shade and take it easy, because we know things will turn out OK? Do we need to fret and worry our life away, waiting for this to happen? Keep reading. We'll find out.

Chapter 20. *Occupy Until I Come*

We mentioned before how more and more people are getting the feeling and the attitude of what is the use. They are taking the attitude that nobody is listening or caring about doing right. Because they have lost their hope, they sink back into the church pews comfortably and they wait for the Lord to come back. They have stopped trying to reach out to those around them who don't know the Lord. Or if they do see the world outside their window, most churches and most people are fighting so to survive that they don't have the energy or the strength to do more than just hold on. I believe that as time goes on that churches will give up and shut their doors because they think that the struggle to be able to keep going is too great. That is the devil's plan. Nothing could be more wrong than to quit trying at this time. We know that the Lord is coming back. Don't underestimate the importance that a victory filled life and a church that is on fire can have on the world. Don't underestimate your effectiveness as a child of God. I am talking to both young people and older people. Don't underestimate what you are able to do for the Lord.

Jesus told a parable in Luke 19 about a nobleman and his servants. If you would please, read that story. It has a lot of truths in it that will help you. This nobleman gave his servants some money to take care of and he told them to manage his affairs while he went away to another country. He told them that while he was gone they were to "occupy until I come." That meant that they were to take care of his business until he came back. When he came back he called them in to check to see if they had been good stewards of his business and of his money while he was gone. He called them in to see how much money they had gained in trading and other things while he was gone. The first one told him that he had doubled the money the nobleman had given him making him a good profit. The next one said that he had gained a half of it back. Making 1 ½ times the money he had originally been given. The third one told the nobleman that he had kept his money in a napkin and hadn't done anything with it because he was afraid that if he tried to do something he would lose it. The nobleman answered him in verses 22-25, "And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him."

In the parable, the nobleman told the stewards to occupy until he came. He was angry with the one who did not do that. I get this feeling from a lot of people. People are tired of fighting for what is right. They are tired of making a stand. They are starting to give in. They are weary. They are starting to compromise and follow after things that aren't right. They are thinking what is the use. The Lord is coming back. Things are getting so bad that what we do isn't going to change a thing. Why do we need to keep telling people they need to get saved? Nobody is listening. They forget about Noah. If you remember the story of Noah, nobody listened. But because he obeyed God he and his family were not destroyed. If Noah had given up because no one listened, the ones to pay for that would have been he and his family. He preached on, even though no one listened. He kept building, even though every one made fun of him. On the day that it started to rain, he and his family were safe in the ark. I don't care if it feels like nobody is listening and nobody else is doing right, that is no excuse for you to quit caring. It is no excuse for you to give in and act like the rest of the world. It is no excuse for you to stop trying. If you stop, what will eventually happen to you and your family? Keep on standing up for God.

The Bible talks about the watchman in Isaiah 33. Read that section of scripture. The watchman's purpose was to stand on the wall of the city and watch for the enemy. Then he was to warn the town when the enemy approached. The Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel and told him that if

the watchmen sees the enemy coming and he warns the people, but they don't listen, then he is guilt free and the problem and sin is with the people. If he doesn't warn them and they get destroyed then the guilt is on his head as well. Also, it says that if he warns them and they get to safety, then the watchmen is blessed and so are the people. So whether the people listen or not, the watchman's job is still to warn them. That is our job as Christians. It is not our responsibility to make the people do what they should, that is their job. It is our job to make a stand and warn them.

Jesus is the one who told the story of the nobleman and the stewards. That steward hid what he was given because he was afraid. Because of this the nobleman in the story got angry. How do you think that Jesus feels when we hide behind our church doors, and settle into compromise because we are afraid to make a stand? How do you think that Jesus feels when we hide our gifts and talents because we're afraid it is not going to change anything so why do it? How do you think that He feels when we cop out on doing what we know to do is right because everyone else is doing wrong? How do you think that He feels when we don't read His Word and we don't let His Spirit deal with our hearts because it is just too hard to make a commitment these days? How do you think that He feels? Well to give you a hint, He is the one who told the parable.

Occupy until He comes. God has given you gifts and talents. Use them for God. One of the saddest things that I've seen is kids who are in church who have beautiful voices to sing. They don't know any gospel song though because all they know is the words to rock music. God gave you that talent. Use it for Him. I haven't yet known anybody that got their life changed and their hope back because they listened to a rock song. God's music can change people's lives. Use your talent for God. Love the people who are around you enough to want to help them

If you have been given any talent, God gave it to you. Use it for Him. Listen to His voice. Go where He says. Do what He says to do. Let Him use you. There is a world full of hurting people dying without hope and you have the life rope that can pull them out. Don't let the devil convince you that there is no use. I am so glad that the people who have thrown me life ropes in my life didn't take the attitude that there was no use to do that because I was hopeless. They looked past the mess I was in and let God use them. You can make a difference.

You may think that you are too young to make a difference. You may think that you are too old to make a difference. Let God decide that. Just do what He tells you to do, and see. I know about an 8 year old who turned his whole country around. His country had fallen into doing some pretty evil stuff. The whole country suffered because of it. This 8 year old started serving God and turned the hearts of his countries' people back to God. This changed his whole country. His name was King Josiah. His story is found in II Kings 22 and 23. Sure he was king and that gave him a little more power. But don't underestimate what you can do. At least you can change the lives of your families and friends and those that you love. Dare to be a light. Dare to wake up and get up out of your comfortable chair. If you sleep too long, you may have your eyes shut when the Lord comes. If you shut your eyes and pretend everything is OK, that still won't change the circumstances. If you remember the parable of the virgins at the bridal feast, Jesus is coming for those who are awake spiritually and those who are working, watching, and waiting for His coming.

Now when I first realized how soon the Lord is coming back, I started thinking about all the people around me that I love and what they are going to face. I went through these things. The first was a feeling that how could a loving God do that to people that I loved. Then back-to-back with that feeling was the thought that maybe this rapture thing can't be true. That is a comfortable thought, but I know that the truth isn't always comfortable. So I got out my Bible and I restudied it. I listened to sound preachers who have studied. And most important I asked God and had Him show me what was going to happen. Now these are three very important steps to discover the truth, and it is important to know the truth. When all three of them line up then you can know that you have found the truth.

Then when I came to know the truth that the Lord is coming back soon, I started freaking out. I went overboard trying to cram the truth down people's throats. I did a lot of spinning around

unnecessarily because I was freaking out. I did more damage than good. God spoke to my heart and told me that I needed to calm down and do one thing at a time. The first step was to hear His voice the next was to do what He said do. That is how we occupy until He comes. We just take one step at a time, one day at a time. We do the thing that the Lord says to do then He will tell you what to do next. That is how we occupy until He comes.

Chapter 21. *An Eternal Hope*

How do you picture forever? How long is it? That is really hard to picture. Our minds had a beginning when we were born. Our life on earth is pretty short. Even 100 years when compared to eternity is like a drop of water compared to the ocean. Because of that we can't understand the concept of forever. One way to think about it is this. Let's say that God is so big that time can fit inside of Him. He sees at one time the day you were born and then He can also see the day you will die, or be taken to meet Him. Time never ends with God. He has always been there and always will be. Nobody made Him. He wasn't born. He will never die. He always has been there and always will be there. When God made us, He made us a little like Him. When we die here on earth, our body dies but our soul and spirit which is the inside part of us is in an eternal container that will live forever. The Bible says that we will get a new body that will house our soul and spirit. That new body will be a perfect body that will never know pain, never grow old, and never die. Forever we will have that new body. We will live forever in a perfect place with God.

The greatest encouragement and hope that I have is when I remember that this is not how it will end. I have a hope that will last forever. After a while, this world is going to get a renovation like you won't believe. It is going to be made perfect. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. The people who don't want to live right won't be there to mess it up. We will all be perfect. There will be no more sin to mess it up. There will be no more sickness. Jesus will be the light. There won't even be any more night. What a day that will be. I can't wait. Whatever you do, don't miss heaven. It makes all that we have to go through down here worthwhile. Revelations 21:1-4, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy City new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed way."

Do we have more proof than just the Bible's say so about heaven? I have heard hundreds of stories like this one. One of the schoolboys was involved in a serious accident. He bled really badly. He had a cell phone and when the wreck happened he called his mom who got there pretty quick since it all happened near their home. When she got there he was kneeling behind his truck. All he could say was "Leave me alone. I've got to pray." Later on after they flew him to a critical care hospital he told his mother what happened. He could remember feeling like he was going to die. He told her that he could remember angels all around him. His pastor had been praying for him but no one told him about what this boy had seen. His pastor later told his mom that when he had been praying for this boy, he had seen angels all around him. For some reason, God had decided to let this boy stay on earth a while longer but he was allowed to see into the beginning of what death brings.

I recently heard the testimony of a man who had actually died more than once. The hospital called him dead. He was gone for several minutes. When he came back to life, he tried to tell his wife about the things that he had seen. He had caught a glimpse of heaven. He couldn't tell his wife about what he saw. He told her that he couldn't describe it because there are no words that could describe how wonderful it is.

These are just a few glimpses. There have been people who came close to death enough to see what was on the other side all the way through time. There have been people who got to see inside heaven's gates that God allow to come back to live and tell what they saw. Some have died after glimpsing heaven and all the wonders there before they died. Some couldn't put in words what they saw but just before they died, their faces shone with the wonder of it all. The greatest

testimony about heaven has been the peace on the faces of people who have died. When I go to a funeral I can usually tell whether that person went to heaven or hell. They would either have a look of great peace, or a look of torment on their faces. Death is not final. Wonderful things are waiting those who love God. How long will they last? For forever.

You have hope now to be able to face and overcome whatever it is that you are going through. You also have eternal hope, hope that will last forever. Forever, you will be able to live in the presence of the Lord and experience the best that He has saved up for His children. Oh what a day that will be.

Closing

This is a hard book to close after just finishing up a chapter about eternity with God. I guess you can say that hope never ends. When you are serving God you will always have hope. Keep your eyes on the promises of God. Keep your eyes on how wonderful He is. When you do that, there will always be hope. You have hope to overcome what you are facing today. You have hope that whatever comes tomorrow, God will see you safely through it. You have hope that for eternity, you will rest in His care. Things may look bad here for a season. No matter what happens, no matter what comes, keep your eyes on Jesus. You will never lose hope.

I pray that you have enjoyed this course, and that your hope has been strengthened. I pray that you have been encouraged and that you have glimpsed ways to help encourage those around you that you minister to. This has been filled with God's Word, and that is the key to unlock hope. Be like David, be encouraged, be strengthened and go forth and change your world.

