Refreshment in Refuge
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By Gina Burgess
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This work took many years to write, not because it took that long to put the words to paper, but I have such a stubborn streak it took that many years to learn the lessons. I thank God that He is so patient, and that He loves so deeply He never gives up perfecting His handiwork.

I pray this offering gives you a refreshing.

To all my teachers, most especially my mother, who worked painstakingly with God, and who inspired me to be a woman who loves God above all.
The message of the Cross is “No stones,” but God never promised, “No storms.”
The storms may be painful, but surviving them strengthens our faith and our walk.

Gina Burgess, December 2010
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The man gave the bolt a final twist and stepped back from under the hood of the car. He wiped his grimy hands on a rag and then stuffed it in his back pocket. He gave a satisfied sigh as he headed to the office and the coffee pot. The coffee was strong and fresh, just like he liked it. Tossing a grin to Gertrude, his part time office help, he said, “Gertie, call Kent Boudreaux and let him know his car is ready and he can pick it up any time today.”

With only a little regret, he set his cup down and headed to back the repaired car from the bay and bring in another to work on. Thank goodness God was good to provide so much work when the economy was so bad. Just as the back wheels cleared the bay doors, one of them ran over something. He didn’t have a clue what it could have been, since it had only been a couple of hours since he’d driven the car in the bay. Then his heart constricted and he groaned in sudden agony.

Alfie’s job was to meet and greet all customers that came into the shop. His throne was the cushioned chair that was next to the desk. Sure it was grimy, but it was comfortable for a small, snowy white, very fluffy dog. Normally, Alfie rarely ventured into the bay area. He preferred the cool office and comfy cushion to the cool, but mucky shop floor. Alfie was the beloved owner of the man and his family. His other job was to give love and happiness to those he loved best.

The man climbed from the car, dreading what he must surely find.

His fear was confirmed when he saw Alfie lying still and flat under the car. Tears welled up, and his heart wrenched again. Suddenly, the bright day darkened to night. The dog must have scooted out the door when he got coffee. Even though he wasn’t allowed in
the shop, the dog had obviously disobeyed the standing command.

He cradled the little dog in his arms, unsure of what to do. The lifeless form just lay there; head lolled back and tiny pink tongue slack instead of happily panting. The shop owner sat down in a grease-smudged chair with the dog across his lap. What should he do? How would he tell his sweet wife and those precious girls what had happened to their sweet, adoring Alfie? Finally, he decided to put the dog in the dog food bag, and place him in the dumpster because he couldn’t possibly bring Alfie home to bury; and in this concrete garden called New Orleans, there wasn’t anywhere to bury a pet. He just couldn’t possibly bring the little thing home to bury. His daughters would be inconsolable.

The rest of the day, he worried and fretted how to tell the family they had lost one of their own that day. There was no good way to do it, so he blurted out as soon as he made it home, “I ran over Alfie at the shop today.”

The family mourned, and rain began to patter against their home’s windows. God, it seemed, was sharing the family’s grief.

The next morning, the man found no joy in his morning routine. Alfie didn’t jump all over him, ready to do morning walk, no cheerful clink of food in his bowl. Going to work was a heavy chore. Sighing heavily, all the way to work, he opened the shop for daily work, sans his beloved, tiny, fluffy companion.

The coffee had just finished brewing when the owner of the neighboring body shop burst into the office. “Are you going to tell me why your dog is in the dumpster?”

“Well, Jeb, I know he’s in the dumpster. I didn’t have any place else to put him. I ran over him yesterday. “No, you don’t understand. Your dog is barking and jumping and trying to get out of that dumpster!”

“What? Are you kidding me?” With joyful heart, the man ran to the dumpster and grabbed up that fluffy bundle of excitement.
That little pink tongue was exploring every inch of his face. That little dog had only been knocked out, and the most refreshing rain, that gift from God, had refreshed and revived him. Alfie wasn’t dead after all, he just needed reviving.

Today, how many Christians look dead? How many are asleep at the wheel or get knocked silly by being someplace they are not supposed to be? Disobedience breaks fellowship with the LORD, and we can’t afford that when we are to be ready for that great and glorious day the Father looks at His only begotten Son and says, “Go get Your Bride, Son.” Glory!

Paul tells the Ephesians And to you did he give life, when you were dead through your wrongdoing and sins, 2 in which you were living in the past, after the ways of this present world, doing the pleasure of the lord of the power of the air, the spirit who is now working in those who go against the purpose of God; 3 among whom we all at one time were living in the pleasures of our flesh, giving way to the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and the punishment of God was waiting for us even as for the rest. Ephesians 2:1-3 Bible in Basic English (1965)

Paul was talking about how they acted as unbelievers, but I have seen a lot of Believers act just like that recently. The Bride of Christ is sick these days, sick with the evil ways of the world and sick with disbelief. We can be like the Rich Young Ruler and say: These commands I have kept, I have not sinned. But, how many of us have watched a movie lately in which God’s name was blasphemed? How many of us worry and fret, harbor anger, bitterness, jealousy, seek vengeance, are critical of others, controlling, gossip, pray by rote, fudge the truth, go places we shouldn’t go, do things in
secret that we’d die if it were printed on the front page of the newspaper? How many pirate music? How many think if it doesn’t hurt other people, it is okay? How many haven’t returned something that was borrowed? How many of us allow work, family, hobbies, playtime come first instead of the LORD?

How many of us have given up on a brother or sister in Christ because he looks dead? How often have we thrown a sibling in the dumpster without thought to the prayers of a righteous man and the resuscitation process laid out by Jesus in Matthew 18: 15-17? Refreshment in the refuge of Jesus is what this book is about. We cannot give up on our siblings because it isn’t God’s plan. He created us and saved us for a mighty purpose. We cannot give up on our self because God considered us worthy enough to send His precious Son to pay the ultimate Bride price for us.

Let me paraphrase Luke 8:17, not one thing happens in secret that won’t be found out, and not a single thing is done in the dark which will not be brought to light. But, why would we care more about what could be said of us in a front-page news story than what God thinks of us? How could it matter more than our precious relationship and that refreshing rain from above?

Revive us LORD Jesus, send your refreshing rain of blessings and awaken us from our dead sleep. Help us labor, watch and be ready. The Bride awaits her Groom. Come LORD Jesus and find Your Bride doing the mighty works prepared before the foundation of the world. Amen.

This column was inspired by one of my favorite preachers, Dr. Preston Nix. He is an Associate Professor at New Orleans Baptist Seminary. Preach it, Brother, preach it.
Putting the pieces back together…

…when you are betrayed.

After I thought I’d healed properly, I adjusted to life without.

Without what, you wonder. That is precisely my point. I had gotten so used to living without hope and without a husband and without a really good job that I had adjusted to hopeless living, all the while putting on the “Joy Face” at church and with friends.

Oh, you know precisely which face I’m referring to. Joy Face is a mask of great deception to one’s self and loved ones. Often the person wearing the mask has no clue that it is, in fact, a mask. This mask has the ability to filter God’s voice. When the mask slips, all the cracked pieces fall to the floor and there’s this shattering, clanging cymbal sound which drowns out God’s voice all together; and you frantically look around trying to identify anyone who might have heard the racket, or even worse see your innermost pain.

Mine slipped. It is most shocking when this happens because, of course, we think we are healed and we are completely over whatever disaster made us put the Joy Face on in the first place. Once the echoes of the sound faded away, I scrabbled around for all the pieces so I could put the mask back on.

How could I face anyone without it? People would ask, “What’s wrong?” Then I would have to lie because I couldn’t possibly tell the truth. Christians are not supposed to harbor ill feelings, anger, or to want revenge. A Biblical principle is to rejoice in the tribulations because we have Jesus who takes all our hurts and replaces them with joy and peace. Besides, the thing happened so long ago, it was just petty to be harboring any hurt or anger. At least, that
was my thought process. So these emotions that had suddenly surfaced must be from something else and I just wasn’t trying hard enough.

But, the mask just would not be put back together. It kept crumbling, and I had to face all the feelings that the mask had held back. I thought I had efficiently dealt with all those things, and did not want to relive that mess all over again. I thought I had successfully tucked them away and masked them with pretend peace and make-believe joy, never facing them down because I feared anger would become bitterness. Of course, I had been taught anger turns to bitterness, so the best way to keep that from happening was to tamp down the anger, right?

I thought I had healed, but I kept trying to heal. I know that makes no sense, however the incongruity of it helps me to know God made sense of it. I was trying to make it happen by myself never realizing God has a perfect plan for the healing process which involves time.

I knew I had to heal in order to be a healthy, productive Christian living for Jesus and ministering, doing the works He had planned for me before the foundation of the world was formed. To be a good Christian, I had to get past all anger, hurt, desire for vengeance. I could do this because I had Jesus in my heart. Right?

A lesson hard-learned is: God works through His child’s problems. God will use situations to teach us life lessons about ourselves and our siblings in Christ. After the process, He leaves a much tenderized heart with no holes or hard, unyielding scar tissue, which conditional upon us is being willing to let go of it and let God handle it. God is mightier than our feelings, and mightier than our fears.

Behind the broken mask, I found God’s soothing voice of comfort in my heart. He was talking to me like a mother soothing a crying baby; all the while He was putting my heart back together.
This is when I found out that if you do not help God put the pieces back together, they go back together without scar tissue and the heart bears no grudge, no anger, no bitterness and no baggage. This is where God’s timing is perfect although it doesn’t feel like it because healing takes time and we want what we want now, not thirty seconds from now. Our society lives in nanoseconds instead of minutes, and hours instead of days. God, on the other hand, works from the inside out; and sometimes our insides need a steam-cleaning from the Holy Spirit before any kind of healing process can begin.

No matter how strong a person is, you cannot do it by yourself because all the nooks and crevices aren’t cleaned, so some left-behind trash starts to fester and breed infection. You hinder the process, when you try to “help” God; and scars do develop encasing some anger, some bitterness and a bit of baggage within the tough, hard fibers of healing. Those are difficult to remove once the scar tissue is formed.

My heart was riddled with scar tissue because the betrayal I suffered was more than from my husband. There were friends that I trusted with information who betrayed me, co-workers who betrayed me, not to forget the rejection I suffered from my second husband who had promised, not only me but God and my parents, to love and cherish me the rest of his life. I kept packing all this hurt piled on top of hurt behind a self-sufficient mask of peace, and it was festering.

I did everything a Christian is supposed to do when bad things come from good people who are trusted and allowed into the inner, tender realm. I was in constant state of prayer. I prayed about everything and frequently prayed myself to sleep. I studied my Bible in-depth, pouring myself into study to make up for the lack of any social life except church. I was at church every time the doors were opened; I poured myself into a weekly Bible study, positive this was
what I was supposed to do to get myself back together. This pouring out of my soul before God accomplished something that I had no idea I needed at the time. It unmasked my need, but not all at once. It was such a slow process I never noticed the progression. Much later, after healing had begun in earnest, I realized I had closed off a section of my heart to all people and even to God.

My Monday night Bible study group did a Beth Moore study and I found myself angry at having to revisit so much of what I thought I’d already worked through. The anger I felt did not clue me in to the fact I actually had not dealt with all those feelings, such was the tightness of the lock I had on my Joy-face. Only at certain times would the uglies drop out and surprise me as well as those around me. Patsy Claremont said at a Women of Faith conference, the only way those uglies can come out is if they are there in the first place. That statement stunned me and gave me considerable pause at my unprovoked anger towards a bible study.

We wonder why the fiery darts find the chinks in our armor so accurately. Any portion of ourselves that we close off, any crevice that we keep from God’s tender care leaves an opening as large as an airport hanger door through which Satan and his minions lob their guilt bombs and fire the bullets of self-reckon. That just adds to the depth and breadth of the scar tissue. Trying to hear God’s voice through those tough fibers is like listening to the radio underwater.

Through the years of healing, God showed me I had used the mask as a numbing tool to keep from feeling all the pain and betrayal. Only when the mask falls and the hurt heals by God’s tender mercy, can we live full of grace and hear God’s voice distinctly over the hubbub of the world. It was exhilarating for those chains to drop from my hand and the fetters to be removed from my feet so I could waltz with my Savior and Lord!
I learned Satan woos... The Christian is seduced... Sin creeps in... And we have a witch’s brew for sticky web entanglement. Christians are more prepared for a full onslaught by Satan, mostly unaware that he prefers seduction, rather than all out warfare. Hardly noticing, we succumb to the Devil’s romance, suddenly waking up immobile in his trap. Fearful we’ll be found out, we put on the mask of being a Christian when we least feel like being or acting like a Christian. We never realize that closing off part of ourselves from God just opens the door wider for sin to creep in, most of the time we don’t realize we are compartmentalizing. We submerge all the anger and hurt we’ve experienced with whatever we can, hoping that time will erode all the sharp edges. One of the signs of that is when we try to justify the sin of asking for vengeance and spend time reasoning out why we just can’t ask God to forgive those who have wronged us. We excuse ourselves for unforgiveness and point fingers of blame, when all along we must look to God to do the heart cleaning. David understood this when he wrote, *Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew within me a steadfast spirit* Psalm 51:10. Without God’s strength and power, we are powerless to resist Satan’s plots and ploys. I submit two equations for your inspection,

**Flesh + Satan = Failure.**

**Submission + Spirit + Jesus = Successful Christian Living.**

All too often we Christians will try to substitute worldly things to fill in the God-sized hole in our spirit. We shop till we drop, we drink socially, we complain to our friends, we vacation, we beach it, we surf it, we ship it, we dance it, we smoke it, we pretend we’re fine with a Joy Face when all the time our heart is full of scar tissue which we’ve patched together with one hand while holding the Bible in the other hand. It is called hopeless living all the while
pretending to be full of Hope, Faith and Charity. It is time to pull off the mask and let God pick up all the shattered pieces. Only He has the blueprint for a perfect fix with no cracks and no plaster because He is the Creator after all.
A living dog is better than a dead lion…

Well that is certainly true. Did you know it’s in the bible? Solomon wrote it as a proof of hope for the living in the ninth chapter of Ecclesiastes. Actually, he says, 9 For him who is joined to all the living there is hope; a living dog is better than a dead lion.

In other words, while there is breath there is hope. Even in hopeless situations, there is hope that the situation will change for the better; and truly it almost always does.

Nowhere in scripture is the axiom “while there is life there is hope” exhibited better than when David fasted and prostrated himself before the LORD when his son was sick and lay dying. (The story is in 2 Samuel 12.) When news of his son’s death reached him, he stood, and bathed, and combed his hair, and ate heartily. His servants were amazed and shocked.

Can’t you just see David sitting at table seeing his servant’s consternation, “What? I’m eating here. You look at me as if I’m crazy!” shrugging his shoulders in perfect Jewish fashion.

Servant: “You do not mourn. You eat heartily. Your son just died. What’s up with that?”

David: “While my son lived, there was hope that God might relent and bless me with healing him. He has gone to be with God.
So, I will go to him one day; he cannot come to me again.” David had a deep hope for his dying son as long as his son held on to life. As soon as his son died, he knew the boundary had been crossed. We can take an excellent lesson from King David.

Hope is an absolute must for healthy living. Without hope, there is despair. Without hope there is depression. Without hope, faith cannot survive. Without hope, love gasps for breath. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13 of the three things: faith, hope and love. The greatest is Love because it is eternal, but hope is essential to the physically living, and faith feeds both.

Notice something with me. Hope. Help. One letter difference, but what a difference that letter instills. In the center of Help is El—God. I believe that is by divine design.

Hope and Faith are not designed to last forever. We hope and we put faith in the Everlasting Father. But Love is the Everlasting Father. I am quite satisfied with the hope and the faith that God gives me. I could not live without it. While we have breath, there is hope. While we have breath we have faith, but once breath leaves us, we either have Love, which lasts eternally; or we do not have Love, and a soul without love is tortured where there is darkness and gnashing of teeth.

Help does not come to the dead. Solomon elaborates on this in Ecclesiastes 9:2 Because to all there is one event, to the upright man and to the evil, to the clean and to the unclean, to him who makes an offering and to him who makes no offering…

I think it was Mark Twain who said there are two things assured to mankind, death and taxes. Concerning death, there are two Spiritual assurances: Those who are filthy when they die will remain so; and those who are clean will be eternally clean.

I will share with you a few Hebrew words through out this edition, not to teach you Hebrew but to let you know the word and what it means. I never liked it when someone would tell me a word
actually meant something other than the translated word which is why I like the Amplified Bible because it gives amplified meanings to the translated words.

In verse five *The living know they shall die*. The Hebrew is יְהֵioneer, nephesh hayyah, or יְהֵיינֶשׁ, nephesh ha'yahah. Nephesh, meaning “breath” or “living things”; and hayyah, meaning “living” (Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, 1890). Say hayyah, out loud. It is almost like expelling a breath, isn’t it? It is translated living creature, and it has that meaning of a physically living and breathing creature. So, the people who are living know they have a date with death. It has happened since the beginning and will continue until Jesus shouts for us to come up there with Him. The physically dead don’t know an iota of the things of this physical world such as the hatreds, prejudices, loves, the heat, the cold, fancy houses, rich clothes, gold, silver, no more rewards for the sweat and hard work. Matthew Henry says there is a reward for the spiritual actions, but not for the worldly ones. Those who have died no longer partake with us who are physically alive under the sun.

We that are among the spiritually alive know this yet; we still grieve and yearn for those who have gone because of that part in us which was created for eternity. Our eternal soul cries out at the separation from our loved ones. We will be reunited with them in the LORD, but we must sojourn here a little while longer.

Hope is for the living, breathing physical beings that we are. It is a blessing that is poured out to us from God. Therefore, 9:7 *Come, take your bread with joy, and your wine with a glad heart. God has taken pleasure in your works.* So, indeed, a living dog is better than a dead lion. How can it not be so?

Psalm 121 *My eyes are lifted up to the hills: O where will my help come from? 2 Your help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. 3 May he not let your foot be moved: no need of sleep has he who keeps you. 4 See,*
the eyes of Israel’s keeper will not be shut in sleep. 5 The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand. 6 You will not be touched by the sun in the day, or by the moon at night. 7 The Lord will keep you safe from all evil; he will take care of your soul. 8 The Lord will keep watch over your going out and your coming in, from this time and for ever.

In Him is our greatest hope, for He most assuredly keeps His promises.
A true love story...

That kind of wind that dances with your pant legs whipped out across the lake. It teased the tops of waves and got colder as it raced across the top of the water. It laughed making the waves ripple. And the water’s chill infused the wind. It got colder. The breeze off the water hit the marble of the steps and spewed up, circling around and finding a perfect hat. It was made of wool and black as night.

The owner of the hat clamped her hand down on it. The hat whimpered to the wind. But the owner grinned and turned her face full into it.

“You can’t have it.” she bellowed. “It’s mine!” The owner of the hat kept walking along the stone embankment. A few more steps and she found a bench. She tucked her thin coat tighter around herself and settled to the seat. The stone bench was cold, so she scooted into a better position and leaned back glaring into the wind. At her taunt, the wind forgot its prey and died down to a moaning, and the woman grinned. “Ha,” she said, waving a dismissing hand. Then splayed it across the brim of her hat and felt the warm wool.

She spent a few minutes enjoying the warmth of her hat, then brought it to her lap, tucking her other hand into its warmth. The cold wind swirled around and lifted dark strands in a dance about her face, while stinging bright color in her cheeks that were sans make-up.

Ah, well. It didn’t matter. It was only cold and wind that she’d met full face. Who would she meet today? There was no one. She put the hat back on, and only for a moment, did warmth suffuse her.

Suddenly, weariness slammed her so intensely she sank into the hard bench, almost like a candle gone to soft wax, losing shape
and flattening on a plate. The wind sang to an audience of one as she sat watching the cold water wave and ebb to the mournful tune. Her thin coat didn’t seem so warm and the wool hat didn’t protect. That hat had been perched on her head when she met him face to face for the first time. She’d known him for a long time, and the face-to-face meeting hadn’t seemed important at first, but then love had grown, and pictures weren’t enough, and voices on the phone weren’t like the warmth of arms or soft kisses. She hadn’t cared what he looked like. His insides were beautiful; at least that’s how she read them through all his emails. His insides seemed beautiful long enough to catch her in the first flush of love and move her across four states. Leaving almost everything behind, she had thrown herself into being perfect. What he wanted. What he required. Those were the things that she care most about, and it wasn’t hard at first because love obscured all flaws, both his and hers.

The cold wind swirled and lifted her hat. She clamped down on it again. Okay, all right. There had been another man; she glared at the gray sky, faintly annoyed that God would remind her of him this cold, bleary day. Her blue eyes grew red, and tears slid from her cold cheeks onto cold stone.

“He was first, Lord. I just thought being betrayed was the worst that could happen. I know he was supposed to be forever, but let’s don’t talk about that one now, Father. That was over a long time ago,” she glared up at the clouds. I did what You asked and I forgave the perverted, selfish—” She stopped suddenly and grinned, dimples appearing in her tear streaked cheeks. “I guess I have a little more work to do on that forgiveness thing, don’t I?”

The wind snatched at the hat, but she was quick to lower her glaring eyes and tug it low on her forehead. After a few moments, the tears chilled to frost on her cheek; then, turned to drops of ice on her coat’s collar.
She brushed at the ice, and despair sat on her. It dug a hole and dragged her to the brink. She studied the darkness for a brief moment then slipped over the rim; her body and mind melted into the hole, finding bleak anguish which pressed her into the hands of torment dragging her deeper into the black hole. No way up, only down. She let go of hope. It rolled out of her like the tears on her cheeks, and her heart crackled as it froze.

What had happened? She’d tried so desperately to be perfect. She studied all about being the perfect wife, and had asked God to clearly show her what her purpose had been to move four states away from family and friends and the church family that loved her wrinkles, warts and all. Here, she’d been to several churches but could find none that had that perfectly warm feeling as soon as you walked in the door. No church that enveloped you in grandmother-arms full of love and comfort and smelled of the LORD’s fragrance. It was so hard when the husband didn’t care a fig about going to church even though he’d promised he’d start going as soon as she got there. It was another promise broken. How insidiously all the promises were broken.

Of course the hormones departing in such rage from her body which the medical society called menopause didn’t help. It was a monster that slept then woke to breathe fire and brimstone then slept then woke to claw at nerves already stretched trying to cope with new husband, new home, new dog, and ten years of man-grime.

“Oh, God!” she cried with every particle of anguish that saturated her being. “Help me,” she whispered. “I cannot stand it. I cannot bear it. He doesn’t want me. I am abhorrent in his eyes. He took everything I had, sifted through it and called it rubbish. I tried to be what he wanted. I begged you to change me, to change me into something acceptable to him. Oh, God, where are You? Don’t you even care about this frozen, shattered heart of mine?”
The wind stilled, seeming appalled at the raw passion of her plea. The sun jabbed a finger through the thick clouds as it lowered to the horizon, and then poked several holes in them. The effect was spectacular color. The woman was oblivious with her face in her hands and her mind in the hole of despair.

Someone heard her cry and sat down beside her. He put an arm around her shoulders and just sat with her, his warmth soaking up the chill from her shoulders then her body. Somehow she knew that he didn’t care how long she chose to sit there; that he was determined to sit with her forever. She trusted that warmth.

Finally, a lifetime later it seemed, she said, “I begged Him to change me so I’d be acceptable.” Tears filled her palms.

“I know,” he said, pulling her tighter against his warmth.

“What is wrong with me that I am so unlovely he doesn’t want me?”

“Nothing, Beloved, you are very beautiful. Your heart is lovely to behold and you are acceptable to Me. Your obedience, your love for Me, and your trust in Me clothes you in bright white linen as the most radiant bride.” He hugged her closer and she raised her eyes, gazing out over the water to the extravagant sunset.

The sight made her forget the trouble in her heart for a moment, “Oh, how stunning that is.” Her tear-streaked face reflected the blush of pink, orange, and gold-rimmed clouds.

“Yes, isn’t it?” He smiled. “I was thinking of you when I created it. It is the handiwork of our Father that is so glorious.” He wiped her face with his warm hand. “Better now?”

She nodded, then, “Wait. Did I hear you right? I’m acceptable to You? How can that be possible?”

“Yes, you heard me aright.” He lifted her onto his lap, removed her hat and put her hands in it, then, wrapped both arms around her. “I have been doing a work in you since you first put your hand in Mine. Just because some man doesn’t appreciate the
work you and I have been doing these many years, does not mean you are unacceptable, Beloved. You are precious to Me. I treasure Your heart. No matter what happens when you go back into that house, I am right there with you. I want your heart just as it is, full of My love. You let me worry about that man you call husband. You let me take care of him. You reflect Me and forgive him. I am with you always and I will never leave you or forsake you. I will never allow harm to overwhelm you. Beloved, I will allow only those things which are good for you and in your best interest happen. Life is not an easy path to walk, so tread softly for there will be obstacles in your way. Those are things which will give you to test your mettle, your faith, and to give you more strength. What has happened this day is not in my perfect will for you, however that man has chosen to go in a different direction. I shall deal with him. He may or may not bend his neck to My will. If he chooses not, then I will not allow him to embarrass Me any longer. But as for you, Beloved, rest easy for now, I will heal your heart and you shall love more deeply and forever in the fullness of time."

“How precious are those words in my ears.” She was quiet a moment. “Rejection is extremely painful. If not for You it would be literally unbearable.” He was silent and held her close. Her breath and His came in mingled, steamy puffs.

Tears began to trickle down her cheeks again.

“What is it, Beloved?”

“How wretched You must have felt! I was rejected by this one man whom I loved dearly and deeply. But, You are rejected by so many.” This time her heart wept as she whispered, “I cannot fathom how much that must hurt You; but I hurt so much at the rejection of me. How can you possibly endure the rejection of so many?”

“Hush, child. It is painful, for I know what is their reward and My heart aches when I think on it. It was My love for you and
the joy of what would be that I endured the cross and the pain and despised the shame and endure the rejection. Even now I sit at the right hand of the throne of God. Do not grow weary and fainting in your soul, child, for I am here.”

She held His hand in both of hers and said, “I cannot express how much I welcome this time with You. You have made me feel so special and so loved and—and so—alive. Thank you. Thank you for Your love and Your protection and thank you for telling me I am acceptable. I think I can actually stand whatever I must in this life because of You. I love You, Lord.” She sighed. Turning back to the fine tapestry of sky, she said, “That is an absolutely gorgeous sunset. I am constantly in awe of God’s glory and His creation.”

“I know.” He squeezed her hand. “This is the LORD’s doing and a wonder to our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made we shall be full of joy and delight in it. Beloved, you cannot out-love God.”
Godly esteem vs. Self-esteem

There are certain people in this world that have come to believe that they are completely useless. They have come to believe this for many various reasons. They believe they are only useful to be punching bags for others, to be rugs for others and that they could never be worthy to even breathe air much less to be of use for anything other than to cook, clean and be a repository for sperm.

These women, for it is mostly women that believe this way, although some men have also fallen into this satanic trap, believe what the world tells them and it is that they are ugly. They believe what those around them tell them and that is they are useless. They do not believe what God tells them. I know that thought process because I lived it. Oh, it took several years to be shaped into that mold, but I fit in it quite tightly. The space was so cramped; it took several years to break out of the mold of unacceptability and dependence upon other’s approval.

One thing I have learned during my years with my beloved Lord God there is no faith where there is no hope. The two are so entwined and bonded together that it is impossible to have one without the other. And the third cord in the unbreakable heavenly rope is God and His infinite love. With faith and hope comes love. First the Godly love that He pours into our hearts so that we can at least lift our face up to Him. Then faith comes evidenced by trust in what God promises to do and will do in our life, followed by hope that life isn’t ugly.

When you teach that selfishness and ego and the flesh are the same as self-esteem, you are removing hope which takes away faith and that takes away the capacity to recognize God’s love. God never removes His love from His creation or His beloved children. However, when Satan seduces us into thinking we are worthless, we
begin to embrace the uglies because we feel that is all we deserve; and that prevents us from recognizing the depth and breadth of God’s unconditional love.

We love God because He created us with a huge God-sized hole within our hearts that only He can fill, but we are able to recognize something so extremely spiritual because He created us with a self-esteem that requires self-preservation almost at all costs. We want to live which is a motivation that most scholars don’t study when it comes to why we believe God about salvation.

Some people equate self-esteem with selfishness, old nature, flesh, pride etc. However, it is a God-created characteristic and is necessary for us to be able to recognize God’s love. In other words, God created self-esteem on purpose.

I think, perhaps, to separate self-image from self-esteem is a good thing. I do not believe they are the same thing at all. As a friend of mine has stated, self-image is how one sees one’s self. Self-esteem is how one regards one’s self or rather how one values one’s self.

Alone, we have a zero value—on the surface. However, God valued us enough to send His Son to die for us. So what was it that made us worthy in God’s sight to pay this high cost?

It certainly wasn’t anything we did for while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. It wasn’t that our physical bodies were so valuable because we return to dust. It had to be the fact He created us for His good pleasure.

We are merely sojourners in this world, and we Christians know there are two ways to look at things:

1. Worldly way
2. God’s way

Perhaps it isn’t baldly apparent, but self-esteem does have a worldly meaning and a spiritual meaning.
We are worthy/valuable because God created us and we are worthy because Jesus paid for us. Of course no one can put a price on Jesus’ sacrifice which increases our value to God proportionately. There is no argument against sanctity of life. Regardless of how we value ourselves, God valued us enough to pay the highest price of propitiation.

From our side of the coin, we esteem God and the Holy Spirit dwells within us therefore we esteem ourselves—we value our self because God resides within our soul thereby creating something new of eternal proportions. That is a healthy and non-egocentric valuation of self.

Satan and this world walk hand in hand when it comes to tearing down the Christian’s value system. We look at the world system and think we need to be skinny and have washboard stomachs, and rippling muscles and then we’ll be happy. We look at God’s system and realize this body is only temporary therefore useful for a pinprick of time compared to eternity.

However, Satan says we are ugly and points to famous models. Satan says we are not worth a plug nickel and points to the Donald Trumps of this world, or Bill Gates or Joseph Bloweth down the street, all who have the appearance of being the happiest people on earth with a multitude of material things spread out before them like a Baptist Dinner On the Grounds Picnic. Satan tries to twist the spiritual value system into a worldly standard and tries to make us compare ourselves against the other, imperfect humans of this world. And we can always find someone who is prettier, has more money, has a better sense of humor, is kinder, has a better singing voice, can play the piano, and fill in the blank.

This is where we fall short because we measure our self-image or self-esteem against a measuring stick of other humans which is very dangerous. We start believing what others say about us – matters not whether it is bad or good. And that is a value system
based on the world.

When we measure ourselves with the Perfect Measuring Stick—the Perfect Life—then we see how far short we really are. But in this scenario, it doesn’t matter how unworthy we are due to the litany of our sinful deeds because – *For all have done wrong and are far from the glory of God;* Romans 3:23. The glorious thing and what truly matters is God considered us worthy. God considers us acceptable—warts and all because Jesus stands between us and the Great White Throne.

Suddenly, life is so simple. Life is so restful. Life has purpose. Peace, joy, goodness, love, self-control not only permeates our life but, it becomes a lifestyle. Self-esteem is in the proper perspective viewed through God’s eyes because the Blood of Jesus makes us righteous.

We love Him because He first loved us and the only way we can possibly understand His unconditional love is because He created us capable of going beyond ego and reaching for completeness in our Lord God Almighty.

Our bodies do not belong to us. We would never house sit for someone while they were on vacation and repaint the house neon pink or replace all the furniture with concrete blocks. Therefore, by the same token, we should care for our bodies and our selves as lovingly as the Owner of our bodies would. We just have temporary custody. Our bodies are God’s temple. Therefore, Godly-esteem is both external and internal because we are spiritually new creations.

Therefore, we must first understand which self-esteem level we are on. Remember, level one is the world and level two is spiritual. We belong to the spiritual plain because we are new creations.

The very fact the Bible mentions “loving yourself”, is proof that God understands how Satan works, beating us up with worldly ideas. It is entirely likely that a person not well grounded in Scripture could easily believe he is worthless and suddenly commits suicide in
a fit of depression. It happens all the time.

Absolutely we have external esteem. But Christians have the internal self-esteem which extends down from a higher realm infusing the soul. We must look at ourselves *through* the Owner’s eyes, not through worldly eyes, and acknowledge it is He who established our worth and thereby our esteem.
Satan’s lies about love

There I was, ten years old, standing in the movie theater and just crying my eyes out. Big, sloppy tears soaking the front of my shirt, making it stick to my chest—not a tissue to be found, either.

“Get your coat on, Gina,” Mom said as the credits to *Little Women* scrolled on the huge screen in front of us (The old one starring June Alison as Jo, and Peter Lawson as Laurie.)

“But, Mom,” I wailed, “why didn’t they get married? They loved each other.”

At ten years old, that’s what I thought love was all about, especially the Christmas love stories where the snow starts falling and the boy and girl were kissing and the natural next move was marriage and a baby. That’s the way it happened on the big screen so that’s the way it was supposed to be in real life, correct?

**Satan’s Lie Number One... There is only one true love for a person.**

Here’s a news flash, in case you haven’t figured it out yet: *Love is a choice.*

Jo wasn’t ready for love’s commitment. Another bald fact is that Jo and Laurie didn’t have a lot in common, although it seemed like they did on the surface. The things that Laurie admired in Jo would have caused a lot of friction in their marriage; and Jo would have become impatient with Laurie before they’d been married two years. If we listen, God will let us know when we are moving down the wrong path, it is something the Holy Spirit does at the first sign of wobbling.

The first challenge is finding someone that we are compatible with, and who has the same Spiritual goals. The final (and continual) challenge however is choosing to love in spite of the
faults instead of loving because of the beauty of face and form and chemistry; choosing to love when it suddenly becomes work instead of romance. It will become work; ask any one who’s been married for longer than seven years. What woman hasn’t looked at the tousled-haired, couch potato and thought, “What was I thinking when I married that thing?” What man hasn’t looked at the woman bending over the dishwasher and thought, “Who are you and what have you done with my wife?” Thoughts such as these will pop up, but that doesn’t mean we have God’s permission to cultivate the thoughts. Those thoughts are weeds that must be plucked from the garden of our minds.

Satan’s Lie number two: When a person finds “true love”, then it’s smooth sailing.

No work, no problems, no conflicts. Prince Charming and Snow White kiss, snow starts falling and there’s a fade out to the sunset. Willow makes it home sans Brownies to his true love and children. Prince Humperdink is vanquished. The Beast and Beauty get married. No more conflict, no more problems. If you have lived past your second decade you know this is False. We understand as we mature that working for something gives that something a special value. Ask any couple who has been married more than thirty years what the secret is to the longevity of their marriage and you’ll hear from every one of them of commitment, and of working to keep the love fires burning. Hollywood would have us believe that love just happens; and that it pops in then leaves at the first storm. The world thinks “I’m sorry, I just don’t love you anymore,” is an excellent reason to end a marriage. The sad thing is society is starting to believe that blather. Nothing is further from the truth. Just like the Christian lifestyle requires a certain work ethic, so too does marriage. If one partner decides to quit working at it, then the other partner needs to
tap into the Major Firepower of God Almighty. If the non-working partner is a True Believer, then the Firepower will prevail and the marriage saved. It is so sad that many give up before God begins work. It is even sadder that one or the other partner has a problem with a stiff neck. You remember that same problem the Israelites had in the wilderness which caused them to die there without entering the Promised Land. Pride goes before destruction, and unfortunately a lot of Christian marriages are destroyed by pride and unforgiveness which, by the way, are sins. Satan just loves to stir the pot of pride and season it with unforgiveness. Recognize that and suddenly Satan loses power to control your thought direction.

**Satan’s lie number three: True Love is unconditional.**

I’m going out on a limb here; I do not think it is possible for a human being to be able to unconditionally love another person.

Parents have great love for their children but, that love is birthed at birth, flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone. That is a condition.

Husbands and wives love each other through various and wonderful interactions. The love continues through a commitment to each other and through the grace of God – especially when tempers flare. But, it is a condition.

Brothers and sisters love each other through thick and thin, through good times and bad times, but they, again are flesh of each other and bone of each other. Families love each other in spite of the cantankerous differences. That is a condition.

Friends love each other because of commonalities. We are drawn to certain people because their lifestyle or their beliefs or their likes and dislikes match pretty closely with our own so we become friends... sometimes life long friends. That is conditional because we can grow apart.
Try loving someone completely unconditionally. It is wonderful and not so hard when they love you back. When they care about your feelings... when they put you first before thinking about themselves. But, what about when they do not like you anymore? What about when they kick you... betray you... spit on you... do things to harm you?

What about when they turn from God? Can you love them still? We are not talking about the faceless people who are a world away. Nor are we talking about the lost person whom you do not know, but pray for because God wants you to.

Would you take a bullet for someone you knew but could not abide? Loving those people is not easy... not even when God loves them through you.

Is there a point you reach when you have to say, “Loving you hurts too much for me to continue to love you unconditionally.”

The pivotal spot is God does not expect us to be God. He expects us to act like Him to the best of our abilities, and for us to measure ourselves using Jesus as our plumb line, but when there comes a time it hurts too much to continue down a certain path. We must break away in order to maintain sanity.

In case you think, “She hasn’t a clue what she’s talking about.” Let me tell you that I was given a job by God. He told me I must love someone unconditionally, no matter what this person did or said. For months I followed God’s lead. For months I prayed and loved unconditionally...through the friendship, through the first blush of love, through the pain of rejection, through the callous treatment, through it all. Rejoicing through the good things and weeping with him through the bad things. It was all about him. I set my needs, my wants, my desires all to the side and poured enough energy into him to light up New York City with absolutely no per-
permanent reciprocation or consideration and mostly rejection. I was flayed alive, and cut to the bone.

I found out my limit. And I found out a most enlightening truth about God. He has limits, too. A few have argued with me against that thought, but 1 John 5:16 bears witness to it.

We are all very needy in Christ. Each one of us has unique needs and common needs. God knows that and plans for that. He nurtures us and pours out blessings over us and through us as we grow in Him we become so close to Him we begin to look like Him. But, when we take and take and never give, God quits pouring out because the receptacle (you) is too full to hold anymore. You have to slosh it out to make room for more and especially to keep it fresh. The Jewish term living water has the connotation of moving water. As we all know running water is aerated and doesn’t stagnate. He has expectations and He has conditions. Selfishness has no place in God’s plan for our lives. He won’t tolerate a selfish attitude.

He loves unconditionally, but His blessings have conditions. He loves eternally, but eternity in heaven may begin much sooner than expected when a Christian does not do the work of God according to His purposes. There are many Scriptures for this truth and if you require them, email me and I’ll look them up and send them to you.

Jesus loved us unconditionally. He loved so much that He gave His life willingly so that we might live eternally with Him. He loved us when we were unlovable. He loved through the rejection, through the pain, through the shame of the cross. He knew the future. He knew that not all would accept the gift, but He gave it anyway. He provided it for all to embrace, but only a few accept.

No matter how unconditional is His love, salvation is conditional. We must first believe that God exists, Romans 1, We must then believe what God said; believe in Jesus and believe that He died
for us and rose from the dead. If you don’t believe that, then you won’t go to heaven. That is conditional.

God loved Adam and Eve, but they chose to disobey, and God had to cast them out of the Garden. That was conditional.

The father watched continuously for his prodigal son and ran to meet him when he finally saw him coming up the road. That was conditional upon the son returning.

The father never quit loving his prodigal son. The blessings were conditional, not the father’s love. The son would never have received those blessings of a coat, a ring and a feast if he had not returned to the father.

That gives “Return to Me” from Isaiah 44:22 a deeper meaning for those who love.
Rain plinked on the roof, a soothing sound far outweighed by the splattering of rain in the puddles. The dampness soaked into my clothes and settled into my bones. The small blaze in the brazier finally gave up the fight against the cold and went out. I shivered.

Slipping the roped leather sandals from my feet, I tossed them to the corner of my bed and tucked my feet under me to warm them. I succeeded in chilling the only part of my body that had any warmth left. I brushed dirt from the thin sheet, my hand found a worn place and my broken nail caught a thread, tearing a hole in the only thing I owned between me and the cold winter.

The bed on which I sat, and the box it filled, for it could not be called a room at all, belonged to the man whose back I was watching. His coat was thick with animal fur and his turban was wound around his head in thick braids with a double portion protecting his neck. I shivered as I imagined the warmth he was enjoying. I didn’t have to see his face to know he was scowling. It held a permanent expression of displeasure even when he was taking his pleasure, which he did often enough for me to know every cranny of his face. As each day passed into night he would allow man after man to look in my box; and when they would shake their heads refusing me, his disposition got increasingly malevolent. He snarled words at me, making my ears burn from the pain of them.

I know what they saw. I had no comb so my hair was matted and dirty. I had no bath so my body was caked with grime. I had no perfume so the stink was unbearable. I was not old in years, but I was very old in experience.

So I dreamed.

My feet were in soft, hand-worked leather slippers. My body
was draped with silk and a girdle of gold about my small waist. I smelled of the finest perfume and my hair was soft against my cheek. My husband settled a stole of softest fur around my chilled shoulders. I lifted my cheek for his kiss and waved him on his way. As soon as I heard the door close, I rose and powered myself. Without a thought to the babes in their cribs, I ran to meet my lover. I melted in his arms. His strength was beyond bearing. His weight was a seal upon my heart. His breath was sweet and his passion was intense. I savored the glow of pleasure. I craved it. More and more I needed the release of it so I cared not for the risks I took. Dressed in the gifts of my husband, I ate what he gave me; but I craved pleasure from another.

For a moment I tried to recall my first lover. His face was blank above me. I was not married then, and I was free to choose when I would take pleasure because the life in which I was born had none of ease or wealth. I flitted from one to another, tasting what was offered and offering myself for tasting, all for a price that was worthy of my youth and beauty, and I called it love.

Sensuous pleasure lasts for such a fleeting moment. I craved it more and more because it made me feel loved. So, gradually I sought lovers, and brought home whomever I could coax into my bed, far grander than the one I sat upon at the moment. With an eye toward the future, I gathered gifts from my lovers, fig trees and grape vines. I had a forest.

After I married, I saw no reason to change my ways. He knew what I was when he married me. So what? Yes, yes... He gave me all I could ever have wanted. But, he also gave me children! Bah. My body changed and bloated and I thought I would never get my sleek curves back. When I did regain my nubile body, I ran to the lover I had seduced before the pregnancy. He didn’t want me! He slammed the door in my face!

I went to the next one. He said I disgusted him, not so many
years before, a far different tune he had played in my bed. I met wall upon wall and had no where to find pleasure or comfort, and love was beyond reach.

So, I turned toward my husband’s house. I could not quite call it home, for I had not truly made it my own. My feet dragged in the dust as I trudged toward I knew not what, and trepidation filled my heart.

I had chased so many lovers, I had worn holes in my shoes and the sand ground blisters upon my tender feet. The path was hot. The sun beat on my back. My throat dried up, and I craved water more than any thing I had ever wanted or chased. I stopped at our well, but the bucket came up empty of water, only full of mud.

Winter wind blew in the opening of my box, spraying my face with cold rain rousing me from my remembrances. It was just as well for I had no desire to think about what happened next. It was too humiliating… too painful. I scrubbed my face with the thin sheet, and some of the grime transferred from my face to it. This is probably why the next man to poke his head into my box decided to taste my wares. Money clinked from one hand to another and I transported my mind from this box back to that hot day. What was the difference? The shame was the same.

That day, my husband called a meeting in the gates. That day my every secret was exposed. I had not thought much of shame whilst I was chasing pleasure, but that day shame washed through the fibers of my being multiplying the rush of embarrassment at my disgrace.

I heard the shouts of outrage from the gate, and knew I would soon feel the sharp edges of pelting rocks. I stood there staring into the depths of the muddy bucket, my thirst to a point of a cracked river bottom. My tongue cleaved to the roof of my mouth and I could not have defended myself even if I had so desired.

Jezreel, my oldest born, came flying from the doorway. He
fell to his knees and his pleas were just a jumble of words. Loruhammah, my lovely daughter added her cries to those of her brothers for Loammi had joined us by the well. After some moments, I dropped the bucket and tried to sort out their distress. All of life stood still as I gazed at their faces streaked with tears. Surely thunder cracked overhead when the lightening strike of understanding hit my thirst-craved mind. Their names made sense to me for the very first time. God Will Sow... No Mercy... for you are Not My People.


No wonder I had been tossed out with nothing save the clothes on my back. No wonder I landed in a box the size of a small bed with a mattress of dirty straw and a thin sheet for warmth. He disowned me, and I deserved it. I sold myself to another for food and a box. I had valued things over Him. I loved silks and perfumes rather than my children. I craved those fleeting moments of pleasure rather than the warmth and strength of my husband’s arms. I chose the raspy voices of many over the sweet words of love offered by my husband. I chose thirst-causing strong drink over refreshing waters. I desired sweets rather than roasted meat, and therefore I was starving. I was a seeker of satisfaction and had found only intense discontent. I was blind to the true treasure which was what my husband provided. I was wretched.

    Icy tears slid from my closed eyes. I had not even noticed when the latest invasion had left my cold bed. I curled into a ball and let the tears flow. I lost it all. No hope. No love for me. I had it at one time, but tossed it away like a dirty rag.

    I heard the chink of coin again and groaned. Not another! How much more could I endure?

    “Aiyi! From the looks of it, this is your day of fortune!” the raspy voice of my owner raked over my nerves as he jiggled and
poked me to sit up.

“Eh?” I rubbed my eyes and looked at the veiled face in front of me. It was of such fine, thin material his breath ruffled it away from his face. I could only discern he was male, all male, broad of shoulder and thick of arm. His chest expanse seemed to fill the box opening. Fear snaked through me. This brawny brute could do lots of painful things with those hammer arms if he so chose.

“Fifteen pieces of silver! Ha! Not even the going rate for a slave girl. You are not worth the spit from my mouth so I have sold you. I will eat well for all winter with my seventeen bushels of barley and my fifteen pieces of silver! You, my ugly one, have provided well for me this night. Be off with you. No! Leave the sheet. I paid good money for it and will need it later.”

I scrambled from the box and blinked in the rain. With no covering for my head, my hair was soon soaked and my clothes clung to my thin body for all to see each bony angle. The man slipped a fur lined cloak around my shoulders. It was warm from his body and held a scent of sweet memories.

I quickly glanced up. The eyes were so different from the last time I’d looked into them. Gone was the anger and fire. In their place was something I had not seen since the day of my marriage. It was gentleness and mercy and compassion. Those eyes held the kindest expression. His arm was wrapped warmly around my cold shoulders and then He swept me up into his snug embrace. Where I had foolishly chased dreams with no substance, he offered kindness and I grabbed it with all my being.

“You will be with me for the rest of your life,” he whispered to me, his breath warm in my ear. “No longer will you lay on your back for coin. No more chasing after other lovers. I betroth you to me forever. This time our wedding will be full of feasting and dancing and your eyes will be only for me and mine for you. To you I am no longer Baali, My Master. You will call me Ishi, My beloved hus-
band. I will give you vast vineyards and precious treasures, but your greatest treasure is your Ishi. Come rejoice with me, Beloved.”

That was many years ago. I still look at my Ishi with that first flush of love welling up in my being. He writes of this in his book called Hosea, read it to see if this is not so.

*Editor’s Choice Award, October 2010, Fiction Writer’s Platform*
God Woos His Wife Israel

I have heard it preached from the pulpit. I have experienced the prejudice first hand. I have seen the devastating disappointment incurred by the mistaken belief that divorce is a sin. It is not a sin. What caused the divorce is the sin. Yes, God hates divorce; and from the very beginning it was not ever a godly solution to human problems. However, God exposes the sin which is good cause for divorce in several books of the Bible. We find these passages in Ezra 10, Ezekiel 16, the entire book of Hosea, and in every other book of the prophets. Adultery, fornication, child abuse of the most heinous kinds are the main offenses.

The story of Gomer and Hosea goes back to Israel committing adultery with foreign gods, and seeking security from foreign nations rather than worshiping the one, true God and having faith in His omnipotence. This broke the marriage contract Israel had with God which is found in Deuteronomy. This adultery which broke the covenant wasn’t just a one time fling either; it was a constant thing. It was extremely degrading and embarrassing to God, because it declared to the surrounding nations that He was a cuckold. Do you find that shocking? Today when the Bride of Christ worships modern day idols and puts those idols in places of honor within her heart, she is declaring to the world the same thing. Yes, it is quite shocking.

Israel was different because she “paid her lovers” and was paid in return. Ezekiel describes this extensively in 16:15-34. The horror of the things Israel called worship delved into the satanic when they offered their babies as food for the foreign gods, and made their infants to “pass through the fire”. We think we are not so barbaric as those who sacrificed their children to foreign gods, yet I see people who profess Christ and never teach their children
about Jesus. I see young children who only see the inside of a church a few times a year, and only hear how to be saved when they go to Vacation Bible School. I see parents ignoring their children’s Christian education because they themselves do not “feel the need to go to church.” I witness parents going to church every Sunday, but living like hell the rest of the week as a testimony to their children. What is that telling them? That Jesus isn’t really the answer, and church is just something to do on Sunday, but doesn’t really mean anything. That is the same as making them pass through the fire for unless they repent and are saved, they will eternally live in the Lake of Fire.

Jesus told us that it is easier for little children to come to Him, and that only if we came to Him as little children would we enter the kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 18:3) Since days of old, God has held parents responsible to bring up their children in the ways of the LORD with the result they will not stray far from the path.

Now, study Gomer a soiled wife, being wooed back to her husband. She was taken to wife by Hosea from her life as a prostitute because the Children of Israel were acting like prostitutes. God has never taken marriage vows lightly. This is one of the most serious commands ever given by Him. The example that Hosea and Gomer were to be for the Ten Tribes was excruciating for Hosea while Gomer was never truly required to change her behavior until after she was forgiven and taken back into Hosea’s bosom. How does one love a person who betrays you, and acts abhorrently? Only God can love that way, and it is only through the power of God that we can forgive to the point that love abounds again.

The lesson is far more than how God will deal with Israel, the Ten Tribes scattered around the world. This is God telling husbands and wives to love each other even when betrayed, even when the action of the spouse is so abhorrent divorce seems to be the only answer to peace. It absolutely cannot be done within our own
power. Only God can give us the ability to love enough to forgive and set the wrong behind us. This, of course, is the ideal. Far too often, Christians get a divorce because of unforgiveness. Infidelity is the worst sort of betrayal, and yet when the guilty person acknowledges the sin, repents of the sin, and asks forgiveness, we are commanded as Children of God to forgive. He forgave us, how can we do any less? This does not mean that we sweep our anger into a box, tape it shut, and try not to think about it. It does not mean that we say, “I’m okay with what you did to me.” That is not what God is saying here when He tells Hosea to take back his wife and to love her as He loves the Israelites.

Please note when you read Hosea’s story that the adulterous wife forgot her Husband and the fine gifts He gave her, but God said He would woo her back to Himself. He also would betroth her in faithfulness, and she would look at no one else and call Him Ishi. Come Rejoice With Me is that story, and you can see it does have a happy ending no matter how distasteful the beginning and the middle of the story. We know the end of the story for we find it in Luke 7:47. When Jesus is dining with Simon, His feet are not washed, and He is not greeted with the kiss of goodwill. (In the Middle East, men greet each other with a kiss to indicate all is well between them which is why Judas’ kiss was such an act of betrayal.) The woman never quits kissing Jesus’ feet; she washes them with her tears and anoints His feet with perfume. Simon mumbles that if Jesus knew what kind of woman was touching Him, He would have nothing to do with her. Jesus replies beginning with Luke 7:44 And turning to the woman he said to Simon, You see this woman? I came into your house; you did not give me water for my feet: but she has been washing my feet with the drops from her eyes, and drying them with her hair. 45  You did not give me a kiss: but she, from the time when I came in, has gone on kissing my feet. 46  You put no oil on my head: but she has put perfume on my feet. 47  And so I say to you, She will have forgiveness for her sins which are great in number, because of her
great love: but he who has small need of forgiveness gives little love. And he said to her, You have forgiveness for your sins.

In Deuteronomy 31:16-20 God shares with Moses He knows Israel will be unfaithful and break covenant with the LORD, that they will lust after other gods and forsake the one, true LORD, that they will lust after other gods and forsake the one, true God. Then He promises, “hiding I will hide My face.” That is a Hebrew nomenclature of a sweeping, continuing action. However, Isaiah tells us that God didn’t divorce Israel right away; He separated from her as a punishment to bring her back. He withdrew the blessings and rain didn’t fall among other things. But Israel continued to embrace other gods and Hosea tells us that this produced illegitimate children “children of whoredom” found in Hosea 2. Then in Jeremiah 3, we see the bill of divorcement where God hid His face from His people and declared they were not His people. The book of Jeremiah displays the unrepentant Israel and why the bill of divorcement was necessary. Ezekiel and Hosea also describe the punishment which was designed to stop Israel from sinning with idols. The punishment was necessary because Israel broke the marriage contract 16:58-59, and showed neither outward nor inward signs of repentance. In fact the book of Hosea is the surface story of God and Israel.

Therefore, despite the punishment, there is hope for Israel; and a continual call to repentance in Jeremiah 3 as well as in Hosea, but for 2,500 years to no avail. We find God did not divorce Judah because to do so would have made Jesus illegitimate. He suffered Judah’s harlotry until she rejected Jesus, her own Son. So now we have a situation that continues today. Israel and Judah are still in punishment. What makes it exceedingly worse for them today is the clear evidence that Jesus is God’s Son and is the Messiah, and they continually reject this evidence. God promised to give them back their land, which He has done in part. Israel does not yet have all the Promised Land.
In Jesus day, they had the opportunity to become sanctified but rejected it as a nation. Individuals believed and were saved and entered into a new marriage contract as the Bride of the Lamb. But the nation rejected Him on a corporate level thus the Woe curses and the scattering and the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in 70AD.

Hosea tells us of how God will woo back His wife. Verse 14, He will “allure her into the desert and speak tenderly to her”. Several places, one being Matthew 24, Israel is told when you see these signs “flee into the mountains”. All their needs will be provided for: food, water etc. and this is basically when Israel finally turns back fully and wholly to God and calls him “my husband”, not “my master” Hosea 2. Therefore, all Israel will love so much because they have been forgiven so much.

This story gives the Bride of Christ the example of love and forgiveness. Divorce between believers is not an option, yet there is stubbornness of will and divorce happens. It is not something that cannot be forgiven. It isn’t something that debilitates a Christian from doing his or her work in the LORD. Only he who is without sin may cast the first stone. Since we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God, then no believer has a right to hold a grudge against another believer. In order for us to keep the vertical relationship with God healthy and open, we are commanded to forgive. That isn’t saying forgiveness is supposed to happen instantly, but it must be an open road with no dead end. He who is forgiven much loves much.
Feelings are no guarantee...

There is a time to rely on feelings and a time to ignore them. Someone once said to me, “I know there are times when I’m not saved because I don’t feel saved.” Pooh! John wrote the believers so that we could be assured of our salvation. In fact, 1 John is the book of assurances. There are several things that give us that reassurance of our salvation. Grab your Bible and read along with me in 1 John 4 beginning at verse 13. It is important that you look at these verses in your own Bible because that is from where God speaks to your heart.

1. God put a seal upon us with the Holy Spirit who helps us talk the walk and walk the walk. It is impossible for us to do this under our own power. Through Him, we show love and compassion to our brothers and sisters. We act like a family. There are moments when the flesh takes over and the uglies come bursting from our mouths. But, we do practice loving our neighbors as ourselves, and we love God with our whole heart, soul, and mind. That is a good starting place for an assurance of salvation.

2. We bear witness that Jesus is God’s Son, born in the flesh from Heaven, God’s only begotten Son. That’s another good assurance. That kind of witness will never come from unbelievers.

3. We put action to compassion by helping those we see in need. James says we don’t just pat them on the shoulder and say, “I’ll be praying for you. Be warm.” We give them a coat to stay warm.

4. We don’t condemn ourselves. Here is the feeling part of
all this. God is greater than His creation; He knows everything in our hearts. How amazing that we are forgiven before we sin. If we confess our sin then God is faithful to forgive us, putting our sin as far away from us as the east is from the west. Astounding! We are the ones that keep reliving the sin and embracing guilty feelings. We are the ones that build the wall and break fellowship, God doesn’t do that. He’s always there and always bending down, stretching to reach us. So don’t condemn yourself. Confess the sin and work at not doing it again.

5. We have a clear conscience. Not only that, but we are blameless. Imagine it! Blameless in the eyes of God does not mean sinless. It means that we are justified by Jesus’ blood, blameless from the sin because Jesus took care of it for us. There is nothing to condemn ourselves for at all. I believe that is called shadow boxing when striking out at shadows of nothing.

6. God answers our prayers. Sometimes He answers immediately. Sometimes He says, ‘Wait’. Sometimes He says, “You are not ready for that, yet.” The condition is praying for things that are within Jesus’ character and within God’s principles. Praying for someone to get saved, and for the wisdom of our leaders is a Biblical command, so we know it is a godly prayer. We must always remember that God’s ways and thoughts are much higher than our own. He sees all the consequences of every action. If just one thing is out of kilter, which could hinder someone’s walk with Jesus, then He answers prayer in the way which pleases Him, not us.

7. We obey God, not from a sense of duty, but because we want to please Him. We keep His commandments and we don’t “fudge a little” here and there. It is part of our having a clear conscience. Walking with God doesn’t allow for fudging. When we do fudge, the Holy Spirit pounces on it, reminding us of our sin. If you tell a lie and the Holy Spirit doesn’t call you on it, there may be cause for some serious soul searching.
8. We want to please God. It isn’t a matter of “trying to be good.” It isn’t a matter of being fearful of what might happen. It is a definite, deep and deliberate desire to please our Heavenly Father. That stems from loving Him.

9. We believe Him. We not only believe in Jesus, but we believe what He says in His word. How can we trust unless we believe? Believing we believe. Abiding we abide in Him. All the above happens because He first abided in us. The Holy Spirit ignited our souls into life, Spiritual life and the combination of the Holy Spirit with our soul made a brand new creature. That is so exciting. We are not at all “just human”. We are something quite different, and precious in God’s sight. Sacrifice. That word that means the surrender or destruction of something prized or desirable for the sake of something considered as having a higher or more pressing claim. God gave His Son. Jesus willingly laid down His life in sacrifice for us. God says it and that is enough. Believing or not believing does not make it so or not so. God did it. That settles it. This is how we know beyond any doubt, beyond any question that we are saved. These things are outward indications of the inward change that the Holy Spirit caused to happen. Amen and Glory be to God.

10. We work toward a strong relationship with our LORD. We do this through prayer, worship, reading His word. These are daily tasks, and if they are not then we start feeling the wall of separation being built between us and God. Avoid the draining emotions of hate and anger and bitterness: These emotions are strongholds that Christians embrace, never realizing they are debilitating to our Spiritual health. When we are wronged, it is so easy to buy into Satan’s accusing whispers, and to fortify unforgiveness with anger and hate which turns to bitterness. These feelings and emotions are what disguise our true relationship. Deliberately choosing to forgive the unforgivable will allow the power of God to make it happen. We can’t do it ourselves because we happen to live in this fleshly body.
But, God can. Feelings are too fickle to trust. God, on the other hand is the Rock and Fortress. *The joy of the LORD is our strength.*
Blessing from sweet trust

Jesus is the physical side of God. He is the one that we can relate to so He is the one that we are betrothed to.

I am so in love with Him that I cannot fathom how deep my love is and where His love begins. I cannot fathom how His Spirit has made my soul so vibrantly alive that I am not alone for He is constantly with me. Power and Glory and Majesty is He, but more also is He. Only Jesus, only God can pour righteousness over me as fragrant oil...and through nothing that I do, it is just His love that makes me pure. He does this for me because He loves me.

He raises His sword and destroys all fear and conquers my insecurity.

He is my God, my King, my Beloved, Ruler of my heart--tender and sweet is He.

Because He wept at His friend’s grave, He understands my grief as my tears roll down His fingers and my trembling chin is lifted by His palm.

His eyes so full of love spread healing balm throughout my being. He is there because…

Because He had no place to lay His head, He knows the weariness of my body.

Because He walked with feet bare and dusty, He knows the pain in my feet.

Because He held a baby, He knows my love for my children. Because He stilled the sea, He knows the storms in my heart. Because He knew hunger, He knows my hatred for diets. Because He built a chair, He knows why I must sit down. Because He loves me, I am at rest.
Because He died for me, I can enter the throne room of God. That huge splendorous place filled with His train.

I tremble, I shake, and at the Thunder from the Throne I fall to my face. So ashamed am I, so undone. I am so unworthy I cannot look upon His face. The Four Living Creatures protect me from His Glory or I shall cease to exist. I am mute with terror. I have no words for my defense. All my earthly works suddenly appear before the Throne, and shame consumes me. All the wicked words I uttered, all the black deeds I committed, the unbelief, the deliberate turning of my back upon my LORD God, flicker before my face in nanoseconds, too fast to dwell upon. As soon as they flashed by, they burn, and are consumed in Holy Fire from the Bema Seat, like a straw house, or wood primed with kerosene. The shame within me dissipates like fog in bright sunshine never to be remembered or spoken of again.

Then suddenly, a warm hand presses my shoulder and a soft white robe comes between me and the throne. I grab His robe and press my face deep into it. It smells so good, and so clean, and so fresh. It is warm because I feel Him through the soft cloth.

A low voice whispers tender words to me and my terror melts away. His hand slides across my back and He lifts me in His arms so strong, His strength stills the tremors of my terror like His breath stilled the wind and calmed the waves. He looks at The Father and simply says for all to hear, “Father, this one is mine.”

Suddenly gold, silver, and precious, sparkling gems shower around just us two. The Holy Fire flicks tongues of flame around each nugget, testing and trying to consume it to no avail. I know beyond doubt those deeds could never have been done without Christ’s power and blessing, so I gather them in my hands and I see within them kind words, forgiveness, willingness for Him, nurturing of my children, encouraging of friends and siblings, deeds that I had not thought of as ministering. Without thought or pride I offer
them to my Savior, and He smiles saying, “Well done, My good and faithful servant.”

“Oh how sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take Him at His word.”
Faith

*We all know what Faith is. It is the certain knowledge of the things hoped for, evidence of the things not seen...*

The light gradually grew brighter. I tossed the light covering aside and slipped on my robe. The cold stone felt refreshing to my feet only for a short while then the cold crept up my legs into my bones. Oh, it wasn’t the cold stones. It was despair. I had passed depression long ago. Despair gathered the corners of darkness and wrapped it around my whole being. Defeat tied the knots. One day had melted into another without any relief from my hopeless situation.

I stopped myself from calling out for Tabitha. I had no money to pay her anymore so I had urged her to take another position. Why should she suffer because of me? I looked forward to morning only because I hated the loneliness of night so deeply. No warm, loving embrace during the night. No husband whispered sweet love words in my ear, his breath warm against my neck. I had lost it all because of something beyond my control.

My father had no son, only me, so I received the fortune he’d spent his whole life building. It was quite vast. He taught me well in business. I was no ninny, I assure you. It was quite exhilarating to land a deal and see those camels lumbering into town laden
with spices and silks and to know that they were all sold to the highest bidder. The bag used to hang so heavy along my leg, the slight clinking of gold sounding musical to my ears.

The scarlet thread ruined everything.

I came home one day with a cramp or two. Nothing serious but Ishi, my beloved husband would hold me that night for the red river would flow the next day for sure. I lay on his breast through the night. He was tired. It had been hot and the camels had been cranky the handlers were even worse. What was seven days in a lifetime of love? We had the rest of our lives to lavish love on each other. It would only be seven days.

I was in niddah (separation) because, toborab or family sacredness decrees that when the secular world-things tum’ab such as menses begins it takes the mind off the Holy Things and makes a person Unclean. My beloved could not touch me. There was some disagreement among the Sanhedrin about this. Torah said not for seven days. Did one count from the first flow or begin counting after the flow ceased? But regardless, we could not express our love for each other that night because that would mean we would be cut off. No going to the Holy Temple. My beloved could not minister there. No sacrifice, however expensive, would cover the sin. So we abstained: I in my chamber and he in his. It was a lonely state, but it was only for seven days. So many women of my acquaintance cherished these days of separation. I could never understand that until I realized they must not love their husbands as much as I loved mine. I was young. I was in love. I had so much passion for him and not just his body. His smile lit up the room. His soft voice sent velvet peace through me as he read the Torah or the prophets or the songs.

He was the mountain rock that protected me from the storms of life. It would only be for seven days.

But the red river did not stop flowing. I tried the remedies handed down from mother to daughter for centuries. I thought it
would stop. It went on for months.

The day my husband came in with a bit of parchment with writing all over it, my heart drained of all joy. What little hope I had cherished was ripped from me as I read that paper. It wasn’t my fault. I was released from my vows. He required an heir. I could not give him a most hoped for son. I was divorced.

That day, I hated the sun more than anything. It kept shining. My world had suddenly gone dark but the sun kept shining and it kept rising day after day, cheerily glowing, warming, setting the evening sky on fire all while darkness filled my being to the marrow of my bones. My beloved walked out the door, his broad shoulders and his rich brown hair reflected the cheery sunshine whilst inside blackness ascended the throne of my heart.

I resolved to find a doctor that would make me well. I sent out servants to the four corners of the earth in search of learned physicians to heal me. The servants came back one by one with physician after physician who tried recipe after recipe of the vilest concoctions and still the red river flowed. Each smiling man held out his hands. One clutched a new medicine and would only let go of it when his empty hand was filled with gold. The bag that used to merrily hit my leg as I confidently strode the streets of town grew lighter and lighter. Year after year passed by and loneliness kept creeping closer, sidling up to me, sliding around my heart, craving a cold friendship.

At first the days were filled with hope. The next physician would have the cure. The next caravan would bring the medicine that would heal. At first, I didn’t notice as one acquaintance after another quit inviting me to social engagements. I had to turn them down so often. I was unclean. Of course I didn’t spread the news. That sort of thing is just not done. But women talk. We gather at the well. We share recipes, cures, hope, and gossip. That last one… oy vey!
The gossip wasn’t noticeable at first. But then the hands quit dropping to the task at hand but stayed over the mouths as eyes followed me down the street. The sound of whispers touched my ears as I passed groups of twos and threes, either pity or scorn on their faces. I despised both. That served to push them further away. I was shunned. I was cut off.

This morning I awoke to a sky pale in the east, the sun not ready to break the day. I leaned on the window then a cramp dropped me to my knees. In that moment I decided I could not carry the load another second. “God,” I cried out. “God, remember me this day,” I begged, forgetting pride and self esteem. I had nothing left to bargain with. I had nothing to offer Him except a shriveled and tattered heart. “Remember me like you remembered Rachel and she became pregnant. Remember me like you did the countless times you remembered Israel in the travails before the kings. Remember me, oh Adonai, as you remembered Hannah. Please heal me this day.”

The golden sun stretched over the horizon and warmed my cold face. A tiny spark of hope lit a single corner of my heart and I was able to face the day. A peace settled in my being. I knew I would be healed. Where, or how, or when wasn’t important in that moment. The hope of healing took my breath. I knew. It was as if a giant hand picked me up from the floor, rushed me into my dress and hurried me out the door. Where I was going I had no clue. Then I heard the whispers. He is here today. He is coming today. He will pass along this way for He is teaching. He has healed hundreds. That demon-possessed man out by the cemetery was cured! He heals the lame and the feverish.

My heart leaped. I dare not let them see my face for then they would hush and cross to the other side of the street. I would never hear more of this Man. I must hear more...hear it all. “Who?” I wanted to scream. I wanted to grab an arm and shake until I heard the whole of the story, Jesus of Nazareth. Finally. I heard the name. It
melted over me, sinking into me, peace washing over me like the waters of the mikveh which I had not felt in twelve long years. Hope gave spring to my step. I followed the crowd and when it became so close I used elbows and heels to break through. Closer I pushed.

I heard one of the synagogue rulers, Jairus, as I recall, had approached a man falling at His feet. I watched and then I knew in my heart that it must be He, the Jesus that would save me, the Man that would heal me—God’s remembrance. I crouched down and crawled forward. I knew that if I just touched his talit, just one tassel on the corner of His talit, I would be healed. He had healed hundreds; the tassel was all I needed. He was Holy. I was unclean. He was of God. I was filthy. He was kind, for I saw Him start to follow Jairus to go heal his daughter. I was shunned and cut off. How dare I touch Him and make Him unclean? I could not. I dare not. But His prayer shawl I could dare to touch. I reached out. The tassel brushed through my hand... the barest of touches.

Darkness fled. Despair became a wisp, blown away by a puff of breeze. The red river ceased and I was well. The filth of twelve years disappeared just as if it had never been.

“Who touched Me?” His voice was full of compassion, love, and the waters of His words washed me clean. The first time in twelve years I was clean.

I could do nothing but fall at His feet. I poured out twelve years of grief and He replaced it all with such joy I could not contain it all.

“Daughter,” He said, daughter a term of endearment such as I had not heard in years, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be whole from your plague.”

I rejoiced, Ah, Lord God, thou hast saved me this day. I could not help but sing the Psalm of David

_ Jehovah is gracious and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. Jehovah watches over the simple; I was low, but He saved me._
Return to your rest, O soul; for Jehovah has blessed you.
For You have delivered my soul from death, my eye from tears, my feet from stumbling.
I will walk before the face of Jehovah in the lands of the living. I believed; so I speak...
Benjamin Franklin once said that to set a habit, one had to practice a certain behavior for thirty days, and I’ve often heard that to get rid of a bad habit, one must work at that for forty days. There certainly seems to be something about that number forty because it appears in scripture many times, mostly in times of testing or healing, and specifically when God judged earth with rain for forty days and nights.

Habits can work for us or against us, and the smart woman will learn what habits will be most beneficial to her lifestyle and which ones are better tossed. I look back at my life and wish someone had shown me what cigarettes do to the lungs like those commercials of the egg frying in a hot skillet illustrated drugs on a brain. I would be a lot healthier now if I’d never smoked. If someone had designed a class for young women that illustrated all these wonderful habits, I think I’d be a much better Christian woman today.

LORD, help Yourself to the kitchen of my life. Help me to cook what is most pleasing to you and therefore what will be most digestible to my siblings in Christ. Some daily habits to practice:
• **Put on a fresh apron:** Colossians 3:9-10 *Do not lie to one another, having put off the old man with his deeds 10 and having put on the new, having been renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.* Every chef knows there is nothing like beginning to cook a great meal with a clean apron about the middle. That white garment may get soiled by a few splashes of worldly wickedness, but it will keep the clothes clean. Jesus warned the church at Sardis that those who have kept their garments white will walk with Him for they are worthy (Revelation 3:4).

• **Cut away the fat of egotism and stuff my life with savory things of God:** Colossians 3:2-3 *Be mindful of things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God. We are saturated with messages about self and selfish things. In this life and the next, it is all about bringing God glory and all about Him, not self. Egotism has no place in the Family of God. We have been given the Mind of Christ; therefore, we should be especially careful to put Him and others above self by putting to death earthly desires and allowing God to give us our heart’s desire. It is the only way to look more like Him and less like the world.*

• **Soak me in the marinade of Your Word:** John 13:5 *Then He put water into the basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples, and to wipe off with the towel with which He was girded.* Peter was horrified that his Lord would wash his feet, the act being the lowliest of slaves’ work. But, Jesus told him if he would not let him wash him, then he did not belong to Him. Jesus was asserting that we are clean because of Him, and that we can be cleansed daily by immersing ourselves in His Word. Interestingly, there is a distinction in the Greek words for baptism. The clearest example that shows the meaning of *baptizo* is a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander,
who lived about 200 B.C. It is a recipe for making pickles and is helpful because it uses both words. Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be ‘dipped’ \textit{(bapto)} into boiling water and then ‘baptised’ \textit{(baptizo)} in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of baptizing the vegetable, produces a permanent change in the vegetable which is preserved almost indefinitely.

- **Sift me to remove the lumps of wickedness that Satan tosses my way:** Psalm 141:4 \textit{Do not let my heart turn aside to any evil thing, to practice deeds in wickedness with men who practice iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies.} It is very easy to embrace wicked things because the world is full of subtleties. Satan uses others to draw us away from godly things; and he uses our fleshly desires against us to drag us into his web of intrigue. A daily date with God will assure our safety because He will shine a light into all the dark corners of our heart and mind. He will make sure our path is well-lighted when we hide His Word within our hearts.

- **Pepper every relationship with godly love and wisdom:** John 13:34 \textit{I give a new commandment to you, that you should love one another; according as I loved you, you should also love one another.} John also affirms to us that Jesus said this is how the world would know Him, by our love for one another. Wisdom is essential to our well-being, and God has a lot to say about it in Proverbs 8. James tells us we need only ask for it, just like Solomon did. Astoundingly, God gives us His wisdom which is part and parcel with the Holy Spirit as noted in Isaiah 11. We have much scripture about wisdom; and I am constantly amazed at Christians who do not practice it.
• Blend me with faith, whisk me with Your joy, fold into my soul self-control, whip me with the cream of peace, swirl my being with kindness, combine me with grace, bake me with goodness, test me with meekness. Ephesians 4:29-30. *May only that which is pleasing to You come out of my mouth.*

• **Serve me, LORD, as the dish of Your pleasure:** Help me to bring You glory, to give myself in unselfish service to work the works You have provided, to make you pleased and proud so that I might hear those precious words, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

The kitchen analogy was inspired by Cindy Townsend, Louisiana’s Women’s Missions Director at Louisiana Baptist Convention, from notes I wrote on February 8, 2003.
Pain lanced through my back like a spear. Not that I had ever been lanced before, but I have seen it. I saw the look of surprise and then the anguish of pain on the man’s face; it was not pleasant. I have been hit in the lower back before and that was most excruciating. It was a bar brawl. I was waiting tables and serving the drunks because by then there wasn’t a sober mind in the place. But, the pain of that elbow jab into my back must have been the cousin to what it feels like to be speared.

This pain was much worse. There were numerous spears within shouting distance, but none had found its way into my back. This pain came from the inside, and took me to the floor. I had bent over to pick up the basket, a simple everyday task. I rolled from my knees and sat down on the floor thankful I could lean on the basket instead of picking it up. I bit my lip to bear the pain that nearly cut me in half. This one lasted longer than the last and reached around my large belly. I was terrified that the pangs were becoming so intense and not nearly enough time between them to gather my breath or my courage.

I confess I am a large woman. I love to eat and I serve a grand table, which is why so many travelers stay at my inn located close to the barracks. The soldiers often wander over when I’m taking the bread out of the oven so I have always baked more than
necessary for the week. It is how I make a living while my husband serves in the King’s army. As I was saying, I am a large woman, but my large belly had little to do with being wantonly fat. My husband loves my softness and my large curves. He says that me being well-fed reflects well on his provision. He had been gone a very long time when he returned from his regular furlough; he closed the inn for a week and we got to know each other again in a most pleasing and satisfying way. That was nine months ago and I was soon going to see a tiny copy of my husband, Adonai willing that all goes well.

This would be our first child. We had tried for years to have a child. We had both prayed and sacrificed to Adonai, but the Lord had not granted our hearts desire until now. I wrote my husband, but he was on duty along the border and not able to return home. However, he assured me that he would be home within the year and because of the child, he would request a home guard position. We prayed the Lord would answer this prayer, for I sorely missed him.

“What are you doing on the floor, Dinah?” Agatha waddled into the hall, her expression cantankerous as usual. “If you expect me to help you, forget it. I can’t bend over to see my sandals, much less pick you up or carry that basket. I am so heavy and the heat is unbearable. When are you going to buy that fan I asked for last week? I am suffocating.” She grumbled and complained every time she opened her mouth. I was sorry that I had ever allowed her to live with me as well as work for me. She had been a constant sore tooth since the day she walked into the inn, except she did help with the chores. Her pregnancy did not affect her as mine did me. She did not get sick, so she had been a blessing for me as she took over the duties of innkeeper as I lay close to the waste bowl all morning long. I was so sick; I did not care if she dipped her hand into the money box. Business was good enough this time of year that I had no worry about money.

The nausea was almost unbearable, but I didn’t care. I
looked past that to the joy of holding my first child. I yearned for the smell of him. I longed to put him to my breast and to watch him grow fat from my well-stocked milk, for by then I would have regained my appetite. Oh, that day would be so joyous. I would hold my little one close and would breathe in his scent. I would look at his tiny face which would look so much like my beloved husband. He would grow up into a stocky and sturdy little boy full of all good mischief. What songs we would sing and what stories I would tell him. If I had a little girl, I would love her no less. I would feel the same because it wasn’t the fact of boy or girl. It was my child of my womb a delightful gift from Adonai and for that it was glorious for not many more years and I would be beyond the age to conceive a child. So I savored the delight of my little family growing in my womb. Little did I know as I hummed about the house during the times I wasn’t sick, of the tragedy soon to raze all my peace and delight. If I had, I would have prayed harder and longer that the LORD would bring my beloved to me.

I leaned heavily on the basket to get up after the pain left me panting on the floor. Agatha just laughed at me. Soon she would be feeling this same pain and I had to fight off the desire to wish her agony.

“Dinah, here is a stick to help you up. You should consider losing some of that fat.” Agatha held a walking stick toward me just out of my reach. I grunted with the effort to grab the stick. “That’s it, stretch. Come on, now, stretch a bit more.” She giggled at my efforts and I gave up reaching for the stick. “Oh, all right! Here!” She tossed it my way and I grabbed it before it sailed over my head and into one of my cooking pots over the fire.

I had just risen to my feet, still leaning heavily on the stick, when an army captain knocked on my door. At that precise moment my world shifted and I was suddenly bereft of any foundation. He handed me a packet on top of which was scrawled a note which was
brief to a knife-edged point. I had never known words to slice into my chest and remove my heart until I looked at those words.

If you have never loved someone with the depth and breadth of your soul and then lost that someone you could never understand how the world dropped out from under my feet at that moment. My mother lost her second husband to an ox goring him. She had mourned for years, often crying into the night and there were days when she did not eat a morsel. She would often breathe erratically as if her grief had taken her breath and she must suck it back or die. When I would sit by her side to comfort her, she would talk of the good times and the bad. She mentioned then the only thing she had ever felt that came close to that kind of pain was when her first husband rejected her; sending her off with a writ of divorcement.

Rejection… abandonment… loss… instill grief so deep and so finely etched into each fiber of the soul that there is no relief from any quarter. It scrapes at the insides leaving lacerations that bleed into the pit of despair which is never filled up, gaping and gulping for more.

I clutched at my womb, holding on to the only sweet and wonderful thing I had left. Another searing pain reminded me of sweetness to come. I knew that the babe was stretching to enter a cold, harsh world. It would be hours yet, before I would see the precious, tiny face screw up and hear that sweet little voice cry, to see that tiny chin quiver in shock at the cold world. It would be hours of pain. I actually welcomed the pain. It was fitting for my body to hurt like my heart was hurting.

My labor was two days and a night. I was singing David’s song about joy coming in the morning when my little man entered the world. He was tiny and he was loud. His little face was an exact of my late husband. I rejoiced. I did not have my husband anymore but I would have his last gift to me, our son. I cleaned him up and put him to my breast. He was lusty in his eating and gusty in his
cries. While he ate, I contemplated the perfect name for him. We both drifted off to sleep.

Three days later, I screamed a scream of anguish and outrage. The scream was so loud and so long that the neighbors began banging on my door.

My son, my little man, the last gift from my husband was dead at my side, blue and cold. The world stood still and everything in it. No breath, no heart beat, no city sounds, everything was draped in a death pall. Anguish like no other washed through me, leaving blackness akin to that of the Dragon’s Dungeons. The Angel of Death had visited my house and left my first born dead. What had I done? People called me wanton for being fat, but that was as much for my beloved husband or more so. My eyes closed, and I started a keening wail with my little son pressed to my breast. What was despair? It was joy and happiness beside what I was feeling. Darkness had the brightness of the noon day compared to where my heart plummeted. Oh, God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The prophet Job declared Let the day be darkness! Let not God look on it from above, nor let the light shine on it. Oh, God, let the day I was born perish and behold, let that night be barren and no joyful voice rise from it. Bile rose in my throat and I coughed it down.

I opened my eyes to gaze upon that little face that looked so much like my beloved husband and suddenly light returned to the sun. The world began again. My breath returned, my heart beat once more and the city was alive again for the babe in my arms was not my son.

“Agatha!” I screeched marching down the open hall to her room. I pushed on the door to storm into the room but something blocked the door. “Agatha! Give me back my son. You may steal my money while my back is turned but you will not steal my son.” She shrieked an ugly word but would have none with opening the door.
The next few hours I pounded and screamed. I thought I would faint from the anxiety and my throat ached with the force of my screams. Until the guards from across the street forced their way into the fracas. I was so thankful to hear a familiar voice, I called for them to sprout wings and fly up the stairs to knock down the door and rescue my son.

The door splintered and Agatha began a tirade of such utter nonsense that I would have laughed in her face if it concerned anyone else but my son. The wanton would not shut up. Her fat chins, all five of them, kept bobbing with her words and I was bereft of speech. She kept insisting that my child was hers and painted such a black tale of my murdering my own dear son that the guards could not make sense of any of it. One guard hefted my son to his shoulder and went down the stairs.

“Come back here with my son,” I screamed. “Where are you going?”

“Outside where your screeches do not bounce from the walls and ring my ears,” the guard shouted over his shoulder as he pushed through the outside door.

I scrambled after him, nimble even in my girth. Sincerely I pled my case and insanely she pled hers. I did not know this soldier so I could not rely upon his knowledge of my character. Since there was no one in the house to support the truth of my claim, I tried with all my persuasion to urge him to give me my son.

My child was whimpering and I knew that cry. I had heard it every three hours for the past four days. It was his, “I am wet and I am almost hungry,” cry. I tried to take him from the guard to make him more comfortable and to feed him, but the guard pushed my hands away saying, “It won’t hurt him to cry a bit. He may not live the week out anyway.”

Those words constricted my heart. How could I listen to those whimpers and stand it? I breathed a prayer for my son and for
me, for I knew not how this tangle would unweave.

Today was the King’s Court day. On this day, any who had a case to be heard could bring it to the King and be heard. Since I had no witnesses in the house to help prove my case, I instantly decided to throw the case before our new king, Solomon. God willing, he would rule justly and fairly and I would get my treasure back. I looked up at the guard.

“Let us to the King’s Court. Today he hears cases and we shall let him discover the truth of the true and rightful mother of this babe.” I tugged at his arm and he fell into step beside me.

“Dinah, this won’t do. I refuse to let you bother the king with this trifling. It is my child not yours.” She waddled behind us, huffing her indignation at each step.

The court was bright and airy; the walls hung with silk from the East in purple hues. It looked like a dazzling cloud. I had time to think about what I would say as we waited for an audience. I determined to be the accuser for the burden of proof lay with the defendant. Agatha was deceitful and quick witted so the best tactic was to take the offensive. I was not a soldier’s wife for nothing. I could see God’s hand in this already. Elohim give me strength of wit and of tongue and guide your son, King Solomon’s judgment. The prayer was all I had time for because the herald called my name.

I rushed to the throne and knelt at Solomon’s feet. They were clean feet. Strange, that I should notice that detail in my distress. His feet were shod in sandals of thick leather and his toes were relaxed. That was a good sign, for it meant that he was ready to listen and was not unsettled about something else. I had learned much about feet when I was a washing girl before I washed my husband’s feet and he lifted my chin to gaze at my face. His was a sweet expression and I will never forget his smile. My son would have that smile and he would bestow it upon some young virgin who would give me grandchildren. My resolve was strengthened in the space of
those few seconds. I rose and stood before King Solomon. His face was impassive, but his eyes were alight with anticipation and some other light that seemed more like kindness.

I took a deep breath and rushed into my speech before the King could say a word, nor even Agatha. “Oh, my lord, I and this woman dwell in the same house. I was delivered of a child with her in the house. On the third day after I was delivered, she, too delivered a son. We were together and there was no one else in the house; it was only we two in the house. During the night as she slept, she rolled over onto her babe and it died. In the middle of the night, she got up and took my son from my side whilst I slept and laid my son onto her bosom and laid her dead son in my arms. When I awakened in the wee hours to give my son suck, I discovered the child was dead. When I considered it, I realized that was not my son that I did bear, but her child that was dead.”

“Nay!” Agatha screeched although the King was but a few feet away, “The living is my son and the dead is your son.” She would have continued except the King spoke.

“The one says, ‘This is my son that lives and your son that is dead.’ The other says: ‘Nay, but your son is dead and my son the living.’” Solomon took only a second’s pause, and then said, “Bring me a sword.” The guard stepped forward with his sword drawn.

“Divide the child in two and give half to the one and half to the other.”

Darkness pierced my heart that moment. Nay, it could not be that the King would so divide my son. I would not let that happen. I dropped to my knees placing myself between the sword and my son. “Nay, my lord, in no wise slay the child! Give her the living child.”

Agatha snarled, “Divide it! Let it be neither yours nor mine.”

I pleaded with my eyes for Solomon’s pity. I did not care for the woman raising my son, but where there is breath there is hope. I
would that I could gaze upon the face of my son for many years rather than burying him as my husband had been buried. I love my son with every breath of my soul and I would die rather than that sharp blade should hack him in two. I was willing to barter my life for his which was better than my life without him.

Solomon’s lips curled in a half smile and his eyes filled with satisfaction. He leaned back and said, “Give this one the living child, for she is the true mother.”

The very brightness of the sun shone in my face as I picked up my son and gazed upon the exactness of my husband’s countenance. Thank you, Adonai, thank you!
Happyness...

Don’t you just love that movie, *The Pursuit of Happyness*? The main character, played by Will Smith, gets bugged by how happiness is spelled on the side of a wall. He just says it once, “Happiness is spelled with an I, not a Y,” as he and his son go into the daycare. His point is that ignorance is why someone spelled it with a Y.

My point is that recognizing the “I” in Happiness helps us to understand the state of being Happy is generated from within your self. Being happy is our choice. It is not generated from circumstances, just like joy or faith or love is not generated from circumstances.

What of Asher, Jacob’s son born from Leah’s slave girl, Zilpah? His name means Happy. Leah called him this because the “daughters will call me Happy.” (I am not trying to teach you Hebrew, I am trying to show you a deeper meaning of scripture. I used to dislike if very much when people would tell me what a word actually meant but never backed it up.) Here I’m giving you the actual word and its meaning. The root word means blessed or more to the point, “right with the world”.

A primitive root; to be straight (used in the widest sense, especially to be level, right, happy); figuratively to go forward, be honest, prosper: - (call, be) bless (-ed, happy), go, guide, lead, relieve.

This is classic circumstance generated happiness or blessed-
ness which has nothing to do with what is going on inside the heart.

We live in a world where appearance is everything... super models to corporate board rooms to Donald Trump’s pink tie, where the clothes make the man and man’s opinion is derived from the clothes. Matthew Henry calls it “vanity of the world and foolishness bound up in our hearts.” Isn’t that the truth? When did we get so superficial?

I guess humankind has always been that way.

The I in happiness is the exact center of the word, the heart of the word. This is where the state of being happy is generated. Choosing how one reacts to any given situation is the key to generating a life full of happiness. As the world defines it, social psychological studies have proven that people who go to church on a weekly or bi-weekly basis view themselves on a scale of 1-10 much happier than those people who do not go to church regularly. On the same side of the coin, those who read their Bible regularly are happier than those who do not. Why do you think that is?

Bear in mind, we are not the ultimate authors of happiness even though we choose the state of being. Blessings come from God. The fruit of the Spirit is God’s gift to His children and being in the center of His perfect will generates that well being feeling in the center of our souls. Less worrying and much more leaning upon Him, also results in happiness. Here again, it is our choice to go to church and our choice to study His word.

It is our choice to throw off the bad feelings, the worry, the anger, the bitterness that infiltrates our daily walk. It is our choice to laugh when we’ve forgotten our umbrellas at home or in the car and the sky is raining buckets. It is our choice to let God handle our problems, and to measure our problems next to the gigantic-ness of God as David did with Goliath, to put our trust in Him that He is intensely interested in our well-being just as Jeremiah 29:11 promises us or Deuteronomy 20:3-4.
Deuteronomy 20:3 and say to them. Hear, Israel, you are drawing near today to battle against your enemies. Do not let your heart be faint; do not fear nor tremble, nor be terrified before their faces. 4 For Jehovah your God is He who is going before you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.
An irritated chirping sounded from the bushes behind me. Good, I thought. Better the birds should be uneasy in this hush before dawn. I had never heard the city so quite. My chest hurts from so much weeping. I think I have poured out all my tears and yet, more come. My body aches from so much lamentation.

I shifted, seeking a more comfortable position on this hard rock I chose for my night’s repose. But … it is more like a vigil for the hours grew long that I watched and waited. The chill in the fibers of my being had little to do with the chill of the night, although, it truly was an unusually cold night, too. The stars seemed to have lost their luster and the moon hid its face from any who looked for it. Too many had hidden their faces from not only the moon, but from those who had murder in their hearts. Trusted men scattered and hid behind locked doors. It is a cold Hell and had been for several days. It was a wonder the tears on my cheeks did not freeze into trails of ice.

I tugged my robe tighter across my shoulders and tucked it under me for ever so slight a cushion. Like a sore tooth, I poked and prodded at the anguish in my heart. Not one person in all of Jerusa-
lem could imagine one half of my desolation. Well, maybe Peter could. He had hidden his face, too. John, so young and his resilience stronger, was with him I found out later.

I tried to distract myself by remembering. My life was filled with evil and torment for all of the early part of it; I was victim to demons and they made my life miserable. My mother practiced the occult, and I never knew a day without some demon’s whisper. Therefore, I made life miserable for anyone who came near me. I had only a few brief years of respite, one might even call it happiness. Yes. I would call it happiness.

A beautiful man had crushed my tormentors, broken the shackles of bondage and set me free, cleaned me up, dusted me off and I was so deeply grateful for that, but more importantly, I loved Him deeply for it. Why couldn’t those addle pated priests see the Truth for what it was? Why had this terrible thing happened?

I tried once to make them see… to make them understand. They would have none of it. I was tainted. I was unclean. Some thought I was a whore. No so! I was none of those things, but they could not see past the surface. The feeling of fruitless frustration overwhelmed me so I turned from those thoughts back to the Man.

His name was Jesus. Rabboni, master, teacher. One day I was drawing water and He walked by. Something compelled me to spit in His face. I cringe now to think of it. These tormentors who spoke things in my mind and took control over of my body screeched at Him obscene things that make my whole body blush to think of them. He just looked at me with the strangest expression. I had no idea what it meant. I had never seen compassion on anyone’s face before. I saw that same look on His face when He healed the lame and the sick and the demented; and He even looked that way at a rich, young ruler. Some part of my brain registered surprise that he would look at me so when I’d just spit at Him. He spoke two words. *Come out!* His voice was soft, but held such authority that my tor-
Gina Burgess

mentors flew from me.

Emptiness after that.

Nothingness. The clamor was gone. The thunder ceased. The change was so abrupt I collapsed in a faint. The next thing I remember was the tenderness of His touch. He was washing my face with His robe dipped in the water I had drawn. For the first time I knew what clean meant. It had nothing to do with the removal of a bit of dirt from my face. It had everything to do with the removal of those things from my mind and a completely different path to walk.

I glanced up at the sky for it was getting a bit lighter. Not much longer now. The spices at my feet give off a heavy, but sweet aroma.

What’s this? The earth trembled and shook.

I fell to the ground. One minute I’m was sitting on solid rock and the next I had been tossed to the ground. Oy! What was going on? Then my heart stopped beating along with my breath when I looked to the tomb.

Oh! The stone was gone! The obstacle we women had worried how to move from its place was now up at the top of the hill. How could it have moved up? What force, what hand had the power to move it thus?

The other women came out from their places of vigil and looked at this most extraordinary sight. We stare in wonder. Tears come in torrents and I cannot stop them from flowing. My body is wracked with sobs and I cannot attend to the two men dressed in shining clothes because the worst possible thing has happened. Jesus was gone. His body had been stolen and I would not do this last thing for Him… to wrap Him in spices and to prepare Him for His final repose. It was too much to bear!

One of the shining men asked me, “Woman why do you weep?” I fell to the earth in fear and despair.
Desperately I cry, “They have taken my Master and I do not know where they have put Him!”

One of the men said, “Why seek the living among the dead?” I paid no attention and ran from them into the garden, seeking I know not what, my thoughts in such a whirl.

A Gardner stood a short way away. Again I am asked that horrid question, “Woman why do you weep? Whom do you seek?”

I accused Him, “Sir! You have taken Him. Tell me where You have put Him and I will take Him away.”

He says one word, “Mary,” His voice so tender, so soft, and so full of authority. I knew that voice. It instantly calms the troubled waters of my soul.

How does one describe joy? What is this emotion that displaces despair? The one is death and the other is life. I can only tell you that my heart started beating again. My breathing started up again. Where there was numbness, there was life. Where there was darkness, there was Light.

He cautions me not to touch Him for He had not yet ascended to our Father. He knew I wanted Him to stay here forever so that I might love Him, serve Him, and learn from Him. He told me and the other women to go tell the disciples what we had witnessed.

I had a mission! What greater joy than to be a service to Him. He could have done that Himself, yet He told us to go. We had great news and we could bear this great Joy to those closest to Him! I ran. I could not help it. The energy surging through me had to be expended or I would burst. I knew what David’s thirtieth Psalm meant. It seemed that David had written that Psalm just for this morning, for truly, my joy came that morning.

2 O Jehovah my God, I cried to You, and You have healed me. 3 O Jehovah, You have brought up my soul from Sheol; You have kept me alive, from going down into the Pit. 4 Sing praises to Jehovah, O saints of His; and
give thanks to the memory of His holiness. 5 For His anger is only a moment; in His favor is life. Weeping may endure in the evening, but joy comes in the morning. 6 And in my prosperity, I said, I shall never be moved forever. 7 O Jehovah, in Your favor You have made my strong mountain to stand; You hid Your face; I was troubled; 8 I called to You, O Jehovah; yea, I prayed to Jehovah. 9 What profit is in my blood, in going down to the Pit? Shall the dust praise You? Shall it tell of Your truth? 10 Hear, O Jehovah, and favor me; O Jehovah, be my helper. 11 You have turned my mourning into dancing for me; You have loosed my sackcloth and have clothed me with gladness. 12 So my glory shall praise You, and not be quiet; O Jehovah, my God, I will give thanks to You forever.
10 things a Christian must know,  
11 things one cannot live without

1. The difference between love and lust.
   1 John 4:16 And we have known and have believed the love which God has in us. God is love, and the one abiding in love abides in God, and God in him.
   Jeremiah 22:17 But your eyes and your heart lust for nothing but your unjust gain, and to shed innocent blood, and oppression, and to do violence.
   Galatians 5:16 But I say, Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

2. When to hold on and when to let go.
   Proverbs 3:18 She (wisdom) is a tree of life to the ones who lay hold on her, and happy are the ones holding her fast.
   Luke 14:3 And answering, Jesus spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, asking whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. 4 And they were silent. And taking the man, He cured him and let him go.
   Esther 8:3 And Esther spoke yet again before the king and fell down at his feet. And she begged him with tears to put away the evil of Haman the Agagite, and his purpose which he had plotted against the Jews.

3. Trouble when he sees it.
   Exodus 18:8 And Moses told his father-in-law all that Jehovah had done to Pharaoh and to Egypt on account of Israel, all the trouble which they had found in the way, and Jehovah had delivered them.
   Job 5:6 For affliction does not come forth from the dust, nor does trouble spring up out of the ground;
   Psalm 22:11 Be not far from Me; for trouble is near; because no one is there to help.

4. A load of bull when he hears it.
Psalm 59:12 For the sin of their mouth is the word of their lips, even let them be captured in their pride, and for cursing and the lying which they utter.

Psalm 120:2 O Jehovah, deliver my soul from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue.

2 Peter 2:3 They will be greedy and cheat you with smooth talk. But long ago God decided to punish them, and God doesn’t sleep.

5. One’s strengths and weaknesses.

Nehemiah 8:10 Then he said to them, Go eat the fat, and drink of the sweet, and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared. For this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of Jehovah is our strength.

Job 17:9 And the righteous shall hold firmly on his way; and be of clean hands adds strength.

Romans 6:19 I speak as a man on account of the weakness of your flesh. For as you presented your members as slaves to uncleanness and to lawless act unto lawless act, so now yield your members as slaves to righteousness unto sanctification.

6. How to start a fire -- in the hearth and the heart.

Psalm 104:4 He makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flaming fire.

Proverbs 25:21 If one hating you is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, 22 for you shall heap coals of fire on his head, and Jehovah shall reward you.

1 Peter 1:7 so that the proving of your faith, much more precious than perishing gold, but having been proved through fire, may be found to praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Song of Solomon 2:3 As the apple among the trees of the forest, so is my Beloved among the sons. I delighted in His shadow, and I sat down; and His fruit was sweet to my taste. 4 He brought me to the house of wine, and His banner over me was love.

7. How to be gracious in victory and defeat.
1 Chronicles 29:11 *To you, O Jehovah, be the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all in the heavens and in the earth belongs to You, O Jehovah; Yours is the kingdom, and You lift up Yourself to all as Head;*

1 Corinthians 15:54 *But when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, then will take place the Word that has been written, “Death was swallowed up in victory.”* (Isaiah 25:8)

Numbers 10:35 *Each day as the Israelites began their journey, Moses would pray, “Our LORD, defeat your enemies and make them run!”*

Romans 12:21 *Don’t let evil defeat you, but defeat evil with good.*

8. **When to talk and when to listen.**

Numbers 7:89 *Whenever Moses needed to talk with the LORD, he went into the sacred tent, where he heard the LORD’s voice coming from between the two winged creatures above the lid of the sacred chest.*

Proverbs 18:21 *Words can bring death or life! Talk too much, and you will eat everything you say.*

Proverbs 23:9 *Don’t talk to fools-- they will just make fun.*

Proverbs 25:15 *Patience and gentle talk can convince a ruler and overcome any problem.*

Ecclesiastes 5:2 *Don’t talk before you think or make promises to God without thinking them through. God is in heaven, and you are on earth, so don’t talk too much.*

9. **The Ten Commandments: The importance of trying to follow them.**

Exodus 20

10. **At least one true friend who will be there whenever he calls.**

Psalm 144:2 *You are my friend, and you are my fortress where I am safe. You are my shield, and you made me the ruler of our people.*

Proverbs 7:4 *Let wisdom be your sister and make common sense your closest friend.*
Proverbs 17:17 A friend is always a friend, and relatives are born to share our troubles.
Proverbs 18:24 Some friends don’t help, but a true friend is closer than your own family.
John 15:13 Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

11. You must know Jesus, and have Him in your heart or you will perish. The message of the cross is no stones, but the message is foolishness to those who are perishing.
Little Baby Feet...

Little, sweet baby feet. Mary covers them with her hand, warming them against the chill. She has treasured in her heart all the words spoken about her first-born Son.

“The angel was so glorious, shouting out praises to God on High and the Good News! The Messiah is born! Our long awaited Savior, the Lord, is born!”

Word went out publically, through the bright streets of Bethlehem lit by the star shining down on the child. The little feet wiggled in His mother’s hand.

Eight-day-old feet, tiny toes curling in pain, kick at the centuries-old right of covenant performed on the Messiah. Simon lifts his old eyes, tears spilling from their corners, to the Lord God Almighty, praising Him for this precious gift. Anna speaks to all who will listen about this most amazing Gift from God.

The feet grow large enough for little sandals as they toddle, one in front of the other. Tiny hands holding on to a big Daddy finger. His first steps, those little feet on their own, dust swirling around them, making the little nose sneeze. A delighted chuckle from Daddy and a bright grin from Mommy as loving, watchful eyes guard those little feet from the fire, the holes, and rocks.

One day a mighty procession fills the streets of Bethlehem. Camels dressed in finery, servants dashing from house to house questions in their expressions, the star’s bright light settled over one
house, and the Magi, wise men from the far East, nod and smile at
the sign. They carefully search the packs until fine gifts are found.
Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. Reverently they enter His presence;
bow and worship Him, kiss those feet.

The days turn to years; His feet grow larger, tucked under-
neath Him as He sits in His Father’s House. The voices of many
echo around. He speaks with great authority and the voices quiet.
“Did you not know that I must be in My Father’s House and about
My Father’s business?”

Time passes and His feet grow larger. The heat bears down
and the slap of leather against hard ground is muted by many voices.
Dust billows up covering those following behind Him. Disciples
they are, dust-gatherers because they follow behind Him, walking in
the prints left by His large feet. Men and women thirsting for the
living water that falls from His lips; hungering for the Bread of Life
which is Himself, although they do not know it.

Soon miraculous events unfold storms cease, roiling billows
calm, deaf hear, blind see, sick healed, lepers cleansed, demons rout-
ed, and the dead raised. His feet get tired and His bones grow weary
from the press of the oppressed. His own received Him not but
those that did receive Him were given Life because He is the Way,
the Truth and the Life, the Doorway to Heaven. The feet carried
Him through desert and over mountain, through streams and over
the sea.

One afternoon the feet are resting against cool tile. A woman
enters the room. She settles at them. Her tears wash the dust from
them. Her hair dries them. She kisses His feet in deep worship for
she has been forgiven much. She washed His feet as the nobleman
did not.

One day the feet stumble down the street, drenched in His
blood. Each forward step toward Golgotha is agony. The nails are
hammered through them into the cross and splinters pierce the skin.
Blood drips from them into the dust and the feet strain to hold Him up for one last breath until He gives up His spirit.

Tenderly the feet are washed one last time, a hundred pounds of spices tucked inside the clean cloths wrapped around His body, and He is laid to rest in a freshly hewn tomb. The stone covers the entrance and darkness engulfs the One. Suddenly, the earth trembles.

Those dear feet touch earth once more, transformed and yet the same, glorified and radiant feet and body. These dear feet walk down a dusty road and the King tells from Genesis to Zechariah those things that foretold His coming, His dying, His arising in victory over sin and death. On the mountain the disciples gather, the last vision of their beloved Savior are the soles of those feet rising to Heaven.

Oh happy day, when I can sit at those feet that are now on the pavement of sapphire as clear as the heavens, to kiss them in worship and adoration, to sit at them and learn from He who has all knowledge and has all power and secured victory for me and gave me life eternal with him.

Oh, glorious feat.
Believing walks before obedience

There are three letters that make us know that an action is in progress, and that it is continual. ING... running... jumping... swimming... believing...

Believing God is an action that must be, and always be continual for the action to be effective. Once we stop believing God, all the lions and tigers and bears start crowding our thoughts, which will lead to fear.

Fear is of Satan.

Genesis 22:5 And Abraham said to his young men, You stay here with the ass. I and the boy will go over there that we may worship and may return to you.

Fascinating passage. God had just asked Abraham to sacrifice his son by his beloved wife Sarah, to put him on the altar as a burnt offering.

Fear could so easily have engulfed Abraham. So often we tell God “Your will, not mine, LORD.” Then when God asks us to do something, we say... “Um, I know I didn’t hear You correctly, LORD. I think you actually meant this and such.” Or we tell God that we’ve decided to do something else altogether. Sometimes it may take a month, or a year, but those who really love the LORD will come to the realization that God literally meant what He said and we must do what He says.
What we so often forget is that God can do what He says He can do. He is the Creator after all. He is in control, if we let Him be in control. Things actually do turn out a lot better when He’s director of our feet rather than an observer of our path.

Abraham did not say, “Uh... wait a second God. You just gave me this boy fifteen years ago. He’s the promised one to me and now you want me to do what???”

No. Abraham knew beyond any doubt that God would provide the sacrifice. He would follow through with the sacrifice exactly as God asked. His beloved son was on the pile of wood, he had the knife in his hand to slay his son and suddenly an angel cries out for him to stop.

Can you imagine Isaac’s relief? Think upon that for a moment. This half-grown boy fully understood what was happening. Did Abraham take time to explain to him on their trek up the rocky slope? Did Isaac look up and see that out cropping that looked like a skull and think, there go I? Did God put a blanket over him so that he would not thrash about, or cry out the single word, “Why?” Did his heart flutter in fear or did he, too, have that deep belief that no matter what happened, he would be walking down that mountain side beside his elderly father feeling full of life? He heard his father say to the servants, “...the lad and I will return.” What did those words instill within his heart? What trust that young man had in his own father and in God!

Can you imagine the burgeoning joy that floods Abraham at the realization that he would not have to follow through with the sacrifice of his son? I do not know if Abraham thought God would bring the boy back to life, or if he knew God would stay his hand at the last minute. I do know, though, beyond any shadow of doubt that Abraham knew he and Isaac would return down off Mount Moriah, back to his men and the donkeys, for this is what he said
before they ascended the mount. “We go to worship…the lad and I will return.”

That is Believing. That is faith in action.

But, that is not the end of the story. Because of Abraham’s believing and because of his unquestioning obedience both in deed and in thought, God blessed him.

Genesis 22:16 And He said, I have sworn by Myself, declares Jehovah, that on account of this thing you have done, and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 that blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the shore of the sea. And your Seed shall possess the gate of His enemies.

Blessing follows obedience. It always has. This scriptural instance is only one of so many. Perhaps God asks the impossible of us, but He never fails to provide what He asks. Time, talent, money, children, family, God requires many precious things from us, and He is fully trustworthy with them. He never fails. He always prevails. Have faith in God. Have faith in God.
The sun is warm on my face and it feels good to these old bones of mine. I listen, but the house is still. It is only me and Hara now. The children have homes and children of their own and my sweet husband has gone to rest in Abraham’s bosom. That other is gone, too, God bless her. Why Hara stays and takes care of this old woman, I do not know. God’s blessing for sure, but why a young woman would care for an old woman when she should be caring for a husband is beyond the reach of my mind.

“Enjoying the sun, my dear ‘Em? Here, I have you something cool to drink.” Hara settled on the cushion at my feet. I loved how she called me ‘em. It means mother and point of departure. Strange how the word so delicately describes the mother dividing from her baby so the one becomes two. Leaving the womb is a traumatic event for such a small being. Warmth, closeness, and protection all suddenly snatched away and replaced with cold, hunger, and thirst. I smiled at my granddaughter.

“Thank you, dear child. You grow lovelier everyday. When
will you leave this old woman and seek out your own husband?”

“When I find one that is worth seeking,” she smiled up at me. “Now, continue your story. I shan’t leave here until I hear everything.” She tucked her skirt around her legs in such a ladylike manner and looked up at me with an expression of anticipation that reminded me of her uncle and a time so long ago.

I watched my husband’s face. He was not magnificently handsome, but oh, he was handsome. His eyes were beautiful with full lashes and when he looked at me, my heart filled with warmth. His nose was strong and straight. His hair was dark, wavy, and so silky soft. He was not too terribly tall, my head fit perfectly on his shoulder and his arms would wrap around me quite nicely. I was so blessed; and I was so in love.

I watched him play with the children. They climbed him like a mountain and his face lines melted into tenderness. I treasured how gentle he was with the tiniest of them, not yet weaned and how rough with the oldest just enough to teach him to be a man with manly strength. It was so good how he taught them in the Lord’s way. And they did become good, godly adults. Yea, he was a good father, an excellent husband, a wonderful provider. Our fields were lush with crops and our corrals full with beasts of the field giving us plenty to eat and great things to sacrifice on our annual trip to Shiloh.

My heart feels the stab wounds of grief as I remember that time. I remember yearning in my heart, _mayhap this year God will grant my heart’s desire for a babe._

My husband set the children on their way back to their mother. I watched as he shared a special look with her. That look was reserved just for her. He would look at me tenderly; but, he never gave me that look. My heart cinched and my throat ached with held-back tears. I watched as Peninnah went into the house with the children, her hips swaying making her skirt swing provocatively, put-
ting on a show for him.

He glanced up and saw me. His face lit up, shining with joy and love. All my ire drained from me and I smiled back at him. Isn’t it extraordinary to share a sweet, tender moment with the one you love across a huge courtyard? I find it so wonderful that he could hug me and yet be so far away. He seemed to hug with his eyes and I could feel it all over my body. Contented, I sighed. My husband loved me, if only I could bear him children. It was a short-lived contentment, to be sure, for I could hear the clamor of before bedtime sounds.

The children made such raucous noise as they scrambled up the stairs; their excited voices ringing through the top of the house. Playing with their papa always spiced them up into lively bundles of energy. I tensed up, knowing what was soon coming. The mending in my lap lay untended for I knew she would say or do something to make me prick my finger or miss a stitch. I had learned her well.

“So! Not only is the wife barren, but she is also unproductive!” Peninnah’s voice held contempt as she waved toward the pile of mending. “Ha, ha, ha, hie. Did you get that, Hannah?” Peninnah sauntered to the pile of completed work and tossed my things to the side. “Ah. You did mend my skirt. Excellent. I shall wear it tonight! This night the master and I shall make another little one. Too bad you will never know the delights of a suckling babe, One Who Gives. An unproductive woman with a name like that! Hannah! Bah!”

The muscles at the back of my neck became hard as stone and I gritted my teeth until my jaw trembled. I would not respond in kind to her. It was not God’s way to return evil for evil so I shut out the rest of her rantings. That is all they were, hateful taunts thrown into my face, I think because she was jealous I was the first wife. Elkanah took great pains to show his love for me and this rankled Peninnah. However, these taunts still hurt. I could not help that
God had shut up my womb. I felt a kinship to Rachel and her lack of sons and daughters.

When I would play with the children, I would ache to hold my own. Year after year I would beg God to grant my heart’s desire and year after year my belly remained flat and my breasts empty. For a time, I threw all my passion and love into my husband. He responded lovingly, but his work would take him from home for days at a time. I would be left with a spiteful woman who crowed over my empty womb while her belly rounded with yet another blessing from God.

Oh, I ached. Year after year I wept for my loss. No. It cannot be a loss when one never has. I wept for my lack.

One year, we went up to Shiloh. I prepared my sacrifice as all the years before. Elkanah gave me the choicest double portion from the peace offering. I found it not strange that he offered the peace offering first every year. Our home was not the most peaceful in the land. We pitched our tents close to the Tabernacle. We dressed in our finest for dining with the LORD, yet my heart was heavy and breaking. That morning, Peninnah became most vicious in her taunts and I could not help it, tears began streaming and I could not dam up the river of them. Elkanah served us at table. I could not eat. I waited until after blessing then left the table.

My beloved husband followed me, wrapping his warm arms around me he said, “Hannah, my beloved, why do you weep so? Why is your heart breaking into pieces?” He nuzzled my neck. “Am I not better to you than ten sons?”

I turned in his embrace and wept on his breast, and he squeezed me tightly. I went to table and tried to eat, tried to drink what I could this was worship to my Lord God, Jehovah of Hosts.

Yes, my husband was dear to me, but better than ten sons? Surely he jested! A husband is not even in the same compartment as a son. The love for one was not akin to the love for the other. My
husband satisfied my wifely yearnings, but my motherly yearnings had never been satisfied. Peninnah’s children did not satisfy that. A child is the union of husband and wife incarnate. It is the physical evidence of love between man and woman. I had no such physical evidence. That thought tasted so bitter in my mouth. Then a thought struck me. I trusted Jehovah. He looked down from on high and knew my heart. The love for my husband and the yearning for children had been a constant topic of prayer. Elkanah’s remark had put a new thought into my bitter heart. God was better than ten sons. I knew what I was to do.

I went to our tent opening and gazed toward the majestic Tabernacle. I could see the blue covering over the top of the Tabernacle from the door of our tent and my heart settled on what I was to do. It was the most difficult choice I had ever made. It would hurt, no doubt, but my God was better than ten sons. I stepped out, went to the Temple, and prayed.

I made a solemn vow. “O Jehovah of Hosts, I beseech Thee. If looking you will look upon the affliction of your devoted hand-maiden and give me a son, then I will give Him to You and a razor will never touch his head.” I had just promised a Nazarite separation of my son. He would taste no wine. He would taste no fruit of the vine, nor leaves nor stem. He would come close to no dead body all the days of his separation for that would make him unclean. He would be holy to Jehovah all the days of his separation. I was saying all of this with such intense meditation that I was startled by the high priest.

“How long will you remain drunken, woman?” he snapped at me, “Put away the wine!” His cracking voice wrenched me from my prayers.

“Oh, no, my lord, I am much broken of spirit and deeply aching. I have not drunk any fermented drink. I am pouring out my soul to the Lord God. Do not, I pray thee, think that I am a woman
of wickedness. I have been telling Jehovah all my complaints and frustrations from whence comes my distress, not from drink.”

“Be at peace, daughter.” Eli patted my shoulder. “May the God of Israel give you your petition which you asked of Him. Go in peace.”

Peace, indeed, filled my heart and filled my soul. I found myself humming on the way home. No taunt of Peninnah’s could pierce my newfound peace. All was well; and I ate, and I laughed with my husband. When we got home, he came to me and my dear Hara, in due time, I bore your uncle Samuel.

Oh, that was a joyous time. I loved him and played with him and it was just as I had imagined only better, much better. There is nothing like the beautiful smell of a newborn’s head, Hara. I look for you to enjoy that smell soon enough. I rejoiced so greatly that the time flew by. Soon it was time to go up to Shiloh to the Temple to worship and sacrifice. I told Elkanah that I would not go that year that I would stay home until the boy was weaned. Elkanah gave me blessing to do as I saw right. It was a great blessing, but the greater blessing was before that when I told Elkanah of my vow. He nodded his head and blessed my vow. He could have rescinded it; and then we would have had Samuel all to ourselves. That would have been a huge mistake and would have deprived Israel of her greatest judge and prophet.

My husband was ruled by God, my dear granddaughter. He honored the vow; and it became his vow as well. I prayed aloud that day. No hushed beseeching but loud words of praise, for I had much to be thankful for. God had, indeed, opened my womb. There is no rock like our God. I rejoiced in His salvation. Mark my words, child, the bows of the haughty are broken and those that stumble shall gird on strength.

As I look back, Hara, I see so much of God’s work in my life. Your uncle is a great man, well respected and a holy man of
God. If I had not brought him to the Temple as I had promised God, then he would not have heard God’s voice in the night or told Eli the prophecy.

Every year, I went up to see him and brought him new clothes. He was so young, just four years old. It was so incredibly hard, but I did rejoice over him and prayed for him. I knew God would use him in a mighty way; God does prevail.

It took years of preparation for God to bring me to the point of desperation that I would willingly and even joyfully give my son to God, my one and only son. Of course I had more children but at the time I made my vow I had none. It is a frightening thing to do, but it is worthy, for God can be trusted more than any man or woman. He is worthy to be praised. Amen.
Lessons from Hannah for men…

Walk with me, if you will, through 1 Samuel 1 for a glimpse at what makes women tick.

There was a man named Elkanah and he had two wives.

Of course polygamy/bigamy is forbidden in the U.S. and in most places around the world it isn’t practiced – men have wised up since the days of Solomon. But there are a lot of things that men can be married to besides a woman.

A woman needs to know her man loves her above all others. When a man spends long hours at work, at a hobby, working out, with “the boys” then there needs to be priority adjustment if the marriage is going to work. When Elkanah sacrificed, he gave several shares of the meat to his wife Peninnah with all her sons and daughters; but, although he loved Hannah, he gave her only one share.

A husband needs to show his wife he loves her. We are not told how Elkanah showed Hannah how much he loved her but he allowed her rival, Peninnah, to revile her and torment her because she had no children. That doesn’t show much love and allows conflict within the family. No matter with what the husband replaces his wife—hobby, children, work etc, this thing getting the attention the wife should have is reviling her and humiliating her. It is torment to love someone and be treated as the “second” wife. Year after year this happened… It is worse when nothing changes.
Tears usually mean, “I need you to comfort me and show me how much I mean to you.” Once when she was in tears and would not eat, her husband said to her, “Hannah, why are you crying and eating nothing? Why are you so miserable? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”

In a word, Hannah said, “No.”

Why is that? Remember the song in *Funny Girl*, “Sadie, Sadie, Married Lady”? For a Jewish woman, getting married was what she was born for, and the next priority was having children, preferably boys with a few daughters sprinkled in for old age. It was everything. When a woman had no children, she was nothing and was made to feel to be nothing with hurtful, sly, and snide remarks from the other wives of the home and the village. It was always pointed out. “Oh, yes, you know Hannah. She’s the barren wife of Elkanah.” The one with no children to take care of her in her old age.

Today, we are not admonished in public. But, inside we wither just a bit with so much longing to have a baby. Women sometimes worry themselves sick which literally keeps them from getting pregnant. Is the husband more than ten sons? In a word, “No.” There is no comparison. A husband cannot replace a son, nor can a son replace a husband. It is a ridiculous thought and one I am sure earned Elkanah a withering glance through Hannah’s tears.

*And Hannah rose up after eating and drinking.* That word translated “rose up” or “rise up” is very interesting. קום qûm The meaning is full of action: accomplish, confirm, continue, decree, make good, help, hold, (help to) lift up (again), make, X but newly, ordain, perform, pitch, raise (up), rear (up), remain, (a-) rise (up) (again, against), rouse up, set (up), establish, (make to) stand (up), stir up, strengthen, succeed, (as-, make) sure (-ly), (be) up (-hold, -rising). Isn’t it fabulous the word UP is included. We all know Who is the Up-est of all Ups. She had decided to take some definitive action. She went to the Temple and made a vow.
This was one of the hardest things any woman could do. One has to wonder if she truly measured the cost of giving up her son after he was weaned. Samuel was around two or three when she grabbed his little hand and deposited him at Eli’s front door.

I imagine she probably wanted to say, “Here’s my drunken dream, Eli-man. What do you say to that?” But, I’m sure she didn’t. Can you imagine how difficult it would be to give up your son and only see him once a year? Can you imagine what it would be like to lovingly make clothes for him through out the year and then not see him wear them? To know he would out grow them? To love him, but not chat with him, or hear about the frogs and snakes he found? Nor ever to get a bouquet of wildflowers in a grubby little hand, or a hug that smelled of clean mud and a whiff of barn yard? Aching-hearted, this woman gave up her rights of being Mother to give Israel a prophet who would anoint the kings of Israel. God must have settled her soul, and gave her comfort. We do know that He opened her womb with many more children. How marvelous to hear the giggles and squeals of her own children.

Women are resilient, persistent, hopeful, tolerant, prayer warriors. Those of us who put God first, know who has created us, given us our family, and who provides for us daily. There isn’t a man in the world who can fathom all the intricacies of women, or what makes them tick. The magnitude of a woman’s heart knows no boundaries, and the prayers of a righteous woman avails much.
Are you in a dark place?

Have you come down with an illness? Has silence descended into your marriage? Have you lost your job? Have you lost your church position? Have you been rejected by your peers at work or by your boss? Have your finances taken a slide downhill? Have you had to quit your job in order to take care of elderly parents, or a sick child? I have experienced every one of these things, and as a result I have been able to minister to others who suffered the same. Troubles are common to mankind as Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 10:13. Jesus also warned us that the world would hate us just as it hated Him. Some men faced uncommon troubles such as Job for no apparent reason at all, and others such as Jonah suffered because of his disobedience.

There once was a fish that God had appointed to do a great service for Himself and to Jonah. Sometimes God puts us in the dark place so that we can realize what God has known all along. Sometimes the belly of the fish is the only place where we can come to terms with our need to do a one-eighty turn back into His perfect will. All trials and tribulations can be categorized as a Dark Place, but not all Dark Places are specifically for the exact same godly purpose as Jonah’s Dark Place was. Not all Dark Places are designed to make the inhabitant repentant or less willful. However, each Dark Place has a godly purpose for those who love God and are called according to His good purposes.
The lots had been cast. The white side came up. Everyone knew Jonah was guilty of some grievous sin. Jonah even admitted it. So he told them to toss him overboard and their ship would be saved. It was so.

Something crazy happened from Jonah’s rebellion. There were some men who worshipped other gods who cried out for the one true God’s mercy, who recognized God’s power, and who begged for Him not to hold tossing Jonah overboard against them. This is an incredible example how God turns something evil into something good for someone. Those men met God and it brought them to their knees. Why is it that God’s power and His presence don’t do that to us? We don’t seem to be as desperate for God as we used to be. And sometimes, we don’t “hop to” obedience as we once did which is why God prepares this Holding Zone or Dark Place for us to inhabit for a time.

God Almighty is always closer than we think. Even when it seems that He couldn’t possibly be in the Dark Place, all it takes is simple repentance and suddenly the walls come tumbling down, the curtains are ripped in two from top to bottom and God, in all His glory, hears Jonah’s cry.

The walls are not of His building. He didn’t fashion the curtains. Those are things of our own construction. Jonah did an excellent job of wall building. He chose a course of action that he knew was wrong. Another one of my favorite pastors, Tommy Winders, once called him The Wrong Way Prophet. It is an accurate description.

While in his Dark Place, Jonah took several steps toward an attitude adjustment. The first thing he did was pray. This is something recounted countless times in the Bible. The first thing godly men of the Old Testament did from Adam to John the Baptist was pray. Jonah cried out from his deep distress to the LORD. From the deepest, darkest part of the deep blue sea, Jonah cried out and God
heard him. Jonah recognized that it was God who put him in that Holding Zone. The waters closed over his head, he sank to the feet of the mountains, seaweed clung to his head. His soul fainted within him. And then he remembered to pray.

Humans are stubborn and rarely do we learn from someone else’s mistakes. There is usually something that we dig in our heels about, and to our horror, we come face to face with adversity of some kind. Even though these things make us stronger and insure a closer relationship with God, we have a tendency to cry out, “Why me?” Jonah didn’t do that.

He was in the belly of that fish for three days. One wonders what he thought about during those three days. Could the very short chapter two be all that he thought? How long did it take for him to realize he must bend his neck and do what God had told him to do? Short answer is three days. There was a process though. He prayed in his distress. He cried out. He had a deep understanding of the danger he was in and he realized it was God who had saved him from drowning. He knew his prayer lifted up as high as God’s Holy Temple, even from the depths of the sea. And he finally bent his will to God’s will and declared he would do what he had vowed to do—obey God.

Once he had committed to obedience, God spoke to the fish. The fish was thoroughly sick of Jonah, and Jonah ended up on the beach.

What did God really want Jonah to do? Share Grace with the lost. Has God changed His agenda since the days of Jonah? No, although we act like it sometimes. We Christians need to release our own personal agendas and jot down God’s agenda in our daily To Do list. It just might keep us out of the belly of a fish.
Forgive Yourself...

Probably one of the hardest things to do is to forgive yourself. Someone once pointed out to me that it was not a Biblical principle. I hunted and searched for hours trying to find something in the Bible about forgiving oneself. The closest I came was David’s Psalm 51 when he asked God to create in him a clean heart and to renew a right spirit within him. When you compare his Psalm 32 in verse 3 *When I kept silence, then my bones became old, through my bowing all day.* We see the consequences of unconfessed sin. But that is different from forgiving one’s self for past transgressions which we have confessed and repented. Why do we groan in shame for them long after the deed?

Satan constantly bombards us with taunts of past wrongs hoping that our guilty feelings will draw us away from God, out from under His protective wings. That is something that Satan knows we Christians are prone to do. We think our sin is too huge to be forgiven because we think from our own level of forgiveness. How could we forgive someone doing that to us? If we can’t forgive, then how can God forgive? That kind of thinking is another of Satan’s lies that we buy into.

That still didn’t quite fit the requirement for a Biblical basis of forgiving yourself. So I kept looking and found *Isaiah 54:4* *Do not fear, for you shall not be shamed, nor shall you be abashed, for you shall not be wounded, for you shall forget the shame of your youth, and you shall not re-
member the reproach of your widowhood any more.

Very interesting word: widowhood. The Hebrew word is the feminine form and is אֲלָם ‘alman al-mawn’. Prolonged in the sense of bereavement; discarded (as a divorced person): - forsaken.

(Isaiah is prophesying a time when Israel will be gathered to the LORD’s breast as a much beloved wife. In verses four through five, he is talking about the shame and guilt we feel when we are confronted with our sin and are convicted of it within our heart. Here are most beautiful words to any Christian who has had those moments of knee-bending, face-in-the-carpet shame: You will no longer remember your disgrace.

Why did God say that? Because we have a conscience and we are prone to dwell on the negative. And because Satan knows this and drives those stakes into our minds. The saying one bad apple spoils the whole barrel is true. Negativism breeds and multiplies faster and further than anything imaginable. Just look at the murmuring and rumbling of the Israelites in the wilderness. When you get that old Dragon, the Accuser firing guilt tipped darts at the chinks in our armor; you have a problem of unforgiveness of the self kind.

To forgive our self, we must reverse that process and remember that God is greater than our sin. Christ’s sacrifice was once and for all… that means every possible, conceivable sin was accounted for and covered by Jesus’ blood. That, my beloved siblings, is the greatest story of grace man ever attempted to understand.

Since our Kinsman Redeemer has already bought the sin, why do we insist on hanging on to it?

Unbelief.

It isn’t hard to do, either. Even Moses, who was the conveyor of such miracles of God as the parting of the Red Sea, the providing of water for more than two million thirsty people, plus all
the livestock (which is an astronomical amount of water every day), and forty-year-old shoes and garments never wearing out plus many other things, had a moment of unbelief which cost him the promised land. Numbers 20:10-12. He struck the rock twice instead of speaking to it. God said it was his unbelief that caused it.

We Christians do not believe that God can, in fact already has, forgiven that horrendous sin that we keep hidden in our hearts. Holding on to the sin is tantamount to making Jesus go to the cross all over again.

That is what unbelief does.

Since we know He only went once, and that was enough, then we should know that those guilty feelings which Satan aims at us as fiery darts are literally harmless breaths of hot wind. They have no teeth so to speak, it is merely baying at the moon. Unless, of course, we give him the power to shame us, and permission to judge our guilt.

What happens to our past moral and spiritual failures when we repent of our sins and claim God’s forgiveness? Have you ever had an itch right in the middle of your back? Ever try to scratch it with your hand? That is where God casts our sins when we confess and repent, never to be reached, touched or thought of again by Him. He will never reproach us for them ever again. Glory!

The LORD forgives the past. His great compassion is far beyond understanding. If we were to be asked to give our first and only beloved son to pay for the lives of the most wicked of people who had nothing worthy to give back, our hearts would be granite and our faces would be flint. Yet, God has mercy for us because while we were yet sinners, Christ willingly died for us. Here’s the Biblical proof of it:

Hebrews 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more.

Hebrews 10:17 also He adds, “their sins and their iniquities I will
remember no more.”

Jeremiah 31:34 And they shall no more teach each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says Jehovah. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more.

Isaiah 38:17 Behold, for peace was bitter to me, most bitter; but You loved my soul from the pit of destruction; You have cast all my sins behind Your back.

For the mountains shall depart, and the hills tremble; My loving kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall the covenant of My peace be shaken, says Jehovah who loves you. Isaiah 54:10
It was hot that day.

Sweat dripped from my forehead into my eyes and stung. It slid down my back making my robe stick to it, but that didn’t help me keep the front closed. My feet were bare because the men who dragged me from my bed never gave me time to put on my shoes. One of those high and mighty Sanhedrin guards dragged me into the hot street. He didn’t care what I looked liked evidently, because he didn’t bother to toss me my girdle as he dragged me out of the house.

One guard took pity on me. His eyes were kind but guarded. I guess he was afraid he would be punished if he showed me any sympathy, but at least he threw my robe at me as we passed through the front room to the street. Oh, I wish I had my girdle and this oaf would quit twisting my arms so I could at least keep the front closed. Shame washed through me, flushing my heated face. I ducked my head to the side so the women across the way would not recognize me. Shame stained my cheeks. Of course they knew who I was. I was the “prideful bride”. They talked about me, whispered about me. I provided many topics for whispered conversation at the well. “She wasn’t so proud this morning, no. She was put in her
place last night.” A nudge to the one beside her, “A bruise or two on her face, this morning, I see.”

I hurried along with the guards. Not because I was anxious to go where they were taking me. I could only imagine the pit they would throw me in and the jagged stones that would be hurled at my tender flesh. No. I hurried along because the sand burned so hot, the soles of my feet were baking like bread in the oven. The Sanhedrin guard kept pulling and tugging at my arm seeming to delight in my embarrassment; jerking at my hand as I desperately tried to cover myself. I was deeply embarrassed and ashamed.

I thought what we were doing was in secret. He had told me he loved me and he was certainly handsome and he certainly treated me better than my own husband did. He didn’t beat me or scream harsh words at me. For so long I had longed for those tender words from my husband but they never came. Was there nothing in this world that would soothe that ache of loneliness? Was there nothing that could fill this dark void in the depths of my being? I longed for children, but God did not grant them. I longed for tender caresses but none were saved for me, only harsh words scraped my ears instead of gentle fingers touching my cheek. I longed for love and searched everywhere for it, finding only emptiness. Was there nothing that would soothe this ache? Was there nothing that could fill this void?

The troop suddenly came to a halt.

I looked up from my hands which clutched the tattered ends of my robe. Two guards in front of me moved to the side and then back, leaving me alone. I was alone in the middle of a crowd. The man they called Jesus was standing to one side of the clearing around me. Fresh shame washed through me. A thin robe, made for the bedroom not the streets of Jerusalem, was my only shield. I found myself standing alone in front of the Man called Jesus!

Oh, yes. I’d heard of Him. I’d heard of that day He had fed
so many and about that day He had whipped the money stealers in the Temple. I had wanted to hear Him teach, but I was afraid. I over heard one of the women talking about how He had looked right through her, directly into her heart. She had felt such shame she had turned away and never wanted to see the Man again. That made me afraid of what He would see in my heart. It was ugly and I was ashamed. I didn’t want anyone poking around in my thoughts and feelings. I hurt too badly for that. No. I was better off not searching Him out because that way I could avoid any more pain. But, now, they had taken me right to His feet and I couldn’t escape.

There was a lot of shouting but I heard none of it, because His eyes were speaking to my heart. He knew what I had done that afternoon and a dozen afternoons before this one. He searched my heart in that instant and found it devoid of hope. His expression turned tender with love.

What little strength I had, left my trembling legs and I dropped to the ground, cowering in dirt that was cleaner than I. My embarrassment turned to despair and in mortification I dropped my gaze to the dirt thinking I was no better than that dirt. My tears soaked into the cracked earth, swallowed up into that thirsty sand which took and took and gave nothing back.

Why did I feel so filthy, so unworthy? I paid my woman’s dues at the Temple. I served my time helping the poor. I made my husband’s fine raiment. I submitted to the cruel truth that I would never present a new life to the world, nor would my husband know the joy of circumcising his own son and holding him up to Adonai. When I realized that, I knew how deep a hole hope carved when it left my heart. I clung to the ground, legs trembling, muscles tense, agony so great my breath came in short gasps, stirring the sand and dust.
The throng around us must have been noisy; the city was always noisy. Yet, in that moment, I was deaf to the world. My shame had clothed me like my robe could not, enveloping me in a flush of guilt. Alone. Empty. Unlovely. Sick. I was so unworthy to touch His shoe or to let a tear trickle onto his toe. Afraid. So afraid. He would see inside my heart and then I would be exposed. Laid bare. Oy vey. I could not bear it.

Accusations hurled over my head as I felt burning sand sear my cheek. Oh, if only that sand would open up I would scuttle into the hole and hide. My heart cried out to my mind, “Hide from that tender look?” Yes! Oh, yes, for I was not worthy of that look. I had sinned. The whole world was screaming my sin, exposing every detail of that sultry afternoon. There was no forgiveness for it. I would have to drink the bilious drink or be stoned for the adulteress I was. Why had I listened to that seducer’s soft words and yielded to the yearning of my body? I recoiled at the memory now.

The stones would come next. I tightened my muscles and hunched my back actually hoping the stones would come soon and take my miserable life. I would prefer that over the shame the women across the way would toss at me. How could I face what would surely come? Certainly, my husband would never appear and beg for my life. His heart was colder and harder than the stone held in the fist not two yards from my face. He would toss me out and there would be no place for me to go. Nothing for me to do but go to the brothel and supply the needs of the Roman soldiers.

“Come stones, come,” I breathed into the sand. Those stones would release me from the emptiness that filled my life. I was sure of that. Anything would be better than this torment of shame and guilt.

The shouting stopped and the only sound was the soft plop of my tears into the sand.

His finger wrote in the dirt. I couldn’t see what He was writ-
ing. I held my breath and the valley between my shoulder blades deepened as I scrunched into a small target, certain the stones would peck away my life. Of course the sand that rejected swallowing my body when I silently begged for it to close over me, would gulp my life’s blood down its ever thirsty throat.

There was a thud. Then, I heard a harder thud. A stone rolled close to my face, coming between me and that foot I was not worthy to touch. Then whitened knuckles loosened, and thud followed thud as stones of different colors and sizes dropped around me. Miracle of miracles no jagged-edged stone touched me or sliced my tender flesh.

Then a shoe scraped the sand, then another, then another. A few moments and all was quiet, the sun beating on my back. I felt His hand then, on my head. It was a gentle caress as His fingers slipped under my chin and He wiped the tears from my cheeks.

I dared to look up.

His eyes were tender and full of forgiveness. He spoke to me then. “Where are they? Has no one condemned you?” And I marveled. All those men who had dragged me down the street were gone! There was no one left except this Man who looked at me with compassion and love.

I said, “No one, Lord.”

Unbelievably. Astoundingly, He said, “Nor do I condemn you. You may go and sin no more.”

I owe my life to Him.

That day is when my real life started. I had no idea life could be so full of joy. Oh, no, my husband never forgave me. He gave me my divorce papers and I’ve tucked them away in my little wooden chest along with the robe I wore that day. I had to save it, to remind me of what I did not want to go back to. I am finally free of those bonds and that feels too good to ever go back down that path again.

In Him, in my Lord, I have taken refuge; He shall never let
me be put to shame. He heard and set me free. He is my rock and my refuge and I shall always find safety in Him. He is my Hope. (Psalm 71) Therefore, I shall strive to never shame Him.
May I have a drink, please?

The message of the Cross is “No Stones”. There it is in black and white and covered in Christ’s blood. No stones for those who believe. Yet, we Christians continue to slice and dice our brethren and sisters because we disagree with their opinion or their heartfelt beliefs. “No stones” is a message we should listen to more often and take to heart on a consistent basis.

There are two stories that come to mind which convey this strongly and Jesus is prominent in both. One is the woman who was caught in adultery and brought before Jesus depicted in the story above; and the other is the Woman at the Well. Can’t you just feel the heat of that day? It was the sixth hour. Jesus was weary from His journey. He was hot and He was thirsty, but that didn’t stop Him from recruiting a most unlikely missionary. This woman was someone who was counted as worthless in her village, but would be instrumental in the salvation of the entire village.

Jesus conversed with her before He told her to go call her husband, and He did a lot more than tell her she was living in adultery.

He spoke to her...

Jews of that day lived in mortal hatred of Samaritans who they called curs and half-breeds. They so despised the Samaritans they would
walk 100 miles out of the way around the country God gave to Joseph’s descendants just so they would not step foot on tainted soil.

_He asked a drink of her_...

Jews would have rather endured a time of torturous thirst rather than ask anything from a Samaritan.

_He did not draw back from her_...

This was the heat of the day at the 6th hour. She came to the well at that time most likely because “decent” women shunned her and men found extreme fault with her, most likely because she was barren. Men cast her aside, usually women did not ask or obtain divorces, but men had no compunction if they were not given heirs. Most likely she was beautiful and had a good personality or at least could cook well because she had been married five times. But now, having been cast off five times, she was probably getting on in years, not as beautiful as in her youth and no hope for giving fruit from her womb so the man she was currently living with had not married her. She was a stigma, considered far below worthiness, yet our LORD not only spoke to her, not only asked her for a drink, but leaned forward and taught her about living water.

_He told her what she had done_...

Any gypsy can foretell the future in broad general terms, but no one, unless gifted by God, can tell you what you did yesterday or five years ago with accuracy. Jesus said she had had five husbands and was now living with a man not her husband. At no time in the conversation did Jesus say, “You are an adulterer.” Nor did He say, “You are living in adultery.” He simply spoke facts without condemnation or judgment. I don’t think Christians can do this today (nor journalists or reporters). His courtesy and obvious compassionate interest in her sparked an unusual response for a Samaritan woman toward a Jew.

_She perceived_...
The woman recognized the truth He spoke and called Him a prophet.

*She asked...*

The woman asked about worship. She called Him on the Jewish tradition that worship could only take place in Jerusalem. When Jesus told her point blank that Samaritans didn’t know what they worshiped and that salvation came from the Jews, meaning that the Messiah would be born from the Royal Lineage of David, she accepted the truth without the arguments most of the Jews gave Him. When Jesus told her He was the Messiah.

*She became a missionary...*

The woman went to her village and rounded up everyone who would listen to her. I can hear her excitement and I know her eagerness. She didn’t say, “Go listen to Him.” She said, “Come. Come hear Him, is He not the Christ?” She was herding them toward Jesus as if their lives depended on it, which they did. “He told me everything I did.”

*She was saved not condemned...*

So often today we see sin and glorify the sin by hate, by accusation, by condemnation, by pointing fingers and by gossip, by shunning, by ostracizing, by cold shoulders, by casting off, by hurtful words and actions.

Everything this woman felt, the rejection, the wounded heart because every man she married divorced her, all her friends denied her, words of condemnation and scorn lacerated her and scarred her soul, and yet, everything she felt, Jesus felt all of it and more so.

Jesus forgave. Jesus loved. Jesus died, and now He lives. Can we do any less?
Pressing through the storm

Thunder crashing, rain pounding, water rising, those are things people pay attention to. If we don’t something might happen, something beyond our control, but nevertheless, something bad might happen. Why is that? Why do we fear the things beyond our control?

We have a mighty Creator who stirs up the sea and makes its waves roar (Isaiah 51:15) He has covered us with His hand.

He is our LORD and He is mightier than any problem, so why do we tremble and let Satan win the battle of our mind? Our greatest lesson is learned during the storm so that our greatest purpose can be fulfilled on the other side of the storm. Satan knows that if he eats up our time – with worry, fretting, doubt, anxiety, fear – then we can’t do the work God established for us before the foundation of the world was laid.

The trials and travails that Job experienced were not normal to mankind. I know many parents who never lost a child before they died, much less all of them in a freak storm. We can pray that everything will turn out well. And it did turn out well for Job except he received a lot more grief before the lesson was done. But wait...Job didn’t need a lesson, did he?

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz, his name was Job. And this man was perfect and upright, and fearing God, and turning away from evil.

In fact, later on it says that Job did not sin in what was about to happen. So here we have a perfect and upright man who was about to experience some very bad things. Satan held the spoon stirring up trouble and God allowed it. This is why bad things happen to good people when the good people have done nothing to warrant the bad things. There are some things that are common to man,
there are some bad things brought on by poor choices and sometimes bad things happen because God knows we can handle it gracefully.

We groan, “Oh LORD, please pick on someone else!” I read somewhere in a Sunday School lesson, we cannot understand what we are supposed to do if we do not understand what God is telling us. If we do not stop and listen, we will not hear His voice. When we do not resist the fear, worry, and anxiety, then we cannot hear for all the noise going on in our hearts.

Fear is that something that can sour the purest of heart, and paralyzes the most active of persons. We must grasp the fact God’s grace is given according to our need (and God knows that we are a very needy people with very short memories), and this knowledge helps us to weather storms. Fear is the cloud system of our storms or at the very least, the fog of our day. When we start to focus on ourselves rather than on just how big God is compared to our troubles then Satan wins that battle. He loses the war, but he has definitely stolen something precious – our peace. The sad thing is we allow him to steal it.

We should have the mindset of “So?” Rather than “Woe is me!” God is mightier than any problem. Something bad happens? So what! My God can handle that. He promised to take those burdens off us when He said “Come to Me ye who are weary and heavy laden, I will give you rest. In 2 Corinthians we find this treasure, 1:20 For as many promises as are of God, in Him (Jesus) they are yes, and in Him are Amen, for glory to God through us.

There is our Hope through the storms of life. Anytime God says No, there is a greater Yes in store. He may just be saying not right now, you’ve got to get this lesson first. Or, perhaps it is specifically designed for heart tenderization. There’s a whole sermon in that sentence. Or perhaps it is the storm that brings the freedom you may be searching for. Paul and Silas endured an earthquake
which broke their chains. They chose to stay and for that reason a family was saved.

He is GOD. He is intensely interested and involved in our well being, just as we parents are interested in our own children’s well being. All things do turn out for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Amen.
Peace...

I took my position in the bow of the boat. It was just enough small to land that label rather than ship. It was roomy and convenient for fishing. A couple of the men hoisted the sail and we settled back for a cold sail across the sea. The sun had already dipped behind the mountains, the afterglow in the winter sky created an orange wash on our faces as we pushed off from the western shore toward Bethsaida, nestled on the northern shore of *Yam Kenneret*.

I breathed deeply, filling my lungs with the fresh, chilled air of the sea region. I smelled the fish and they smelled like money to me. We were heading to my home and I was looking forward to seeing my wife.

That fateful night, the afterglow did not last long upon the cold water. But we did not fear for the moon would rise shortly and full would be its face.

We had barely got into deep water when the wind flapped the sail. I cursed, and then bit my tongue. I was done with those thoughts and those ways, yet they crept into my head at stressful times. It was hard trying to be good all the time. That Jesus, I told my brother, He is Messiah. John the Baptist had pointed to him and said, “Behold the Lamb who will take away the sins of the world.” My head knew it. My heart was having doubts. First one thing and then another, he would say one thing and the Pharisees would twist his words and the sad thing is, they were making a great deal of sense. But then, so did Messiah. I was stilling trying to understand how a body could lay down his life to save it or desiring to
Refreshment in Refuge

save his life will lose it and the one who loses his life will save it. Oi veh! My poor fisherman’s brain could not wrap around it.

Excuse me a moment while I tend this sail. I want your trip to be smooth so you can better hear my story. The wind is so contrary as it blows one way and then another. It’s the winter gusts we must be wary of and this storm coming up is giving all the signs of a gale. The conditions you see now are just like what happened that night in the beginning. I say, look at those scudding clouds. We best head back to shore, for I would not want you to be distressed this eventide. No, no. Sit down; no need for oars for we’ll be to shore in a matter of moments.

Now then, where was I? Oh, yes, about that night of the great storm, I had just taken my position on the bow of the boat. I had confessed to you that my heart was akin to the winter winds across the Yam Kenneret. Sea of Galilee, as you know it. Afternoon had just rested when the Master urged us to the boat and bid us across to the other side. A few hours passed and it seemed we were making no headway at all. It was only seven miles across: a short, afternoon sail or row depending on how many oars were manned. But, this night, it seemed we worked more against the wind than with the wind for it was so contrary; we lowered the almost useless sail, for the wind was shifting more quickly than we could shift the sail, and took to the oars. I was marking the time so we could be in stroke which is why I was in the bow and why I was the navigator.

Dark clouds raced across the sky. For a time, they were spaced far enough apart we could keep our bearings. Then they closed in around the moon, like a veil drawn across a beautiful woman’s face; one moment glorious light and the next dark pitch. Then the wind gusted hard from the North, the waves pounded the bow sending up sprays of water at regular intervals. That lasted for less than an hour. Suddenly the wind shifted quarters and it was blowing harder from the east. This shifting wind stirred up our little
sea and we were being tossed about like a child’s ball.

The waves pitched our little boat into the air, I gauged about twenty cubits. At each peak the shore to the west looked no closer than the shore to the north east. Soon we had to ship the oars and hang on for our very lives. The cantankerous sea, sucked at the boat to pull it under. Veteran sailors we are, but this storm was the worst we had ever seen. Soon, the waves were thirty cubits if they were a hand’s-breadth; and that is no fisherman’s lie.

The water was so cold and the wind was colder as it whipped sea spray into our faces and cloaks. We may as well had taken to swimming across, as wet as we were. But that would never have done. We would have died in that water in just a few minutes. Oy, I have seen grown men, fishing in waters that cold and fall in while dragging in nets. They were dead before they were discovered missing. Nothing could bring them back from that freezing death.

I rolled my shoulders to release the strain of tension. Not much good it did because of the death grip I had on the sides of the boat. I must have left deep, finger-sized impressions on either side of the bow. Up the side of one giant wave we traveled then down the steep slope of the other side. As we reached the summit of the watery mountain, we’d pitch side to side, taking on a dangerous amount of water; our knees awash with the cold stream and faces frozen into masks of terror. Then we careened down, sloshing a bit of water out one side while taking on more water from the other side. At the bottom of each deep trench, we had tipped over far enough for the water to drain out the port side leaving the water ankle deep, only to start the whole travail again as we staggered up the side of the next giant wave. We had just a matter of minutes before capsizing; the sea has never been so treacherous.

I saw something in the distance and decided to keep my eye on it in order to gauge our position. Surely we had traveled farther than what it appeared. It seemed we were held by some anchor in
the middle of the sea. The wind swirling around us, yet our position held steady. It was odd, but not odd enough to lighten my fear. I could see the horror etched on each face. These men I had walked with, talked with, and laughed with were now sharing the same fear. We were sure we were going to die.

Careful now where you step, the dock is slippery in this rain. Here, give me your hand. Up you go. And now you, sir, my, this is a fine catch of fish, you have. Shall I clean them for you? I am delighted to do so, and you can hear the rest of my story while I teach you the Andrew method of cleaning fish. Oh, sorry, did I slap your back too hard? Sometimes I forget my own strength.

That night, we had no strength. Our bellies melted with fear. I could tell we were making a slight headway because that single point I was watching when we made it to the peak of each wave, had moved a bit to port and had gotten a good deal closer. It seemed to me we would not make Bethsaida this night.

It was the fourth watch of night. In no way could we sleep with the storm throwing cold water in our faces. I was shocked out of my fear when the boat topped the next peak, I saw Jesus walking toward us. At my scream, the others turned to see and some exclaimed it was a ghost. I knew it was Jesus, but my throat was closed so tight, not even a squeak could make it out of my mouth.

He said, “Be comforted. I AM. Do not fear.”

My brother, foolhardy that day as he was in his youth, leaned over the side of the boat and cried out, “Lord, if it really is You, then command me to come to You on the waters.”

If it were possible, my jaw dropped even lower. Only choking on the sea spray made me close my mouth, for Jesus did so command. Just like the flash of summer lightening, Peter was out of the boat and walking toward our Lord. We were stunned.

I can see by the looks on your faces you think I am telling an untruth.
I do not lie; my brother walked upon those towering waves toward Jesus. Then he began to sink. He told me later that he had, at first, only had eyes for Jesus, but then he felt the storm, the giant waves, the cold wind and he lost sight of the power which held him up. Jesus quickly stretched out and grabbed Peter and said, “Little-faith, why did you doubt?” Then He helped Peter into the boat and once Himself was in the boat, the wind ceased and the waves were calm. No gesture from Him. No words fell from His lips. Calm waters like that of a summer afternoon proved the elements obeyed His silent will!

Only one other time had we seen anything like that. Jesus rebuked the wind, saying, “Peace! Be still!” At His first word, the waves settled into stone-like calm and the wind ceased like someone had shut the door upon it. That time we wondered who He was that the elements obeyed His voice. This time, I could not help myself. My knees buckled and I fell on my face, worshiping the Son of God. At that moment I knew beyond doubt that He was Who He said He was.

I did not understand the miracle of the loaves. I was blind and my heart was like a stony ground. But, when that wind cut off, when those giant waves became instantly like stone, when the moon’s face glowed upon the head of the Lord, I knew who He was.

However, I am ashamed to admit that I did not fully understand all the implications of that day. I was so stupid that when the true storm hit and the very real danger exploded into our lives tearing Jesus from our midst and those lies and deceptions of the Pharisees put Jesus on the cross, I ran just as if I had sunk into the depths of the sea all the way to the bottom. We all scattered. We failed Him. And yet, that glorious morning, He let us know beyond doubt that He forgave us. That, my friend, is peace.

You do not see it? Oh, excuse me! I did not mean to swing
the blade so close to your nose. Please forgive me. Take the blade and scrape the scales like this. Yes. You have it now. Do not miss one, they are quite sharp in the mouth.

Let me explain the implications to you.

All the Disciples that Jesus had chosen to follow Him were in that boat. Do you suppose that He would allow anything to cause us harm? Do you suppose that since He could calm the waves and shut off the wind with a single breath from His mouth that He would allow us to suffer that storm unto death? Pah! Decidedly not. It was a lesson, a test. We had eyes only for the storm. The LORD has eyes for us.

In the desert, He is there. In the wilderness, He is there. Whether He is on the mountain praying, He is watching you in the storm and He is always within reach because He stretches to us; He leans down to us. His is the power of bara, creation from nothing. Through Him all things were created, the earth, the wind, the sea. How can the wind not obey His voice? How can the sea not submit to His will? He created them; His is the authority over them. The storms will always come, but He is ever constant. Raging torrents of trials and tribulations have no power over those whom love the Lord. That, my friends, is Peace.

I offer this peace to you. You know how to fish now. You will never starve. Know this, if you believe in Jesus, you will never go hungry and never be thirsty. The storms will come, yes, but there will always be peace in your heart.

Psalm 4:8 I will both lie down in peace and sleep; for You alone, O Jehovah, make me dwell in safety.
Remain calm while the storm rages…

Did God allow Job to be harmed past endurance? Did God share with Job that Satan was the one playing havoc in his life? Were any of us around when God laid the foundations of the world and when He hung the stars in place?

Well, if you answered “yes” to any of those questions, please email me, we need to talk.

No, God did not allow harm to Job beyond Job’s endurance. Anyone else might have committed suicide. God knew the exactness of Job’s strength, faith, will and mental health. God did not allow him to be pushed past a point of no return. God will do no less for us today. He is the same past, present and future, we can depend on that.

Do you ever get a sore soul? I mean a soreness there like an aching tooth in your spirit. The feeling just washes through, leaving a feeling of dread or bleakness. I usually get this feeling when something bad is going to happen. This feeling is not from God. It is something that comes from Satan, and I know this through experience. Even though I know it, I still must remind myself and pray about it when it comes, for it must be my thorn.

Some scholars say that we cannot depend on experience, but must depend upon and lean upon exactly what the Bible says, forgetting feelings, rejecting feelings. But look at the “set up” in Job 1:1
There was a man in the land of Uz; his name was Job. And this man was perfect and upright, and fearing God, and turning away from evil. What problem could the man possibly have? He was doing everything correctly, so there wouldn’t be a need for trials as lessons to learn God’s principles, no need for tribulations so that he could minister to others. There must have been another reason.

Reading on we find in Job 1:9 And Satan answered Jehovah and said, Does Job revere God for nothing? 10 Have You not made a hedge for him, and for his house, and for all that is his all around? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his livestock have increased in the land. 11 But put out Your hand now, and touch against all that is his, and see if he will not then curse You to Your face.

First, please notice here that Satan has no power except that which God allows, or that which we give. Knowing this, we are forewarned and forearmed against an evil foe. However, just like Job we have to endure. The point with Job was not at all to teach Job, but to prove a point to Satan. I am convinced that Job had that soreness in his soul. This is such a huge lesson that I just sit back and marvel. I had always thought all our trials and tribulations were forms of education, tests and basic school work that prepare us for our eternal purpose.

Those things are true, but God’s good purposes may not be for the person that undergoes the trial, but for the education of an observer, or for later ministry to someone who will go through the same thing, or to prove to Satan some Truth. Those kinds of trials are extremely hard to undergo and hard to understand; the things that happened to Job are tremendous stress triggers as well as huge grief causers. What an amazing thing. The witness to Job’s wife who said, “Curse God and die.” She had ten more children. It was the witness to Job’s friends who had advice that produced such contempt from God. Job 42:7 And it happened, after Jehovah spoke these words to Job, Jehovah said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My anger glows against
you and your two friends. For You have not spoken the right about Me, as My servant Job. 8 And now take for you seven young bulls and seven rams and go to My servant Job, and offer a burnt offering for yourselves. And My servant Job will pray for you. Surely I will lift up his face so as not to do with you according to your folly, in that you have not spoken the right about Me, as My servant Job.

But, look! How sweet the thought... “I will lift up his face...”

Job 42:9

And Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as Jehovah spoke to them. And Jehovah lifted the face of Job. Can’t you just feel the soft and tender fingers of God under your chin? Can’t you see His tender smile and gentle laughter? How glorious that would be, to have my face cupped by His hands. How marvelous just to lean into Him and let Him lift not only my face, but my whole self. Yea, Lord, I shout Your praises and Your glory. I am enthralled with Your beauty. After all that, Job had seven more sons and three more daughters and he gave them all inheritance. For Job to recoup all that had been taken from him was at least ten years of waiting and labor. The timing seems so long, yet to God, it is a mere ‘blink, blink, blink’. Remain calm. Be still and know that God is God. Our face will be lifted. We must make our decisions based on our knowledge of God, not our feelings, because He always keeps His promises.
Where is your goat tied up?

Do others get your goat?

I overhead a young woman tell my pastor the other night, “I’ve decided he won’t get my goat because I won’t tell him where it’s tied up.” I thought this an amazing decision and very pithy.

Which brought a question or two to mind that I’ve been pondering for quite some time: Do we Christians tie our goats to our belts and drag them behind us everywhere we go? Does the blatant display of our goats make us easy targets? Is this why our tender feelings get bruised so easily when someone expresses an opinion contrary to our own? So often we’ll express displeasure rather loudly when a sibling in Christ teaches something different than what we’ve learned to be truth. Without thought we attack rather than embrace peace with our brother or sister.

Some say the saying came from horse racing. The thoroughbreds would become antsy and to calm them down, the trainers would tie up a goat in the stall and this would calm down the agitated horses. To make the horse agitated so it would lose the race, some dishonest crooks (is that an oxymoron?) would sneak in and steal the horse’s pet goat. It is a proven fact that thoroughbreds had all different kinds of pets such as dogs, chickens and goats, but there isn’t any written proof that the saying came from this set-up. It makes more sense than getting your goad. The goad is what pokes and prods the cattle and oxen toward something. If you take away the goad, then how does that make you agitated and angry? Another
theory for the origination of the phrase comes from the turn of the century prison slang for anger which was goat. Who knows?

The goat has plentiful Biblical renown. It was clean and fit for food and sacrifice. Interestingly, the first born of the goat (and ox and sheep) could not be redeemed, but had to be sacrificed to the LORD. Numbers 18:17 Goats were most profitable for the owners, and the milk was used for food, and its hide used for clothing. Debatably, if you were to get the Old Testament man’s goat, there would be cause for great consternation.

For some reason, there is some erroneous thinking that we Christians are supposed to be these suffering martyrs, accepting everything thrown at us without a peep of aggravation or complaint. Of course in a perfect world, we do accept it and we try to be content in whatever condition we find ourselves, just as Paul teaches. But, seriously…

The man after God’s own heart was quite vocal with his indignation. Look at some of the things he said:

Psalm 5:9 For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is engulfing ruin; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue. 10 O God, hold them guilty; let them fall from their own counsels. Drive them away in the multitude of their transgressions, for they have rebelled against You.

Admittedly, those who had transgressed against David had done so robustly against God as well. Anyone who messes with God’s children, messes with God. He gets rather perturbed at those who attack His children who are going about His business. We see this clearly in

Psalm 5:4 For You are not a God enjoying wickedness; nor shall evil live with You. 5 The boasters shall not set themselves before Your eyes. You hate all workers of iniquity. 6 You shall destroy those speaking lies; Jehovah will despise the man of blood and deceit.

David pleads with God because of my enemies, make straight Your way before me and lead me in Your righteousness. David was wary of his ene-
mies getting his goat. He looked to the One who could keep things in perspective, and guide him through the dark valley into the sunshine. Perhaps, goat protecting is not just God’s job, though. It should be a joint venture between God and us. We must make the deliberate decision to keep our goat and not to handily display it for all to see and covet.

It is okay to raise your complaint to God. He knows your heart anyway. David did it frequently and, it is supposed, that he recognized the good that came from it. Pouring out all that ire, hurt, despair, doubt, unforgiveness, stubbornness, bitterness, and confusion will do several things for you.

You will be able to articulate exactly what has got you so upset. Then you can consider whether it is crucially important to do something about, or whether it is something that you can set behind you just as God puts our sins behind His back never to be thought of again. After the outburst is over, and the tears have been wiped away, you can then consider the next step in a more calm state of mind. This is critical because all that bad stuff blows toward God rather than on your loved ones. This is a major achievement because God can actually do something about the trouble in your heart, whereas, your loved ones don’t have that kind of power.

This leads to another vital point which is that God cannot be tempted to sin by all our hurtful bitterness and anger, but our loved ones can be moved to exasperation beyond control. It is always best to get rid of it. Make that decision for it to never sit and fester like an untreated sore. Once it is out in the open between you and God, determine not to wallpaper your mind with it again. You must redecorate your mind with wholesome things rather than unwholesome things. That is not a simple thing to do.

That is why God is such a great baby buggy bumper. God will absorb it for us. We can bounce anything off Him and He is none the worse for wear. If we try that with our friends and loved ones,
we never know if we have nicked or pricked them with our own hurt. God will never allow anything to happen to us beyond what we can withstand. He is the escape hatch, if we only will utilize it.

Psalm 55:16 I, even I, will call to God, and Jehovah will save me. 17 Evening and morning, and at noon, I will pray and cry aloud; and He shall hear my voice. 18 He has delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me; for there were many with me. And in Psalm 141:10 Let the wicked fall into their own nets together, while I escape.

When someone finds your goat and steals it, then first listen to God’s voice as He says, “Peace. Be still.” Say the first ten words of the Lord’s Prayer. Pour out every bit of your ire, bitterness, hurt, un-forgiveness, and stubbornness before Him. Every time you think of what has hurt you, pray one of David’s prayers. Trust God to vindicate you. He absolutely will. You may never know it or hear of it, but He will. Know that others are watching how you handle the situation and judging Jesus by your responses. Is that fair? Of course not, but nothing in this life is really fair. We’ll have to wait until Heaven for that.
There was a man, I recall, whose feet were shod in thin leather sandals, his coat was well worn and his prayer shawl was beautiful in its simplicity. The tzit tzit on his shawl were short, unlike the priests’ prayers shawls with tassels that dragged behind them as they walked the street.

His face was not handsome like those silly girls at home giggled over, but I have never seen a face so full of peace and kindness as this man’s face except the first time I saw it.

That day, I thought no man would forget. It was almost the Passover. I hurried mother onto the donkey and we set out to make sacrifice and to pay my Temple tax. I had worked and saved for months to pay the half shekel to the Temple for me and the kolbon, a halfpenny, to the priest who collected the Temple tax. Women did not have to pay this so my labor was not extended to pay for mother. It embarrasses me to say this, but she did not flux anymore so we did not have to purchase the doves to sacrifice either, well enough for my back, I assure you.

I settled mother in a cozy little room in her sister’s house, and then waded through the throng to the Temple gates. I waited my turn in the long line to purchase my ticket for the drink offering while the court was teeming with birds and cattle and people. The
sheep were bleating, the cattle lowing and the birds set up a cacophony that the people shouted over. How anyone could worship in this din was beyond my comprehension. I wondered if God could hear me think over this squawking and screeching.

I watched as a frail looking young woman tried to keep hold of her two doves’ sacrifice. One kept fluttering and wiggling until it broke free. It flew around the court of the Gentiles and finally came to rest on top of the very cage it had been extracted from. Horrified, I watched as it scuttled back into the cage. I grabbed the other bird she was struggling with and tied a string around its feet and handed that to her amidst her cries of gratefulness. I broke the line, marched to the head of the dove line and demanded the man give her back the bird that had escaped from her. He was adamant he was not going to do as I bid until another came as confirmation of my witness. Reluctantly and with the slowness of a flower budding, he retrieved the bird and gave it to the woman. I was disgusted at the trick.

I redeemed my purchased ticket for my drink offering, and then stood in line at the altar. The silver basin gleamed in the bright sunlight, twinkling and I fancied I saw God grinning at me over the dove incident. Since it came aright, I supposed it was all right to laugh at how that freed dove made the whole crowd duck and cover their heads. I poured my fourth of a hin of wine into the basin and for a moment, the way it swirled in the bottom and then drained onto the altar it looked like free flowing blood, covering the whole. I shivered and went to purchase the single lamb for our Passover.

I gazed at the bullocks in the corner of the court. I longed to be able to purchase one for the Chagiga, tomorrow’s feast. Once again, we must purchase for the feast from a vendor who sold portions instead of wholes. Seven days, the Passover lasted. I sighed, for I would have loved to have sat in the Temple the whole time and learned from the Priests and the Rabbis as they taught the Scriptures. I hungered for it, like a starving man— boy—for I was not yet
full grown. One day…

I tossed my half shekel into the trumpet chest for the Temple tax and then put into the greedy hand of the man sitting beside the chest the *kolbon*, payment for the privilege of paying my tax. If it wouldn’t make my brain hurt, I would have figured up how much that man would have made in a day of collecting the Temple tax. It was more than I could ever hope to make in all my days. I smiled then. I knew God provided just enough for mother and me and there were no headaches from too much figuring. I was satisfied.

Turning from that table, I glanced up into a pair of eyes that held me rooted to the spot. I thought my heart would not stay in my chest; it leaped in joy so greatly. I knew not who he was, but I greatly desired to know him. His expression softened as he looked at me. He picked me up as if I weighed nothing and set me beside the wall out of the way. I had no idea why he did this until I watched his expression harden as he surveyed the court. I pressed back; flattening against the wall for the look on His face as He gazed around the court was black enough to cause lightening to strike. His expression bespoke an anger great enough to cause lightening to strike. His expression bespoken an anger great enough at what He saw to call down fire from the sky. Then His gaze roamed over the cattle and the birds and the tables with stacks of money, His mouth hardened into a thin line and His shoulders set; the muscles of His arms flexed and His jaw clenched. The Man was full of wrath.

Amazingly, not one priest or scribe or any member of the Sanhedrin noticed this Man full of fury. I was rooted to my spot in fascination, for I could imagine what was to come next.

He bent over and scooped up some strips of rawhide from the court floor. He up ended a keg and sat down. I was stupefied. What? Where was the thunder and lightening? Where was the purifying flame which would clean out this man-created cesspool in God’s Holy House? I stole a glance at His face. His jaw worked his beard as His teeth gritted. There were white anger lines around His
lips and His eyes flashed a promise of vengeance. My young heart was ready for a good fight and a few bloody noses.

Those eyes never left the noisy business of the court as His fingers deftly fashioned a whip. It took more than an hour for the whip to be shaped. As each minute passed, His expression never softened. I was amazed that no one took notice of Him, not even the owner of the keg upon which He sat.

Then He stood.

I held my breath.

The sharp crack of the whip caused a momentary silence as the people sought out the source of the sound. That silence made my ears ring after such a deafening roar and then the sharp crack. I never thought the court could get noisier. The women set up such a screeching that my bones rattled. I put my hands over my ears. My head pounded with the clamor and my breath stopped. I wanted out of there but I couldn’t move for fear of being trampled. People scattered like ants on a stomped on hill. I regret to say that was a fascinating pastime in my younger years.

He started in one corner and cracked the whip again. I was so jealous of how He made that sound. I was determined to learn how to do that. He cracked it over the heads of the cattle and they startled, rearing up and backing away, trampling the feet of their owners, and breaking down the rickety walls of their cages. The corrals fell flat and the sheep scurrying off, split in a half dozen streams, bleating their terror. The chaotic sound magnified as it bounced around the stone walls of the court.

Then He drove all the animals from the Temple straight into the streets of Jerusalem. The whip was cracking over their heads like sharp bursts of thunder. The men grabbed at the hems of their garments, pulled them between their legs and tucked them in their girdles. Off they scrambled after their cattle and sheep. At another time, the mayhem would have been laughable. The Man then laid
hold of the tables, one by one the tables were flipped into the air, money tinkled and jangled all about, but the people were too stunned to scrabble through the muck for the coins. Well, the ordinary people were too stunned. The priests and the scribes dropped to hands and knees and searched through the cracks and crevices and all the muck to find each coin. Their hands and clothes became fouled. The stench they stirred up moved me to leave the place, but not before I heard the Man shout at the sellers of doves, “Take these things from here! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise.”

He’d said, “My Father’s house.” I knew the instant my gaze met his that this Man was someone so very special. I longed to follow him, to get to know him. Hush, a priest had screwed up courage to approach him.

“What sign do you give us that you have authority to do this?”

The Man turned to the priest, His fury softened a mite, but the priest backed away from him. “Destroy this sanctuary and in three days I will raise it up.”

Bravely, the priest scoffed, “It took forty and six years to build this and do you raise it in three days?”

Jesus. I heard his name whispered in the crowd. Jesus then tossed the whip in the muck and strode from the court, His shoulders wide and his stride firm, confident. I could not help myself. I ran after Him. I had to know this man.

His name was Jesus. For seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, I stayed close to Him. I drank in His words. I learned more from Him than from all that Rabbi ben Phenias taught. I was so thankful I had learned my scriptures for the Man quoted from them constantly. He spoke of things that I had wondered at and had questioned, and now they were explained. Those around me scoffed. They would throw questions at Him and were angry at His answers.
Alas, I had to take mother home to our little hamlet, but I watched and listened for news of this Jesus. When ever He came near, I would hasten to where He was. One day, there was a vast crowd gathered on a hillside. I hurried with my chores that morning so I would not miss His teachings. Mother pressed a basket in my hand before I left, but I barely noticed until that evening.

When he looked down at my young face, his eyes thanked me and blessed me in greater terms than if he had handed me a bag of gold. He acted like I had handed him a gift of great value, like the basket was made of gold and the fish and bread were rubies and diamonds. Even my mother never acted with such gratitude as that when I gave her my few earned coins at the end of the day. Oh, he didn’t do anything except pat my shoulder and look at me. But, glory, this Man was great at saying things without speaking a word!

I watched his hands, big and gentle, break those fish and bread. Then his voice so sweetly blessed the food and God. Mother was completely undone when I brought several baskets of food home with me. I didn’t have to work for a whole week! I wanted to know more about this man. I heard everything he said. I went about gathering information like I was going to report it at school. In fact, I did. After I recited the sayings of Ezekiel, I reported on what I had seen and heard.

Rabbi ben Phenias scoffed, “How could such a small one see prophecy fulfilled in such a small bit of scripture?”

I wavered. I had been so excited to remember what I had seen this man Jesus do with that little bit of food and then to recite the saying, “And I will raise up over them one Shepherd. And He shall feed them. My servant David, He shall feed them, and He shall be their Shepherd.” And especially after I had looked into His eyes; surely this Man was sent by God. I heard Him say so and the miracle could not be done by anyone but from God. But, my mind was young, then. Who was I to question the Rabbi, who had studied the sayings and the scrip-
tures all his life? So, I tucked the thoughts and memory away to be considered one day when I was older, more learned, and more versed in Scripture and the Sayings.

I stored up the things I studied. I did not just recite by rote, I tried to understand what I was learning, and then reciting. This God that we worshiped, this God of my father and his father and his father and all the fathers before was magnificent. He was power and might. He fed the children of Israel for forty years. He parted the sea and made the bottom dry ground. He struck down great armies. He made the sun reverse its course for a day so the children of Israel could win a battle. He walked in the fire with the three friends of Daniel. His hand holds the earth and He sits on the circle of the earth. He put each star in place. He lets loose the rain and holds back the waters of the sea. His word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. He answers the prayers of the lowly. He promised a Shepherd that would feed His flock, who would heal the sick, and make the lame walk and the blind see and the dead walk. His power and might knows no bounds.

I drank in His words like a thirsty man collapsed on the desert floor. I believed Him. He healed the sick, made the lame walk and the blind to see again. I believed Him, but I was too young to follow Him.

Three years passed, no, more than three. I gathered in all I could hear about this Man. I searched for Him every Passover and was never disappointed. I noted that the priests and scribes grew more agitated at His presence and teaching than a mother bird is agitated at an egg-stealing snake. One time, they fluttered and fussed and picked up stones, and Jesus just melted away right in front of my eyes. He was there and then He was not. I was astounded.

Brothers, today I stand before you, a man of great conviction that Jesus is the Son of God and that He lives. Today we are talking about what our Brother Paul discusses in his letter to the Galatians.
Paul tells us about the fruit of the Spirit. When you believe Him, He comes to indwell your heart and you, too, can exhibit this fruit. I wanted to give you an eyewitness account of Self-control. On the thirteenth of Nisan, in the year our Lord was crucified, I witnessed such self-control that has never been exhibited to this day. Pardon me whilst I wipe my eyes, it is difficult for me to contain my grief at the thought of our precious Jesus on the cross.

Yes, it was the thirteenth of Nisan. I had just poured my drink offering into the silver basin, and I turned to watch the poor, dressed in ragged homespun, laboriously counting out their Temple taxes to priests dressed in fine linen, dripping in gold chains. I saw the money changers dressed in purples and fine linen miscounting in their exchanging Temple coin for foreign coin. I saw doves wiggle and flutter out of poor women’s hands, flying back into their cages. I saw exorbitant prices paid for lambs that could be bought at home for a few coins. Bullocks brought fortunes to their sellers while the waste from these animals fouled the Temple floor and air. I was sickened at the noise and at the evil that had again pervaded the Lord’s Temple.

The crowd parted for an instant and I looked directly into those eyes again. The white marks of anger were back around his lips, his shoulders were set and his jaw worked his beard. The Man was holding back white, hot fury, again.

I had learned over the past few years that this Man, the Son of God, had the power in his finger tips to consume the whole of the mountain, not just the Temple or the people in it. It was going to be a huge uproar and I wasn’t about to miss one second of it.

I scampered to a corner and settled on a keg to watch.

His feet never once stopped in hesitation. He strode to the corrals and tossed down the rickety walls, driving out the cattle, shooing the sheep and overturning the tables of the moneychangers. All the while He was shouting, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a
"house of prayer."” He tossed another table into the air, “But you,” He growled the word, “have turned it into den of thieves. You have defiled the Sabbath and this House.”

On that fateful day He was crucified, this Man who is the Son of God had even more self-control. He stayed upon the cross. When He had angels to command, when He had all the riches of Heaven, when He could calm the wind and still the waves with just a word, “Peace, be still”, this Man chose to stay on the cross, and what’s more, He asked forgiveness for those who crucified Him. They knew not what they did. He is the height of love, mercy, and looking past the shame of the cross to the joy beyond it with us on His mind, my brothers. Pay heed today. That, my friends, is self-control beyond comprehension.

With one breath from His mouth, He could have consumed them with fire, yet He did not. In the Temple, He scattered the cattle and sheep, He did not kill them. He scattered the people, He did not kill them. Our brother Peter teaches that God does not pour out His wrath upon this people who deserve His wrath because His desire is that all come to Him and to not perish. Our God is holding back His white-hot fury so that all those who desire to become His can have that opportunity. Make no mistake, His wrath will be poured out and the earth will melt, make sure you are not one of those caught in the flames.
You just know it is from God…

Numerous times God has spoken to me or given me a delight for encouragement. Oh, not out loud, but in such a way I knew it was Him talking to me.

I was on my teeth-grinding drive home from Arizona after my second husband decided he didn’t want to be married anymore. I was devastated, and I wanted to turn back. God kept nudging me forward. Finally, the whole western sky was a brilliant orange and I heard plain as day, “I’ve got your back.” That night as I lay in a hard, motel bed, I was sobbing my eyes out and crying out to God, “Why? What is so terribly wrong with me?” I felt Him press me into the mattress, covering me with His hands, and I heard, “You are acceptable to me, beloved. You need only worry about what I say.” The next day, my heart was lighter but I was still angry.

Along about Albuquerque, I was enjoying the sun on the snow. I’m a Southern Magnolia and we don’t see snow much. Only often enough to know what it is when we see it. For miles and miles the pristine snow stretched out on both sides of the interstate highway. So I got a thought in my head about bringing some of that snow back to sweltering Louisiana. I didn’t have a thing to put it in except a plastic bag. But, I decided to stop. At the next exit, I drove down the ramp and pulled to the side of the road. Right where I
stopped, there were some deer tracks which angled from the North, across the road through the ditch and around the maintenance building then off into the distance. A jack rabbit had hopped right over those tracks. What a find! I scooped up those deer tracks and rabbit tracks, putting them in the bag and tossed it into the seat next to me. Back on the road, I chuckled and then laughed out loud. God is so funny. Only God could have directed the timing of those animals and the timing of my arrival to the exact point of intersection on that day at that hour. All I had to do was glance in the seat beside me at that melted snow and I would grin. The lighter mood lasted the rest of the way home.

I stopped in Amarillo for the night. It was freezing cold and it must have snowed after I laid my head down because I had to scrape a goodly portion of ice and snow from the windshield. There’s wasn’t a cloud in the sky when I set out. The first flush of dawn was just a thought in the back of God’s mind because He had done a spectacular job on the stars. When I hit Wichita Falls and turned south, the sky was crystal and I remembered something about a green flash that happened right at the second the sun touched the horizon; the atmosphere giving it a prism effect. Not many people get to see this because conditions must be exactly right, so I was glad I had remembered and decided to watch for it.

I saw the first rays streak across that crystal sky and it was so beautiful it took my breath away. In the space of about a second, I glanced back at the road with a sigh because the green flash had not happened for me that morning. As I sipped my coffee and thanked God for the morning, the sky, right at the horizon, turned this brilliant emerald green and the color flashed across the sky from east to west. I was stunned. It was one of the most spectacular things I had ever seen and it happened so quickly I could have missed it with the blink of my eyes.

I pondered the wonder of that as I drove through Dallas and
then home. God reached down to me to give me a delight to lift my sore heart. That trip was best thing I could have done to start the painful process of healing. It was just me and God on the road. I learned a lot about myself and about God. He absolutely does care deeply about each of us and what happens to us. He’s right there every second, in total control, like with the deer and rabbit tracks. Every time I glanced in the seat beside me at that bag of melted snow, I felt God’s personal presence. I brought those deer tracks home to my Daddy. What a hoot that was!

“What’s this?” Dad cleared his throat as he peered through the water in the bag.

“Deer tracks and rabbit tracks,” I tossed at him dragging my suitcase from the back seat.

“Whaaaa--deer tracks!”

I told him what I’d done and where I’d scooped up the snow. He started laughing then and chuckled every little while then he told Mom, “I’m bringing that to church tomorrow.” She just laughed, aware of the “Top this!” game that he and someone at church were constantly playing. They would each bring something back from a trip... some gag gift or novelty toy and give it to the other just to watch the grins and hear the chuckles from everyone. Whatever it was, it would cause a stir in folks as they tried to figure out what it was or would laugh over the saying on the thing.

On Sunday, after I got my coffee at church, I passed a clump of people peering into that bag of water and one fellow was saying, “Yeah, I think I see it. What was it again?”

It’s a God thing.

_Blessed are ye who weep now, for ye shall laugh_ Luke 6:21b
I get to the screaming point. I want to shout out the truth,  
But to no avail.  
I work and work at trying to be what God wants me to be  
And I always fail.

Help me, Lord.  
Carry me over the fjord.  
The chasm is deep and  
I weep.  

Dry my tears.  
Release me from my fears.  
Carry the truth to those ears that refuse to hear the truth.  

Put back that hair that I have pulled out.  
Rub the steel bands that are supposed to be my shoulders  
for I am done with things as they are, to no longer look back and pout.  
Whisper my name, cause me to be still.  

Tomorrow I shall go forward,  
leaving behind the crumbs and the rust  
of broken things.  
Tonight I shall snuggle under Your wings  
for it is only You that I trust.
Tree of no Fruit, dealing with depression

Habakkuk 3:17 *Though the fig tree shall not blossom, and fruit is not on the vines; the work of the olive fails, and the fields make no food; the flock is cut off from the fold, and no herd is in the stalls,*

Ever had a day like that? Raise your hands because I know you have. You sit at your desk and look at the sun coming up and the depression that oppresses your soul is like a sore tooth, but you do not know where the soreness is coming from or why it is there. Life should be good. But, it is not at this precise moment.

Seriously, I never thought Habakkuk could ever teach me a lesson. I do not think I’ve ever heard a sermon on Habakkuk. But, there it was in black and white. Verse seventeen of chapter three. Yes. I felt that way. Empty. Void. Depressed. Where is the fruit that God needs from me? Where is the stuff that He works through me? What use am I to the Lord God, or to anyone else? There seemed to be a numbness pervading my being. Verse 17 described it perfectly.

Then I read verse 18.

Habakkuk 3:18 *yet I will exalt in Jehovah; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.*
It’s like Job declares, “Though He slay me, I will still praise Him.”

Something cracked inside as I read that verse. A dam burst; no, it was more like a glacier melting. In the time it takes to blink, a thousands years could expire, but that all depends upon perspective. God has no time constraints because He invented time. From my perspective, thirty seconds can seem like ten years sometimes. Those few months of grief were but a speck in my time line, and do not amount to a nanosecond in God’s time. And it all means absolutely nothing compared to the wonders God has planned for eternity. My little spot of woes won’t matter one whit a million years from now, unlike the woe Jesus withstood. By then I’ll have been with my glorious Father for a million years. That is true, but in a million years will doing the works of God matter? Will fruit matter?

When Hurricane Charley blasted through Florida, my cousin’s grapefruit tree was six years old and was about to bear some fruit. Charley ravaged it badly. In the following year, though, it leafed out beautifully, but no fruit. My cousin consulted an arborist who told her the tree was sacrificing its fruit so that it could survive, and it might take several more years before it finally bore fruit. Survival of itself was more important to the tree than its bearing fruit and its own procreation. We are so much like that, because we have such a tenacious hold on life.

However, to God, fruit is the purpose for the tree. The fruit is the important thing which is one reason Jesus died on the cross.

Matthew 21:19 And seeing one fig tree by the road, He went up to it, and found nothing on it except leaves only. And He said to it, Let there be no more fruit from you forever. And the fig tree immediately dried up.

The lesson from Jesus? No fruit, no life.

Jonah blathers about Nineveh’s repentance and pouts on a hill. God causes a vine to grow that protects Jonah from the scorching sun and the beating heat. Then God causes a worm to eat the vine, the vine withers and Jonah, fainting from the sun and heat,
pouts even more. I can see God shaking his head at Jonah.

“Don’t you get it yet, son?” God asks. “You have pity for a plant that lasted twenty-four hours, how much more pity I have on the more that 120,000 innocents of Nineveh who do not know their right hand from their left hand.” God gave those innocents mercy and grace, and the people of Nineveh repented of their wickedness, turning to the One True God. Though they did not deserve it, they had Grace. While they were yet sinners, God gave them a chance to live for him. Those people of Nineveh were just like that grapefruit tree and the fig tree. One hundred years after Jonah pouted under a withered up vine, the great city that Nimrod built and that Sennacherib made even greater and more lavish crumbled under the heel of Nebopolassar, a Babylonian leader. It was destroyed just as God told Jonah to prophesy that it would.

The prophet Nahum cried out against the seacoast city of Assyria which was a nation that had the opportunity to bear huge amounts of fruit, but went back to worshiping gods that had no eyes to see and no ears to hear.

Nahum 3:1-4 Woe to the bloody city! All of it is a lie, all of plunder; the prey is not withdrawn. The sound of a whip, and the sound of rattling of a wheel, and a galloping horse, and of a bounding chariot. The horseman lifts up both the gleam of the sword and the lightning of the spear, and many are slain, and there are a mass of dead bodies, and no end of corpses; they stumble on their dead bodies, because of the many harlotries of the well favored harlot, the mistress of sorceries who sells nations by her harlotries, and families by her sorceries.

God spent a lot of time teaching me, training me, carrying me, dancing with me, loving me and walking with me. Now it is time that I walk His way, follow His steps, wait for His timing, bear His fruit, and work His works.

This is the recipe that God provided for us to withstand the kind of depression that Satan blankets us with from time to time in order to break our relationship with our beloved Lord. Satan is hop-
ing that we’ll fold up into ourselves and become like that fig tree with no fruit.

What God desires of us is to labor and be ready which is all about other people. When we quit focusing on the inside stuff and pour out the joy toward others, there is a shield which blocks Satan’s depression net. We don’t have time to worry so much (which is a sin of itself). Bearing fruit suppresses depression.

_The joy of the LORD is our strength._ Nehemiah 8:10.
Being A Well Watered Garden

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To lose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh? Isaiah 58

Those words of Isaiah found in chapter 58 shed a great deal of light on the mission that our forefathers set down for these United States. Isn’t this what we are doing in Iraq, and Afghanistan? Just asking. It seems so to me. Isn’t it what our church does when it reaches out to the oppressed of our cities, towns, villages, of our great country? Isn’t it what we do when we take a stand for what is right and speak out against what is wrong?

Ah... then. Then your light shall break forth like the morning, Your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry and He will say, ‘Here I am.’”

God’s promise is not that we will have no hurts or sicknesses. His promise is that our healing will be speedy if we do His will, follow His commands and keep the Lord’s Day Holy. God’s will is clear. We are to be the champion of the downtrodden. But more importantly, we are to give God all the glory for what we do and
what He gives. Amazingly He has always provided for His work and always will. The Children of Israel were to ask the Egyptians for gold, silver, jewels, fine clothing and the Egyptians gave them everything they asked for. This is what the LORD’s Tabernacle was made from. This provision was also what they made the gold calf from which was doubly evil because they took what God provided for Himself and made an idol, and worshipped it. At that time, God was swift with punishment. Today, He is longsuffering, desiring none to perish, wanting no person to have zero opportunity to come to Him and be saved. Let us not give to idols—work, greed, play, foul desires, or inanimate objects which steal our affection for God—what belongs to God Almighty.

It is mercy not sacrifice that the LORD loves. He, speaking through His prophet Isaiah in the fifty-eighth chapter is explicit. His children are to remove the yokes of oppression, quit pointing fingers of shame and speaking wickedness. We are to extend compassion and help to those who are hungry, satisfying them with spiritual food as well as physical comfort.

Then our light will brighten the gloom of this world. He will guide us constantly and continually through the valley of the shadow of death, strengthen our bones, help us to heal quickly; and well will be like a well-watered garden full of life and peace with eternal living water ever ready to refresh those close to us. God has promised this (very loose paraphrase of Isaiah 58).

I know God can do what He says He can do. I know that He has in my life and has engraved me in His palm. I praise His Holy Name, HaShem for strengthening my bones and for not only giving me water in a dry and thirsty land, but making me a spring of water which never fails in that dry and thirsty land. All I have to do is keep Him first. Is that hard? You betcha it’s hard. Is it worth the struggle with the old self, the old man? Absolutely. God never fails, He always keeps His promises, and life with Him is far more wonderful
because we do not have to do anything without Him. The Christian life is impossible to live without the strong arm of God, the Lion of Judah. Do I need to repeat that statement? No man can do it within his own strength; no believer can live up to that higher standard that being a child of God requires. This is why being a bond servant of His has so much freedom.

Revelation 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And the one hearing, let him say, Come! And the one thirsting, let him come; and the one desiring, let him take of the water of life freely. The One Who testified to these things says, “Yes. I am coming quickly.” Yes, come, Lord Jesus, come!
How to bring God glory…

I heard a long time ago our purpose is to bring God glory. At the time, it seemed a daunting task. I though all I had to do was obey God and adhere to the Great Commission and God’s glory would take care of itself. Someone once said that God doesn’t share His glory. I immediately thought of Moses asking God to show him His glory so God put him in the cleft of a rock and allowed him to see His backside.

That is both terrifying and a little bit strange to me. Terrifying because Moses, chosen by God, and spoke with God mouth to mouth, could not see God’s full glory. He was so close to God that his face glowed and he had to cover it before he went in front of the people. God is so holy that being in His presence can kill. That instills in me such fear I am awestruck. I have this image of God walking away and all this shimmering glory is trailing behind Him. I want to bask in that glory, but I’m fearful of the overpowering fullness that causes.

Strange because God showed him His backside as He walked away. It just strikes me as a little amusing and greatly extraordinary. It seems the only way Moses could remain in the cleft and not fall on his face in a dead faint was to see God’s backside. When Daniel was confronted by God, he fainted. John instantly fell on his face in worship, even though he had rested on His breast at the Last Supper. When confronted with the full glory, people can’t seem to remain standing. Now, if that doesn’t just send shivers down your back.
Let us count the ways to glorify God…

We can do a word search to discover numerous ways God created for us to give Him glory. According to Scripture, Romans 4:20 *and did not stagger by unbelief at the promise of God, but was empowered by faith, giving glory to God*, Our faith gives glory to God, coupled with belief. Some would have it that faith and belief are the same. I am not so positive of that because I see so many disbelieving God, yet solid in faith that He can take care of any problem, just not positive He will do it for them. Believing is akin to Faith which is akin to Trust. All three are the same diamond, but are different facets to the diamond. In John 11:40 *Jesus said to her, Did I not say to you that if you would believe you will see the glory of God?* This is the New Testament affirmation.

Psalm 50:23 *Whoever offers thanks glorifies Me; and he who prepares a way, I will show the salvation of God to him.* Our praises and thanksgivings give glory to God. If we confess our sins and abandon them, our calling upon God will bring Him glory. Acknowledging we have sinned, accepting Jesus as the only way to the Father, and finally repenting of our sins is the way to salvation, and the way to bring Jesus glory.

John 21:19 *But He said this signifying by what death he would glorify God. And having said this, He told him, Follow Me.* Jesus told Peter how His death would glorify God. I believe it was Jesus’ obedience that also glorified God. By our own obedience, we glorify God reflecting Him to the world.

In 1 Corinthians 10:31 *Then whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things to the glory of God.* 32 *Be without offense both to Jews and Greeks, and to the assembly of God.* 33 *Even as I also please all in all things, not seeking my own advantage, but that of the many, that they may be saved.* What ever we do, we are to do it to glorify God. I’m thinking that if we had this at the forefront of our minds the instant we wake up, our day would probably be different, and at the end of the day, we
would have much to be thankful for, and many more would be saved. Come on now, you know I’m correct about this.

We find in 2 Thessalonians 1:11 *For which we also continually pray concerning you, that our God would deem you worthy of the calling, and would fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness, and work of faith in power,* 12 *so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.* Here we see two things, “continuous prayer” of the saints for their brethren; and “worthy of the calling” on purpose of God’s good pleasure. This tells me our good purpose is impossible to do under our own energy and own will. We must have intercessory prayer over us so that we can do those works that God has called us to do which brings Him glory. Intercessory prayer is a must, not an option or a suggestion. Jesus practices intercession while sitting at His Father’s right hand. We find it in Hebrews 7:25 *And from this He is able to save to the end completely the ones drawing near to God through Him, forever living to intercede on their behalf.*

How easy it is to pray for those that we love, and how hard it is to pray for those who intend us harm. A man was told to pray for one who was doing him great harm. It was hard other than the God-please-bless-so-and-so kind of prayer. Then God got in his face and told him to pray as fervently and earnestly for this guy as he prayed for himself. Ouch! What a toe stumper that is. Years later this man saw the one for whom he was commanded to pray and the guy told him what a witness for Jesus he had been. That brought God great glory. It also illustrates how emphatically God uses us to forward His good purposes, sometimes without us even knowing He is doing it. Think Job, for example.

Which brings me to this: allowing God to work through us brings Jesus glory and glory to God. John 15:8 *In this My Father is glorified, that you should bear much fruit; and you will be My disciples.* The work of our hands brings God glory. The fruit of the harvest brings
God glory. The fields are white for harvest and are readied to bring God glory, astounding to fathom.

1 Peter 4:16 *But if one suffers as a Christian, do not let him be ashamed, but to glorify God in this respect.* Our trials and tribulations bring God glory. In this we should rejoice. I knew it was good if we suffered for Jesus sake, but I did not know that it brought Him glory. How astonishing that the one true God is glorified by trials and tribulations. Of course, they only bring glory to Him when we truly act like His children. Setting on a pew hatching out nothing reflects nothing and is like a dark lighthouse over treacherous coastal rocks.

Somehow, that makes all this trouble that is common to man seem like a very good thing. Anyone care to rejoice with me? Rejoice, rejoice and again I say rejoice. If only I could remember all this when I’m struggling in those trials and tribulations.
Stopped Long Enough To Hear God...

Going to and fro, hardly time enough to sleep much less time to smell the coffee, or drink it while it’s hot. Sound familiar? You don’t have to have two small children and a husband to feel like that, or hold down two jobs, or have a demanding family that you are trying to house, feed and clothe all with the shrinking dollar. There is a term used today - Time Poverty. We all suffer from it, or do we really. What exactly is sucking up all our time?

Do we sit in front of the computer for hours on end? Do we hold a phone to our ears chatting with dozens of people? Do we sit in front of the TV watching football... movies... soaps... inane sitcoms, all the while tuning out the humdrum life?

Ever notice the amount of people in the hospital and in prison who suddenly find Jesus? Perhaps it is because those are the ones who have stopped life’s treadmill long enough to actually spend time with Him and to listen to Him. We Christians are supposed to be Quick to hear the Word of God, Slow to speak – be quiet, be still and hear what He speaks to our hearts. A lot of us don’t want to hear what God is saying because He doesn’t seem to be saying what we want to hear. We know He knows what’s best, but sometimes He doesn’t agree with us on how a particular prob-
lem or issue should be handled. We’ve got it all figured out. After all, we seem to manage our families, children, parents, spouses okay, why shouldn’t a certain problem be handled the way we think it should?

Oh, we know that God’s ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. But, God is way up there and we’re down here in the trenches doing the actual fighting, correct? We’re the ones in the line of fire and we know the situation, correct?

We are a gluttonous people. We supersize everything and we get cranky when we don’t get large portions of everything, get it quick, and get it our way. We’ve been incredibly spoiled. We’ve got piles and piles of things on our plates with places to go and people to see and problems to solve. What happened to asking God what He thinks? It went by the wayside when we quit riding horses and started driving cars. It went by the wayside when we invited that stranger with the foul mouth that brings bad news, which spews all kinds of filth from cable channels into our living rooms. It has one eye and never listens, constantly spewing noise into the family and in constant competition with radio and children, and interrupts quiet conversation. We don’t know how to write letters anymore. We don’t know how to correctly spell words with all the C U L8TR (See you later) texting.

I lament the days when we went to friends homes after church for cake and coffee, when we sitting on the porch and watching the people walking their dogs was the evening entertainment; so often chatting with them that we never noticed a mosquito bite or two. I miss sitting under the street lamps telling stories, playing Can You Top This, or ghost stories and scaring ourselves silly.

Those were the days when God was the LORD of this nation, when we had prayer in school, when morals and high ethical standards reigned instead of this “relative” stuff permeating our brains. The LORD set us free as a nation, and it was Christ who set
us free from sin. Our forefathers signed the Declaration of Independence knowing all the while that it could mean treason and that meant hanging by the neck until dead. All fifty-six men who signed that document knew God and honored Him. All twelve of the Apostles knew that following that upstart Jesus could mean death, and they never denied Him; they died honoring Him and spreading the Gospel. That is miles from where we are today.

Jesus said take up your cross and follow me. Deny yourself, lose your life and you will save it.

Deny yourself??? What? We don’t even give up dessert!
What is crooked cannot be made straight

I have been thinking about this for quite some time. Only God can make something crooked straight. The froward (stubborn disobedience) disposition of mankind cannot be straightened by mankind either individually or corporately. That is essentially what Solomon is saying in the verse in Ecclesiastes 1:15. This is precisely why believers cannot live the Christian lifestyle within their own power or their own wisdom. The standard of living under grace is set so high for Christians that only God can diminish the old self and magnify the new creation.

In order for God to make the crooked straight, we must surrender to God’s will. Someone in my Sunday School class said she didn’t think that God really cared about the mundane in our lives. After all, why would He care what dress we wore or if our shoes were comfortable? He has so many more important things on His mind. Like what He has in mind for the Bride of Christ, world events, and answering prayers of heads of state. Such things are an excellent overview of the different kinds of Wills of God. His perfect will, His absolute will, His divine will, and His personal will for each of His children.

There is a personal will because He designed our good works
before the foundation of the world. I believe that He is intensely interested in His people. He cares if you are late for work, if you are hungry, or if you are dressed in a manner that is pleasing to Him. We know this because of what is written about Him in scripture.

George Muller said, “our outward man is not fit for work unless our inward man eats God’s Word.” I am reminded so much of Jesus sitting by that well in Samaria, hot, tired, thirsty and hungry, but He talked to a woman. When His disciples returned with food pressing Him to eat, He replied that He had “food to eat which you do not know.” It’s that Spiritual thing which supplies the soul far beyond any kind of satisfaction the body could possibly know - including chocolate brownies hot from the oven.

**Fact:** We should steep ourselves in God’s Word every day. Not this one verse a day with a few paragraphs of devotional (I am not saying that isn’t good! It is. It is just that ten minutes a day is not enough!) Never wait until a problem needs solving or a decision needs to be made to open the Bible, then expect some Holy Oracle to spill forth giving you exact instructions. Your mind won’t be prepared to **hear** exact instructions unless you are prayed up, read up, revved up, and shored up in Christ. You may get a notion of what to do, but it won’t be the same as if you were rooted in Scripture.

**Fact:** There is much to be learned with context. It is far too easy to get something that isn’t entirely Biblical or to skew doctrine when only reading Proof Texts rather than the whole discussion. How does one know truth from fiction if one does not know the whole story? With this same premise, how does one know God’s complete will, if one isn’t familiar with the Bible? The first step to knowing and understanding His will is reading about how He dealt with His people. Abraham was created to be His friend. David was a man after His own heart. Jesus was His only begotten and beloved Son. And there are lessons upon lessons in how Jesus dealt with his followers.
Fact: Confession of sin opens the floodgates of your relationship with God. When temptation rears its ugly head, the mind reels with its heady steam, the body follows the thoughts and pursues a course of action that the soul knows is wrong, this action puts the soul, mind, and body at odds with God. Disobedience is the wall between you and God. Confession is that which tears the wall down. If the wall is up, the ears are closed and there’s no hearing God, no matter how much you want to hear Him, you can’t. Confess that sin (both of commission and omission). It is the only way to restoration and revival. Otherwise you are in a Spiritual Coma. If you stay in a Spiritual Coma, you run the risk of being tossed in the dog food bag and placed in the dumpster! (See the first chapter: The Refreshing.)

Fact: You probably already know God’s will on most things in your life. You know to dress modestly. You know that a job which is morally or legally wrong is against God’s ten commandment teachings. You know if He has given you a propensity toward the mechanical (working with technology) or the physical (carpentry/construction) or the mental (math acumen or writing ability). Some people are better at certain things than other people. It is what makes the world go round and round.

Taking these facts in consideration, we can then walk a fairly straight path into God’s personal will for our life’s choices. Asking your self a few questions will help to generate some answers that will result in making godly decisions.

*Is it a legal, moral, spiritually correct thing to do?* Most people would say, “Well, duh!” Then again, perhaps this is why there are so many people becoming Christians in prison. This also includes all those possibilities that could hurt or harm other people. We are to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

*Did God make a promise in the Bible about this thing you are considering?* You may or may not be amazed at how many promises God has made that pertain to our daily Christian living.
word search or a Bible search on specifics will reveal a multitude of promises.

**Is the door to this path truly locked?** Many times we think a life path is blocked by God when actually there is something that God is wanting us to do, but we are resisting Him? I cannot tell you how many times I have had to do something that I really did not want to do, but I went ahead and did it because I knew it was what God wanted me to do. Then, after doing it I was blessed immensely. So many times, God is testing to see if we really mean it when we sing, “I surrender all, all to Thee, my Precious Savior, I surrender all.”

**During consideration of one or another of your choices, do you have peace in your soul?** This is something that a lot of Christians will tell you: You can’t depend upon your feelings. Feelings are no assurances, but the Holy Spirit’s reactions to certain things we do or certain things we think will cause conviction which causes feelings. The Holy Spirit is alive and well dwelling inside us. When we grieve Him, our soul hurts. When He rejoices, our soul also rejoices. This is because our soul is one with the Holy Spirit. It is He who makes us spiritually alive! He lets us know when we are confronted with temptation not to go down that path. He nags us when it is time to confess and get back right with God. It is the Holy Spirit that urges us, prays for us, interprets our deep groaning, and who seals us against all things Satanic or demonic. That is who should be in control of our feelings and when we get that Gut-Feeling of peace, and then the decision should be settled. Often times, the decision to do a particular thing is not reasonable or justifiable, but extremely peaceful. Go with the peace path because that is part of the Fruit of the Spirit.

**Can you absolutely ask God to enable you to do what ever it is?** Because of the first question, it would be ridiculous to ask God to help you rob a gas station, although there are other things
that may not be as obviously unethical or immoral, but just as wrong. Such as asking God to give you a promotion even though you are not qualified for the position. Asking God to bless your course of action without discussing it with Him in the first place is probably the fastest way to failure in a venture. The Acapulco divers always study the waves before diving off those cliffs. We Christians should take a lesson from the divers: Check to see how deep the water is before diving off the cliff.
I know Whom I have believed

One of my all time favorite verses is For I know Whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I’ve committed unto Him against that day, 2 Timothy 1:12. That verse struck a chord with Daniel W. Whittle in 1883 because he wrote a hymn which is found in most hymnals even though it is such a very old song. It has such a lyrical phrasing; I’m thinking that Paul must have sung those same words. How sweet to have that deep confidence and that utter trust in the One who saves us from that most heinous day of judgment. There is another verse in that chapter that holds sweet assurance, too.

In 2 Timothy 1:7 *For God did not give a spirit of cowardice to us, but of power and of love and of self-control.* Some translations call it a “spirit of fear”. Fear does not come from God, guess who it comes from? That old dragon who knows his time is drawing near and is getting angrier and angrier, but not more cunning. He just watches and listens and catches us when we are not looking at Jesus and looking down instead of up.

Paul is not talking about Fear of the Lord here. He is talking about that irrational (for Christians) fear that closes up our throats and gives us that adrenal rush of urgent flight when we come up against things we have a difficult time handling or don’t even want to face in our daily living. Things like losing a job, or facing cancer in our self or a loved one, uncertainty of the future. Satan uses those
feelings we have and intensifies them with his whisperings creating more fear if we allow him to do so.

A synonym for fear is “awe” which has a two-fold meaning.
1. a mixed feeling or reverence, fear and wonder caused by something majestic, sublime, sacred
2. the power of inspiring intense fear or fearful reverence.

Awe refers to a feeling of fearful or profound respect or wonder inspired by the greatness, superiority, grandeur and the like of a person or thing and suggests an immobilizing effect. Reverence is applied to a feeling of deep respect mingled with love for something one holds sacred or inviolable and suggests a display of homage, deference etc.”

That is a lot stronger than what is usually meant when we hear, “Oh that is awesome!” How trite that word sounds next to its literal meaning. When we acknowledge Satan’s whisperings with feelings of fear, we are actually giving him profound respect and to a lesser degree, homage and esteem. We should have a healthy respect for the Devil because he rules the earth, is the prince of the air, (Ephesians 2:2) and he sows disobedience, but we shouldn’t put him in the place that God fills.

I am inspired with an intense feeling of wonder, peace, respect and a feeling of being tiny and insignificant when I look at a sunrise or sunset knowing that God designed this perfect artwork. Is that just plain awe or reverential awe? Does that feeling of being insignificant put it into the “reverential awe” category?

I know it sounds as if I’m being facetious here, but I’m not. I think Fear of the Lord is categorized into two distinct parts. One is the respect and reverence that Christians give to our Father. The other is what will be felt by many unbelievers when they face the Great White Throne, that awful Day of Judgment. The first part is
action and the second is emotion. As Christians we are commanded to fear the LORD. Jesus said in Luke 12:5

   But I will make clear to you of whom you are to be in fear: of him who after death has power to send you to hell; yes, truly I say, Have fear of him.

The trouble is there are far too many who don’t have a clue just how horrible Hell is. They joke about meeting their friends in Hell, they put cans of beer and packs of cigarettes in caskets because “Old Joe never went anywhere without a cigarette and he’ll need them in Hell.” How ridiculous, we say. Yet, this is Satan’s lie that many believe, Hell is something to joke about, and not a place to fear. Some hold back from committing to Jesus because they don’t want to go where their loved ones won’t be... they’d rather go to Hell with their spouse than to Heaven with a real Husband. May it not be so! Yet, it is. There is no fear of the LORD any more. This is why sin is rampant and why some church-goers hear a “feel good” philosophy from the pulpit instead of the harsh truth of judgment. Amen? Amen.

You know what? When ever I think about going before the Throne of God I get tears in my eyes where I can hardly see—like right now. I think of all the times I have let Him down. I think of how I am absolutely nothing—like Paul says—a worm. And the only way I can even imagine myself before the Throne of God is behind the robe of Jesus. To me, this robe is red with blood.

As I touch this robe so I can peek at God the Father, it is soft and comforting but the color reminds me so powerfully of what I have done to cause that blood to be there. Tears stream down my face and I can’t stand up, my face falls to the ground and there is just no way am I able to look into the face of the LORD for I am so unworthy. At my touch to His robe, Jesus bends down and picks me up, holds me and turns back to the Father, and I bury my face in His shoulder for I cannot look at the Father for my shame.
Jesus, holding me really close and very tightly, gently tucks my face under His chin and whispers in my ear, “its okay, Gina. I claim you as My own.” Only then do my tears dry up and as my feet touch the floor of this majestic Throne Room, my heart is light and I finally see the face of my Beloved Father. Tears well up again, and I fall to the ground again but this time, not in shame but in true, full worship of the Living God. It is the kind of worship I can barely understand in this physical body. The worship from a true and perfect heart with no thought of “how’s the roast doing?” but with one mind and purpose to praise and glorify Elohim, El Shaddai, Creator, I AM, The Prater of Seas, the Provider of manna, The Pillar of Fire, The Raiser of Jesus Christ. And He knows me, little old Gina, Oh! The awesome wonderment of it all!
The Domestic Diva: Proverbs 31

Juggling multiple priorities can either be the blight or the crown of Today’s Woman. The first step is actually recognizing something as a priority then being able to categorize all of them into manageable slices. Some people use lists, others use piles, some use other methods. If we do not have a system for managing and prioritizing our tasks, we flounder in stress and stacks of chores. The most perfect woman described is the one in Proverbs 31 where we see a true Super Woman. This Wonder Woman was able to manage multiple priorities with seeming little difficulty. That was quite a feat because they did not have all the modern conveniences of today, on the other hand there were no distractions such as phone, Twitter, Facebook, or blogs.

I ran across a blog post that stated the Proverbs Super Woman was unattainable. He (of course it was a he, but surprisingly a pastor) blithely stated that he hoped his wife would read his post because he wanted her to know that no matter what, he loved her and she did not have to be this super woman to have his admiration.

Oh, come on!

That is rather commendable, but so erroneous to think that Wonder Woman is unattainable. Absolutely, this Proverbs woman is
quite the paragon, but her qualities are not unattainable. She is described as a virtuous woman...excellent woman...capable... a noble woman in various translations. But in examining the Hebrew word *Charity*, הַיִל pronounced khah’-yil, translated virtuous, valiant, excellent in several different translations; and is described as a force, whether of men, means or other resources; an army, wealth, virtue, valor, strength: - able, activity as in an army, band of men (soldiers), company, (great) forces, goods, host, might, power, riches, strength, strong, substance, train, (+) valiant (-ly), valor, virtuous (-ly), war, worthy (-ily). We see it is translated more in tune with strength of armies. In the KJV, it is translated two hundred and forty-three times as valiant describing men of valor, riches, or strength. It is the same word used for the character of good, capable judges in Exodus 18:21. We can conclude then that the author of Proverbs 31 was describing a strong woman.

Although, her relationship with God is not mentioned until verse thirty, we can acknowledge this strong woman is made strong by God through His wisdom and grace.

She is not only capable, she is powerful; and her worth is far above rubies. Perhaps that does sound unattainable to you. Eleanor Roosevelt said, “No one can make you feel inferior without your permission.” However, David said it best in Psalm 121. We must know whence our help comes; it comes from the LORD.

These twenty-two verses exemplify the Hebrew way of writing. The point made in the first sentence or two is expounded by using a first statement of truth and a second statement of example, an explanation of why the statement is true.

In this acrostic example, each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet which is similar to Psalm 119. This is a way of stating that an excellent woman is the beginning and end of a husband and family’s delight. She is the center and the light of the
home. The woman of the home is like the keel of a ship. She does not command the ship, but without her the ship won’t go where the commander commands, nor will it be provisioned for the long haul.

10 An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.

The question “who can find?” is reflective of how in short supply this woman actually is. The qualities described here are worthy of all women, not just wives. Although, a woman may appear to many to be excellent, the character of her soul may only be skin deep and not sink to the core of the woman—much like beauty. This is an excellent wake up call for women today, although few rouse to see it as such. Do we only appear excellent or are we marinated enough in God’s principles to actually be excellent? Not perfect, but excellent?

11 The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain.

Her husband’s faith in her illuminates her character. Too often men and women marry with only a superficial trust, not the deep abiding trust that emanates from the heart. No matter how one slices it, that kind of trust is earned. She earned his trust by her actions, her thoughts, and her words, over a period of time. Too often we get caught up in the Me Generation Mentality: “If it feels good, do it” which is not a Biblical principle. I have heard character defined as that which one does when no one is looking. Trust is an overlooked commodity. When your trust is well placed, you have a good investment, just like the husband in this verse. We will ostensibly trust someone because of their position (both in the church and in business) but our trust will invariably be betrayed with a word or deed because humans are frail and there is only one Jesus. When trust is lost, it is extremely difficult to regain. Because this woman has the whole trust of her husband, she has exhibited that she is faithful and
trustworthy. She has exemplified that she holds her husband in great esteem because trust is a two-way street. And the next verse illustrates that.

12 She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.

The discussion of exactly what is good could take up an entire book and is not the focus of this discussion. The Hebrew word for good is טוב (tob) (as an adjective) in the widest sense. It is used in the Hebrew just as it is in English as an adjective, an adverb, and even a noun. In the broadest sense it means to be good, pleasing, joyful, beneficial, pleasant, favorable, happy, kindly, loving, merry, prosperous, sweet, well, and to be righteous. This is exactly in line with goodness being listed as a part of the fruit of the Spirit; it is actually a state of being as well as an action. This verse implies that her heart intent toward her husband is one of love as expressed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. When she demonstrates she is trustworthy in all aspects, this makes her husband easy in his thoughts toward her—without jealousy or rancor. The good comes back as a balm upon her from her husband.

13 She looks for wool and flax and works with her hands in delight.

The capable woman does not sit wringing her hands in worry. She takes delight in providing for her family. She doesn’t ask permission from hubby to go shopping for her “wool and flax”. She takes responsibility for clothing her family. “Works with her hands” is a Hebrew idiom for being a servant. The able wife not only is a servant but takes delight in being a servant. Working does a couple of things for us women. The number one thing it does is keep us out of trouble. Don’t misunderstand what I am saying here. Idle hands are the devil’s playground (another Proverb). This is true of all hu-
mans, not just women. When we women stay busy, we’re less likely to succumb to the wiles of Satan and no matter how unpalatable that may sound, it is the truth. The next few verses illustrate this truth.

14 She is like merchant ships; she brings her food from afar.

This is the Biblical equivalent of “shop till you drop” with a marine flair. It indicates a picky-ness for just the right food to provide at just the right price. and in abundance, enough to fill a ship, a household a husband’s belly and all the children and servants as well, regardless of how deep the water may be.

15 She rises also while it is still night and gives food to her household and portions to her maidens.

A woman’s work is never done. Dr. Phil said that a mother of two children has the work equivalent of a full time job. If she has three children that work is equivalent to two full time jobs. It is astounding that a woman can have children and hold down a full-time job outside the home! That is the equivalent of two or more full time jobs. The “portions to her maidens” indicates she has servants—that’s plural. Super Mom does not have to do everything by herself, praise the LORD! Although, even with servants to help, she still needs to be on top of each aspect of the household, aware of all that goes on in and around the family. Here again is the suggestion that being busy keeps one virtuous. But we can still sleep late on occasion. I don’t see anywhere in the Bible that it’s a sin to sleep late once in awhile. However, Proverbs 20:13 says we should not love sleep or we’ll go hungry and in Romans 12:11 Paul exhorts us we should be busy serving the LORD.
16 She considers a field and buys it; from her earnings she plants a vineyard.

Does it say here that she has to ask her husband to purchase the field? Does it say here she has to gain his permission so she can buy the field? She doesn’t even ask him for the money to buy the grape vines to plant. Where in the world did the notion that women should not work or have responsibilities outside the home originate? It came from second and third century influence of worldly culture. It certainly was not from God. Is it easier to care for children if a mother does not have to work outside the home? Absolutely! But it is not a sin for a woman to have a job outside the home. Is her primary concern the job or her husband and children? All twenty-two verses expound the most excellent woman’s main priority which is her husband, her children and her household. She loves the LORD and wants to please Him and the family He gave her.

Studying this passage as a whole, it is because she loves the Lord that she labors for her husband and family so selflessly. It is because she loves her family, she gets up before dawn and works all day long tirelessly – at least that is how it looks on the outside. (But we all know it is impossible to keep going twenty-four/seven without our daily refreshment in the Lord. We must take refuge in Him by reading His love letter to us and by prayer, bringing everything to Him or we’ll go bonkers.) By planting a vineyard, she is providing a legacy for the future. This is the Hebrew equivalent of a 401K…the vineyard’s fruit will provide for them in the senior years and will be passed on to the children as an inheritance. She not only cares for her family in the present, she provides an income for future generations. She has taken responsibility for this and is not depending upon her husband’s provisions, but adds to the family wealth her own earnings.
What an amazing woman she is. My mother is like this woman. She never sat down until the last dish was dried, everything was in its place, and she always had some kind of mending or handiwork beside her chair. Mothers are wonderful things.

17 She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong.

This girding is a term used to indicate protecting the lower back similar to a weightlifter wrapping that leather belt about his lower back and waist. Paul uses it in his description of the full armor of God in Ephesians 6. She practices physical labor and thus her body is strengthened. There was a documentary on Discovery Channel about mummies and one of the mummies was of a female with bones so delicate the slightest pressure could have snapped them into pieces. We were told the owner of those bones had done no physical labor at all, most likely never even stood up for more than a few minutes at a time. She had never lifted anything heavier than a few ounces her entire life so therefore, it was concluded the woman was most likely very rich and a ruler of some sort because everything had been done for her. Not so the perfect woman. It is well documented that physical activity stimulates the production of endorphins which stimulates our sense of well-being. The domestic diva understood this without expressing it in any form other than deed. She is industrious and,

18 She senses that her gain is good; her lamp does not go out at night.

The lamp not going out at night is important for several reasons. I imagine night-lights were as useful then as they are now. Coffee tables are not made for shin breakers in the dark, but it seems that this is their primary function. Her lamp not going out is so significant because the woman of the home is the Light of the
home. This is why the Hebrew wife lights the candles of the menorah on the Sabbath. The lamp holds special significance because from the woman came Jesus who is the Light of the World. Symbolically, since the woman is the light of the home, and since the mother is the one who brings much comfort to her family, her lamp going out would bring despair upon the home. When bad things happen, why does it always seem they happen at nighttime? David remarked upon this in several of his Psalms. Depression and despair creep in and settle in the corners of our hearts and homes during the dark times of our lives. It is so comforting to have a lamp to dispel this darkness. The mother and wife, no matter her skills, is usually the one to offer comfort to her family during those stressful times. Her strength comes from God Who gives her great comfort. This doesn’t mean that she works all night. One of our sayings is a close translation in that it is meant to show she keeps the home fires burning. She keeps the oil lamps well stocked as Jesus mentions in the parable of the ten virgins. The five virgins who have extra oil for their lamps and are ready for the Bridegroom whenever He comes (Matthew 25) but the other five allow their lamps to go out and beg to borrow some oil from the prudent virgins to no avail. Prudence and planning are additional strengths of hers.

19 *She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hands grasp the spindle.*

She recognizes that she can make clothes and other things for her family which are of far better quality, and usually less costly than buying them ready made. The distaff and the spindle are tools used to make yarn and thread. These tools are thousands of years old. The Navajo have used them for centuries, long before the white man came here. Fibers are “combed” or aligned parallel, then twisted into yarn with the hands, the spindle helps in twisting and in wrapping the finished product into a usable “ball”. Time consum-
ing? Yes, but with the hands occupied, the mind has the opportunity to meditate on lots of different things. I’m quite sure that during the midst of this mundane task, many women talked with the LORD, had life-changing conversations with daughters, taught young sons, made plans for different industries to be carried out the next day, that week, and throughout the year, had enjoyable chats with neighbors, sisters, and family. The spindle and distaff are only mentioned once in Scripture. But we know it was a vital part of home industry, as well as business for Lydia made purple cloth. This skill could provide an excellent income for an industrious woman.

20 She extends her hand to the poor, and she stretches out her hands to the needy.

This is another indication of how godly this woman is. This is a command of the LORD in Deuteronomy 15:11. Proverbs 22:9 tells us the one who practices generosity is blessed. Surely, she is blessed and her blessing falls upon her family as a warm blanket. The attitude of her heart is straight from God. Charity begins at home as the saying goes, and Wonder Woman, being a godly woman, will have a heart for missions. She will not just toss money in the offering plate as it passes by, but will give of her time as well as her stores to help make the world a better place, and the needs of the poor to be met. Perhaps James remembers this passage when he penned his admonishment to Christians of his day, James 2:16 and any one of you say to them, Go in peace, be warmed and filled, but does not give them the things the body needs, what gain is it?

Are these skills unattainable? They aren’t hard or incomprehensible. Do the housework, make the beds. Simple enough, but frankly Erma Bombeck said that no one ever died from sleeping in an unmade bed, and I agree with her. Keeping the priorities straight and in proper order is the most important thing. Night-lights are
good for lots of reasons. Mundane work is good to help keep the hands busy while the mind explores regions that only God can fathom. Ministry is good and easy to do when you make time for it. It isn’t a suggestion, it is something that Jesus did all His life and He expects us to look like Him and act like Him. With His help, we can do this.

21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all her household are clothed with scarlet.

The word translated scarlet is红色 (shaw-nee') Of uncertain derivation; crimson, properly the insect which is the Coccus ilicis, an insect which infests oak trees, called kermes by the Arabians. This insect was used to extract the color crimson when it was boiled. It also meant “shining” because of the brilliance of the color, and to get that color it was double-dipped. (We’ll look more closely at this in a moment.)

Since a color cannot protect from cold or dirt, we must look at the word before it, clothed: לַבֵּשׁ (law-bash’, law-bashe”), which is a primitive root meaning properly wrap around, that is, by implication, to put on a garment. It is a double word, double emphasis, followed by a word meaning double-dipped in a broad sense. Gill says “the Vulgate Latin version renders it, ‘with double’, that is, with double garments; and so the Septuagint and Arabic versions, joining the words to a following verse; and this, by some, is thought to be the better rendering of the words…” Therefore we can assume that in the winter, her family was wrapped up snug as a bug in a rug, in a manner of speaking.

Clothing in scarlet was a rich man’s blessing. It took tremendous effort to wring the one or two drops of crimson dye from the female worm that provided this color in Biblical days. The word also
means “double” or “double-dipped”. The color meant “to shine” which denoted the brilliance of the color.

Scarlet thread was used to save Rahab’s family when the walls fell around Jericho, it was used in the cleansing rites of the leper, and of course the theme of the Scarlet Thread throughout the Old Testament refers to Jesus Christ our Kinsman Redeemer. The reference to snow, referring to the cold of winter, gives the reader a glimpse into the fruits of the season of preparation: No fear. I cannot help but correlate how closely this verse relates to God speaking through Isaiah in Isaiah 1:17 Learn to do good, seek justice, straighten the oppressor, judge the orphan, strive for the widow. 18 Come now and let us reason together, says Jehovah: Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as the crimson, they shall be like wool. When we have labored and prepared, we have no reason to fear because God will take care of us all the days of our lives. Jesus promised in John 10:28-29 that we are double-wrapped in His hand and the Father’s hand.

22 She makes coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.

The scarlet and purple were colors for high ranking society, and the fine linen is talked about in Scripture for the priests. What is so interesting to note, we see bright white fine linen will clothe the Bride of Christ. In Revelation 19:8 And it was given to her that she be clothed in fine linen, pure and bright; for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. The bridal dress is the righteous acts of the saints. What an amazing correlation, she is worthy of fine linen just as the Bride of Christ is worthy. Sometimes our society equates high rank with fluffy dogs and eating bonbons—we should take a lesson from Domestic Diva. Her hands are busy with ministering to the needs of others. Ministry produces love and love dispels despair. She ministers, and her acts are considered as worthy as the Bride of Christ.
Please also note that she wears purple, just as the twenty-four elders do in Revelation. If we back up a step or two to absorb the whole picture of this paragon, we can see all her attributes read like a blueprint for the Christian lifestyle. That is not accidental or coincidence.

23 Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.

Is this because of her? Yes and no. She is valiant, and makes good society with the other women of the community. This reflects well upon her husband, and brings him up in stature in the eyes of the community. Just as his conduct and presence reflects upon her. They are made one in marriage. However, the fact that he sits among the elders of the land is a huge honor and great importance, therefore she is honored by his circumstance.

Wonder Woman that she is, her husband isn’t distracted by mundane household problems so he can pay attention to the matters of state which elders handled while sitting in the gates. One has to think about how Christ is pictured the betrothed Husband of the Bride, and we can certainly correlate this verse to Christ for He is known in the gates of Zion. He does sit among the elders and the pastors and the churches for these, as well as individuals, He fell in love with and betrothed Himself to us looking forward to a glorious wedding when the Father finally says, “Go get your Bride, Son.” What a fabulous day that will be, I can hardly wait.

24 She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies belts to the tradesmen.

I have to admit it, now she truly is Wonder Woman. Of course, back then there wasn’t TV or telephones and I suppose if I
got up way before dawn, I’d have time to sew enough clothes for winter and summer plus some to sell in the marketplace, too. This is a worthy occupation. Remember Tabitha, or Dorcas? She was the woman in Acts whom Peter raised from the dead after praying over her. Acts 9:36 She was full of good works and of alms which she did. When Peter arrived at the home where she was, all the widows stood by him and showed him all the tunics and garments she had made while being with them. There is an entire sermon in those few verses.

25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she smiles at the future.

We could also add righteous acts. She smiles because there is absolutely nothing to fear. Whatever the future holds, she knows God is sovereign and in control. This is precisely how we should be living our lives because we will be wearing our righteous acts. Who wants to be wearing a mini-skirt in heaven?

I was taught in Sunday School when I was a teen, that this paragon of virtue was a guideline, but unachievable. I bought into that for a long time. Only after studying this passage with the proper guidance from the Holy Spirit have I realized that the Bride of Christ is the real Wonder Woman. Not because she is stronger than a locomotive or faster than a speeding bullet (oh, wait, that’s Super Man—hmm), but because of the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, living God Who dwells within us. Everything that describes this valiant woman is good, and correlates with Jesus’ and the God-inspired writers of the New Testament.

Just as the Bride of Christ will be clothed in bright white linen which are the righteous acts of the saints, so this virtuous woman is clothed in her own righteous acts. Here are the qualities most valued by God because they are fruits of the Spirit: loving kindness, joy, peace, strength and dignity which equals temperance and/or
self-control; smiles at the future equals no idle worrying and complete trust that God is in control.

Keeping her focus on her household keeps her mind and hands occupied so there is no laziness or wasted time. When Paul described women, he most definitely had Proverbs 31 in mind because his admonitions follow so closely to this passage. This illustrates and exemplifies the true Christian heart.

26 *She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.*

Jesus tells us what ever is in the heart comes out of the mouth. Therefore, her heart embraces wisdom and kindness because this is what proceeds from her mouth.

Godly wisdom and kindness come directly from the Holy Spirit and are not inbred qualities of the human. We know from Proverbs, Isaiah and James – actually, this is stated all through Scripture – that Wisdom is a gift from God. We don’t fall out of the womb stuffed with wisdom. James says this blessing that God bestows comes to those who ask. Proverbs 9:10 Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. She doesn’t indulge in idle gossip but is careful of the example she sets her children and her servants. So often we forget that the respect we receive from those around us comes from how we conduct ourselves, and mostly from what we say. James also notes that the tongue can create a firestorm. The Hebrew word Torah means basically “to sit on her lap and learn her wisdom”. It is interesting that this is the word used for the first five books of the Bible and encompasses all the Law given to Moses from God Himself.
27 She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.

This is a Hebrew writing tactic, a reiteration of what has already been said. It is basically an emphasis that she protects her home and manages it with wisdom, as well as industry. She doesn’t indulge in gossip which is one of those things that God hates.

28 Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband also, and he praises her, saying:
29 “Many daughters have done nobly, But you excel them all.”

Finally, the blessing. All that went before, her actions and her thoughts were about how her family benefited from her industry. Now comes the part where she is blessed. Her children love and cherish her, and her husband praises her saying that she has achieved above the average and excelled beyond all others. It indicates his pride. It reminds me of what Jesus will say as we meet Him in the air, “Well, done my good and faithful servant.” I want so much to hear those words.

30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.
31 Give her the product of her hands, And let her works praise her in the gates.

Here we see the blessings that result from the godly management of our households and our Christian lives. It is the affirmation that charm and beauty is fleeting; all that men hold dear and hold in high esteem are an abomination to the Lord (Luke 16:15). Outward beauty is not an achievement to be pursued. Beauty that God bestows is what brings eternal and lasting pleasure and glory to the Lord. Only loving and serving God can ever bring about
the true acclamation which matters. We are not to do works in order to gain praise from man, we do them in order to please the LORD. Paul exhorted women to put on the kind of beauty that is depicted here in Proverbs 31. A woman with good works will be praised and that clothes her in beauty. It will be better to be clothed in the bright white linen of the righteous acts than to be naked in physical beauty which fades with time and disappears in the presence of God. Working towards that goal, the righteous acts will be rewarded above any imaginable thing here on earth. No eye has ever seen or ear has ever heard the wonderful things to come.
Ruâch

Someone asked in my group on LinkedIn, what do you do when writer’s block hits? I blithely wrote that you pray and then sit down and write whatever enters your head. Soon the block melts and things like creativity start flowing again and you’re off again.

I was too hasty. It isn’t that you pray, and it isn’t that you just start writing whatever enters your brain. The awful thing is that when you want to write inspiring things you’ve got to have the breath of God. That is what Spirit literally is. Ruâch ́הוּר (roo’ akh) – try to say that with a guttural breath and you are probably fairly close. Definition: wind; by resemblance breath, that is, a sensible (or even violent) exhalation;

Now, look at God’s name YHWH and pronounce those syllables in one breath. Yah Wha, breathy and windy said very softly as with a sleepy breath. In the middle of the night when you’ve been awakened, you say something quietly, breathy, Peacefully.

It could also be a violent exhalation like when frustration bubbles up and you’ve got nothing on your mind except to release that pressure cooker steam build-up, or you will explode. What comes out of your mouth? Is it really a word? Not likely. When you express your anger in words your mind is engaged and you are thinking of something. But, during the time when nothing comes
out but a very angry growl, your teeth are clenched, your hands are clenched, every tendon in your neck is exposed, and your blood pressure spikes, and your muscles are as hard as steel (perhaps encased in a bit of flab?), that expulsion of breath, that air that whooshes out of your lungs is in response to injustice.

Is your anger justified? Is it impaired by worldly values? Nonetheless (archaic, but such a wonderful word), nonetheless this expulsion is a response to injustice. It could so very easily be a guttural expression of ֶרֶחך. When that next happens, think about it. Does it sound like the word ֶרֶחך? (Right after that “violent expulsion” of air, say the first ten words of the Lord’s Prayer in order to give a calmer response. It truly works!)

What about sweet nothings? Oh, please, not that the Holy Spirit is nothing, but He is so very sweet. The young man’s breath on the soft cheek of his beloved, how does he love her? If it is though the Lord’s love, it is an eternal kind of love that will last through thick and thin, through heartache and joy, through children and, yes, through the love of others. The more one loves, the more love abounds. If he loves through the world, ah, how short lived that is. It will die and wither; it will burn up one day, just as the world will face that fate when Jesus steps foot on earth again.

Figuratively the word ֶרֶחך means: life, anger, insubstantiality; by extension a region of the sky; by resemblance spirit, but only of a rational being (including its expression and functions): - air, anger, blast, breath, cool, courage, mind, quarter, spirit ([-ual]), tempest, vain, ([whirl-]) wind (-y).

All of that in one little word, two symbols, that conveys a realm of emotion and physical attributes of our earthly abode, and we haven’t even scratched the surface of it. But where is the Spirit in the definition? Well down the list, and it is in brackets no less... or no more. Why is that?

Then we have the Sigh. “Heigh ho” says Juliette. “Hee,” says the exasperated mother at her wayward children. “Ach,” says
the sea captain in surprise. How does it work together? It is life! What is that Jewish word? Liechem -- To Life! Rebtiva says in Fiddler On The Roof. It is with our very breath that we express life. It is how we worship. Oh, yes, we can worship without speaking aloud, but how does one sing silently? How can the trumpet sound without breath? We must have it to live, and we must have it to express that Thing which defies the Devil. It is written. Jesus said it aloud. The Spirit moved and Satan was thwarted. It works.

Anger we briefly discussed, but let’s look a little closer. Ruach alone can express anger. Look at Revelation 19:15 And out of His mouth goes forth a sharp sword, that with it He might smite the nations. And He will shepherd them with an iron rod. And He treads the winepress of the wine of the anger and of the wrath of God Almighty.

That is a mighty expulsion of breath which will do something that no human can possibly conceive much less do. This sword that comes from His mouth will pierce even to the dividing part of the soul and spirit. (Hebrews 4:12)

Hebrews 4:12 For the Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing apart of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Have you ever thought about that dividing of soul and spirit? Did you ever think that they could be divided? How about when the soul goes to Hell and the spirit returns to the Lord? Ecclesiastes 12:7 then the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.

It is the Breaths of Life that God breathed. First the blood and then the air. How can anyone live and not recognize His handiwork and creativity? That is the mystery to me.
After weeks of scorching heat and baking sunshine, I lifted my head at the faint scent of moisture in the air. I wasn’t wrong because a tree frog began an anxious croaking. He smelled it too, and began rejoicing over that first drop of water before it fell to this parched land.

Then the thunder cracked with an earth-shaking boom. The first drops of rain tickled my arms, but I was too weak at the moment to do anything but thank God for the rain.

Rain began lightly enough, refreshment for the scorched ground, and sending up a wonderful fragrance that perfumed the air, a glorious perfume of—oh, you know what that smells like and how good it is. Then it came down harder, not so hard that it hurt, but it was beating me down, as weak as I was, I couldn’t stand against it. My feet were rooted to the ground and I couldn’t run for cover like the cat did when it thundered.

Soon I was hurting in a different way and I cried out, “God! Oh, God! Why are You pelting me like this? The refreshing water is wonderful. The coolness of cloud cover after the blazing heat is restoring, and the blessing of rain which removes the dust and dirt from my face is so rejuvenating, but why so much? Why so hard? It bends my head. It spatters the mud, choking me. It hurts.

“I know I should be thankful. I should rejoice, and I do rejoice because I was dying. But, this blessing is hurting me in a different way.”
“Trust Me, child,” He replied. “I know what I am doing because I created you. If I do not give you enough rain, your roots won’t go deep into the ground where it is safe, healthy, and moist. Too little rain and your roots grow along the top of the ground and they would burn in the sun; they would wither and you would die. It has to be just enough rain to soak deep into the ground. Just enough rain so when some evaporates, the process won’t deprive you of My life giving water. I designed it this way.

Psalm 19 and 96
Things I’ve Learned in Fifty Something Years

Burl Cain, warden for Angola Prison in Louisiana, once said that no earthly thing can change a man, only Jesus can. He became warden over a prison that was once called the bloodiest place on earth. Back in the fifties and sixties, no one came out of there alive, and no one served their full term. This gutsy man proved that only Jesus can change a man by bringing Jesus and Biblical principles into Angola. I learned that particular lesson the hard way.

Here’s what I have learned in the past 50 years:

Foremost lesson is what I learned from the study of Nehemiah: Bring everything to God before any action takes place. Paul backs that up, too. The second is like it: Bring anger promptly before God and lay it at His feet before the first word passes the lips. It will save lots of heart ache and keep relationships whole. I cannot say that I do this all the time. I am impetuous and stubborn. Imagine that! However, when I do follow the above, I have found that I can give God glory rather than embarrass Him.

There are other things that I have learned which seem almost obvious, yet the lessons came hard won.

1. I do not believe the world’s assertion that there is Only one true
love. Love is a choice. I know this for many reasons. (More on that in a bit.)

2. More money only magnifies the character of a person. If the person has a bad character (lies, cheats, greedy etc) it will get worse. If he/she is generous, generosity abounds. If thrifty, then thrift abounds.

3. The bad habits a boy has will get worse when he grows older. Once a person “gets away” with something they will get more daring stretching the envelope until caught or deeply mired in the quicksand of their own making. I watched this happen to someone who wound up in prison for his illegal escapades.

4. Repentance sometimes brings the blessing of not having to pay the consequence of a sin, but more often than not, we do pay the consequences. Praise God we do not have to pay the ultimate price because Jesus did this already on the cross.

5. A woman will never change a man.

6. A baby will never change a man.

7. The only thing that changes a man is Jesus. If a man has no discipline before he’s married, he will have less discipline when he’s married. If a man loves Jesus and lives Christ-like, then marriage will magnify that, and children will magnify that. It is more desirable to have a man like this than to have one with no discipline. In other words Bad Boys remain Bad Boys and do not make good husbands, unless Jesus changes the man.

8. There is no bottom to the depths of a woman’s heart that is in love.

9. Just because a person says he loves Jesus does not mean that he actually does love Jesus.

10. Minor character flaws really do matter. If he lies to others, he’ll lie to you. If he steals from work, he’ll steal from you. If he is unfaithful to his work and to his boss, he won’t be faithful to you. If he is not a good money manager before marriage, he’ll be
even worse after marriage because he’ll have your money, too. If he has bad credit before he marries, he’ll ruin yours after he marries you.

11. When a man prays, keeps his word, reads his Bible, he may seem unexciting and dull. But, that is the kind of man most desirable for a husband, and he will be the anchor in the storms of life. This kind of man will make a terrific best friend who will remain loyal throughout life. If his jokes are kind, if he is uncritical, if his friends are kind, honest and loyal then he will be the same kind of man 30 years from now.

After marriage...

I discussed this earlier, however, I feel compelled to elaborate on the subject. Love is a choice; therefore Christians should not consider divorce an option. Getting up one morning, and looking at the person you’ve been married to for the past five, seven, or even ten years and thinking “I don’t like him much” is not a reason for divorce. It truly is a passing phase. When two people love the LORD first and their mate second, there is no such thing as “growing apart”. It cannot happen. This growing apart is the result of selfishness.

It takes hard work and total commitment to keep a marriage healthy. When a couple decides to marry there is the conscious and deliberate decision to commit to one another. The love between them comes from God and with His nurturing will continue until death. When the couple lives as two individuals with selfish attitudes that leaves God out of the equation, this is when the marriage begins to fail. When the individual comes first before the spouse, when the selfish desire takes precedence over the spouse’s pleasure, then the death throes of the marriage begin. The only way a marriage will last is when both have a greater desire to please the other in everything rather than selfishly pleasing him or her self. Much like how
we are supposed to be with Jesus—being more concerned about pleasing Him than ourselves.

However, there are covenant breakers such as, lascivious behavior, adultery, verbal/physical abuse, child abuse. When counseling doesn’t help and the behavior doesn’t stop, then pack the clothes and lock the door because those things are not “as into the Lord” and God has no intention for us to continue in a life filled with that, after all, He divorced Israel over the same kinds of behavior. God intended betrothal to be like Song of Solomon, a courtship full of respect and excitement toward one person only. I believe marriage to be like Psalms. Joy in one person to the exclusion of all others in that way. Being dependent upon the LORD for all things and relying upon one’s mate to keep their covenant involves a great deal of trust.

**About siblings in Christ…**

When trust is betrayed, there is an essential requirement from God. One must forgive. That is a very hard thing to do. When two Believers marry, then divorce is not an option. When two believers are friends there will be conflict of a sort because Satan will make sure of it. You can depend upon heartache and pain when two people come together. That is part of our human nature. However, never letting the sun go down on anger (*Be angry, and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down upon your wrath*, Ephesians 4:26) absolutely paves the way for Joy to come in the morning.

Self-control is part of the Fruit of the Spirit. It requires a great deal of self-control to live harmoniously with another person. God will guard our tongues as well as our thoughts if we ask Him to have control over them. It brings Him glory and isn’t that what all this is about?
About the author…

Gina grew up in Monroe, Louisiana and studied journalism in college there, but took a thirty year detour to raise two beautiful daughters in Baton Rouge, LA then went back to school and graduated with a BAAS degree from Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas, the same college her mother attended. For more than thirty-five years she has taught Sunday School and Discipleship Training because God gifted her with the motivational spiritual gifts of encourager and teacher. She’s so bossy because she also was gifted with an abundance of Administration gift.

She has been an editor for several publications, including Life-styles Editor at her home town newspaper, The Picayune Item in Picayune, Mississippi; and she writes a weekly column for Studylight.org as well as bi-weekly columns at EverydayChristian.com. Check out her blog, Refreshment in Refuge, Refreshment-Refuge.blogspot.com, and her book reviews at Upon Reflection, Upon ReflectionBlog.blogspot.com.

“I love using my God-given talent to shine a light in a dark world. I am absolutely committed to bringing God glory with my writing,” she professes.
Bibliography

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3 I Know Whom I Have Believed Daniel W. Whittle, pub.1883 Copyright: Public Domain Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:12

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