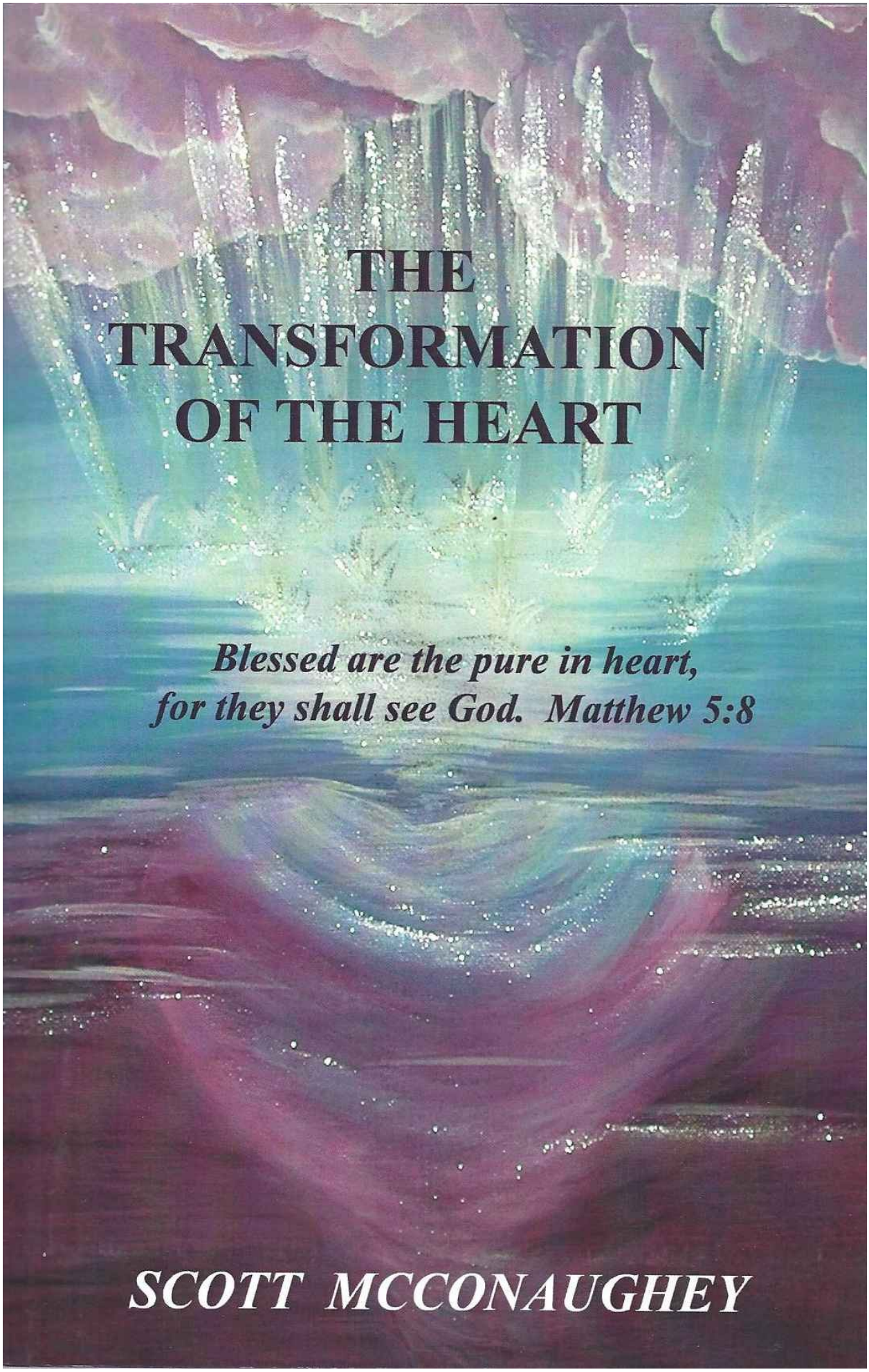

THE
TRANSFORMATION
OF THE HEART
Blessed are the pure in heart,
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SCOTT MCCONAUGHEY

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DEDICATION: This book is dedicated to our first born daughter, Christine Helen McConaughey. The first manuscript for this book was completed on the day Christine graduated from Highland High School as one of the valedictorians. She has since graduated from the University of Hawaii with a major in Asian studies (Mandarin) and spent a year in China teaching English. Christine edited many of my early manuscripts including this one. For several years Christine was an administrator in the Manhattan Language School that works with international students. Presently, Christine lives in Israel and works for the U.S. State Department as an office manager at the Embassy in Tel Aviv.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE HEART
By Scott McConaughey

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INTRODUCTION

He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, the King will be his friend. Proverbs 22:11

There is no greater joy or privilege than to be friends with the King of Kings. Solomon revealed that this incredible friendship is available to those who love purity of heart. A pure heart will flow words of mercy and grace over lips purified by the hot coals from God's holy altar[1].

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. Luke 6:45

If you listen to someone talk long enough, you will know what is in his or her heart. The heart is filled with beliefs and values that come out through speech. Proverbs 23:7 declares **"As a man thinks in his heart, so is he."** What a person believes in his heart will determine who he is and how he lives.

There was a time when I did not think that I could ever attain a daily walk of holiness. My focus was on my weakness rather than God's ability. Although I wanted a pure heart, my consistent failure in attaining such a state was sufficient evidence to convince me that I could not be completely pure and consequently I continued to struggle.

When I converted to Jesus Christ in 1974, several cults approached me and tried to recruit me away from truth in Jesus. I became fearful and sought truth in God's word for protection. Unfortunately, I became intellectual and doctrinally oriented out of fear rather than relationship oriented in faith.

Religious spirits began influencing my life, and I became intolerant of other Christians with views other than the ones that I held. It made me very nervous to be around anyone who spoke in tongues or even claimed to be a charismatic. I did not enjoy worship music, because it was "too emotional", and I was more intellectual.

God knows how to crack hard heads, and over the years, my walk became so dry that I was dying to learn how to worship the Lord. Through a 24-tape teaching series called the Encyclopedia of Worship, by Pastor Jack Hayford, I began to understand the biblical principles on worship and decided to apply them.

[1] Isaiah 6:15

So I quietly bought some worship tapes and began to listen to music from streams in the body of Christ that I had once criticized because of their theology. Although I questioned the theology behind the music, the experience of worship was wonderful, and I began to spend extensive time in praise and worship

As Christmas came that year, my heart was filled with adoration and worship for the incarnate Christ (baby Jesus!) in a completely new and fresh way. As I drove all night with my wife and six children through the mountains of Northern California en route to visit family in British Columbia, something startling happened.

I had been softly praising and worshipping God for several hours with the help of praise music on CD's. The sky was clear and full of majestic beauty. The van hummed along with no mechanical problems, which was always a reason to rejoice. Then it happened. Suddenly, and with tremendous force, the Creator of the Universe manifested His presence to me in that van in such a powerful way that brings chills and joys to my body as I write. Glenda and the children were all asleep. It was about 2:00 A.M. There was no mistaking God's presence.

"I want to give you a Christmas present" Almighty God declared. **"Ask Me for anything you desire, and I will give it to you."**

There was no doubt in my mind that it was God and that He was completely serious. His word is good! John 15:7 declares, **"If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it shall be done for you."** By His grace, I was abiding and He was offering a gift. The "substance" of faith permeated the atmosphere. At that moment, I had "God faith".

It took me about 20 minutes to decide what to ask for. The eternal Lord of all waited patiently for my reply. My heart was stirred by Solomon's request for wisdom, but I thought how he had fallen in his later years. If I have only one chance to ask for one thing, what should I ask for? In my heart, I believe I knew all along. Then I said it.

"Lord, I want to be holy."

That was it. Simple. To the point and clear. There was no voice in response. I did not need one. God had promised and gave me complete faith to believe Him to give me the gift of holiness. At that moment the thought of my heart changed because of a mustard seed of faith that God gave me. My heart thought and my lips declared "God will make me holy".

Unfortunately, I thought this would be an instant transformation. Over the next six years God took me through a most severe wilderness cleansing process that nearly killed me. Well, I suppose He did kill me. Although I still die daily, the Lord God has done a miraculous surgery on my heart to produce holiness. I love purity of heart and am becoming a friend of the King.

The Bible teaches that when we experience salvation through faith in the cross of Christ, we are justified and made completely righteous before God[2]. What God worked into our hearts through faith in Him, we need to work out through a process of growth called sanctification[3]. Our faith is completed by the good work of walking yoked with Jesus and cooperating with Him to transform our hearts and lives to conform to His perfect life.

There is no greater need in the body of Christ today than to have pure hearts and a passionate zeal for the holiness of God. We all need to have faith in our hearts that God will make us holy. And we need to follow His principles to perfect holiness. Most "believers" I talk to are "unbelievers" when it comes to living a holy life. They are just like I was before that Christmas encounter with the Omnipotent God of the Universe. I didn't think I could be holy either, but it is not about me. It is not about you. It is about His ability! God wants to make you holy. He can do it while you are still on earth!

The Lord fashions each heart individually, but it is certain that the wilderness is the only pathway to purity of heart. God must expose our hidden idols and purify our hearts before He takes us into the Promised Land. As we radically pursue holiness, many enemies of God will be encountered along the way that will resist us. Satan cannot deceive a pure heart that sees and hears God clearly.

Satan seeks to fill our hearts with impurity in three basic ways, which John taught us in I John 2:15-17. Satan's goal is to steal the affections of man's heart from the worship of God to the worship of himself. He uses three main ways, including:

1. **The love of money** - The desire for riches, wealth, prosperity, prominence, fame and control (love for the world system - greed)

2. **The love of idols** - False religions, counterfeit "Christian" religions, cults, ideologies, pagan lifestyles and the works of man (boastful pride of life)

[2] Romans 3:24-26; Romans 5:1-9; II Corinthians 5:21
[3] I Thessalonians 4:3,4; Philippians 2:12

3. **The love of sensual pleasures** – Immoral sex, entertainment, gluttonous eating and drinking, self-indulgence and all manners of carnality (lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes)

Satan seeks to counterfeit the true love of God in every possible way. He sends powerful seductive spirits to assault us, as portrayed in the adulterous woman of Proverbs 5 - 7. **"For the lips of an immoral woman drip honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lay hold of hell" (Proverbs 5:3-5).** These flattering words appeal greatly to the heart with idols of lust hidden within. Satan has seduced billions of souls to dine with him instead of Jesus.

The essence of his strategy is to captivate the desires of our heart and lead us onto the pathway to hell. All three counterfeit "loves" cause one to focus upon self and man's efforts instead of the mercy of God. The serpent wants to influence us to doubt God's goodness and His word so that we depend on self or false gods for personal gratification and success. God commands us to be holy.

"I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless" (Genesis 17:1b). God commanded Abraham before the law was given to walk in holiness. Abraham feared God and believed in his heart that he was required to be blameless. Abraham set the intent of his heart to be holy. The attainment of that maturity would take years of further preparation. This is an important principle we must grasp.

A pure heart begins with receiving the seed gift of faith to believe (think in your heart) that God will enable you to walk holy in daily life. God commands your holiness and will give you the grace to grow into that attainment if you believe and set the intent of your heart to be holy.

When God gave Moses the Law, the standard remained the same that God gave Abraham. **"For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourselves with any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44-45).**

King David operated under the law given to Moses and believed God's word like Abraham did. He set the intent of his heart to worship God and walk blameless before Him. Although David stumbled badly as he matured, the intent of his heart stayed focused on serving and obeying God. When David

was confronted about the matter of his sin with Bathsheba, he repented thoroughly and was cleansed[4].

God confirmed His standard through Peter in the New Covenant when the apostle wrote, **"but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (I Peter 1:15).**

It is God's command and will for every believer to have a pure heart. Jesus taught us in Matthew 5:8: **"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."** When God visited me during that van ride, He gave me substance faith to believe Him to make me holy. When this happened, the intent of my life was set to pursue a pure heart. God wants to do the same in you.

End Times Purity

And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time. Daniel 11:35

Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. Daniel 12:10

Daniel prophesied of a time when "believers" would fall in order to refine them and make them pure. We have seen many Christian leaders stumble in the last decades. God has exposed our impurities in order to refine us by holy fire from heaven. Most of us are fortunate that our sins have not been made public.

God's plan in these last days is to purify the Bride for His Son Jesus. The Father will not present a sin-stained Bride to His Son as a reward for His suffering. Our Father will demonstrate His glory as Daniel declared by making His bride pure, white and refined. This is a glorious hour in which God is releasing His anointing to transform our hearts. My earnest prayer before the Lord is that this book will give you revelation to help you see God through a transformed heart. You can have a pure heart and see God!

[4] Psalm 51

CHAPTER 1 – UNDERSTANDING THE HEART

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings. Jeremiah 17:9-10

The fallen heart (sinful flesh) is deceitful and desperately wicked. Our hearts receive various forms of communication early in childhood and we believe the information supplied as truth whether it is or not. Our hearts become programmed by various degrees of deception because of our fallen condition, the influence of our parents and various sociological and environmental influences. Understanding this condition Solomon warns us that **"He who trusts in his own heart is a fool" (Proverbs 28:26).**

The programming on our heart is hidden like the programming on our computers. A great deal of those values and beliefs in our hearts do not line up with God's perspective. Consequently, our hearts are deceived in every area that we believe lies and hold false values. Apart from God's revelation, we cannot even know what is hidden in our sinful hearts.

Jesus said, **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).** God wants to transform our hearts from dark deception to pure discernment, to know God and His will for our lives. We need to carefully understand the heart and this transformation process so that we can partner with God to allow Him to transform our hearts to be like Jesus.

As the human heart pumps life giving blood to our system, the spiritual heart of man is central to our life. The heart is our mind, emotions and will. The heart is our inner most being. The heart includes our soul and our spirit. When we discuss the heart we are referring to the mind, emotions, will, soul and spirit, all of who you really are.

Heart programming determines behavior. As a man thinks (or is programmed) in his heart, so will he behave. As we reach the age of accountability, we become responsible as the head programmer of our heart

The heart receives programming through all the senses including spiritual senses. These include hearing, seeing, emotions, touch, smell, thoughts and imaginations, reading, experiences, focus, taste, actions, speech, and inner vows.

Heart programming begins at the moment of conception. The heart of the child is able to download some programming in the womb of his mother. During the nine-month development period the child can receive all kinds of signals from his mother, father and environment as to who he is and what

kind of a world is outside. This kind of programming can have a major, lasting impact on the child even before he is born.

During the first five years of a child's life, nearly all of the inner programming is set. As one author said, children are like wet cement and the initial formation process is completed by about five years old[5]. This has tremendous implications for us as we seek to become like Jesus.

All of us were brought up in imperfect homes with various levels of sin and dysfunction. Our hearts were programmed before we could have any chance to do anything about it. That doesn't seem fair, but that is the truth. Most of the experiences growing up have an impact on our heart's beliefs and values.

God loves us and reaches out to all of us during the difficult formative years. Those who have loving, Christian parents generally turn out to love God and are well adjusted. Those who grew up in broken homes experiencing outbursts of violence and abuse generally turn out similar to their parents. The basic law of reproduction is that we reproduce in kind. We tend to become like our parents, but God enables us to change and become like Christ.

The Power of Speech

That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Romans 10:9,10

This verse teaches us an important principle on reprogramming the heart. It is based on making choices as to what we believe and say. It is vital that we confess with our mouth. The confession of our mouth has an impact on believing in our heart. With the mouth, confession is made unto salvation. This principle is not just for the initial salvation experience, but rather for a lifetime of transformation into the image of Jesus Christ.

During deliverance ministry counseling, we often discover that individuals need to confess the truth of what kind of abuse happened to them or what kind of sin they allowed themselves to commit. Time after time, we watch Christians get set free from guilty and painful memories as they confess their sins and forgive those that hurt them.

We must continuously declare with our mouths that Jesus Christ is Lord of our life. Our hearts will believe it as we say it over and over again. We can

[5] **CHILDREN ARE WET CEMENT** by Anne Ortlund.

make many declarations such as: “The blood of Jesus is able to cleanse me of all unrighteousness.” “The power of the cross is enough to set me free from sin.” “God is able to make me holy as I walk with Him.” “God loves me and is in control” and so forth.

It is true that if we say things out loud over and over again, our hearts actually begin to believe they are true. This principle is amoral. It works in the business world as salesmen listen to motivational tapes and practice saying things like “I am a great salesman”. Pathological liars become so convinced that what they say is true, they can no longer distinguish reality. Sports psychologists teach athletes to visualize and have positive self-talk to improve their performance. As we “say” into our heart, so will we become.

If a child continuously says, “I’m stupid,” “Nobody loves me,” “I can’t learn,” he will become a poor student, insecure and a major problem child in school. Some call these statements “inner vows” that become powerful tracks in our heart programming. During an emotional healing conference I attended years ago, the Lord revealed to me in a dream an inner vow I had said in my heart when I was a child. It was simply this: “Nobody wants to play with me.”

It just so happened that I was born the third of five children. I was a middle kid and once felt terribly isolated as my older siblings went off to do things and my younger sisters were too young to relate to. I can still recall a memory of crying in the dinning room, feeling left out and alone when my older brother and sister attended an event for their age group. It was then I said in my heart, “Nobody wants to play with me”.

Based on my new self-stated heart program, I began to play by myself. I played basketball alone for hours every day and excelled at the sport. Then I nearly became a professional golfer, which is an individual sport. After conversion, I gravitated to intellectual studies rather than relational activities.

After I married and had six incredible children, this programming still operated subconsciously on my heart. When the family wanted to play board games and do family oriented games, something in my heart checked up on me and I would say, “I don’t want to play. You go ahead.” I was mildly amused how much others loved to play in these group games, but I couldn’t get into it.

Why? Because my heart had been programmed as a child by an inner vow I made by simply saying several times, “Nobody wants to play with me”. The statement was made under emotional stress for a little boy who felt left out. The declaration programmed my heart for decades. My heart believed what my mouth said was true! In reality, many people including my children,

wanted to play recreational games with me for fellowship. The only games I had enjoyed were games of skill where I could win and conquer. What an insecure mess we can become when are hearts are full of unrighteous beliefs.

Through prayer, I took authority over that vow and broke it and started entering into more family games. I became much less competitive and more relational. I now desire community more than individuality. A simple childhood experience became a major programming point for my heart. In a sense, I deleted that program and installed a new one that said, "Some people want to play with me". I have a lot of fun with people now and am starting to enjoy what I used to think were "dumb" games.

This childhood story is a mild illustration of how we make statements into our hearts and program our behavior for decades to come. All of us have some faulty programming. Some have horrendous inner vows of hate, greed and wickedness. God is able to transform everyone who believes in Him and embraces the cross of Jesus Christ no matter what his or her background.

Some may need professional assistance by anointed Christian counselors who operate in the power of the Holy Spirit. Most of us can choose to seek God with all our heart and begin to experience transformation as we operate based on the knowledge of God's principles. God spoke from His heart when He declared, **"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).** All of this knowledge is available in God's word.

Say the Truth into Your Heart

This book of the Law shall not depart from <u>your mouth</u>, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Joshua 1:8 (underlining mine)

To transform our heart, we must say the word of God over and over again out loud. We must declare God's word as truth. Our heart, once properly prepared, will believe God's word as we say it again and again. Of course, we must believe that God's word is true and be willing to obey. God told Joshua to say the word (meditate) so that he could be victorious in the Promise Land. In order to claim the land of our inheritance, a holy life, we must do as Joshua did.

The ancient Hebrew meditated by reciting the word of God continuously. God tells us how to program our hearts. We program our hearts by saying the truth over and over again until we begin to believe it in our hearts. This action also wields the sword of the Spirit to assault the lies of the enemy.

While prayer walking one afternoon I heard the verse, **"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1).** The Spirit spoke to my heart that I was worrying about the lack of money and that I really didn't believe this basic verse. I confessed my sin out loud before the Lord and began saying "the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" many times, over and over, for the next ten minutes as I walked. After numerous repetitions, it became a loud declaration of faith to cut the enemy in pieces, who had been sowing fear and doubt into my mind. As my heart began to believe what I was saying, I experienced the impartation of a mustard seed of faith, and the word of truth began to grow in my heart at a deeper level.

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by <u>the word of their testimony</u>, and they did not love their lives to the death"(Revelation 12:11 - underlining mine). The spoken word of our testimony has great power to overcome Satan. This kind of testimony is stored in the heart and is anointed by the Holy Spirit as it comes forth to proclaim what God has done in our lives.

Jesus told us how important the word of our testimony is in our relationship with Him. **"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32,33).** The heart full of love for Jesus can not help but confess Him before men. Confessing Jesus before others will increase our heart belief and deepen our faith.

The Mirror of God's Word

When the word of God begins to grow in our heart's belief system, we begin to be transformed into the image of the One who is the word of God, even our Lord Jesus Christ. Meditating on the word of God will reveal what is hidden in our hearts.

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12-13

As we mediate on the living word, the Holy Spirit places a mirror on our heart and exposes an area He wants to do surgery on and heal. This exposure of our hearts should lead us to godly sorrow, repentance and confession, as an essential aspect of transformation.

How you spend your time and money will also reveal the values in your heart. **"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21).** The heart is the place where all of our values dwell. Our behavior demonstrates the programming in our heart, just as the computer screen indicates what programs are actively operating on the hard drive.

"If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless" (James 1:26). Your tongue has the power to deceive your own heart. Gossip deceives the heart. Flattery deceives the heart. All useless words deceive the heart.

Original sin erupted from the heart of Satan by the choice he made: **"For <u>you have said in your heart:</u> 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High'" (Isaiah 14:13,14).** (underlining mine)

We notice that Satan programmed his own heart by what he said into His heart. The human heart has the capacity to become hardened or softened towards God, depending on the "I will" of the individual. God gives each of us the dignity of choice as we mature. No matter what our parents did or did not do for us, we quickly reach the age where we are fully responsible for all of our choices. God gives us the power of choice until the day we die. On the Day of Judgment, we will not be able to make any more choices as to our eternal destiny.

Sunlight is a beautiful gift from God and is a demonstration of His love. On a warm day, if you place a candle and some fresh moist clay in the sunlight, one becomes softer and the other harder. The warm sunlight does predetermine the reaction, but the effect is caused by the composition of the material being exposed to the warm sunlight. It is similar with our hearts. God gives us the will to change the focus of our hearts so that we can change our heart condition to melt in the presence of the Lord rather than harden.

God knew the heart condition of Pharaoh, as Moses came to deliver Israel. God demonstrated His love giving Pharaoh ten chances to obey God's word, but Pharaoh continued to harden his heart by refusing to believe in the Lord. The light of God exposed Pharaoh's heart for the evil that was within. God exposes our hearts through various tests, afflictions and trials.

God's love is shinning toward us at all times with loving desire to transform our hearts. We must make choices that position our hearts to believe and receive. The most vital choice we make is in relationship to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 2 – REPENT AND BELIEVE IN THE GOSPEL

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Matthew 3:1-2

John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus by preaching repentance and conducting water baptisms. He scolded the Pharisees that a "religious" action was of no value, nor was calling Abraham their father sufficient to save them. John declared that they needed to **"bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Matthew 3:8).**

Jesus Christ preached a message of repentance and called the people to believe in the gospel. **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).** The fruits of repentance include godly sorrow, a broken and contrite heart and forsaking sin. Fruit also includes believing in the gospel, which will result in the character of Jesus being produced over time.

"Repent and believe" is the life long pattern for the transformation of the heart. We die to self and live to God[6]. We put off the old and put on the new[7]. We reject the wine of this world and receive the filling of the Holy Spirit[8]. **"Repent and believe"** is the daily theme song of every disciple who longs to become like Jesus. We also stand in the gap for our "fathers" and perform identificational repentance to bring healing to our land[9]. We repent and believe to bring revival to our region!

Repentance also breaks ties to demonic influence. In order for the heart to be transformed, all demons must be expelled. Demons can get in a person's life through sin and various events of wickedness and abuse. Sin gives demons legal rights to hold the ground the fallen person has given them. Repentance of sin, which includes confession of sin and faith in Jesus Christ to cleanse from all sin[10], breaks the legal bond demons have on a person. All demons should come out immediately upon conversion when a person has experienced true repentance and faith.

However, when salvation messages and altar calls don't include biblical repentance, many demons don't leave their hosts. They cling to their legal right until the sin is confessed and forsaken. In order to have our hearts transformed, we must repent and forsake all sin.

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[6] Romans 6:11
[7] Ephesians 4:22-24
[8] Ephesians 5:18
[9] Leviticus 26:40-45; II Chronicles 7:14; Daniel 9
[10] I John 1:9

The Way of Salvation

And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. Matthew 1:21-22

Jesus came into the world to save His people from their sins. The glorious Savior did not come into the world just to cover the legal requirement of God's wrath against sin, but to deliver His people from a lifestyle of sinning unto a lifestyle of holiness and love. Salvation is a lifetime event, not just a one-time transaction.

Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away. John 15:2a If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. John 15:6

Jesus indicates that there are branches "in Me" that are taken away because they do not bear fruit. Branches are those who indicate belief in Jesus Christ, but if they do not abide or continue daily in Christ, they do not receive the flow of His nourishing Spirit so they dry up and wither. These are thrown into the fire and are burned.

Jesus teaches us that those who do not bear fruit by abiding in Him are separated from Him and are thrown into everlasting judgment in the lake of fire. Fruit certainly includes the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5:22,23 that includes the character of Jesus Christ: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. While some new believers like the thief on the cross do not live long enough to exhibit much fruit, those who have been in church for many years should show some signs of salvation. They should demonstrate fruits worthy of repentance. If there is no fruit, perhaps they never repented and are like the Pharisees. God sees the true heart condition.

The Heart That Bears Fruit unto Salvation

Jesus taught us that there are four heart conditions of those who hear the word of God. Only one heart condition produces fruit. Let's examine the parable of the sower carefully.

Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang

up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Matthew 13:3-9

Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Matthew 13:18-23

According to Jesus' parable, the seed is the word of God, which Jesus sows across the world through His servants. The condition of our hearts will determine whether or not the seed will bear fruit to the glory of God. Let's look at the four heart conditions Jesus described for us.

1. **THE WORLDLY HEART** - The seed that falls by the roadside is the broad way of the world that leads to destruction. Traveling in the ways of this world hardens the ground of the heart. The more worldly and sinful a person lives the more callous the heart becomes. This individual does not understand the word sown, and Satan quickly dispatches demonic "birds" to snatch the word away, so that it does not penetrate the heart. The hard heart has no chance to bear fruit unto salvation.

2. **THE STONY HEART** - This heart condition is characteristic of a shallow belief, rather than true faith. There is not much soil available in stony hearts, and there is no genuine depth created through repentance and a broken and contrite heart. As the seed springs up quickly with enthusiasm and excitement, there appears to be hope of fruit, but fruit is the last thing produced under proper conditions and nurture. When tribulation, testing or persecution comes, the individual with a stony heart withers away from saving faith and the crop fails.

3. **THE ENTANGLED HEART** - The word is received in this heart along with seeds of the enemy which quickly grow to entangle the precious developments God intends. The pleasures of this life, the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word so that it cannot get proper nutrition, sunlight or water of God's Spirit. This person's

heart becomes a tangled up mess of confusion and darkness. No fruit is borne.

4. **THE GOOD HEART** - The word is heard and understood. At salvation, godly sorrow pierces the heart leading to repentance to enable the heart to receive the word. Patiently the individual learns to cultivate the ground of his heart through worship, repentance and obedience. He allows the Spirit to water the seed through devotion to prayer and God's Word. He keeps his heart pure and in peace so the maturing tree may bear fruit for the Master gardener. Persevering faith is the tractor that pulls the plow of repentance to deeply cultivate the soil of our hearts.

The seed of God's word sown into a person's life must find good soil in order to bear the fruit of salvation. Consequently, many that hear the word of God by human ears do not have the proper heart preparation to receive that word unto fruit bearing salvation.

Most of us have been taught that we are saved by faith alone. While this is true, biblical faith always includes repentance that leads to salvation and separation from the entanglement of previous sins. In all of the years I ministered to men in the inner city, I never met one who did not "believe" in Jesus. They might be unemployed, standing around a burning barrel on a cold winter day with a bottle of alcohol in their hand, having lived a life of uncontrolled sin, but every single one of them I talked to believed in Jesus. Are they all going to heaven? Not likely.

My neighbor in St. Louis, whose name I'll call Bob, was a gifted athlete and worked in construction. Bob was arrested for the serious charge of kidnapping and rape. It appeared certain that Bob was guilty, based on the facts that I knew. As a minister of the gospel with a burden to reach the lost, I went to the prison where Bob was held and brought along a Bible and intended to share the gospel.

The conversation we had was far from productive. Bob's heart was extremely hardened by many years of wild and sinful living. What startled me was Bob's response to my question, "Do you believe in Jesus?" Bob replied, "I pray to Him all the time!" I'm not sure how much Bob prayed, but his life bore no fruits of repentance, and it was frustrating to try to help him see his need. I left the Bible with him and prayed that God would help him see the truth.

Since Bob told me he prayed all the time, I probably could have led him in a sinner's prayer to ask Jesus into his heart. Imagine that I led Bob to "receive Jesus" while his heart remained unrepentant. We could call him "Brother" and declare he became a Christian, but he would not really be

saved. Yet this happens countless times on Sunday mornings across America.

Living in "post-Christian" America, most unchurched people have little understanding of who God is, the Bible, the cross of Jesus Christ or the cost of following Him. At the end of one service, if a person is encouraged to slip up his hand or "look up here so we can agree with you in prayer to receive Jesus", what exactly happens in those encounters? By God's grace some may get saved or later get deeper instruction, but why not preach what Jesus preached to begin with? **"Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15b).**

Paul never gave his converts assurance of salvation because they prayed a simple prayer. Rather he instructed the Philippians to **"work out their salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12b,13).** Paul declares a partnership with God, who comes into the believer to give the grace and will to accomplish the goal of bearing fruit. The believer is responsible to partner with God to work out their salvation.

The biblical declaration of salvation is given as a seed gift to the heart of those who believe in Christ. We must cultivate the growth of this gift through repentance and faith, as a lifestyle, until we bear fruit. God gives the free gift of salvation as a living seed, and we partner with Him to facilitate fruit. Assurance of salvation must be based on bearing fruit or observing the evidence of God's working Christ-like character in the heart of the convert. We do not earn salvation by works, but we do enable God's seed gift to bear life-giving fruit by cooperating with God.

Paul's Striving to Produce Complete Faith

Paul labored in agonizing, travailing prayer that Christ would be formed in his converts. He was never content to have them simply attending church. **"My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily" (Colossians 1:28,29).**

Why was Paul consumed with such a **"striving"** over these believers? The word used for striving is "agonizomai" from which we get the word agony. Paul deeply loved his converts and wanted to insure that the word of salvation took root and produced fruit, so that those whom he loved would truly be saved. Paul had already led them to faith in Jesus Christ. Then he prayed in agony and travail that they would grow to bear fruit. His goal

was to present every man **"perfect in Christ Jesus".** This must be our goal in fruit bearing ministry.

As a great apostle, who received tremendous revelation from God to pen nearly half of the New Testament, Paul understood that salvation faith needed to abide in Christ and bear the fruit of Christ-likeness in order to qualify before God on the Day of Judgment. This is exactly what Jesus taught in John 15. As we understand God's word on salvation, we can understand the heart of Paul when he wrote to the church at Thessalonica. "**For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain" (I Thessalonians 3:5).**

Paul and Silas planted a church in Thessalonica. Paul labored to teach those in the synagogue and **"some were persuaded"**, including a number of leading women[11]. The apostolic team quickly began to disciple the new believers. They had only been able to stay in the city for about a month before opposition drove them out and persecution came against Jason and other believers.

Paul understood the parable of the sower and the seeds. Under this kind of persecution, the new believer's faith might fail if it was in shallow rocky soil. Had their hearts been properly prepared to receive the word implanted? Would the persecution Jason and others experienced cause them to fall away from faith in Christ and to fall back into idolatry? The danger was extremely real. It was a matter of eternal life and everlasting death.

Paul wrote that he was concerned that Satan might have tempted the new believers to give up their new beliefs and fall away from true faith. Paul realized all his efforts would have been **"in vain"** if this happened and prayed earnestly and with compassioned agony that their faith would not fail in the day of adversity. This is the apostolic model of preaching the gospel and agonizing in prayer to see the word bear fruit in the hearers. Paul was consumed with concern about his little flock and later sent Timothy to find out if they were standing in faith.

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also see you—therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our

[11] Acts 17:4

God, night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith? I Thessalonians 3:6-10

Paul's burden of prayer could only be relieved by the confirmation that these new converts were standing strong in the Lord. He continued to pray intensely to visit Thessalonica and complete what was lacking in their faith. In what way might their faith be lacking? If it was the shallow faith many cling to in American churches, the kind of persecution these believers encountered would surely cause it to wilt and not bear fruit. Fruitless faith is not saving faith. Once Christ is formed in the heart of a believer and faith is deeply rooted in Christ, fruit will be borne, and nothing can derail that believer from holding fast to Jesus until the end.

The person with fruit producing faith cannot possibly "lose their salvation". Those whose temporary belief in God did not produce fruit, never truly had faith unto salvation. While they may have embraced the word of salvation for some time and participated in numerous Christian activities, those things don't save a person. Salvation is evidenced by a growing relationship with Jesus Christ, walking by faith, bearing lasting fruit and a lifestyle of perfecting holiness in the fear of God. The cross has the power to deliver us from all sinful habits. If we have faith in the cross, we will be set free over time. If we continue in habitual sin, we are in unbelief and deny the power of the cross of Jesus.

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.
I John 2:1-6

John does not say we can live in sinless perfection, but that we only have assurance of our salvation if we keep His commandments, obey His word and walk just as Jesus walked. God commands us to live holy lives before Him. Many of our hearts have been programmed with a shallow compromising belief system.

Our minds can rationalize certain passages of scripture and we easily get into deception tolerating sin. Our hearts are darkened as to our true condition, and as we resist the Holy Spirit's conviction, the heart becomes harder. It is common to attend a church in accordance to our own desires

or beliefs that allow us to continue to control our own lives and live in a mixture of sin and religious activity. Will this kind of life bear fruit unto salvation?

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. Hebrews 12:14-17 (underlining mine)

The writer of Hebrews stated that if we do not pursue holiness, we will not see the Lord. This relates to the intent of our heart, and not necessarily the full attainment of character. Esau sold his birthright for instant gratification[12]. Our birthright is to walk holy before God with a pure heart. We must not sell our birthright for the temporary pleasures of sin. We all reap what we sow, and if we sow to the flesh, we will not be able to recover our loss on the Day of Judgment.

We must diligently repent of our sins and cling to God's grace to forgive others that hurt us. If bitterness takes root in the heart, a person can reach a stage like Esau, where all he had was worldly sorrow that would not bring restoration of that which was lost. Worldly sorrow does not produce repentance or salvation. "**For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (II Corinthians 7:10).**

One thing we can all earnestly pray, is that God would grant us godly sorrow over our sins that will lead us to repentance and salvation. Godly sorrow is a mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. When sharing the gospel, I look for indicators of godly sorrow. If a person is distracted and uninterested, that is a good indicator that their heart is not ready to receive the word implanted.

At that point, rather than trying to jam the seed into their hardened heart, we need to love them, and pray for God's convicting pick ax to start breaking up the fallow ground. As we pray earnestly and love a person consistently, most individuals' hearts begin to tenderize to the gospel, and God will give the opportunity to plant the seed of His word. If the soil of their heart is "good" they will receive the word and bear fruit unto salvation. The reality of their lost condition and hardened heart should

[12] Genesis 25:30-34

motivate us to pray in agony that they might have their hearts softened to receive the word of God, so that it will bear fruit.

Justin went forward to receive Christ at a special meeting, much to the delight of family members who prayed for him for years. Unfortunately, a few years later, Justin's lifestyle included regular binges with alcohol and unfaithfulness towards his wife and children. He only rarely attended church, and his heart condition was extremely hard towards the topic of Christ. Attempting to talk to Justin about Jesus raised his defenses and exposed his bitter heart.

I was not present when Justin heard the message and responded, but I know him, and it is quite evident that there is no fruit of salvation in his life. The seed of the gospel did not find good soil in Justin's heart the day he walked forward, and it was choked out by worldly pursuits within a few years. The gospel may have been accurately preached, but the heart condition did not enable God's holy seed to bear fruit. As we understand Jesus' parable of the four soil conditions, we can understand the reason why so many who once started to walk with Jesus fell away. Their heart was unprepared by repentance to be good soil.

The Luke Warm Church

Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked--I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. Revelation 3:17-20

Many American churches are in the condition of the church at Laodicea. Jesus is not manifesting His presence in our churches with miraculous power and the salvation of many souls. He is standing outside the door knocking, telling us to be zealous and repent. Once we get our hearts into brokenness and humility through diligent repentance, then Jesus will come in to have intimate fellowship with us. God cannot abide with sin, nor will He have any fellowship with "carnal believers" (a modern oxymoron).

As we repent, we also believe the good news of Jesus' love, forgiveness and grace that we have been taught so much about. We have been terribly weak on the repentance side of the coin, because most of us did not understand, nor were we taught, the doctrine of salvation correctly. Once

you understand Jesus' parable about the heart and Paul's application in ministry, you may need repentance for the way you have ministered.

Since the Lord put His seed faith in my heart to make me holy, I have constantly been repenting of one area after another. Once I think I am at the end of the road, the Lord puts the plow deeper and pulls up more rocks and stumps of sinful programming in my heart. It hurts terribly, but the end result is a pure heart that sees God. Beseeching God for a pure heart should be the cry of every true believer.

Jesus tells us the way. "**Therefore be zealous and repent"[13].** One dear friend of mine paid me a nice compliment when she said that I keep climbing onto the altar of God's fire and throwing myself on it to burn up more flesh. God has helped me to be zealous unto repentance, because He gave me faith to have a pure heart, and I understand how deceptive, wicked and ugly sin is. I don't want any sin left in my heart and there is only one way to get set free. We must place our lives on the brazen altar and cling to the cross of Jesus to set us free.

Through this long process, God has begun giving me a heart to focus on Jesus and to present myself to Him as a chaste virgin on that glorious day. The focus has started to be on the worthiness of Jesus, rather than my desire to be pure and see clearly. The Father is committed to presenting His Son with a bride that is without spot or blemish. In order for this to happen, our hearts must be transformed. God is sending His fire and doing this great work as we agree and partner with Him. "**I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" (Luke 12:49)!**

Jesus sends fire on the brazen altar of sacrificial devotion to prayer. For months our intercessors prayed and asked the Lord to send His fire. We certainly didn't know what we were asking for at the beginning. Altar calls started centering on repentance. People came forward weeping and lives were being changed. Trials increased and pressures became nearly intolerable. Individual lives were exposed and we cried out to the Lord for deliverance.

After several months, we began to realize God had answered our prayers, and His fire was burning up our flesh. We started to pray for others to get the fire and they began going through repentance for months. God's fire comes to deal with our heart condition, to expose sin and bring us into repentance so He can plant more seeds and bear more fruit in us. We should all pray that Jesus would kindle His fire in our hearts each day!

[13] Revelation 3:19

CHAPTER 3 – LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. Mark 12:30

Transforming the heart must include a wholehearted dedication to fulfilling the first commandment. Each individual in the body of Christ must be regularly challenged to stay on focus to pursue an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, the Lord of all. God created the human vessel to function properly only when given in complete and wholehearted love and devotion to God. This great commandment is absolutely vital in enabling the heart to bear lasting fruit. The motivation of every believer must be grounded in love for God.

The human heart is incapable of fulfilling God's command apart from the grace of God through the person of the Holy Spirit, who comes to live in the heart once faith is placed in Jesus Christ unto salvation. We cannot love God without cooperating with the Holy Spirit and learning from His leading every day. It takes God to love God wholeheartedly. We need the power of the Holy Spirit every day to love God and follow Him. As we submit to the Teacher, who is eternally "on line" with the Father and Jesus, He will lead us to passionately love Jesus even as the Father loves Jesus.

And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. John 17:26

Jesus declared to His disciples the name (characteristics and nature) of the Father. As we grasp the revelation of the Father's nature, God is love[14], He begins to impart the love with which the Father loved Jesus into our hearts. As we receive that impartation of love, over time, we become transformed to the nature of Jesus expressed uniquely through our personality and gifting.

The love of God fully liberates us to be the glorious person in Christ Jesus the Father intends us to be. Experiencing passionate love for Jesus at the level described by John completely alters our worldview. Our heavenly Father is consumed with perfect love and zeal for His Son. The impartation of this level of intense devotion to Jesus is essential to equip us to persevere through the trials that come in life. Consequently, we must diligently study God's word to know His name.

[14] I John 4:8,16

But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. II Corinthians 3:18

Paul taught us the transformation process simply in this one verse. We are transformed by beholding the glory of the Lord. Paul beheld the glory light of God in a lost condition on the road to Damascus[15]. Later, Paul was caught up into the third heaven and beheld the glory of God. His life was never the same[16]. Imagine that you were caught up like Paul and spent one hour in heaven face to face with God. Your life would never be the same.

It has not been common for saints to be caught up like Paul was, but we can come into God's presence through various disciplines taught in the Bible. Choosing extended times of worship, praise and prayer opens our hearts to beholding God.

We behold Him through diligent Bible study and meditation on His truth. As we reflect upon the word of God by the Spirit, we begin to know His name, His nature and His ways. As we adore Him in praise and declaration, He flows His life to us and our hearts receive the water of His Spirit to grow the seeds implanted. He also sows fresh seed truths of His word into our hearts prepared by humble worship, prayer and meditation.

When I was converted to Christ at 20 years old, I immediately received passionate zeal to pursue God. Although I stumbled badly in immaturity, the intent of my heart was zealous from the first day. Then I met "Christians" my age that were not zealous at all. I couldn't understand why they didn't have the same intensity and hunger as I had.

Why did God infuse a supernatural passion in my heart and not in many of my brothers and sisters? How can a person without passion for Jesus capture it and be transformed? What dynamics enable a person's heart to be transformed?

The Tractor Beam of the Spirit

To answer these questions, consider the science fiction space drama where one space ship is able to lock a tractor beam onto another vessel and place a magnetic pull upon it, drawing it near. There is a certain point at which the ship being drawn can no longer loose itself and is drawn into captivity.

The human heart has a tractor beam capacity of sorts, and so do God and Satan**. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8a).** As the human will focuses the direction of his spirit (heart) onto an

[15] Acts 9:3ff
[16] II Corinthians 12:2-4

object, he will begin to draw near to it with a spiritual magnetic pull. If that object of desire is God, the Lord Himself will also draw near and will lock onto the individual to captivate his heart.

By God's design, neither He nor Satan may violate the human will. There is a point where Christians can run from God and unbelievers can resist the devil. Once the will has chosen to desire and lust for something or someone, a connecting gate is created in the spirit to join the two. The tractor beam of the heart locks onto the object of desire. If the two persons draw intimate, they can become spiritually one.

"But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Jesus declared this principle in relationship to a man lusting after a woman in his heart. The principle also relates to women lusting for men and in general to all forms of lust. Jesus is declaring that when a person locks the tractor beam of his spirit on sexual lust for a woman it is as if he has already committed the act of fornication in his heart. Given the proper circumstances, the sinful behavior would manifest.

In sexual union, a man and a woman mysteriously become one flesh. Their spirits are joined, and a spiritual flow back and forth will occur. Some call this a "soul tie". Jesus teaches us that lust alone is enough to create a soul tie in the heart.

In Numbers 25, the men of Israel were lured into false worship and the ritual sex that was part of Baal worship. **"So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel" (Numbers 25:3).** They did not love God with all their hearts but began to worship other gods. They became spiritually "joined" to the demonic power called Baal of Peor. It is vital that Christians understand the implication of this truth.

Men were enticed to a pagan worship service, banquet and fornication with the pagan women of Moab (ritual prostitutes). God declared that Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, the pagan god of Midian. We know that behind false gods are unclean spirits that seduce people into worship and give them various forms of carnal compensation for their false worship.

In the case of Baal of Peor, idolatrous worship included license to have unrighteous sex and enjoyment. Sexual union occurred and the men became spiritually connected to the demons in the women. Demons were transferred into the men, making them joined to, or "one", with Baal of Peor.

What infected those men had an impact on all of Israel. Moses was instructed to kill every man who was **"joined to Baal of Peor" (Numbers 25:5).** This drastic action was taken because these men were now polluted with demons and would influence and transfer these demons to their wives and children. What a horrible situation!

This brings us back to Jesus' declaration that if there is even lust in the heart it connects the human spirit with the object of desire. It opens a gate in the spiritual realm to receive, that which is behind the object of lust. This principle works in every case of lust or intense craving.

The love for money is a lust, and the Bible teaches us that it is **"a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (I Timothy 6:10).**

Love for money is a lust which opens the gate of the heart to all kinds of evil. This includes demonic invasion, which will bring many sorrows and much oppression. The enemy understands the operation of the human heart far better than we, and he constantly conspires to captivate our heart by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the love of this world or the boastful pride of life[17].

The human heart is a tractor beam, or magnet, that never turns off. God programs the need of the human heart with a hunger that can only be truly satisfied in Jesus' love. However, Satan counterfeits passion in thousands of ways and seeks to steal our heart affections, so that we point our hearts on something, or someone, other than Jesus. Once we turn our attention to a worldly affection and begin to draw near, the enemy will begin to draw near to us as well.

As one pursues carnality, there comes a point of connection in which the flesh is captivated by the enemy and becomes in bondage. Through repeated sins, the power of the connection grows stronger and the bondage greater. Only the power of the blood of Jesus can set a person free from this kind of bondage.

The great tragedy and reality of this hour is that many Christians have allowed their hearts to be captivated by various and diverse lusts. The spiritual principle of joining to demons does not become exempt because the Holy Spirit dwells in the heart. This is a stumbling block to most Christians who have received little teaching on spiritual realities and the demonic realm.

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[17] I John 2:15,16

Demons may not possess and control a Christian's spirit, but they can captivate portions of the soul that are opened to them. I believe that through deep bondage to sin, their spirit will also be polluted. God's word exhorts us to **"Cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 7:1).** While this one verse is not conclusive, Paul indicates the need to cleanse our spirit from filthiness. He is writing to Christians. If sin can get into the spirit (heart), then so can demons.

Through intense lust, Christians can be joined to Baal of Peor and other demonic powers that influence their behavior and cause them to be powerless in advancing the kingdom of God. Worse yet, they may not bear fruit and may fall away from faith in Jesus Christ's power to save them through His cross. Christians who fall into sin and are joined to demonic influence do have an impact upon the entire body of Christ.

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh". But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. I Corinthians 6:15-20

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul taught that being joined to a harlot makes us one flesh. Every believer must flee sexual immorality. Every believer must also flee lust since lust also opens up a gate in the realm of the spirit to drink from the demonic spirit behind the object of desire.

By God's power, my wife and I decided to cancel all TV service a few years back. With six growing children in the home, it became an incredible chore to try to monitor TV watching to screen them from evil influences. Watching television, like many activities, is an act of receiving, or drinking, input from a source. All of the images produced on television have a spiritual reality or motivational force behind them.

For example, the modern wrestling programs that have huge audiences and have captivated the hearts of many young people are saturated with demonic activity. It doesn't take a whole lot of discernment to perceive demonic activity motivating most of the individuals participating in this form of entertainment. Most programs are far more subtle than wrestling.

As people watch programs, they drink in the images and the stream in the spirit coming from them. This is true about every single program on television including the news, sports and commercials. The Lord opened my eyes one day to see a vision of a serpent lying in wait in the cable connected to a television set.

Please allow me to be very candid. Satan is vigilant and tenacious in seeking to destroy every Christian on earth. He absolutely hates it when we love God with all our hearts, so he is constantly seeking to steal our heart's affections. Because we have not understood the spiritual reality of drinking while watching television, Satan has influenced television programs and movies that flow spiritual pollution. Even channel surfing can expose a person in a few seconds to demonic images that are extremely hard to shake. Demons literally hide and wait, in some situations, near the TV for a person to open up their spirits and drink in the sludge. As a viewer opens his heart to the images on television, he may open his heart to entrance by a demon.

God has trained me in spiritual warfare and given me sensitivity in the spiritual realm. On a ministry trip, it was recommended that I stay at a certain hotel although I had the option to choose any number of hotels. As I checked into this hotel, I felt a little uncomfortable, but since I am often assaulted I resolved to pray about it. When I got to the room, I was tired and decided to take a nap.

However, there was that television! Since I once aspired to be a professional golfer and Tiger Woods was taking the tour by storm, I thought it might be interesting to watch a bit of the tournament. For the next three hours, I drank in golf. Tiger Woods made some great shots, and during the commercials I channel surfed and sampled many other programs. At the end of this time, I was not rested nor spiritually empowered to minister. My heart was crying out to drink in the Holy Spirit's flow of life from the throne, but I only gave it drink from the well of this world.

The experience left me completely unsatisfied. Paul said, **"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (I Corinthians 6:12).** This explains my experience exactly. While it may be "lawful" to watch television in the liberty we have in Christ Jesus, most of the time it is not helpful. Television, like many activities, can bring us under its power.

When we love God with all our hearts, He will flow a drink and taste that will satisfy the deep cravings of our heart. We will experience true satisfaction without the demonic bondage that comes with many wines of this world that enslave the heart with its passions.

Since the human heart is designed for passionate love, there is only one safe passion we can have, which of course is passion for Jesus. Godly passion is a powerful emotion and motivating force. It is ardent and adoring love for the One who gave His life for us so we might be saved from the punishment of sin. Passionate love gives us pure zeal for the Lord of Hosts. This fundamental principle applied daily will open the flow of God's Spirit to transform our hearts from glory to glory.

The Bridal Heart

As we grow to perceive ourselves as the Bride of Christ, our love causes us to focus on being pure and holy for His enjoyment. The focus is taken off our desires and placed on pleasing Him. The Song of Solomon vividly portrays, in poetic song, the journey of the passionate bride captivated by her Beloved. This is a prophetic picture of Christ's relationship to His bride and how we individually and corporately must journey to know Christ as our all consuming love.

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. For your love is better than wine" (Song of Solomon 1:2). The passionate cry of the bridal heart is for intimacy with Jesus. The awakened believer can be satisfied by no other affection than that of the pure wine of God's love. The wines of this world no longer captivate, sparkle or satisfy when the believer is drinking in the love of the world's greatest Lover.

The human heart craves intimacy with the Creator, because God designed us that way. The heart can only find true satisfaction in God alone. The hunger of the heart causes us to ponder the word of God and meditate beyond the surface to receive the deep things of God. Only a deep hunger for intimacy with God will keep us on track as we walk through this world filled with deception and traps of the enemy.

Religious spirits cloak themselves in many robes to lure us into a stale captivity to doctrine, dogma, tradition and respectability. Passionate romance with the Bridegroom breaks through the mental boxes into which religious spirits try to place God.

The pursuit of holiness must be rooted in passionate love for God, or it easily becomes self-righteous religiosity. The pursuit of ministry without passion causes burn out. Our life may become a work of suffering without the banquet table of His enduring love in the midst of our enemies. We must eat, be satisfied and full of Him alone. It is from this place of heart captivation that God will lure us into His wilderness to purify our heart and burn His Spirit into our bones so we become holy servants unto Him.

How Do We Impart Hunger for God?

You cannot give what you do not have. Each of us must first become a model of intense hunger for the Lord in order to pass it on. We can all learn from King David, who said, **"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him" (Psalm 34:8).** David was a man after God's own heart, because he had the greatest hunger for God of perhaps any man who ever lived. David tasted and experienced the goodness of God through worship and praise.

In order to develop hunger for God, we must taste Him through extensive worship, prayer and meditation on His word taught by His Spirit. The sense of taste is a very subjective, or individual experience. I happen to enjoy the taste of chocolate, but not just any store brand version of chocolate will satisfy my pallet, especially in the ice cream department. There are chocolates and then there is CHOCOLATE. One of my daughters carefully removes every raisin from any dish where she finds it. Curiously she likes the cereal Raisin Bran, but removes all the raisins. However, she does not like Bran Flakes which is simply Raisin Bran without the raisins. Go figure!

Many of our cultural western traditions influence us to be suspect of subjective experiences especially when it comes to spiritual tastes. We have developed a great distrust of another person's "religious experiences". Some Christians go to extensive lengths to criticize and theologize against what another Christian "tastes" in the Lord. How unwise!

Experiencing the love of God will endure through all eternity. The four living creatures that surround the throne and who never cease to say, **"Holy, Holy, Holy" (Revelation 4:8)** are not chanting that God is without sin. They are astounded by His majestic splendor, and as they catch another glimpse of His infinite beauty, this crescendo of praise simply erupts in their beings. God is set apart, wholly other, completely unique.

Once we begin to taste God through worship, praise and meditation, it is quite easy to be drawn back again and again into His presence to banquet some more. As one who was once captivated by many worldly lusts, I must admit that the world has an awful lot of attractions, especially for someone with money. Christians may enjoy some of these things in the proper context, but nearly everything can become an idol and enslave the heart.

Tasting the goodness of God and experiencing the supernatural manifestation of His presence is nearly indescribable. It is a subjective experience, somewhat like tasting gourmet cooking. The barrier for many Christians is that they enjoy eating at the trough of this world and are unwilling or afraid to give up the pig's portion.

Let the reader be assured that the diligent pursuit of God will infinitely outweigh everything this world has to offer. You will experience delights in your heart in this world and eternal life and rewards in the age to come as you pursue the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Loving God in this way will enable you to bear fruit.

Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. Song of Solomon 2:3

Passionate love for Jesus leads to a lifestyle of obedience to His commands. As we obey Him, we become His friends, and He shares the most intimate secrets with us and gives us clear direction and leading so that we may fulfill all of His purposes. Along the journey, our hearts are transformed to be like His.

CHAPTER 4 – OBEY GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART

If you love Me, keep My commandments. John 14:15

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. John 15:14

The human heart will not be transformed without obedience. The kind of obedience that pleases God is an obedience of joyful submission in which we delight to do the commands of God. Submission is an inner attitude of trust that can declare at all times, "Father knows best!" Of course, that declaration is absolutely true. God always has our best interest in mind, and His commandments will lead us on a great adventure of faith that will enable Him to transform our hearts.

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. I John 5:2-3

Many believers go through such a great tug of war between their flesh and God's Spirit, that His commandments are burdensome to them. When the Lord commands us to **"be holy" (I Peter 1:15,16),** a lot of saints either groan or simply ignore the command. Their hearts are preprogrammed to deny certain commands and truths.

As we grow to love God and understand His nature, we realize that everything He commands us to do is for our benefit and is part of a master plan to build His kingdom, edify His Church and make a difference in this world. We long to obey His voice and His commandments become our joy rather than a burden.

We also must remember that God is the infinite Creator and Ruler of the universe. Jesus Christ bought us by paying the price of His life, and we belong to Him (I Corinthians 6:20). God owns us. He is the Judge of the world. We must stand before Him and answer for our every deed and action[18]. It makes perfect sense in every way to obey God. It is incredibly foolish to disobey Him!

The Fear of The Lord

One of the great challenges every believer faces is knowing what God's will is for their life. As we develop a lifestyle of obeying God's will in all things, over many years, you would think that hearing God's voice would become easier. Think again. God often withdraws the sense of His presence and

[18] II Corinthians 5:10

His voice for seasons to draw us into deeper pursuit of the depths of His love.

Sometimes, as we diligently seek to know God's will on one matter, He will clearly speak to us about a different matter that we were not asking about. At times, this can be rather intrusive and frustrating to us. I remember once when I prayed asking God for a clear word on a certain matter, and He spoke to me about something totally unrelated. It was a wonderful word He gave me, but it just had nothing to do with what I was asking.

As I was moaning and complaining about this I told a brother about this and was overly dramatic and tried to be funny about the whole thing. I don't recall exactly what I said, but it was a put down on God's ability to communicate. I said something like, "Hello, did you hear what I was asking?" "Is this anyway to run a kingdom?"

Having been a director of ministry for many years, with staff members reporting to me, I would always work with them to communicate and answer their questions. When they asked me when a project was due, I did not tell them something else. Of course, I am not God, but I reasoned that surely God should have the common courtesy to answer the question being posed in a timely fashion.

That night I had an experience with the Lord that changed my life. About 1:00 A.M. as I was sleeping I heard an electrifying voice that said, "Don't worry about it!" I rose up out of bed terrified and woke my wife and told her of the unusual word. As we were both debating as to what this meant, the power of God began to come over me in a way that imparted the "fear of the Lord" to my inmost being.

For over two hours I shook and trembled in the bed as God was speaking to me. I curled up in a fetal position as I was receiving some measure of the terror of the Lord. One thing the Lord said to me in no uncertain terms was that I should never ever despise His voice or mock what He says to me. That experience was years ago, and it still brings chills to my body when I think of it.

At a prayer meeting the next day, people started praying for an impartation of the fear of God, and I was still shaking inside and began saying "no" in my heart. Then the Lord led me to repent of that in front of all of them, and He humbled me for days. Another man heard of my experience and said he wanted it. I just grabbed his hands and prayed the fear of the Lord on him and he shook for a few hours. It was not a fun encounter. It was horrible!

The Lord our God is a consuming fire[19]. He can be terrifying. His voice shakes the nations. We desperately need the fear of the Lord. As I was meditating on this powerful visitation, the Lord showed me that Moses experienced this terror for many days.

Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, "You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was. Exodus 20:18-21

In a small way, I experienced the terror Moses and the people felt at God's awesome presence. His voice was so traumatic that the people no longer wanted to hear God speak and appealed to Moses to be their buffer. I understood those people. What amazed me is that Moses **"drew near the thick darkness".** Even though Moses was terrified, He had the courage to pursue God even closer.

The reality for all of us is that we really don't know God very well at all. I got a little taste of the fear of the Lord, and it shook me up and changed my life. When I hear of people who say they heard God's voice and did not obey Him, I cringe inside. Were they really hearing God? If they were, how could they disobey the Creator of the Universe, the consuming fire of the ages? A person who disobeys God does not really know the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever. Psalm 111:10

I still occasionally pray for the fear of the Lord, because I know it is wisdom, but I'd rather not be in the grip of God's discipline for two hours or two minutes. What most of us need is a really good scourging from the God, whose presence shook His two million chosen people into terror. Moses explained that God imparts fear to those He loves so that we may not sin. Oh how we need this impartation!

We don't have to experience terror from God to be taught to obey His voice. God draws us towards Himself with love and tenderness. He does not make us obey, but as we grow in sonship and disobey, He will discipline us as is best for us so that we will not go astray. As we climb the mountain of

[19] Hebrews 12:29

holiness, I believe most of us will encounter experiences of the fear of the Lord.

The Discipline of Our Father

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:5-11

God disciplines us so that we will have our lives transformed and become partakers of His holiness. The more you obey God and press in to follow Him, the more He will hold you accountable and discipline you when you sin or grieve His Spirit. This discipline is often intensely painful, and many believers shrink back from God's dealing at this point.

We erroneously think that if we obey God and zealously pursue His holiness everything will instantly get better. Wrong again! My experience has been that the more I pray, fast and seek God's face, the more the enemy tries to buffet me and bring me down. God does encourage me, but the resistance at new levels is tremendous. As one writer said, "New levels bring new devils." This is often true.

After seasons of fasting and extended prayer, which God has blessed, often we are moved into new levels of authority with God, and we are allowed to fight bigger enemies in various forms. Obeying God in all areas eventually brings us into conflict with the kingdom of darkness. Only a burning love and passion for Jesus and His glory can keep us climbing Mt. Zion when the enemy is throwing his fiery cauldron down upon us. God is teaching us how to walk in His armor, and He controls all things. It does seem strange at first that when we obey God things can actually get a lot more difficult.

This is especially true for those whom God is calling to be apostles and prophets along with other Christian leaders. During this hour the Spirit is

calling many to pursue God deeper through prayer and fasting. For several months the Lord was gently nudging me to do a three-day Esther fast, which is no food or liquids for 72 hours. I get dehydrated easily, and the thought of three days without water overwhelmed me.

God has enabled me to do a number of longer fasts, but I've always had water and often drank some fruit juice as well. But He finally led me into a place of such need, that I sensed the time to do the three-day fast was upon me. We had just finished a holiday barbecue and I simply stopped eating and drinking for three days. My body did not like it, and the flesh protested the first two days, but God's grace and peace helped me.

At higher levels of obedience, the Lord does not always command us to do certain things, but He nudges, encourages and gently leads us to do them. He's not looking for mindless robots that obey but full partners in Christ Jesus who will learn to reign with Him. Even though God did not command me to do a total three-day fast, I felt His leading, and it became an act of obedience to His gentle guidance.

God honors obedience and often will increase anointing upon you when you obey. This happens because obeying God will position you to receive from Him something that He plans to give. On the third day of this fast, I was at a special Christian meeting where an anointed worship leader was ministering and ushering us into the presence of God. He has a unique prophetic anointing in leading worship using the keyboards.

Since I also play piano and lead worship, I was captivated, not only by the beauty of this worship, but by the grace of the anointing to prophesy while singing and playing. In my heart, during the meeting, I prayerfully asked God for some of that anointing to splash on me that I might walk in that level of song and prophecy.

The next day after getting back to eating and drinking, I had the opportunity to lead worship at the Watch of the Lord, an all night prayer meeting. To my surprise, the anointing I asked for the day before was on me and God enabled me to launch in new levels of prophetic song. That Sunday afternoon, I taught the church on prophetic song and led them into a glorious stream of the river of God in which God blessed everyone greatly.

When I obeyed God's leading to do the three-day fast, my idea was to use it to pray for financial breakthrough. However, God wanted to position my heart to receive anointing at a higher level in prophetic worship and equip me to teach our church. The class on prophetic song had been postponed from the previous week. Looking back, I realize God led the whole thing so that I would not teach prophetic song without an increase in the anointing

to lead. I am amazed at the grace and goodness of God. It is such a blessing to obey Him at all times! Obeying God transforms our hearts.

Obey By Diligently Seeking God

Now therefore, says the Lord, turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning. So rend your heart and not your garments: return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm. Joel 2:12,13

There is a level of obedience that includes extraordinary measures of pressing into God with weeping, fasting, prayer and extended meetings. God calls us into seasons of earnest seeking and repenting. We often think that we have repented for all of our sins until God manifests His presence at a deeper level. Then we end up back on our face.

Many times, God calls us to repent for the sins of our land and stand in the gap to pray and intercede for our city, state, nation or other lands. There is a great need to diligently seek God and get violent against the flesh.

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. James 1:21,22

As we press in to God, He will give us specific words from scripture to obey. We are called to be doers of the word of God. If we don't obey God's word and are hearers only, we will deceive ourselves and our hearts will darken. Every time you hear God clearly speak to your heart from His word and do not obey, you deceive yourself!

Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you. Hosea 10:12

Obeying God includes breaking of the fallow ground of our hearts through being zealous unto repentance. We really need the fire of God and the only place you'll find it is by laying your life on that altar again and again. The burnt offering was skinned, cut in pieces and all the inner organs were washed. The priests were also commanded to wash the legs[20]. God commanded all this action for an animal that was going to be completely burnt to ashes.

[20] Leviticus 1:1-13

Why go through all the trouble of skinning, separating internal organs, washing them and washing the legs? God was presenting a picture of the cleansing process we must endure as the priests obeyed His word.

As the Lord is bringing us to death to ourselves in identifying us with Christ on the cross, His word cuts us into pieces, and He washes our insides and cleanses us from deep wounds and sins attached to our heart. Our legs are washed representing the walk of holiness. All of who we are is placed on the altar to be burned completely. God is a consuming fire and wants to completely burn up all flesh.

At the same time, He will impart burning zeal for His heart and kingdom. We will have the fire of God shut up in our bones and receive the word of God with anointing and power. What a great exchange! God cleanses us, burns up our sins and fires up our lives to glorify His Son.

Do Not Run From God's Dealing

When God begins dealing with your heart, do not run, but rather yield to Him. **"Today, if you will hear His voice: do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness" (Psalm 95:7,8).** Disobedience is the fastest way to harden your heart to God. Compromise, fear of man, unbelief, worry, complaining, blame shifting and selfishness all harden our hearts to God.

The dealing of God to purify our heart is so great at times that seasoned prophets will run from God. God was dealing with Jonah and commanded him to go to Ninevah to preach a hard word, **"But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the <u>presence of the Lord</u>" (Jonah 1:3 -** underlining mine**).** The Holy Spirit wanted us to observe that Jonah fled from the presence of God.

Jonah had many heart attitudes that God exposed in the book of Jonah. God was dealing with Jonah to go to a foreign nation, which Jonah had deep prejudice against. It was a great trial for this seasoned prophet. He was not dead to himself, and his heart was not ready to love these people. Jonah did not want to go through the trials and dealings that God was working on him to be prepared to carry this powerful prophetic message of doom.

As you know, God has ways of getting us to do His will. We choose either the easy way, by initial obedience, or the hard way. Jonah took the hard way and ended up in the belly of a great fish. It must have been an extremely unpleasant place to pray, but Jonah did pray as though his life depended on it. God delivered Jonah and used him in a powerful manner, but his heart still was not pure. At the end of the book God was still dealing with Jonah's heart at a deeper level.

The fact that Jonah wrote the book recorded in the Bible and was so vulnerable about his heart condition, gives us indication that he thoroughly repented and allowed God to transform his heart. We have all run from the dealing of the Holy Spirit at times and ended up in a worse mess than we would have if we had simply obeyed. God is committed to seeing our hearts transformed and He will lock onto us and not let us go.

It is wise to pray consistently, "Lord, please give me the grace to obey everything you call me to do without hesitation or any struggle." As you consistently obey God's voice, your heart will steadily be transformed to be like Jesus.

Obey God by Loving Others

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:34,35

The full fruit of a transformed heart will manifest the love of God when we love each other as God has loved us. The second great commandment was to love our neighbors as our self. Jesus raised the standard and calls us to a lifestyle of pouring out our lives in love and sacrificial service towards one another.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. I John 4:7,8

John understood that the essence of living for God required a life flow of compassionate servanthood towards people. We are not just called to love those in the church but the lost as well. As we love God and obey Him, He will direct our hearts to bear a burden of love and prayer for specific people, areas or countries.

Demonstrating God's love can be simple and practical yet powerful. On a cold winter day in St. Louis years ago we brought groceries to a family in dire poverty. When the alcoholic father of nine children saw us with groceries, tears came to his eyes and he started to pray loudly, "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me! Please forgive me for my sins!" The love of God expressed ministered such life that this man cried out to God.

The completely transformed heart will flow in the love of God at all times. As we obey God's leading to reach out in love to those in need, He will increase the flow of His love and we will be transformed in the experience.

This process will include many trials and challenges, but the fruit will be a blessed pure heart that sees God.

CHAPTER 5 – TRUST GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Proverbs 3:5,6

We are called to trust the Lord with all our hearts. While most believers have memorized this wonderful passage, few realize that the word "acknowledge" in the Hebrew is "yada". It enlightens us to know that yada was used in **Genesis 4:1 "Now Adam knew** (yada) **Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, 'I have acquired a man from the Lord'".**

The word yada incorporates the deepest level of intimacy between a man and woman. Pictured between our Bridegroom and His bride, we are called in all our ways to "yada" Him. We are to seek the most intimate possible relationship with Jesus Christ. We are to pursue oneness with Him.

As we behold Jesus, knowing of His perfect, tender love and great grace, we learn to love and trust Him with all our heart. As we seek the tenderest intimate relationship with Him, acknowledging Him as Lord of our hearts, He directs our paths into His perfect will. What surprises us, is that he often leads us into some difficult places where we learn to trust Him at deeper levels.

The Wilderness

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. "And it shall be, in that day," says the Lord, "That you will call Me 'My Husband,' and no longer call Me 'My Master,' For I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more." Hosea 2:14-17

God lures us into the wilderness by His love, then deals with deep heart issues and brings us out into a relationship of intimacy where we can call Him "My Husband". This takes time and painful trials. Please let me illustrate with a personal testimony.

Early in 1997, the Lord led me to study the Song of Solomon with the aid of Pastor Mike Bickle's tapes and workbooks. My heart was completely captivated by the love of God and the joy of serving Jesus in a fresh way. Although I had served the Lord for over 20 years, the newness and vitality of first love returned.

Immediately thereafter, the Lord called my wife and I to resign our position in ministry and "Go to a place I will show you". The Lord would not reveal His will until after we resigned. Being captivated by His love, we trusted He would lead us and after much prayer and counsel, we resigned. At that time, we did not know the principle Hosea revealed about God alluring us into the wilderness. We expected that our new ministry was going to be a glorious success. Instead, it turned out a miserable failure that catapulted us into God's wilderness.

Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Deuteronomy 8:1-3

It is in the wilderness that we discover the idols of our hearts as the Lord tests us, humbles us, tries us and teaches us that man does not live by bread alone or financial schemes but by every word that proceeds from His mouth. If you consistently trust and obey God's leading, He will lead you into one or more wilderness seasons. That place will include the valley of Achor or trouble.

The valley of Achor was so named in dishonor towards Achan who disobeyed God's command regarding the spoils of Jericho. Achan's sin caused the death of 36 men in the assault at Ai. That also means 36 widows and dozens of fatherless children. The sin of one brings trouble to many.

When confronted, Achan confessed: **"When <u>I saw</u> among the spoils a beautiful Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, <u>I coveted</u> them and <u>took</u> them. And there they are, <u>hidden</u> in the earth in the midst of my tent, with the silver under it" (Joshua 7:21 -** underlining mine**).**

The pattern of sin is revealed here. It begins with seeing. Then the heart lusted for them as sin was conceived in the heart. After Achan took the forbidden items, he hid them. We try to hide our sins from God and others. How absurd! God knows and sees all. Everything will eventually be brought to the light as was Achan's sin.

So all Israel stoned him with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. Then they raised over him a great heap of stones, still there to this day. So the Lord turned from the fierceness of His anger. Therefore the name of that place has been called the Valley of Achor to this day. Joshua 7:25,26

God allures us into the valley of trouble so that He can do surgery on our hearts. In the wilderness, God disciplines us and cuts out the Babylonian mixture in our lives. He stones us to self-death and delivers us from the love of money and the fear of man. It is a most painful trial that cannot be endured without being captivated by deep love for Jesus.

In the valley of Achor, we discover the doorway of hope, which is in Christ Jesus. We learn to call Him "my Husband" instead of Master, and in the wilderness He forever delivers us from Baal worship which is every hidden idol, or heart affection apart from Jesus. It is in this wilderness that God gives us future vineyards of fruitful ministry. This is the doorway of the cross that leads to resurrection power.

During wilderness times, the Lord purposely withdraws the sense of His presence and we find our selves in the dark night of the soul, or that place of doubt, fear, anxiety and tremendous pressure. Our heart longs for those first-love times of passionate embrace, but in the wilderness we feel so all alone. Our heart cries out for renewed fellowship while God is deepening our longing for Him.

During such a season the Lord brings one area after another to the surface that must be confessed, repented of and renounced so the journey of transformation will continue. We must learn to trust Him in this painful process. While this is primarily an inner journey the outward changes will eventually be evident to all who know you.

Tradition-bound churches focus on outward behavioral changes, which appear helpful and good, but ultimately only amount to a cultural form of Christianity that is mixed with inner lusts for the things of this world. Like Achan, we have hid things in our heart that nobody sees. After a while, they are hidden to us as well. This leads to a Babylonian Christianity and must be driven out by an excruciating wilderness time.

Trust the Lord Wherever He Leads

A pure spiritual romantic love with Jesus will motivate us to respond to His call no matter what or where He calls us to go. In my early journey, the Lord captivated and then called me to move into the ghetto and minister to the urban poor of a completely different culture and color. We learned to trust the Lord for safety in a violent area.

I was talking with a couple of policeman at the 9th district headquarters in St. Louis one afternoon and I told them where I lived. "You live where?" the incredulous officer queried. I explained our mission and the fact that we had angels watching over us. He replied, "You need them down there!"

There is no better place to be than in the will of God. It may be dangerous in the natural to live in the inner city, but it is far more dangerous to rebel against God and run from His will. We learn to trust God when He takes us through challenging times. God is faithful, but He is not content that we camp long at the level of trust we are presently experiencing. God wants us to trust and obey Him as Jesus did.

God wants us to trust Him so much that we will take up our cross daily with joy and follow Jesus no matter where He leads. God took me out of a tremendous ministry where I was constantly busy with people and projects. We were extremely blessed, the ministry grew, and there were many staff, building projects and ministry success stories. God wanted to do a deeper work in our hearts and the wilderness was used mightily to transform us.

The Idols in Your Heart

Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak to them, and say to them, "Thus says the Lord God: everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols." Ezekiel 14:3-5

This principle in Ezekiel is important to grasp. The heart is able to hear God, but the communication gets filtered through idols hidden in our heart. It's like a special language translator. Often the original meaning gets lost or twisted in the translation. This happens to us as we seek to hear God on various issues.

Our pet doctrinal beliefs can be a filter to truly hearing the will of God. Our culture is a filter many times. Our personality, age, temperament and context are all filters, but the greatest heart filter is created by idolatry. The pure heart sees and hears God correctly. The impure heart sees and hears God according to the degree of impurity hidden therein.

If you are not seeing and hearing God clearly, you probably have idols hidden in your heart. You are not aware of them because they are hidden. God powerfully exposes heart idolatry in wilderness trials. Remember how He led the people by a visible cloud by day and fire by night?

God led them right into situations and places where their heart conditions would be exposed. At the red sea, their fear was exposed. At Marah, their bitterness was exposed. The enemies that attacked them were all used to expose their hearts.

God spoke to me clearly a few years ago to go work with a certain ministry. I heard according to an idol, which was hidden to me. My wife did not have the same idol as me, so she did not hear as I did. This caused a conflict until the Lord spoke to her clearly that she should agree. God was planning heart surgery, and I was about to climb on the operating table. I thought I was stepping into a successful ministry, when in reality I was stepping into a situation that would expose idols in my heart. It was a terrible wilderness, and I got bit by many scorpions and died many deaths. Although God did not use anesthesia, the operation was a success.

Giants of pride, presumption and selfishness were ripped out of my heart through huge failure. I left this ministry in great depression and defeat. I felt so sorry for myself. Rather than cater to me in unsanctified sympathy, God allowed the enemy to send in the troops to lick my wounds and create a few more. It was the pits! God delivered me from those idols permanently, and I see and hear much clearer today. God caused it to work out for good!

The Prophetic Picture in Rachel

Rachel means “a ewe; a sheep (root = to cherish)”. Rachel is a picture of the church that gives birth to the last day church through two sons. Joseph, the first born, represents the prophets of God introduced in one generation. Benjamin represents the apostles that will come in the generation following.

Rachel prophesied a second son as she named her firstborn Joseph, which means “the Lord will add” (another son). As the prophetic dreamer, Joseph was hated by his older brothers for a season, sold into slavery and had to stay pure in the midst of Egypt. God prepared Joseph through a long wilderness season including prison time to purify his heart so he could be a great ruler over Egypt and the world. Joseph’s gift was to provide bread for the world in need. We see Joseph type ministries being raised up on the earth today.

Rachel was barren for a season and quite jealous of Leah. Rachel was **“beautiful in form and appearance” (Genesis 29:17b)** but she **“had stolen the household idols that were her father’s” (31:19).** The

church in America is beautiful in form and appearance but has taken the gods of Babylon and hidden them in her saddlebags. We have idols hidden in our hearts and hear God according to them. As Rachel lied to Laban when he searched for the gods, today's Church is in denial about her mixture with the world.

Back to the Promised Land

I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family. Genesis 31:13

Jacob set the intent of his heart at Bethel when he made a vow to God, but his character of deception needed to be dealt with. The idols hidden in Jacob's heart were powerfully exposed in relationship to Uncle Laban who was a worse deceiver than Jacob was. Laban had not set the intent of his heart to worship and serve God, however, and his life ended in tragedy.

The Church is prophetically following the footsteps of Jacob. We are on the way out of Babylon as we mature and journey to the Promised Land. God has led us to work for Uncle Laban for a long time. We are taking our families further in God. Jacob's wife Rachel refused to leave her comfortable idols behind and brought them with her. We can not take idols with us into the land where God is taking us.

And Jacob said to his household and to all that were with him, **"Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves and change your garments. Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone…. And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob" (Genesis 35:2,3,5).**

The Church of Jesus Christ must put away foreign gods, purify herself and change her identity. She cannot enter the promised land of God's destiny with idols hidden in her heart. When she puts them away, the terror of God will be upon the enemies of God on the earth. I do not believe Rachel gave up the household idols she had so carefully hidden in her saddlebags. As we enter the "land" of God's manifested presence in days ahead, those who refuse to repent of idolatry will die (spiritually and some even physically).

Jacob was confronted by Laban from the East and the prospect of an angry Esau riding from the West with 400 men. En route to our destiny in Christ, we must thoroughly deal with our past sins and face them. Laban confronted Jacob for stealing his idols and Jacob accurately declared that

whoever took those gods should die. Rachel would not give up her idols and died giving birth to Benjamin.

Jacob wrestled all night with the angel of the Lord and confessed his name was Jacob, the supplanter. Jacob needed to learn to trust God with all his heart and finally gave up all his fleshly ways. In close dealing with God, Jacob acknowledged his sins and was broken before the Lord. Nevertheless, he held on for the blessing in all night wrestling prayer[21]. God answered prayer and Jacob was reconciled with Esau.

After dealing with past issues and being touched by the angel, Jacob became Israel, the "prince with God". Then Benjamin was conceived in Rachel who chose not to give up her idols. Israel ceased to operate by the flesh and became ruled by God, a man whose heart was transformed to trust God.

The Birth of Benjamin

Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel labored in childbirth, and she had hard labor. Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, "Do not fear; you will have this son also." And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Genesis 35:16-19

The church of this hour is in hard labor, and much of that is the labor of the flesh. The midwives, who represent the intercessors, are prophesying a son to be born. As the last day church is birthed it will cause a great pain in the institutional Rachel church. She will think of this new movement as Ben-Oni, the son of my sorrow. There will be great tearing as God births Benjamin.

Rachel and Leah had named all the other sons. Benjamin is the only son named by his father, prophetic of the last day church being "the son of the right hand". This represents the authority of the apostles that will be released in the final "apostolic" church.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem and is the Son of the right hand. Jesus Christ is our Apostle and the High Priest of our faith. His birth, and the subsequent birth of the church, caused great sorrow and tore the kingdom away from natural Israel. The Pharisee religion was beautiful in form and appearance when Jesus came but had idolatry hidden. Even so, at the end

[21] Genesis 32:22-32

of the age, the full fruit of man's religion will be seen as the Rachel church becomes more like the Pharisee religion and dies while giving birth to the true move of God.

We must not be like Rachel and refuse to give up our idols. We may not know what they are but God does. As we diligently seek Him and throw ourselves on that brazen altar with prayer and fasting, He will reveal all the idols, so we may be set free by His truth. His word is a powerful sword and can reveal and cut out every single idol to make our hearts pure. During these times, we must learn to trust the Lord with all our hearts.

Follow the Holy Spirit

We must learn to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. Most of us learn early how to follow our own reasoning. We even apply our heart filters to the word of God and end up making applications the Holy Spirit never intended. In the past few years, God has taught my wife and I to be completely abandoned to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

After years of busy public ministry, the Lord called me into a long season of isolation and prayer to intercede for individuals, regions and write books. He called me on many prayer walks on mountaintops and in deserts to pray against Satanic strongholds. I have no desire to engage demonic forces or walk through dry deserts praying, but my Lover captivates my heart. He has led me by His Spirit to do strange things in the past years but people in love do unusual things.

The Lord wants you to trust the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God and is able to lead you in the path of righteousness at all times. The flesh is often so strong that we cannot hear the Holy Spirit. Through a great deal of prayer, fasting, diligent Bible studies and a lot of meditation, the Lord has been strengthening my spirit. He has spoken so clearly to us with confirmation to do certain things and we have obeyed in faith.

Then everything in the natural seemed to indicate that we had lost our minds and God tested our hearts at deeper levels. We are in the middle of yet another heart test as I write this book, but the outcome is certain. God will lead us into His triumph in Christ Jesus (II Corinthians 2:14). Our hearts will be washed further and flesh will die on the cross with Jesus. God will faithfully bring us through as we hold onto Him. Trust Him with all your heart and He will transform you! Jesus will become your Husband.

CHAPTER 6 – SOW GOD'S WORD IN YOUR HEART

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. Galatians 6:7,8

The best way to sow to the Spirit is to sow God's word into our properly cultivated hearts. Sadly, there are some hard-hearted Bible scholars who sow to the head and do not have doctrine taught by the Holy Spirit. The Pharisees knew the entire Old Testament, yet they rejected the Word of God when He stood in front of them.

In Bible school and seminary students are taught hermeneutics, which is a system of studying and interpreting the Bible. The hermeneutical system one learns is so powerful that it can predetermine what you will get out of the Bible as you study. The realistic scientific method I once learned relied upon intellect and research more than the Holy Spirit. Under this system, one can arrive at all kinds of doctrines that sound right, and appear orthodox and righteous, but are missing vital life giving elements.

I met a Jewish professor and asked him if he had read the New Testament. He told me that he had studied the epistles of Paul with great interest. In some ways, I was in awe of this man who knew Hebrew and gave his life to studying and teaching the Old Testament scriptures. Unfortunately, his mind was veiled to the truth of the gospel in Christ Jesus. He was a great Bible scholar but did not have faith in Jesus Christ.

We must develop a set of "heart hermeneutics" to study the word of God. Otherwise, we could end up presenting all of our excellent scholarship before Jesus' throne one day and hear Him say, **"I never knew you. Depart from Me you who practice lawlessness" (Matthew 7:23).**

Proper heart hermeneutics plow up the ground of our heart so that each seed of God's word will bear fruit. God's word sown in the hard heart, the stony heart or the entangled heart will not bear fruit as we discussed in Chapter 2. Below are fourteen principles that will help you develop a good heart condition to hear the word of God and bear great fruit to the glory of God.

Heart Hermeneutics to Develop

1. <u>A tender heart like a child, full of faith, and eager to learn and grow</u>. "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest

in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3,4). Normal children are wholehearted, fun-loving creatures. The adventure and wonder of learning never ends. Their hearts are teachable. They deeply trust their parents and are totally dependent. God is infinite, and we must hunger to explore His person and be eager to discover new aspects of His divine nature. When we fully trust Him in childlike sincerity, we are ready to move on.

2. <u>A heart that loves Jesus, the Truth, not facts about Him or pet doctrines.</u> "You search the Scriptures for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39). Many Christians have lost sight of the forest of God for a single tree of doctrine in which a fort has been securely built. God wants us to love the living eternal Truth who is Christ our Lord. We must simply love His word with a whole heart. **"The proud have forged a lie against me, but I will keep your precepts with my whole heart. Their heart is as fat as grease, but I delight in Your law" (Psalm 119:69,70).**

3. <u>A humble, broken, and contrite heart</u>. God loves to give the grace of forgiveness and revelation to the humble heart (Psalm 51:17). **"God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (I Peter 5:6).**

4. **<u>A pure of heart whose affections are guarded</u>. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23).** Protect your heart from being captivated by the world. Examine your motivations; for, **"He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory [recognition]; but he who is seeking the glory of the one who sent him is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him" (John 7:18).** God will give greater revelation to the pure heart which says, **"He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30*).***

5. <u>A heart full of love should be the goal of all study</u>. "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (I Timothy 1:5 NASB). "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all of your soul and with all of your mind….. and you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37,39). We must learn to study God's word with our primary motivation being to increase Christ-like love from a pure heart .

6. <u>A heart after God's approval rather than seeking to win arguments or be popular</u>. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God," [not men] **(II Timothy 2:15 KJV). "The fear of man brings a snare" (Proverbs 29:25a). "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26).** How many times do serious

students study the Bible in order to convince someone that their position is correct rather than earnestly seeking to know God's living truth?

7. **A heart of pure devotion to becoming like Jesus. "I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). "But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3 NASV). "But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (II Corinthians 3:18).** The good heart beholds Jesus with Bible study devotion to be transformed into His image.

8. A heart with an eternal perspective. "By faith Moses…refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Hebrews 11:24-26). We must set our hearts on eternal issues and not immediate gratification.

9. A heart that welcomes correction from others with open arms. "Reproofs for correction are the path of life" (Proverbs 6:23). "Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid" (Proverbs 12:1). "Rebuke a wise man and he will love you" (Proverbs 9:8b). "He who heeds instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray" (**Proverbs 10:17).** The wise student will submit his interpretation of scripture to be corrected as needed by mature brethren. His earnest search for truth is more vital to him than being right or having his own way proved correct.

10. A soft flexible heart to receive truth and new revelations. New wine cannot be put into an old wineskin[22]. **"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but can not tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). "The Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17);** Only the Holy Spirit knows how to wield the sword of His word properly. As the wind changes directions and intensity, the Holy Spirit can reveal new applications and understanding of His word. **"After that, He appeared in another form" (Mark 16:12).** The infinite and eternal God continues to appear in other forms and reveals new revelations of His truth. We must enlarge the capacity of our heart, and be flexible to receive fresh revelation.

[22] Matthew 9:17

11. <u>A teachable heart abiding in God</u>. "If you abide in my word, you are My disciples indeed and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31,32). We must live in the word and grow in the liberty of God. Those who think they have the full revelation of God's truth are in delusion. We must have a solid foundation in Christ but be teachable.

12. <u>A heart for passionate romance with our first love, the Bridegroom</u>. "As Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that he might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25-27) "I am my beloved's and his desire is toward me" (Song of Solomon 7:10). The washing with the water must be daily in order to stay pure. Discovering truth is to become intimate in relationship with Jesus.

13. <u>A heart willing to obey God's will before knowing what it is</u>. "If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority" (John 7:17). God reveals truth in order that we might repent, believe and rightly align ourselves with Him. If our heart is not willing to obey, then no matter how hard we study, the Holy Spirit will not unlock certain treasures of the word and we may become a Pharisee or Sadducee. God is the perfect steward of the treasure of His word. If our hearts are right, we will know the true doctrines of Jesus.

14. <u>A heart completely available to God twenty-four hours a day</u>. "And He [Jesus]….called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him….." (Mark 3:13-14). God primarily calls us to be with Him. Our hearts are prone to wander like sheep. We must purpose our hearts to stay close to Him and be available at all times. The heart that watches for Jesus will hear His voice. **"Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42).**

The Life of Jesus

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

There is a principle we must understand in the life of Jesus. Jesus had to take personal responsibility to sow the word of God into His heart in order to fulfill God's destiny in His life. The Old Testament scriptures Jesus had

access to were sown into His pure heart as He meditated upon them day and night.

By the time Jesus was 12 years old, His grasp of the scriptures was so incredible that **"all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers" (Luke 2:47).** Jesus did not have any heart idolatry to contend with, but He did discipline Himself to meditate on the word of God day and night for thirty years in preparation for ministry.

The word became flesh as the living testimony of God filled the heart of Jesus. As we sow the word of God into our purified hearts, God will produce the life of Jesus in us. The word is the living seed of eternal life and will produce God's heart in us. The Holy Spirit teaches us the word and enables us to apply it to our hearts and lives.

As we develop in conforming our lives to the written word of God and living by every word the proceeds from the mouth of God by the Holy Spirit, we will become conformed to the image of Jesus, full of grace and truth. That is why the apostles devoted themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word[23]. The Holy Spirit was activated in prayer to guide them into all truth and their hearts were continuing to grow in conformity to the life of Jesus.

God calls His leaders today to embrace this apostolic wineskin. Christian leaders must devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. While I only understand this in part, let me try and give a practical illustration from my experience of what this means.

First of all, being devoted to prayer means that we must abandon ourselves to God in worship, praise, adoration, intercession and all manners of prayer, including praying in the Spirit or speaking in tongues. To put a time function on this may be dangerous, but there should be at least several hours a day and times throughout the day when the leader is devoted to prayer. Our hearts must be in constant communion with God by the Holy Spirit so He can alert us to prayer needs at any time, day or night.

Secondly, there must be a devotion to the word of God as led by the Holy Spirit. The word must be sown in the individual heart but then, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the word needs to be communicated to the people to bring the fresh bread of life. The Holy Spirit knows what He wants to teach the people. We receive the direction for teaching through much prayer.

We receive the understanding of the word of God through much meditation and reflective prayer. I used to read a lot of commentaries when studying

[23] Acts 6:4

the Bible. But now, thanks to my Teacher, the Holy Spirit, I spend most of the preparation time in prayer and meditation, and He reveals the truths and shows me deeper meanings and unveils prophetic pictures. The Holy Spirit really knows the Bible well!

In extended prayer meetings as part of an apostolic team, the Holy Spirit often shows us a vision, gives us scriptures or various prophetic leadings. As we follow these out, the Lord shows us how to lead the church and deal with specific issues on the heart of God.

Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him." John 8:28-29

Jesus never did anything apart from the revelation He received from His father. God taught Him as Jesus devoted Himself to prayer and the word. Jesus never acted on impulse, logic or a good idea. He waited on His Father in humble submission and diligently meditated on the word of God day and night.

Jesus said the word of God out loud in His prayers and meditations, as every good Hebrew child did. As Jesus did this day after day, the word was sown in His heart. While His heart did not need to be transformed, it did need to be filled with revelation found in God's word. Coming to Earth as a baby, Jesus laid aside most of His attributes and had to learn to read and study God's word. Jesus had to sow the word of God into His heart.

Jesus quickly developed an all-consuming passion for knowing God's word and prayer. He must have been somewhat of an odd child compared to others but He grew and **"became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40).** Jesus certainly had the advantage of a pure heart to start with, but He was called to willingly go to the cross, suffer extreme humiliation, horrible death and carry our sins to hell and experience the wrath of God.

Jesus was able to fulfill God's will by sowing the word in His heart as a model for us to live by. We cannot fulfill God's purposes in our life without the word, and it must be sown in the heart with holy hermeneutics.

There are many helpful books that teach us Bible study methods. Followings these methods with diligent study combined with heart hermeneutics and a life of prayer, we will receive tremendous revelation, correction, instruction and become more like Jesus in the process.

CHAPTER 7 – GUARD YOUR HEART

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Proverbs 4:23

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Proverbs 4:23
NIV

The word of God commands us to keep and guard our heart with all diligence. We must guard our hearts from the spiritual flow of water the enemy floods our way. Water in the spiritual realm relates to the thoughts, values, beliefs, emotions, desires and motivations that seek to fill the well in our heart. From within our heart spring forth the issues, or wellspring, of life. Our words, attitudes and behavior flow out the spiritual water that we drink into our heart. There is a flow of spiritual water coming to and proceeding from the heart of every person.

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. John 7:37-39

When we drink from Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit, our hearts have the capacity to flow forth rivers of living water. Unfortunately, if we drink from demonic sources and are filled with wickedness, our hearts will have the capacity to flow forth rivers of polluted water that can cause death and destruction.

The heart, as we have learned, is like the hard drive of a computer. How you program it will determine how it will operate. We have learned that we must love God, obey Him, trust Him and sow His word into our hearts. We also have to guard our hearts from the lures of Satan. He will throw everything in his tackle box to try to captivate our heart affection to bite on his counterfeit lure.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. I Peter 5:8-9

Our adversary has a powerful war machine including principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places and innumerable demons. Satan is relentless in his quest to exalt his throne

above God and rule every life on this planet. The only true opposition he has is the Church of Jesus Christ.

Consequently, he is relentless in his pursuit to destroy Christians. His strategy is to sow sin into our hearts so that he can deceive us and capture our hearts from the affections of God. He does this by counterfeiting every good thing God has done. In our culture, we see that Satan has had a powerful assault on sexuality to draw us into lust and uncleanness.

Satan also keeps releasing new "wines" so as to enslave the heart. **"Harlotry, wine and new wine enslave the heart" (Hosea 4:11).** New wine represents the latest trend or fashion that tries to attract the heart affections of every person. The old wine will also work. The enemy doesn't really care how he enslaves us; he just makes sure there are innumerable options.

We must guard our hearts from every temptation of wines, sensuality and sexual sin. We must guard our hearts from the pull of this world, from our own flesh and everything from Satan. If we fall into the lure of the enemy in any area, we will be hooked into bondage and become far less effective for God. We may even have our hearts turned into such great deception that we become useless in the kingdom of God or fall away from God altogether[24].

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth, which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned. Hebrews 6:4-8

While this falling away may only be in extreme cases of persistent willful rebellion, it usually begins with a lustful desire or thought. Proverbs 5 – 7 teaches us about the lures of the lustful woman. We may need accountability to help us overcome her powerful demonic pull.

We also guard our hearts by staying in community. We must not become isolated from Christians who know us well and can hold us accountable. If our heart has pride and self-centeredness, the enemy will see to it that other Christians of like heart wound us. God allows this to expose our

[24] II Thessalonians 2:3

hearts so we will allow Him to help us mature. If we run from church in woundedness, we will get bitter and may go into isolation where he can do greater damage to us. This can result in a great tolerance to some areas of sin.

We need to be part of a vital church family and actively involved in the life of the body of Christ. Just as no part of the human body could live for long apart from the rest of the body, we cannot maintain true spiritual life apart from the body. Certainly, God is able to sustain political prisoners under persecution who are isolated and tortured for their faith. If they get released, they will go right back into fellowship with other believers.

Guard Your Heart From Friends and Family

As you press into God and grow in the depths of God, you may find that some Christians do not understand you. They might seriously question your sanity. It is important to listen to them up to a point, but ultimately, you will stand before the judgment seat of Christ all by yourself. They will not be next to you on that day. They may go to heaven, but they will not have to stand in your shoes before God's fiery eyes.

Prophets will be especially tested by rejection. Everyone was against Jeremiah at times when he was releasing the word of the Lord. He had to guard his heart against bitterness. Family, friends and other Christians may turn from us. We may be falsely accused of sin. We will be misunderstood, mistreated and persecuted as we diligently pursue God.

The enemy will try to influence those closest to us to speak fiery darts into our heart. We must be prepared to guard ourselves from those closest to us. At the same time, we must seek out fellowship with those whose hearts are like ours. In fact, there is a magnetic pull issued by the heart to connect to those with similar heart DNA.

If your heart is pure, you will become connected to people with pure hearts. If your heart is full of pride and vanity, you will go to the First Church of Vanity Pride. It always works that way unless you are being compelled to attend a church by a controlling parent or spouse. Eventually, you will connect to those of like hearts.

As you connect with people who have a similar heart condition, the things they do that offend you do so because you probably have the same problem hidden in your heart. This is certain if we judge them for what they did.

Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whomever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. Romans 2:1

Paul told us that in whatever we judge others, we have the same problem. Again, it is hidden to us, but the reality is that we have it in our hearts. To find out what is in your heart, listen to what you say about other people. Every time we get in the flesh and criticize or accuse another person, and therefore judge them, we expose our heart condition in that same area.

We are not even to think evil about anyone. **"Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor" (Zechariah 8:17a).** The Lord showed me that if I do not think His thoughts in relationship towards others, I am thinking evil. Our hearts must be full of God's mercy, compassion and love, or we will think evil of others. This is a deep area that I pray God will continually fill my heart with mercy and renew my mind in!

Jesus commanded us to **"love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34).** This command actually guards our hearts as well as expresses the life flow of God's perfect love. We all need to allow God to transform our hearts by loving and serving people. God calls us to sacrificial love that lays down our life for others. This never happens when we think evil of them. As we think with the heart of God's love, we will diligently pray for opportunities to minister to them.

Love covers a multitude of sins [25]and does not get into lasting offense at poor treatment, whether it comes from friends, relatives, church members, co-workers or strangers. We guard our hearts by loving others. Jesus did not rebuke Peter for his betrayal but rather restored him in love. Jesus loved his enemies who nailed Him to the cross and prayed for their forgiveness[26]. We are called to love and pray for our enemies[27].

Guard Your Heart from Offense towards God

And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me. Matthew 11:6

We have to guard our hearts from being offended by the way God governs the events that affect our personal world. Jesus spoke this word to John's disciples when telling them of the miraculous works He did that confirmed Him to be Messiah. John was in prison, and the expectations of a political messiah were prominent. Jesus was not planning to rescue John and take over as a King in the natural realm, but Jesus was going to allow John to die and then go to a cross Himself to die.

The disciples of John easily could have expected Jesus to deliver the great prophet, and his imminent death could have offended them. Jesus declared

[25] I Peter 4:8
[26] Luke 23:34
[27] Matthew 5:44

that a person would be blessed if they did not get into offense over what He did. Of course, the Pharisees were offended all the time by what Jesus said and did. We can become offended at how God orchestrates events that impact our lives.

This requires a diligent guarding of our heart. Kevin Prosh wrote a beautiful song called **KISS THE SON**[28] that captures the guarded heart in times of crushing defeats by the Lord. In the chorus, Kevin sings, "Though you slay me, I will trust you Lord". During a deep trial in my life, some wonderful Christian friends played this song and prayed over me. I cried a bucket full of tears and found healing in the words. I've quoted the song below:

When you've been broken, broken to pieces. And your heart begins to faint 'cause you don't understand. And when there is nothing to rake from the ashes. And you can't even walk onto the fields of praise.

But I bow down and kiss the Son. Oh, and I bow down and kiss the Son. Let the praise of the Lord be in my mouth. Let the praise of the Lord be in my mouth.

Well, though You slay me, I will trust You, Lord. Well, though You slay me, I will trust You, Lord. Though You slay me, I will trust You, Lord. Though You slay me, I will trust You, Lord.

When the rock falls, falls upon you. And you get ground to dust no music for your pain. You open the windows, the windows of heaven. And then You opened me and You crushed me like a rose.

But I bow down and kiss the Son. Oh, and I bow down and kiss the Son. Let the praise of the Lord be in my mouth. Let the praise of the Lord be in my mouth.

Well, though You slay me, I will trust You, Lord. Well, though You slay me, I will trust You, Lord. Though You slay me, I will trust You, Lord. Though You slay me, I will trust You, Lord.

This classic song sums up the heart experience of every believer I know, who has gone through the dark night of the soul, where God deals at a deep level with the flesh. When the Rock crushes us, we must guard our hearts from offense and choose to bow down and kiss the feet of Jesus. Many saints are being martyred today in various parts of the earth, and suffering is great for millions.

[28] www.kevinprosch.com

We may have expectations of grand ministry success, but God may have a special cross picked out for us that will involve much suffering and perhaps martyrdom. We must not be offended at God. We must guard our hearts with passionate devotion to Him no matter what cards He deals us. In eternity, His wisdom and perfection will be made known to us. The rewards will be tremendous for faithful devotion to Him now.

CONCLUSION – THE HEART GOD TRANSFORMS

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. I Corinthians 11:28

Before we eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord in Holy Communion, Paul exhorts us to examine ourselves. In order to pursue intimacy with Jesus, careful examination and reflection must become a normal part of our life. Prayerfully, this entire book has helped you examine your heart condition and has given you insights as to how God wants to transform you. The Corinthians were a carnal people, like Americans, and needed some major examination and transformation.

We have seen through this book the principles of examining ourselves. First we learned how the heart operates and the power of speech. Next we learned that repentance and believing are part of the gospel. Examining ourselves in the light of God's word will give us ample opportunity to be zealous unto repentance.

We are called to love, obey and trust God with all our heart. These are basic principles by which we can regularly evaluate our lives before the throne of grace. Spirit-filled devotion to prayer and fasting are a must and will hasten the transformation the heart.

We learned to sow God's word faithfully in a well-prepared heart to produce abundant fruit, and finally we saw the importance of guarding our heart with all diligence. We must be full of God's love, and love one another, to protect our hearts. Each chapter is an examination point and can be reviewed again and again to see how we are doing. Above all else, God calls us to behold Him and be transformed by looking into His marvelous Person. Examination apart from God's Spirit can become another religious exercise that makes us feel proud if we're doing well, and condemned, if lousy.

We must ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas we need to confess, repent of and work on. As we do this faithfully through the years, the heart of God's love and compassion will fill our hearts, and we will grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you as you prepare your heart for the coming of the Lord.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. I Thessalonians 5:23,24