



A Tool For The End Times

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Preface:

This book is meant to be used as a tool to help prepare the Church (Christ's Bride) for His (Jesus) return.

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Introduction

We are living in exciting times! On the one hand 'darkness' seems to increase in the earth (floods, earthquakes, volcanoes erupting, financial markets crashing, wars raging, moral decline escalating etc.) but on the other hand, 'light' is shining brighter as people are turning their hearts to God and His Word.

The people of God are known in the Bible as the Bride of Christ and Jesus Christ as our Bridegroom. This book is written in *response* to Him. To those whose ears, eyes and hearts are open to Him, His voice is very clearly audible at this time. He is calling us, wooing us with His song, drowning us in His Grace, immersing us in His Love. The intensity and urgency in our relationship with Him seems to be escalating and I believe, will culminate in His return to this earth.

We are living the greatest **love** story ever! Our Bridegroom gave up **everything** for us. He gave up heaven and even the Presence of His Father to come for us. He was ignored, scorned, scoffed at, humiliated, rejected, misunderstood, bruised, abused and His nakedness exposed for all to see. He was tortured and then killed, whilst being innocent, pure, holy, obedient, and meek, going about doing good and revealing our Father and His awesome **love** for us. Then He conquered death after bearing our sin, shame and guilt so that we could be **free** to **love** Him back! He went back to heaven assuring us that He is going to send us Someone (the Holy Spirit) to be with us always, while He is preparing places for us and interceding for us until His return when He will marry us to Him! There has never been and never will be another **love** like that and we (His Bride) are the object of it!

How do we respond to a Love...to a Bridegroom like ours?

We get to know Him, become more sensitive to Him, more attuned to Him. We yield and keep on yielding and surrendering until we become one with Him. Until all we want, truly want is Him...and the cry of our hearts is: "Make haste, my beloved, and come quickly!" (Song of Solomon 8:14 b, Amplified Bible)

Prayer:

Father God, thank You for Your Holy Spirit. Please open my spiritual ears and eyes. I want to know and love You more.

CHAPTER 1: THE HEART OF THE MATTER

A Call to Love

God is LOVE. That is how He reveals Himself to us.

'He who does not love has not become acquainted with God [does not and never did know Him]; for God is love.

And we know...and believe...the love God cherishes for us. God is love, and he who dwells and continues in love dwells and continues in God, and God dwells and continues in him.'

1 John 4:8; 16 Amplified

Jesus is God's love manifested in the flesh. He GAVE His love to us. He did not hold anything back. As we study Jesus and His time on earth through the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, it is clear to see that everything He said and did was motivated by His *love* for His Father and His *love* for us.

'Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me? What I am telling you I do not say on my own authority and of My own accord; but the Father who lives continually in Me does the (His) works (His own miracles, deeds of power).

The person who has my commands and keeps them is the one who [really] loves Me; and whoever [really] loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I [too] will love him and will show (reveal, manifest) Myself to him. [I will let Myself be clearly seen by him and make Myself real to him.]'

John 14:10; 21 Amplified

So we *respond* to Him by loving Him back! We GIVE our love to Him by giving Him **all** of us - not holding anything back. By obeying His commands just as Christ obeyed His Father even to death!

'Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.' Deut. 6:5 (NIV Study Bible)

Jesus said in Matt 22:37 - 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.' (NIV)

John 14:10 & 21 hold a very important key for us in our (love) relationship with God. The beautiful thing about the kingdom of God and having a relationship with Him is that it is very simple

to understand and to do – so simple that we need to accept, receive and welcome it **like a little child**. Children **trust** easily, they have a very clear understanding of right and wrong and they love wholeheartedly. They also have sharp discernment and tend to be very honest and straightforward! They seem to find happiness and joy everywhere and enjoy the freedom of exploring and learning new things by play. We as adults greatly prize the purity, beauty and innocence of babies and young children. We stand amazed at how easily ‘faith’ comes to them – we teach them that the sky is the color blue and grass and leaves are green and they just believe it to be so!

How wonderful is the good news Jesus gave us in Luke 18:17 Amplified Bible:

‘Truly I say to you, whoever does not accept and receive and welcome the kingdom of God like a little child [does] shall not in any way enter it [at all].’

The good news is that it is neither hard nor intricate at all to have a love relationship with God! Jesus shows us how to in a very simple, so even children can understand, way in John 14: *‘to have His commands and to keep them is to love Him.’* In other words, to **know** Him and **respond** to Him (as a child knows his father and mother’s voices and responds to it), is to love Him. Isn’t it amazing how quickly a child responds when a parent’s voice holds a warning tone (e.g. No, don’t touch that! – a fire or hot stove plate) and how positive and happily they respond when parents speak lovingly to them (e.g. cooing to babies or calling them by their pet names). Children have a choice as how to (and of when!) they respond and so do we. Children *know* their parents as their parents simply because they live with them and we get to *know* God in exactly the same way. We get to know God as we spend time with Him, we get to know His voice and His will simply by getting to know His Word, and we get to know His character and love for us by getting to know Jesus! Jesus: God’s **love** manifested to us!

So how do we get to experience God’s presence (if we are to spend time with Him) and how do we find insight and understanding when reading His Word and how do we get to know this God who became man; Christ Jesus? Even in this, God in His amazing love for us provided us with everything we need to do just that. He wrote us love letters (the Bible) and then He sent us the Holy Spirit to help us understand it. He therefore not only provided us with the Way (Jesus) to a love relationship with Him but also gave us all the help we may need along that way!

'But when He, the Spirit of Truth (the Truth-giving Spirit) comes, He will guide you into all the Truth (the whole, full Truth).'

John 16:13a Amplified

So we respond to Him by loving Him back knowing that He made the way for us to do so.

'We love Him, because He first loved us.'

1 John 4:19 Amplified

Therefore our motivation is *love* and as we already have love poured out in our hearts, we are enabled to walk in love.

'..., for God's love has been poured out in our hearts through His Holy Spirit Who has been given to us.'

Rom 5:5b Amplified

As we heed the call to love God then there comes the call to love one another. He first loved us which makes it possible for us to love Him in return. From there, He leads us to love one another with the love that He poured in our hearts. As we awaken to the great love God has for us we cannot but feel the need to share this wonder with others. When we fall in love with someone (a person), we tell everyone we know about it. We cannot seem to stop talking about them! We are preoccupied with them and everybody just has to know how wonderful, beautiful and amazing they are (and how lucky we are!) We have a similar reaction when we fall in love with God! So we then tell others about Him and what He has done for us (we become witnesses). We share details of our relationship with Him with others just as we do when we fall in love with a person. (We find such joy in sharing with others details about our loved one and what he/she said or did and how they make us feel. We share details of the things we do together and even disclose details about our dreams and plans for the future. We delight in who we find this person to be and we want everyone to get to know them.) Not because we deem ourselves better or claim that we know more than them, but because we deeply care for (love) them and understand that our God loves them just as much as He loves us! As we imitate our Bridegroom, Christ, our motivation to engage with others is *love*. Once again we find all the help we need to do that from God and His Word. In His infinite wisdom and love for us, He has made provision for *everything* we need!

We are called to love:

- God (See: Matt. 22:37 & Deut. 6:5)
- One another

'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is (springs) from God; and he who loves [his fellowmen] is begotten (born) of God and is coming [progressively] to know and understand God'

1 John 4:7 Amplified

'Since by your obedience to the Truth through the [Holy] Spirit you have purified your hearts for the sincere affection of the brethren, [see that you] love one another fervently from a pure heart.'

1 Pet 1:22 Amplified

Loving God

The heart is of the utmost importance to God. When He looks at us that is what He sees...our hearts.

'For the Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.'

1 Sam 16:7b Amplified

Therefore it is necessary for us to know the condition of our hearts. To do this, we need the help of the Holy Spirit. As we invite Him in and ask Him to shine His light into all the dark places of our hearts we see that it is not very healthy and pretty looking in there!

'Then you shall [earnestly] remember your own evil ways and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominable deeds.'

Eze. 36:31 Amplified

We can do very little, if anything, to change the condition of our hearts. All that is needed is to be honest with ourselves and with God, to repent (to turn away, to renounce/ denounce), to receive His forgiveness and to ask *Him* to change us. He then does just that! That is the journey we are on, the road we walk with Him. To walk in His ways is our hearts desire and then we rest in the knowledge that it is only by His grace and the power of His Holy Spirit, that we can do that.

'A new heart will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

And I will put My Spirit within you and *cause you* to walk in My statutes, and you shall heed My ordinances and do them.'

Eze. 36:26, 27 Amplified (emphasis mine)

A wonderful example for us to follow is that of David, the author of many of the Psalms.

'..., I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart, who will do all my will and carry out my program fully.'

Acts 13:22b Amplified

How awesome to have God think of one as a man or a woman after His own heart! What does someone like that look like? Once again God's Word provides us with all the information we need. David's Psalms reveals his heart to us. We can study them and find all we need to know about his life and most importantly about his love relationship with God. He was an imperfect man with weaknesses just like us. David committed terrible sins (murder/adultery) whilst being God's called, anointed, appointed one! We see his character, the essence of who he was, revealed during the worst (and the best) days of his life. King David needed God to speak to him through the prophet Nathan after he committed adultery with Bathsheba – which shows us that he was blinded to his sin at that point (and probably justified what he did by the fact that he was king and entitled to whatever he desired!) and **needed** God to reveal what was in his heart. The wonderful example left us by him after this all came to light is found in Ps 51. His reaction when his eyes opened to his sin was first of all to run **to** (not from) God immediately and repent.

'v. 9 Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my guilt and iniquities.

v. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right, persevering, and steadfast spirit within me.

v. 11 Cast me not away from Your presence and take not Your Holy Spirit from me.

v. 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit.

v. 17 My sacrifice [the sacrifice acceptable] to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart [broken down with sorrow for sin and humbly and thoroughly penitent], such, O God, You will not despise.'

Ps.51 Amplified Bible

He recognized and confessed his sin and God spared his life but because of the consequences of his sin which lead to: 'giving great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme' - 2 Sam 12:14 Spirit Filled Life Bible-, their firstborn child died. We see that when the child became ill, (we find this account in 2 Sam 12:24) David desperately pleaded with God to spare the child. He fasted and prayed until news came that the child had died. Then to the surprise of his servants, on hearing the news of the child's passing, David did not mourn. He got up, washed and anointed himself and went to... WORSHIP God! He was neither bitter nor angry at God about the death of their child nor because his desperate pleas and cries were not answered in the way that he had hoped. He accepted God's will (and the consequence of his sin) and **worshipped** God. Then he went to his wife and comforted her and they became pregnant with Solomon (whom God loved!) From this account we can see that David knew and acknowledged God as GOD. His love relationship with God was so deep that he even knew the comfort of God and could comfort others *in the midst* of this tragedy:

"But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? **I shall go to him**, but he shall not return to me." 2 Sam 12:23 Spirit Filled (emphasis mine)

He knew he would see his child again!

Another great example was his behavior during what must have been the greatest day of his life. The day the ark of God's Presence was returned to Jerusalem. We find the account of that glorious day in 2 Samuel 6. The king of Israel humbled himself before the Almighty God that day as he danced (not in his kingly robes but clad in a priest's garment) before the Lord with all his might as the whole of Israel celebrated with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. When he returned home after the best day of his life, his wife scorned him (v 20) to which he responded with the following:

'David said to Michal, It was before the Lord, Who chose me above your father and all his house to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord. Therefore will I make merry [in pure enjoyment] before the Lord.

I will be still more lightly esteemed than this, and will humble and lower myself in my own sight [and yours]. But by the maids you mentioned, I will be held in honor.'

2 Sam 6:21, 22 Amplified

We can see from this account that David did not care what people might think or say about him as he rejoiced and worshipped God with abandon on this glorious occasion! He did not think about his own reputation as king. His focus was on God (not himself or the people) and his love directed whole-heartedly to God. This seems to mark David's life from childhood (as a shepherd of sheep) to becoming king. His focus was on God. He shared his heart (Psalms) from the time of his youth as a shepherd-boy and life with God and came to know Him intimately over the span of his lifetime. Even in severe hard times (when he was hated and persecuted by Saul – after serving Saul as the king faithfully and humbly with the full knowledge that he himself was to become king), David's focus was on God and His ways. He honored Saul as God's chosen king even after Saul's death – see his response and lament over Saul and Jonathan deaths in 2 Sam 1:11-27.

David even ordered the Amalekite who killed Saul (after Saul himself commanded him to, as an act of mercy after being severely wounded in battle - see: 1 Sam 1) to be killed! After all that he had to endure from being persecuted by Saul, David still understood that it was God Who anointed Saul as king in the first place and he honored that.

“You have condemned yourself,” David said, “for you yourself confessed that you killed the LORD’S anointed one.”

NLT Study Bible

Such deep respect and understanding for God and His ways resided in David's heart. He then wrote a beautiful lament for Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:17-27) in which he described them as heroes and mourned their deaths.

It is even more amazing to see David's first response after that. He now knew that he was king and the very first thing that he did was to **enquire of God** to what his next step ought to be! (Remember that those who obey God's commands are the ones who love Him.)

“After this, David asked the LORD, “Should I move back to one of the towns of Judah?”

“Yes, the LORD replied.

2 Sam 2:1 NLT Study Bible

David then inquired even further of the LORD, seeking His **specific** will:

“Then David asked, “Which town should I go to?”

“To Hebron,” the LORD answered.”

From this exchange we can clearly see that God knew the plans He had for David and that in turn David was seeking God’s will (not his own) and responded accordingly. Then after obeying God and going where He sent him, we see that as king the first thing he did was to reward the men who gave Saul a burial!

When David heard that the men of Jabesh-gilead had buried Saul, he sent them this message: “May the LORD bless you for being so loyal to your master Saul and giving him a decent burial. May the LORD be loyal to you in return and reward you with His unfailing love! And I, too, will reward you for what you have done.”

2 Sam 2:4b-6

What an amazing heart towards God this man had! As we study the Scriptures we see that God’s heart was knitted to David’s too. God entered into covenant with David (see: 2 Sam 7:8-16). A covenant relationship in Biblical times was a very powerful and beautiful thing. It was binding. The covenant which God made with David is even more significant as it points towards Christ our King.

“The covenant that God establishes with *David (2 Sam 7:9-16) is carried over from the OT to the NT. In this covenant God promises a *kingdom to David’s line that “shall be established forever.” This is ultimately a Messianic prophecy of what God will do for the human race through the redemptive work of Christ.”

From: Dictionary of BIBLICAL IMAGERY –General Editors: Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Temper Longman 111

So we see that God and David had a powerful love (heart) relationship that has eternal consequences!

Let's now look to the One it pointed to; our Bridegroom Christ. What does His heart towards our Father God show us?

A few things are to be highlighted:

First of all: Christ lived (and died) in total **obedience to His Father**.

"Jesus said to them, My food (nourishment) is to do the will (pleasure) of Him Who sent Me and to accomplish and completely finish His work."

John 4:34 Amplified Bible

We see once again, from the life of Christ that obedience = love.

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

John 6:38; 40 (Spirit Filled Life Bible)

He knew exactly what our Father's will was and He was set on doing that and just that – He did not have His own agenda. Perfect obedience = perfect love.

Secondly: Christ also came so that we could get to know God.

"And whoever sees Me sees Him Who sent Me."

John 12:45 Amplified Bible

"Jesus replied, Have I been with all of you for so long a time, and do you not recognize and know Me yet, Philip? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say then, Show us the Father?"

John 14:9 Amplified Bible

We can thus study the life and Words of Christ and so come to know (and love) God!

Yet again our God in His great love for us provides us with everything we need to have a love relationship with Him.

We often hear that we should have balance in everything, and that is good advice but in regards to loving God, let's look at His Word and more specifically Jesus' own words on this:

"Teacher, which kind of commandment is great and important (the principal kind) in the Law? [Some commandments are light – which are heavy?]

And He replied to him, You shall love the Lord your God with **all** your heart and with **all** your soul and with **all** your mind (intellect).

This is the great (most important, principal) and first commandment."

Matt 22: 36-38 Amplified Bible (emphasis mine)

Cross-reference: Deut. 6:5

Our love for God is to be a complete surrender on our part, not holding anything or any part of our lives back. It is to be **all**-consuming, unbarred, giving Him **all** access, pouring **all** of our love and desire on Him (heart and soul) and centering all our thoughts, plans and ideas around Him (mind) by studying His Word and Him as a Person so as to come to love and to know Him more fully (intellect).

Just as we would do if we found the man/woman we would want to love and spend the rest of our days with here on earth!

Christ then goes on to say:

"And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as [you do] yourself. [Lev. 19:18]

These two commandments sum up and upon them depend **all** the Law and the Prophets."

Matt. 22:39 & 40 Amplified Bible (emphasis mine)

It is worth it to take some time and just reflect on the gravitas of what Christ said here. I encourage you to read these Scriptures as often as you can. It is God's call to us to *love*. This is the bedrock of why we are here on earth. It is what everything is about...the very essence of life.

In this dispensation that we are living in (after Christ' resurrection and ascension), we are in the most blessed position to have been given God's Holy Spirit as our Helper, Teacher, Counsellor, Comforter, Intercessor, Advocate and Strengthener. He reminds us of everything Christ told us.

Loving others

“This is my command: Love each other.”

John 15:17 NLT Study Bible

From this love between us and God flows love for each other. It is a direct command from God. He makes it possible for us:

“..., for God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us.”

Romans 5:5 Amplified Bible

Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. (See: Galatians 5:22)

To find more understanding into what this love (for others) looks like we can turn to God’s Word. 1 Corinthians 13 is an excellent starting point to begin to grasp the nature of the love we are called (and enabled by the Holy Spirit) to live.

This love is so beautiful and powerful because it is God’s character. We as His sons and daughters are born of Him in the image of Him – we thus have this beauty and power too!

Let’s explore a bit further.

Let’s extract what is said about love in Romans 12 from verse 9 (NLT) onwards:

- Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them.
- Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.
- Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.
- When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them.
- Always be eager to practice hospitality.
- Bless those who persecute you. Do not curse them but pray that God will bless them.

- Be happy with those who are happy and weep with those who weep.
- Live in harmony with each other.
- Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people.
- And do not think you know it all!
- Never pay back evil with more evil.
- Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.
- Do all that you can to live in peace with all.
- Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God.
- Instead, if your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.
- Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

The Word of God shines the light to show us the way unto the journey of loving others. Some more treasures to be found (and explored) during self-study are to be found in the following Scriptures.

Love unites: Col. 3:14; Eph. 4:3

1 Cor. 16:14

1 John 4:7

1 John 4:19

Prov. 17:9

1 John 3:18

Our Bridegroom's take on loving each other:

"I give you a new commandment: that you should love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you too should love one another.

By this shall all [men] know that you are my disciples, if you love one another [if you keep on showing love among yourselves].”

John 13:34 & 35 (Amplified Bible)

From this we can see that we are called to heart to heart relationship with God and others. In all we do or say, *love* is to be our motivation.

An important key to this is:

- Forgiveness (letting go of all hurt, offense, anger and bitterness against anyone who may have hurt or wronged us), asking (and receiving!) God’s forgiveness for what **we** did to wrong or hurt others. Asking others for forgiveness and making restitution where-ever it is possible. (It does not matter whether people forgive us or not, that is up to them and it remains their choice. Just as long as we do what **we** can to heal wounds and restore relationships.) Finally and as important: we need to forgive ourselves. We can do that only once we truly grasp the incredible fact that we are completely forgiven for all our sin! Christ did not die and overcame *some* of our sins, or only those we committed in the past before we got saved. He dealt fully with **all** of it – even the sin we are still going to commit in the future! He knows every day of our lives, even before we live it and He is never surprised by our failures or weaknesses. He loves us despite of it! How liberating is that – we are truly free from sin and death! This glorious work of Christ for us sets us free to forgive others as He forgave us and not to judge others but be merciful as we received mercy!

Prayer:

Father God, please give me a new heart...a heart that loves. Please, knit my heart to Yours. Thank You God, for the love that You have poured into my heart. Please help me to walk out that love every moment, every day, in every situation that comes my way.

CHAPTER 2: RELATIONSHIP versus RELIGION

A call to Freedom and Love

One of the greatest pitfalls for us as Christians, is the belief (though be it unconsciously) that we need to earn/work for our salvation, redemption, healing, deliverance, forgiveness etc. There is such freedom to be had when we can grasp the fact that Christ did **everything** that needed to be done so that we can simply receive (by faith) all that **He** won for us. We simply cannot save ourselves! Not by any effort of our own. All of us are tempted at times, to hold the belief that all the good things we do, our acts of obedience, all the sacrifice we make or the suffering we endure or the act of forgiving someone who tried to destroy us; can serve to *earn* us God's acceptance, forgiveness and favor. This is simply not so. Let's look at what the Word of God has to say about this:

"For we have all become like one who is unclean [ceremonially, like a leper], and all our righteousness (our best deeds of rightness and justice) is like filthy rags or a polluted garment; we all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away [far from God's favor, hurrying us toward destruction]." Isa.64:6 (Amplified Bible)

Our best deeds are like 'filthy rags'! That word should certainly shock all our self-righteousness right out of us! The truth is that NOTHING can make us righteous in God's sight, **but the Blood of Jesus**. He alone is the perfect Lamb, holy and without sin, slain for us. He alone was the ONLY offering acceptable to God, to redeem us from our sin, shame and guilt. (To gain a better understanding of the pre-requisites for 'a perfect lamb', we can study Exodus 12:5&6 on the Passover lamb – which points to Christ.)

"The next day John saw Jesus coming to him and said, Look! There is the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1: 29 (Amplified Bible)

What does this mean then, that we should stop doing good deeds? No, certainly not! It only means that our good deeds are not *a means to an end*. Our good deeds are the outflow of our relationship

with the One Who is GOOD, the One Who is LOVE. Doing good deeds, becomes who we *are* as children of God, our very nature – part of our being.

Our salvation is a *free* gift to us that cost Christ *everything*.

“God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

Eph.2:8-10 (NLT Study Bible)

Even the faith, by which we receive our salvation, is not something *we do*...our faith is a gift from God! Everything we have and all that we are is by and through God Himself...we are *His* masterpiece. After we’ve been saved we are IN CHRIST and *that* enables us to do all God planned for us! How marvelous God’s love for us!

Through-out the ages we, as well-meaning believers, try to please God by our *performance* and satan delights in partnering with us in our endeavors, by accusing and condemning us every time we fail! The sad thing is that we accuse and condemn each other just as easily, believing that somehow another’s failure or weakness makes us more acceptable or ‘normal’. We are caught up in cycles of ‘trying our best’... and ‘failing’, ‘trying again’... ‘only but to fail again’, and sometimes the futility of it all tempt us to simply give up on God, ourselves and humanity!

Let’s take a look at how Christ dealt with religious folk during His time on earth. The scribes and the Pharisees (we see mentioned in the Gospels) seem to depict ‘religious’ folk of the time – they studied and were teachers of the Scriptures and the Law of Moses. As we read the Gospels we can see that they always questioned Christ and accused Him and His disciples of breaking the Law. Examples of this can be found in Matthew 9:11; Matthew 9:34.

“And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, Why does your Master eat with tax collectors and those (preeminently) sinful?” Matthew 9:11 (Amplified Bible)

According to the Law this was not to be done as it would defile one.

“But the Pharisees said, He drives out demons through and with the help of the prince of demons.” Matthew 9:34 (Amplified Bible)

They accused Christ of this after He delivered the dumb man of the demon he was under and the man could then speak again!

As we follow the journey of Christ throughout the Gospels, we can see that He patiently answered these questions and accusations, leading those who were open to it, into truth and freedom.

“But when Jesus heard it, He replied, Those who are strong *and* well (healthy) have no need of a physician, but those who are weak and sick.

Go and learn what this means; I desire mercy [that is, readiness to help those in trouble] and not sacrifice *and* sacrificial victims. For I came not to call *and* invite[to repentance] the righteous (those who are upright and in right standing with God), but sinners (the erring ones and all those not free from sin). [Hos. 6:6]” Matthew 9:12 & 13 (Amplified Bible)

**“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you [before you expected it].”
Matthew 12:28 (Amplified Bible)**

As time passed and they continued in their accusations against Him, we see Christ becoming quite stern in answering them.

“He who is not with Me [definitely on My side] is against Me, and he who does not [definitely] gather with Me *and* for My side scatters.

Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy (every evil, abusive, injurious speaking, or indignity against sacred things) can be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the [Holy] Spirit shall not *and* cannot be forgiven.

And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Spirit, the Holy One, will not be forgiven, either in this world *and* age or in the world *and* age to come.” Matthew 12:30-32 (Amplified Bible)

Until in no uncertain terms, we see exactly how He perceived and felt about them:

“You offspring of vipers! How can you speak good things when you are evil...?” Matthew 12:34 (Amplified Bible)

It is important to us as Christians, to know that Christ was speaking to the religious leaders of the time, the people who prided themselves on knowing Scriptures and prided themselves on living by and adhering to the rules and regulations of the Law. I believe that Christ was seeing into their hearts and what He saw there could have been spiritual pride – a people relying on their own

knowledge and ability and in the process were completely blinded to the coming of the Son of the very God who's Law they were trying to keep! What a desperately tragic situation.

Today we are facing much the same challenge. We pray for revival, quote Scriptures (using it deftly to judge and condemn people) even concocting our own (man-made) doctrines as we twist God's Word to fit what we would like it to say, instead of understanding its true meaning. Is it possible that we too are blind to and missing what God is doing on the earth right now? Could we too be accusing the work of the Holy Spirit today, as being the work of demons?

This is the challenge of our times. Yet, there is always hope for us! We are not helpless and lost! The opposite of pride is humility. Let us humble ourselves on an ongoing basis (as a lifestyle) before God and ask His Spirit of Truth to reveal to us and forgive us, the pride in our hearts. Praying that He will lead us into all truth, and that the truth will set us free from every religious yoke of slavery we might be under, or bring others into, by what we preach and teach about God and His Word.

When writing about 'religion/being religious' in this chapter, please understand that I am talking about 'being religious' (trying to adhere to certain rules and regulations) without 'knowing' (having a living relationship – 'knowing' in the most intimate sense) God.

"Many will say to Me, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name and driven out demons in Your name and done many mighty works in Your name?

And then I will say to them openly (publicly), I never knew you; depart from Me, you who act wickedly [disregarding my commands].

Matt.7:22 & 23- Amplified Bible (emphasis mine)

To understand this condition better, let's explore Christ's take on it some more.

"Take care not to do your good deeds publicly or before men, in order to be seen by them...

Thus, whenever you give to the poor, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the **hypocrites** in the synagogues and in the street like to do, that they may be recognized *and* honored *and* praised **by men...**"

Matt.6:1 & 2- Amplified Bible (emphasis mine)

v5: “Also when you pray, you must not be like the **hypocrites**, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, **that they may be seen by people...**”

v16: “And whenever you are fasting, do not look gloomy and sour and dreary like the **hypocrites**, for they put on a dismal countenance, that their fasting may be apparent to and **seen by men...**”

From these Scriptures, it is quite clear that Christ saw straight into the hearts of these ‘religious’ people. He saw their true intent in practicing their religion, that it was not about God but that they performed these deeds to be *seen by men*. In each of these instances, He called it for what it was: hypocritical. At the root of this behavior lies self-adoration/pride. Whatever we do as children of God in our worship of God, needs to pass this litmus test. It is so easy to test our motivation: In doing whatever I am doing; do I want the attention of people or is this an outflow of my love for God and am I being sincere, not caring what people may think or say about it?

GOD LOOKS AT THE HEART.

He teaches us to when we obey His commands, to not seek the attention of men but let it be done in humility because *He* sees and that is all that matters!

v3: “But when you give to charity, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

v4: So that your deeds of charity may be in secret: and **your Father Who sees in secret** will reward you *openly*.”

v6: “ but when you pray, go into your [most] private room, and, closing the door, pray to **your Father, Who is in secret**: and **your Father, Who sees in secret**, will reward you *in the open*.”

v17 & 18: “But when you fast, perfume your head and wash your face,

So that your fasting may not be noticed by men but by **your Father, Who sees in secret**; and **your Father, Who sees in secret**, will reward you *in the open*.”

We humans tend to think that the world and everything in it revolves around us when the truth is that it all revolves around God (its Creator)! We need a focus shift. God is not there to serve us (although He does!) but we are there to serve Him and His purposes. It’s ALL about Him!

If you've ever been in a love relationship with a narcissist, you'll know the devastating effect it has on your psyche. Nothing you do for that person is ever enough. Your own personal needs and desires are of no importance to them, whatsoever. There's no heartfelt, true emotion, tenderness, care from that person (when they do give, it is only to manipulate and ultimately only to benefit themselves). Could we be narcissistic lovers of God? In it only for what we can get out of it - not caring to get to *know* His heart and what is pleasing to Him. This is very challenging to think about but if we really desire to know God we need to search deep into our own hearts. Our eyes need to be wide open to where we are at.

"But understand this, that in the last days will come (set in) perilous times of great stress *and* trouble [hard to deal with and hard to bear].

For people will be **lovers of self *and* [utterly] self-centered**, lovers of money *and* aroused by an inordinate [greedy] desire for wealth, proud *and* arrogant *and* contemptuous boasters. They will be abusive (blasphemous, scoffing), disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy *and* profane.

[They will be] without natural affection (callous and inhuman), relentless (admitting of no truce or appeasement); [they will be] slanderers (false accusers, troublemakers), intemperate *and* loose in morals *and* conduct, uncontrolled *and* fierce, haters of good.

[They will be] treacherous [betrayers], rash, [and] inflated with self-conceit. [They will be] lovers of sensual pleasures *and* vain amusements more than *and* rather than lovers of God." 2 Tim.3:1-4 Amplified Bible (emphasis mine)

This portion of Scripture then probes even further:

v5: "For [although] they hold a **form** of piety (true religion), they deny and reject and are strangers to the power of it [their conduct belies the **genuineness** of their profession]."

What does the word 'hypocrite' mean? By definition according to Random House Webster's College Dictionary it is:

"...a person whose actions belie stated beliefs....a stage actor, hence one who plays a part..."

Stage actors do exactly what the word says – they act. An actor plays a role – on stage they are not their true selves, and who do they act for? They play their roles for *other people to see*. What we see

on stage is not real! Christ saw right through the fakeness of the religious people of the time and He called it evil!

So what then is the opposite of hypocrisy? It is being authentic.

Definition of 'authentic' according to Random House Webster's College Dictionary:

"1. genuine; real."

Simply stated it means that our lives need to mirror what we confess we believe. That what we confess to believe is what we truly believe from the *heart*. It is not for the show. The power of what we say we believe should be evident in our lives, bearing fruit.

In our relationships with each other we quickly realize those who truly care for and love us. It is evident in their behavior towards us. We may be fooled for a while by someone who says all the right things but only until we realize that they never *do* any of the things that so smoothly flow from their lips! It is truly tragic when it dawns on you, that the person you love only shows you affection when other people (those they want to impress or desire to have a certain image of them) are around! This gives us a clearer understanding of God's feelings/thoughts about hypocritical, religious people.

Freedom to be authentic comes when we grow in the understanding that God knows everything about us anyway! Nothing is hidden from Him...not even the things we bury so deep that we hide it even from ourselves! He is never surprised at anything we do or don't do, have done or didn't do or in the future will or won't do! We can truly come to Him *every time* just as we are, safe in the knowledge that He knew about this moment even before it happened. He doesn't ever condemn us or shuts us out. As long as we keep on coming to Him and not run away from Him, He keeps on receiving us into His Presence – only because of the Blood of Jesus that covers us as believers. We *are* the redeemed, ransomed by the price Christ paid. What freedom! What grace!

It takes a lot more courage to be authentic with the people in our lives. Unlike God, people do hurt us. Yet once we understand that none of us are perfect and God calls us to love each other sincerely, it becomes easier. Authenticity goes hand in hand with honesty. Our walk with people though, should always be a 'love' walk. Being real and honest never gives us license to hurt one another. Here again, sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit is key. Honest communication done in love, with empathy and sensitivity to the other person, results in authentic relationships.

It is important to spend time with people that we trust, with whom we can openly and honestly share our hearts. With those people, who we know can handle our questions and doubts and our feelings without condemnation or superior attitudes. It is even more important that we *become* someone like that to the people in our lives! We are all on this journey that we call life together and we all go through good and bad times. We need each other.

If we're stuck in 'religion', our hearts motivation for doing good works and serving God will be *for* love from men and from God, but if we're in a love relationship with God our good works and serving God will be *from* love.

Religion is a slave master that *drives* people like a herdsman driving/goading cattle. God is the Good Shepherd Who *leads/guides* His sheep. Slaves are people in chains, carrying heavy yokes, destined to work themselves do death – they lead hopeless/loveless lives with no-one showing them compassion or mercy. The beloved of God (His people) are the redeemed – freed from every yoke of slavery. Free to know and follow and love the Lover of their souls. If you happen to be a dog-owner and you live somewhere where you can take your dog for a walk to a forest or park where you are allowed to unclip the chain and set them free to run and explore, you would have experienced their joy and delight in that freedom. A good owner however always keeps an eye on his dogs and they always return to him when called.

A good shepherd's sheep flourishes under his watchful care. Everything he does is for the good of his flock. If they follow his lead/voice, he will guide them to the best pastures and fresh water. He protects them against predators and sickness and disease. If he disciplines them it will always be for their own good and the greater good of the flock. God is a Good Shepherd...His goodness cannot be compared with the goodness of even the best human shepherd – He is just so far above any worldly standard. He placed His law in our *hearts* because He **loves** us and cares for us watchfully. If we heed His voice then just like the flock of an excellent shepherd, we will be given the best care possible! God's law is not a set of rules and regulations to be enslaved by but a manifest of His love that leads to freedom and life in abundance.

“Love does no wrong to one’s neighbor [it never hurts anybody]. Therefore love meets all the requirements and is the fulfilling of the law.” Romans 13:10 – Amplified Bible

There's one very important aspect that we always need to remember in our love relationship with God, the Creator of all. He is GOD. We always need to respect and honor that fact! Although we have complete access and full freedom in Him, it doesn't give us license to talk to Him any way we want or have the audacity to tell Him what to do. He is the One and Only God, worthy of all our worship. He is God Almighty, worthy of all our praise. Our love for Him is to be rooted in reverent awe. The NLT Study Bible says the following in the notes on the FEAR OF THE LORD pg. 1030:

“Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true knowledge” (1:7). *Fear* implies respect, awe, and (at times) knee-knocking terror. It also acknowledges that everything, including knowledge and wisdom, comes from total dependence on God. The fear of the Lord leads people toward humility and away from pride (3:7, 15:33).”

The *fear of God* acknowledges Who He is. It is not the same thing as being afraid of Him. We never need to be afraid of Him. We can approach Him as the very best, most loving Father ever whilst knowing that He is the most powerful, holy One as well! We can adore Christ wholeheartedly as our Bridegroom, knowing that He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords as well! We can know the Holy Spirit as our best Friend and Helper, yet always be very aware of Christ's warning not to sin against

Him. As the saying goes: “familiarity breeds contempt”; we need to always guard against that in our relationship with God and others. We need to get to know God for Who He *is*, not for Who *we* want Him to be. For that to happen, we need to be rooted in the Word of God, which means we need to get to know the Bible intimately.

“Every Scripture is God-breathed (given by His inspiration) and profitable for instruction, for reproof *and* conviction of sin, for correction of error *and* discipline in obedience, [and] for training in righteousness (in holy living, in conformity to God’s will in thought, purpose, and action).” 2 Tim. 3:16

Every Scripture, in the New as well as the Old Testament! *Every* Scripture, not just some (our favorites) and not others! One of the best things that we can do in our relationship with God, is to read and study His Word on an ongoing basis – preferably daily. Just like we would talk and listen to our spouse and our loved ones, daily! That is how we keep our relationships strong and alive. That is how we get to know each other better and learn to love each other through good and bad times. No communication...no relationship. This leads to the subject of prayer. Although there are many kinds of prayer, to simplify it, it means *talking to God*. Just like we would like to talk to the person that we are in love with all the time (if it was possible) so do we need to talk to God all the time (in our thoughts if not out loud)...and that is actually possible! In that way we share our everyday life with Him. He is closer than our best friend and He is more interested in us and loves us more than any other human being ever could!

So, what does it actually mean to have God’s law written on our *hearts*? Not written only on our *minds*, but our *hearts* as well. Let’s look at the Word of God:

“But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are under no obligation to the law of Moses.”

Gal. 4:18 NLT Study Bible

To put that verse into context, let’s look at some more verses from Galatians 5. The caption to these Scriptures in the NLT Study Bible reads:

LIFE BY THE SPIRIT (5:13-6:10)

Life in the Spirit (5:13-26)

Freedom and Love

v13 For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature.

Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.

v16 So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.

v22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!"

Prayer:

Father God, thank You that we are not bound by religion anymore. Thank You for setting me free to have a love relationship from the heart with You. Holy Spirit, please guide and direct me so that I may bear Your fruit in my life.

CHAPTER THREE: THE BRIDE and the HARLOT

We, the Beloved of God are spoken of as 'the Bride of Christ' but the Bible also often speaks of 'the harlot/prostitute'. This is an important theme for us to explore. To understand this better, let's look at some Scriptures and then at the characteristics (heart) of the Bride and of the harlot.

Rev.17:1b&2 (NLT Study Bible)

"Come with me," he said, "and I will show you the judgment that is going to come on the great prostitute, who rules over many waters. The kings of the world have committed adultery with her, and the people who belong to this world have been made drunk by the wine of her immorality."

v 15 Then the angel said to me, "The waters where the prostitute is ruling represents masses of people of every nation and language."

v 18 And this woman you saw in your vision represents the great city that rules over the kings of the world."

Rev.18:2 ..."Babylon is fallen – that great city is fallen! She has become a home for demons. She is a hideout for every foul spirit, a hideout for every foul vulture and every foul and dreadful animal.

v 3 For all the nations have fallen because of the wine of her passionate immorality. The kings of the world have committed adultery with her. Because of her desires for extravagant luxury, the merchants of the world have grown rich."

We can see here that she is known for her immorality and adultery.

"Images of prostitution are completed by judgment. In Revelation's judgment, prostitution again assumes figurative force. *Babylon, the *city of godlessness, decadence, materialism and ruthless power, is pictured as the Great Whore "which made all nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" (Rev 14:8 NIV). "– pg. 678 Dictionary of BIBLICAL IMAGERY, GENERAL EDITORS: Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman
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From this we can see that 'the harlot' seduces people from all nations into godlessness, decadence, materialism and ruthless power.

We can glean more understanding into the harlotry and adultery spoken of here, by exploring further:

“The NT continues the figurative use of adultery when those who reject Jesus (Matt 16:1-4), those who choose friendship with the world (James 4:4) and those who follow false teaching (Rev 2:20-22) are called adulterous.”

– pg. 16, Dictionary of BIBLICAL IMAGERY

“From the most common metaphors, we understand that greed feeds the *heart of a prostitute. Whether because of genuine need or base ambition, a prostitute takes the posture of grasping, seeking satiation at all costs, while also promising satiation for a price. Self-indulgence is at the heart of prostitution.” pg. 676,

Dictionary of BIBLICAL IMAGERY

“God had commanded Israel, “[Do] not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own heart and eyes” (Num 15:39 NIV). In his eyes prostitution is self-indulgence, not self-sacrifice.” pg. 677, Dictionary of

BIBLICAL IMAGERY

We find a very explicit account of God speaking to and through Ezekiel concerning this theme in Ezek. 16. (Please take some time and study this portion of Scripture.)

“What a sick heart you have, says the Sovereign LORD, to do such things as these, acting like a shameless prostitute.” Eze.16:30 NLT Study Bible

Note that once again, God is looking at the *heart* and that He is addressing His people Israel, not the gentile nations of the time! Throughout history, God’s people stand guilty of being faithless to Him – committing adultery and worshipping idols. God, Himself stands amazed at this phenomenon! (See Ezek.16:16; 18 &19) We need to be very aware of the fact that still to this day that is the tendency of His people. We need to search our own hearts at all times to be able to see where we are at.

A look at the heart of:

The Bride (motivation: love)

The harlot (motivation: lust)

Pure

Defiled

Chaste

Flirtatious

Serves (e.g. Rebecca)

Seduces (e.g. Delilah)

Self-less (outward focused)	Selfish (self-centered/narcissist)
Giver	Taker
Faithful/devoted	Faithless
Desires to delight her Bridegroom	Lives to please herself
One Lover	Many lovers
Loves God	Loves mammon
Controlled by the Spirit of God	Controlled by the spirit of the world
Always points to Christ	Leads many astray
Builds (edifies)	Devours
Humble	Proud
“To live is Christ” (in Christ)	“Me, Myself, I”
Surrenders/yields to the Holy Spirit	Controls/manipulates
(Five wise virgins = Spirit-filled)	(Five unwise virgins = Backslidden)

For the sake of the topic of this book, please note that the emphasis lies on the fact that *we as the people of God* need to examine our hearts to see where we are standing. We tend to think that ‘the harlot’ points to people who do not know God and do not serve Him, but everywhere in the Bible we find examples of God referring to His own people as adulterous and idolatrous. We need to search our hearts and truly repent if we are not to be caught unawares thinking we’re right with God when He clearly would claim otherwise!

“Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father Who is in heaven.

Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name and driven out demons in Your name and done many mighty works in Your name?

And then I will say to them openly (publicly), I never knew you; depart from Me, you who act wickedly [disregarding My commands]." Matt.7:21-23 Amplified Bible

From these Scriptures we can see that God addresses this condition in the Old as well as the New Testament. The above Scripture was a severe warning from Christ Himself which we would be wise to heed!

"Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and perfect will of God, *even* the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you]." Romans 12:2 Amplified Bible

Some of the lies of the spirit of this world (idolatry/adultery) in our culture today are:

- "*Money makes the world go round*" as opposed to: God is the Creator of heaven and earth. One of His names is "Jehovah Jireh". He is our Provider, our Source as opposed to the lie, that anything at all that we have/accomplished was done in our own strength/wisdom/power. This lie says: "*I am the captain of my own destiny*".

"But you shall [earnestly] remember the Lord your God, for **it is He Who gives you power to get wealth**, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day." Deut.8:18 Amplified Bible (emphasis mine)

- "*It's my life and I can do what I want*", as opposed to: we are not our own, we have been bought with a price.

"Do you not know that your body is the temple (the very sanctuary) of the Holy Spirit Who lives within you, Whom you have received [as a Gift] from God? **You are not your own.**" 1 Cor.6:19 Amplified Bible (emphasis mine)

"And set your minds and keep them set on what is above (the higher things), not on the things that are on the earth.

For [as far as this world is concerned] you have died, and your [new, real] life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Col.3:2 & 3 Amplified Bible

If at the end of our lives our tombstones read that *we did it our way*, we could find ourselves in deep trouble!

- “*Whatever works for you is fine.*” - This lie seduces people into thinking that whatever *feels* right to them or whatever *they choose* to believe to be right is fine. This lie leads people into believing that they have a right to live anyway that pleases them, choose any lifestyle or religion, and at the end of the day all will be well. The idol here is: Me/myself/I. It is worship of self.

“Jesus said to him, I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except by (through) Me.”

John 14:6 Amplified Bible

We all have been given the freedom to choose. God is not a puppet master with people as puppets. We are free to choose but it is imperative to know that the choice we have is a choice between life and death!

We can choose to follow, serve and worship God as the One, true God or ourselves as our god (which ultimately serves satan as this leads to death for us). Our decision does not only have an effect on ourselves but on our children and generations to come as well. (See: Deut.30:15-18)

“I call heaven and earth to witness this day against you that I have set before you life and death, the blessings and the curses; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live

by loving the Lord your God, obeying His voice, and clinging to Him. For He is your life and the length of your days, that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” – Deut.30:19-20 Amplified Bible

Christ spoke these words in John 6:47 &48, Amplified Bible:

“I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, he who believes *in Me* [who adheres to, trusts in, relies on, and has faith in Me] has (now possesses) eternal life.

I am the Bread of Life [that gives life – the Living Bread].”

Once again we see these Scriptures from the Old *as well as* from the New Testament, going hand in hand. It is so important that we realize that Christ did not come to do away with the Old Testament but to fulfill it.

“Do not think that I have come to do away with or undo the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to do away with or undo but to complete and fulfill them.” Matt.5:17 Amplified Bible

Throughout the ages God is still God. His Word throughout the ages is still His Word. We were helpless to abide by it but He made a way for us through Christ. It’s so beautiful to see that from the beginning God looked at the *heart* as well as the mind - Deut.30 (NLT Study Bible) – emphasis mine:

v6 “The LORD your God will change your **heart** and the **hearts** of all your descendants, so that you will love him with all your **heart** and soul and so you may live!”

v10 “The LORD your God will delight in you if you obey his voice and keep the commands and decrees written in this Book of Instruction, and if you turn to the LORD your God with all your **heart** and soul.

v11 “This command I am giving you today is not too difficult for you to understand, and it is not beyond your reach.

v14 No, the message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your **heart** so that you can obey it.”

We see that Scripture speaks about the Bride and the harlot, the wise and the unwise virgins (Matt.25) and the sheep and the goats (Matt.25 from verse 32 and Ezek.34). All of these Scriptures help us to better understand the heart behind the behavior.

In conclusion the heart behind the harlot is the idolatry of, the worship of self. The root of the adultery is greed (lust). We usually think of lust in connection with power, sex and money but

though it manifests that way, greed is a condition of the *heart*. It screams: “I want...” and “Give me...” It takes, it grabs and it expects to be served. When it does give, it is conditional giving for more selfish gain. It is utterly selfish, self-centered and self-indulgent...it demands and is not willing to sacrifice. It is completely insatiable, never fully satisfied but experiences only brief relief at times only to yearn for what it does not have or for still more of what it just had. There’s a permanent, deep discontent which manifest in restlessness, boredom and striving.

“You played the harlot also with the Assyrians because you were insatiable; yes, you played the harlot with them, and yet you were not satisfied.

Moreover, you multiplied your harlotry with the land of trade, with Chaldea, and yet even with this you were not satisfied.

How weak *and* spent with longing *and* lust is your heart *and* mind, says the Lord God, seeing you do all these things, the work of a bold, domineering harlot,...” Ezek.16:28-30 Amplified Bible

In a relationship, the person driven by lust degrades their partner to an object, leaving her/him feeling used and unable to satisfy the needs of that person. Such a lustful relationship drains without ever replenishing until eventually it burns out.

Whilst in a relationship that is motivated by love, there is a mutual, ongoing caring and concern about each other which leads to a heart attitude of mutual serving and giving. Each partner’s focus is on the other and they are more than willing to make sacrifices that would benefit their partner and the relationship. Such a love relationship is deeply satisfying, fulfilling and leads to contentment by choosing daily to love with an attitude of deep gratitude.

In such a relationship of reciprocal love, love bears beautiful fruit. Both partners flourish as being genuinely loved from the heart leads to healing, restoration, peace and well-being. This love never runs dry for there is a constant supply as it is connected to the Source - it is connected to God, Who *is* Love.

Such love is the life-force of our relationships.

Our God never leaves us helpless. There is always redemption available for the harlot. If we are honest with ourselves, none of our lives are free from idolatry/adultery. We are all born selfish and live for ourselves until we get born again into God's Kingdom, made new and are transformed daily into more of the image of the One we love. Just as people who have been married for a very long time 'become' (and even start looking) alike, so it is with us and God as well. The good news of redemption for the harlot can be seen in the examples of:

- Rahab; the harlot who hid Joshua's spies before the Israelites entered Jericho and went on to become the mother of Boaz and so became ancestry of Christ! (See: Joshua 2)

- Gomer; the prophet Hosea's wife who was a prostitute and was repeatedly unfaithful to her husband but returned to him time and again to be forgiven by him as God instructed Hosea, so as to show God's heart towards His people! (The book of Hosea is a painfully, powerful picture of God's love & redemption, for His adulterous people.)

Throughout the Bible this is the picture painted: A holy God loving an unholy people; always calling them to repentance so that they can experience His forgiveness and cleansing and be restored back unto Him. It shows God's pain, agony and anger at the behavior but also always the call back unto Him. In the end-times though, there is a final, urgent warning and call to *flee* from harlotry and of the impending judgment on it:

"I then heard another voice from heaven saying, Come out from her, my people, so that you may not share in her sins, neither participate in her plagues." Rev.18:4 Amplified Bible

v8 "So shall her plagues (afflictions, calamities) come thick upon her in a single day, pestilence and anguish *and* sorrow and famine; and she shall be utterly consumed (burned up with fire), for mighty is the Lord God Who judges her."

We can clearly see in the verses 11, 15, 17, 22 and 23, that the harlot and mammon (trade, business and wealth) are linked.

v11 “And earth’s businessmen will weep and grieve over her because no one buys their freight (cargo) anymore,”

v15 “The dealers who handled these articles, who grew wealthy through their business with her, will stand a long way off, in terror of her doom *and* torment, weeping and grieving aloud...”

v17 “...And all ship captains *and* pilots, navigators and all who live by seafaring, the crews and all who ply their trade on the sea, stood a long way off.”

And then the most catastrophic picture of all:

v22 “And the sound of harpists and minstrels and flute players and trumpeters shall never again be heard in you, and no skilled artisan of any craft shall ever again be found in you, and the sound of the millstone shall never be heard in you.”

v23 “ And never again shall the light of a lamp shine in you, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall never be heard in you; for your business-men were the great *and* prominent men of the earth, and by your magic spells *and* poisonous charm all nations were led astray (seduced and deluded).”

Just to clarify, it is not wealth, business or trade in itself that is idolatry, but if the heart behind it is a *heart* of greed and lust, worship of self and the love of money (worship of mammon - as portrayed here in that great city of Babylon), is.

In strong contrast to this picture of impending doom and judgment we find this picture of the Bride:

“Let us rejoice and shout for joy [exulting and triumphant]! Let us celebrate *and* ascribe to Him glory *and* honor, for the marriage of the Lamb [at last] has come, and His bride has prepared herself.

She has been permitted to dress in fine (radiant) linen, dazzling and white – for the fine linen is (signifies, represents) the righteousness (the upright, just, and godly living, deeds, and conduct, and right standing with God) of the saints (God’s holy people).

Then [the angel] said to me, Write this down: Blessed (happy, to be envied) are those who are summoned (invited, called) to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he said to me [further], These are the true words (the genuine and exact declarations) of God.” Rev.19:7-9 Amplified Bible

Prayer:

Father, God please reveal to me through your Spirit the areas of adultery and idolatry in my heart. I repent of these from the heart. My hearts cry is to be Your bride, ready and prepared at Your coming. Amen.

CHAPTER 4: THE SONG OF THE BRIDEGROOM

David, the man after God's heart, says the following in Ps.32:7 Amplified Bible (emphasis mine):

"You are a hiding place for me; You, Lord, preserve me from trouble, **You surround me with songs** and shouts of deliverance. Selah [pause, and calmly think of that]!"

We know that David was a musician, so the idea of God being the God Who originally composed the very first song and thus being a Musician Himself, was not a strange concept to him. David was always making music unto God – the word 'Psalms' translated is 'melodies of praise'. From this Scripture we see that David knows where the songs that surrounds him, originates from. Music or songs, are very much part of our relationship with God. We praise and worship Him with songs and we know from Scripture that in heaven there is constant, ongoing worship of God happening. In Revelation 5 from verse 9 Amplified Bible (emphasis mine), we find the following song being sung to our Bridegroom:

"And [now] they sing **a new song**, saying, You are worthy to take the scroll and to break the seals that are on it, for You were slain (sacrificed), and with Your blood You purchased men unto God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

v11 Then I looked, and I heard the voices of many angels on every side of the throne and of the living creatures and the elders [of the heavenly Sanhedrin], and they numbered ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands,

v12 Saying in a loud voice, Deserving is the Lamb, Who was sacrificed, to receive all the power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and majesty (glory, splendor) and blessing!

v13 And I heard every created thing in heaven and on earth and under the earth [in Hades, the place of departed spirits] and on the sea and all that is in it, crying out together, To Him Who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb be ascribed the blessing and the honor and the majesty (glory, splendor) and the power (might, dominion) forever and ever (through the eternities of the eternities)!"

How wonderful it is to know that God not only created music and songs but that it is so much a part of Who He is that He is constantly surrounded by it and that *He* even sings over us!

“The Lord your God is in the midst of you, a Mighty One, a Savior [Who saves]! He will rejoice over you with joy: He will rest [in silent satisfaction] and in His love He will be silent and make no mention [of past sins, or even recall them]; **He will exult over you with singing.**”

Zephaniah 3:17 Amplified Bible (emphasis mine)

Let’s just take a moment to ponder that statement! Almighty, All-powerful, Holy God exults over *us* with singing!

Take note that these words were spoken by the prophet Zephaniah.

Random House Webster’s College Dictionary defines the word ‘exult’ as follows:

exult: 1. to show or feel a lively or triumphant joy;

2. to leap for joy

The image ‘leaping for joy’ immediately brings to my mind the occasion on which David danced (exulted) with joy as the ark was returned to Jerusalem! (We’ll talk more about that in a following chapter.) In our culture we would probably *leap for joy* when our rugby or soccer teams scores, or when we receive exceptionally good news! How wonderful to think that our Bridegroom exults with such joy over us! Furthermore, He not only leaps with joy but also *sings* with lively, triumphant joy over us. How incredibly, exciting!

Let me encourage you to ask God’s Holy Spirit to open your heart to the songs He sings over you. I believe that we can hear the Bridegroom’s ‘Song’ in more ways than one. It takes many forms -our hearts just need to be open to it. Just as gifted musicians can ‘hear’ when someone’s voice has perfect pitch as they sing or when an instrument is in tune; in the same way we can ‘hear’ the Bridegroom’s Song if we are tuned in to it.

Christ's life is His Song to us.

Every detail of Christ's life on earth sung the song of His love and His heart towards the Father and towards us. As we study the gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, we are able to 'hear' the Song Christ sang with His life. The narrative of his life on earth from the moment God spoke Him into being (before His birth & conception) to His death (and then even His afterlife!) is recorded there. And just like a favorite song, we can choose to 'listen' to it over and over again, until we know it by heart! But unlike any other song, this is one that is divinely inspired by God Himself, sung by Him and there is always some nuance new to us to be heard each time we listen to it! Surely this is the greatest love song ever sung! His love song to us is not merely lyrics set to a tune, but He lived and walked the 'talk/song'! He truly was the Word made flesh. Love manifested!

"And the Word (Christ) became flesh (human, incarnate) and tabernacle (fixed His tent of flesh, lived awhile) among us;..."

John 1:14 Amplified Bible

The Word of God (the Bible), is His love song to us.

Many of our praise and worship songs are based on Scripture – we are in effect singing back to Him what He sings over us! One of the most beautiful and precious memories that I cherish, is attending a conference in Jerusalem where the worship team sang a worship song with lyrics from Song of Songs. That song turned out to be such an incredible, intimate heart to Heart moment with my Bridegroom! Time and time again when we praise and worship, we do not only find our love and worship expressed unto Him but He meets with us every time (if we surrender to Him completely and focus only on Him alone and when worshipping together with others, not on the people around us, nor the music itself) and in those times as we encounter Him, we 'hear' Him singing to us as we

sing to Him. We 'hear' Him in the words of the songs as it mirrors His heart and Will for us as contained in Scriptures.

God's creation (the works of His hands) sings His Song of Love to us.

There is so much to stand in awe of; so much of His splendor and of Who He is, revealed to us through nature. All we need to do is to ask Him to open our eyes to the wonder of Him that He is revealing through His creation and we will hear His Song to us. It is there in every sunrise and sunset, every bird-song, the rustle of the wind through the trees, the sound and smell of rain falling, the stars and moon appearing in clear night skies, the exquisite beauty and diversity of every flower, grass, shrub and tree and snowflake. It is there plain to hear and see in cry of every newborn baby and creature. We 'hear' it in roaring waterfalls, quiet lakes and forests and in the majesty of mountain ranges and vast landscapes. We hear it in the cry of the fish eagle and the roar of the lion and the sound of ocean waves crashing at the shore. We are surrounded by an ongoing symphony of glorious beauty and love, if we choose to open ourselves to it.

The love that we give to and receive from others sings His song to us.

We are vessels of God's love to each other and this world. This is the 'song' we hear with every kind word, tender touch and loving embrace. It is the 'song' we hear when help is given at a time of need. We find these beautiful songs in family and friendships and also from people we don't even know! It is truly all around us! And in the same way, we too are constantly surrounding others with God's Song as we walk in love. This 'Song' of Love has no boundaries...it can be heard everywhere where Love is shown!

His song in the night:

Many of us have discovered the power of music. Music is said to be the language of the heart, perhaps because through music, emotions and feelings can be expressed on a much deeper level.

God blessed us with the gift of music. He blessed us with the 'song'. It is an expression of His Love for us in good and bad times. There is a song for every situation we might find ourselves to be in and a song available to surround us with, in every possible circumstance, in every season of the soul.

"Yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, and **in the night His song shall be with me**, a prayer to the God of my life."

Psalm 42:8 Amplified Bible (emphasis mine)

I do believe there is a deeper meaning to this portion of Scripture. Yes, it is to be taken literally but just as God's loving-kindness surrounds us both day *and* night and His song the same, I believe we can also see 'in the night' as the hard times that we go through when it is difficult to see! It is very interesting to see, when we take time to research, how songs like the very well-known song 'Amazing grace' or 'It is well (with my soul)' were birthed. They were written by people of God who went through very dark times indeed and those songs still to this day, are sung and help sustain people the world over!

Many of us experience the power of a 'song in the night'. Recently, I had the privilege of listening to a very well-known preacher testifying to exactly this. He was at the end of himself in a situation from which no-one was able to deliver him. In desperation one night he called out to God and the words of a song came to mind (I believe God surrounded him with that song). He started singing just one verse and then night after night more of the song so that as time passed when he would find himself waking up in the night (usually anxious and in despair) it was an automatic response. This song of praise to God in the dark night of his soul helped him through this time (and still does whenever he feels anxious).

Prayer: Oh God, how I would love to be able to hear and recognize, the songs that You surround me with! Please open my ears, my heart and my spirit to it, in Jesus Name I pray...Amen.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE CALL, THE CHOICE AND THE COST

A Call to 'follow':

"And He said to them, Come after Me [as disciples – letting Me be your Guide], **follow Me**, and I will make you fishers of men!"

Matt 4:19 Amplified Bible (emphasis mine)

This is Christ' call to Peter and Andrew, His first two disciples: He called them to *follow* Him so that HE could *make* them disciples so that as to, at the right time, He could *send* them to *go* and do likewise.

For us today, this call still remains: it is the call to *follow* so that we can *go*.

This also is Christ' final words to His disciples recorded in the Gospel of Matthew:

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

Go therefore and **make** disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matt.28:18b – 20 Spirit Filled Life Bible (emphasis mine)

First He calls us: it is an invitation to *come* to Him and then to *follow* Him.

"As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, And He said to him,

"Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him.

Matt. 9:9 Spirit Filled Life Bible

It is interesting to note Matthew's response to Christ' call: There is no hesitation on his part nor long arguments or many questions asked, and no excuses either. He just got up and followed Christ - as

simple as that. And in that one moment his life was forever changed. There was no way that he could have known the gravity of that invitation but he *chose* to respond (not knowing where it would take him) by getting up (from where he was and from what he was busy with) and to follow Christ!

That invitation from Christ is still to this day, open to *all*.

“For God so **loved** the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever** believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

John 3:16 Spirit Filled Life Bible (italics mine)

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”

John 6:37 Spirit Filled Life Bible

“I have come as a light into the world, that **whoever** believes in Me should not abide in darkness.”

John 12:46 Spirit Filled Life Bible (italics mine)

“And let him who thirsts come. **Whoever** desires, let him take the water of life freely.”

Rev.22:17 Spirit Filled Life Bible (italics mine)

So now we know from God’s Word that this ‘call to follow’ is open to all. Let’s define the word ‘follow’:

follow, *akoloutheo* (ak-ol-oo-theh-oh); Strong’s #190: To accompany, go along with, go the same way with, follow one who precedes. *A* is in union with, and *keluethos* is a road. *Akoloutheo* is being on the same roadway with someone. Since the word was used for soldiers, servants, and pupils, it can easily be transferred to the life of the Christian. In 78 Gospel occurrences it is used 77 times of following Christ. Metaphorically, it is used for discipleship (Matt.9:9; Mark 9:38)

WORD WEALTH at John 13:36 Spirit Filled Life Bible

To follow Christ then would mean to walk with Him, in the same direction. ‘To follow one who precedes’ would mean for us, to do what we saw Him do (during His time on earth) as well as to

follow His lead from now on in. That would mean that we need His Presence with us if we are to walk *with Him* and we need to 'see' where He is going/leading us if we are to *follow* Him. The only way that can happen is when our spiritual eyes and ears are opened by the Holy Spirit. I believe that we as followers of Christ need to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God just as the Disciples of Christ needed to be filled before they could 'go' and be witnesses to the world.

"And when they had prayed, the place in which they were assembled was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they continued to speak the Word of God with freedom and boldness and courage."

Acts 4:31 Amplified Bible

The Holy Spirit enables us to continue speaking the Word of God with freedom, boldness and courage! We are completely dependent on Him to 'follow'!

A Call to 'go':

"But you shall receive power (ability, efficiency, and might) when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends (the very bounds) of the earth."

Acts 1:8 Amplified Bible

These are the words of Jesus to His disciples and it happened that way just as He told them it would! We need the Holy Spirit! He enables and empowers us to be God's witnesses. That is the purpose when we *go*...to witness! The disciples were first-hand witnesses because they have been with Christ during His time on earth. And even though they witnessed His life, they still needed the Holy Spirit to empower and enable them to testify! We need the Holy Spirit to enable and equip us to be God's witnesses here on earth!

Just a note:

The call to 'go' might not mean that all of us get to physically 'go' to a faraway place to testify to a people who never heard of Christ, but *in prayer* we CAN all 'go' to any nation and pray for those who

do not know Christ! We can pray for a specific nation(s), for their salvation, for blind eyes to open, deaf ears to hear and hearts to turn to God. We can all pray for revival! Then, if and when the opportunity arises, we can 'go' to wherever we feel called to!

We can all pray for our Christian brothers and sisters who are being persecuted for their faith! We can choose one of the nations where that is happening and bring them before God continually in prayer. Likewise we need to pray for our own nation. Pray for revival. Pray for the leaders. Pray as the Holy Spirit directs us according to God's will and purposes for ourselves, our families, cities, regions, nations and continents!

"And He taught and said to them, Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?"

Mark 11:17a (Amplified Bible)

"First of all, then, I admonish and urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be offered on behalf of all men,

For kings and all who are in positions of authority or high responsibility, that [outwardly] we may pass a quiet and undisturbed life [and inwardly] a peaceable one in all godliness and reverence and seriousness in every way.

For such [praying] is good and right, and [it is] pleasing and acceptable to God our Savior,

Who wishes all men to be saved..."

1 Timothy 2:1-4a (Amplified Bible)

We all have family, friends and neighbors. The call to 'go' is simply to make use of every opportunity as it arises and just be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's lead. Our 'going' can be as simple as just greeting someone with a smile. Touching someone lovingly who is sick or in pain. Be there for a person who

just needs someone willing to listen to them. Responding to a need (giving practical aid) or just blessing someone for no reason at all! The call to 'go' is us responding to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

A Call to 'be':

This is the highest call. It is the call to *become* more like Jesus. It is the call to godliness. For this to happen in our lives we need to keep on surrendering every part of ourselves. It is a *journey* (not a one-time happening) which will be concluded only when we see Christ.

"The first man (Adam) was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven.

As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.

And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

v51, 52 ...I tell you a mystery;...we shall all be changed-in a **moment**, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet."

1 Corinthians 15:47-49, 51 &52 (Spirit Filled Life Bible)

That is what we look forward to in joyful anticipation-the glorious conclusion of our journey (as believers in Christ) here on earth! But the journey starts from the moment we give our hearts and lives to God and accept Christ as our Savior. Our minds get transformed and renewed by God's Word and by the Spirit of Truth. Our lives get transformed continually as God shapes and forms us.

"Therefore if any person is [in grafted] in Christ (the Messiah) he is a new creation (a new creature altogether); the old [previous moral and spiritual condition] has passed away. Behold, the fresh and new has come!"

"So we are Christ's ambassadors..."

“For our sake He made Christ [virtually] to be sin Who knew no sin, so that in and through Him we might become [endued with, viewed as being in, and examples of] the righteousness of God [what we ought to be, approved and acceptable and in right relationship with Him, by His goodness].”

2 Corinthians 5:17, 20a & 21 (Amplified Bible)

It is a journey into godliness and godliness means simply put; to please God. As we continue to seek Him and His ways as the true north of our lives, He reveals to us His will. The cry of our hearts to Him for His perfect will to be done in and through our lives pleases Him. Every step we take in obedience to what we believe His will for us is, pleases Him. As we surrender our will to His, we *become* like Him. After all, we are created in His image! This image was marred by sin and the enemy of our souls tried his best to destroy it BUT in Christ’s victory over sin and death, He won for us the restoration of that image! So day by day, as we move forward with and in Christ, as we get to *know* Him more; we *become* like Him. It is not by what we do (our effort/performance), it is by what Christ did. Do we believe?

“However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

Luke 18:8b (Amplified Bible)

It is interesting to me to note that the portion of Scripture that follows the above verse, engages the subject of self-righteousness! Which raises the question, do we (even in the smallest of ways) believe that our own efforts can save us? Do we pride ourselves on our performance, in any way at all? I believe that self-righteousness is the enemy of godliness. The root of self-righteousness is pride. Pride led to Lucifer’s downfall. Christ’s humility leads the way for us to move in godliness. He is the Servant King. He gave so that we could have. In His absolute humility, He had no selfish agenda in coming to earth. His life was completely selfless to the glory of our Father. In losing His life He gained for us the all-surpassing victory. Nothing we could ever *do*, or can ever do, could earn that. It was the gift of salvation given to us, a free gift that cost Christ everything. A gift that is ours if we believe!

The Choice:

So now, we are left with a choice. What do we do with what Christ did?

God is not a puppet-master with humanity as His puppets. He in His all-knowing wisdom gave us free will. Which means, we can decide and make our own choices with the life and the opportunities that we are given. God does not make the choice for us, we choose. We should know that as with any action, our choices do have consequences. So with the freedom of making our own choices in life, comes the responsibility to take ownership of our choices and its consequences. Every choice that we make has a profound impact not only on ourselves but on everyone around us.

Every day and in every situation we make a choice. We choose between life or death, faith or fear, trust or despair, praise or heaviness, to love or not, to forgive or hold on to offenses, grudges and pain, to give or to hold back, to build or break down etc. We choose whom we serve; God or the devil. *We* have that choice.

“I call heaven and earth to witness this day against you that I have set before you life and death, the blessings and the curses; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live

And may love the Lord your God, obey His voice, and cling to Him. **For He is your life** and the length of your days, that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

Deut.30:19 Amplified Bible (emphasis mine)

Note: Abraham is our father too – he is our father of faith. We are God’s people and His Word is for all of us.

It comes down to our will. If we choose to make our own choices and decisions based solely on what we want or believe to be best for us then our will is not submitted to God’s will and ways. If, on the other hand, we seek God’s will in our choices and decisions and submit to His will, then we can rest

in Him for the outcome of our lives and the impact that it will have on others. What a relief! What a glorious place to be in! But that place doesn't come cheap as there is a price to be paid.

The Cost:

Read Luke 14:25-33

These days we get bombarded by what is called the 'grace-message'. From these words of Christ Himself addressing the crowds (not His disciples only), we can see that He in no uncertain terms, states that there is a *cost* to be counted to follow Him and be His disciple. He also clearly (so that there can be no confusion or doubt) tells us what that cost is.

"Whoever does not persevere and carry his own cross and come after (follow) Me cannot be My disciple."

Luke 14:27 Amplified Bible

"So then, any of you who does not forsake (renounce, surrender claim to, give up, say goodbye to) all that he has cannot be My disciple."

Luke 14:33

It is so important for us to know that God is a good God! We should not see this as a price that is impossible for us to pay for that would be a very cruel requisite to following Him! It is as simple as that when we truly understand Who He is and that He gave all for us, we cannot but want to give all to Him!

We don't have the desire to hold onto anything because NOTHING compares to Him and His love! Again it is to be compared to when we fall in love with someone and we are prepared to do and give any and everything to that person to make them happy and to show them how we feel about them. We would go to any lengths for them; nothing they ask or need is too much for us to give. It is a 'heart' thing! When I say heart, I do not mean a 'feeling'. We definitely experience strong feelings when we love someone, but the walking out of the love we have for someone is definitely not just

feelings. It is a **choice** we make (whether we feel like it or not). It is hard! It is sacrificial! It is persevering in love through the most difficult times.

Let's look at the father of our faith, Abraham again. His calling/destiny was to be the father of faith of many nations. His life of following God meant that to kick off with, he had to leave his family and all that was familiar to him and follow God, not knowing where he was going!

"[Urged on] by faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed and went forth to a place which he was destined to receive as an inheritance; and he went, although he did not know or trouble his mind about where he was to go."

Hebrews 11:8 Amplified Bible

So amazing was this man of God that he even gave his nephew Lot the choice of choosing where he wanted to dwell so that there would be no strife between them. (Read Gen.13:1-18) Lot then, chose the best land for himself! But as we can see, this wasn't the wise choice (even though it looked so good).

"But the men of Sodom were wicked and exceedingly great sinners against the Lord."

Gen.13:13 Amplified Bible

Horrible things happened to Lot and his family there and even though angels were sent to rescue them (after Abraham pleaded with God), it was a disastrous choice. (See Gen.18&19)

Whilst Abraham's choice to let Lot choose and to give him the better land, led to God's blessing on Abraham.

"For all the land which you see I will give to you and your posterity forever.

And I will make your descendants like the dust of the earth, so that if a man could count the dust of the earth, then could your descendants also be counted.

Arise, walk through the land, the length of it and the breadth of it, for I will give it to you."

Gen.13:15-18 Amplified Bible

Let's keep our eyes on Abraham's *heart* condition towards God as we look to his reaction when he was called to give up this very promise of God!

"After these events, God tested and proved Abraham and said to him, Abraham! And he said, Here I am.

[God] said, Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I will tell you."

Gen.22:1,2

So, Abraham did. (See Gen.22)

"And He said, Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear and revere God, since you have not held back from Me or begrudged giving Me your son, your only son."

Gen.22:12 Amplified Bible

Once again, God looked at the heart. The 'price we pay' does not necessarily mean that we have to give up everything, but we have to be willing to if asked. God is good and faithful and He will provide like He did for Abraham. All that we have is given to us by God anyway, we are not owners but stewards of God's blessing. In God's kingdom, the more we give...the more we have. We 'hold' on to what we receive from God with an open hand.

What seem to be harder for us to give though, are our own desires and dreams. Sometimes God gives us promises (like in the case of Abraham, Joseph, David etc.)and we are so excited and overwhelmed when He does but then it doesn't look like it's ever going to happen or it looks like the dream/promise died and we feel like we have to let it go.

Sometimes we do; sometimes people we love die or we lose our homes or income or we get divorced or lose our health. A beloved pet may die or something irreplaceable gets lost or stolen. What we can know and believe is that if God said it...it WILL be so. Abraham's descendants to this

day are still increasing in numbers! Joseph's dream did come true even after he was sold by his brothers, whisked off to a foreign land and imprisoned! David did become king many years after being anointed by the prophet, even though he was hunted down to be killed by Saul and had to live like a fugitive (after he had been anointed 'king' and knew that was to be his destiny). Christ became King and Savior even after being innocently battered, bruised and crucified.

So even though we may have to give up what we believe we need or can't live without, God is trustworthy and His plans for us better than what we could ever come up with. He takes us through the valley of the shadow of death and gives beauty for ashes. We can trust His plans for us. We can know that His dreams and desires for us far exceed our own. Part of the cost is giving up our own understanding and believing that He is indeed Who He says He is...Faithful and True.

Christ taught this:

"Again the kingdom of heaven is like a man who is a dealer in search of fine and precious pearls,

Who, on finding a single pearl of great price, went and sold all he had and bought it."

Matt.13:45,46 Amplified Bible

We need to understand that this stage of our lives (on earth) is just temporary and a mere blip on the screen of eternity. The treasure we have in heaven is what will last for all eternity; all the other things will pass as our lives on this earth comes to an end.

This is what Almighty, All-powerful God Himself said to Abraham, the father of our faith:

"...Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

Gen. 15:1b Spirit Filled Life Bible

...and this is what He says to us, His Bride:

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."

Rev.22:12 Spirit Filled Life Bible

We cannot even begin to imagine how wonderful those rewards are going to be! For us, just to be with Him forever seems reward enough!

Prayer:

All of me for all of You.

CHAPTER 6: THE DANCE

We were created to worship and we love movement. Even before we are born we move in our mothers' wombs. As babies we move our arms and legs without having been taught how to do that – it comes naturally. Even small babies are fascinated by movement accompanied by sound (mobiles with bells on). Young children love clapping whilst singing. We love to move in rhythm to music. We love tapping our feet or swaying in time with a good rhythmic beat. As we grow, we learn to dance. We learn how to listen to the music and follow the beat and how to move our feet to the rhythm of the music. When a couple dances together, the man usually takes the lead and the woman follows. If they are in sync with each other it is an amazing experience to dance together. There is so much intimacy in that they are completely focused on each other and the music. Normally, we need to learn to dance together, to get to know each other.

I had the wonderful experience as a young woman to be taught by my boyfriend at the time how to dance. Because he was the one teaching me and I did not have any previous experience of dancing with a guy, we just gelled together and never since have I experienced dancing with someone the way I experienced it with him. I realize now that it was so because I totally accepted the way he taught and I did not have any ideas of my own on how to do it! I felt safe with him and trusted him and could just enjoy being held by him and moving to the music as one. It was exciting as well because he would do steps and turns with me that required me to read his signs and be in step with him. We just seemed to be able to flow together. It was amazing.

We can have that same experience with God, the Lover of our souls. The One Who gave us music and song, the One Who dances over us. It requires us to focus on Him alone and to listen to what He is saying and then move to the rhythm of it in step with Him. There is nothing that compares to that kind of intimacy with the One Who created us to be His Bride. At a wedding, the couple getting married usually opens the dance floor with a dance. It is quite a big thing; they choose the song with care and then spend a lot of time learning how to dance together on it. It is a highlight of the

celebration for them and the wedding guests. What a beautiful way to kick off the celebration of the beginning of their marriage (which is *the dance* of their lives together).

When two people really *know* and *understand* each other, they dance so well together that they don't even have to consciously listen to the beat anymore. They can just relax and enjoy each other and the dance. They can look each other in the eyes and know what the next move will be. Our lives can be like that with our Bridegroom because of the Holy Spirit. The Bible speaks of it as being led by the Holy Spirit. We just need to be willing to let Him lead and trust Him enough to follow. We need to get to know Him well enough to understand Him and recognize the signs (promptings) He gives us. For that we need to be filled with Him (become one with Him) and get to know Him and His ways. We need to never ignore or quench or grieve Him and if we do immediately repent and surrender to His lead again. It requires sensitivity to Him and for that we need a living relationship with Him.

Just as we need to learn the music and the steps to be able to dance with our partner, we can learn to dance with the Holy Spirit. It requires intimate knowledge of each other; He leads and we respond and so that we can move in step with each other. Listed below are a few points to help us step into *the dance*:

- Choose Him as our dance partner
- Forgiveness: it keeps our hearts soft and yielded to God and others
- Worship: is surrendering to Him in adoration
- Thanksgiving: in all circumstances is trusting Him every step of the dance and in all the twists and turns
- Humility: keeps us teachable and obedient (quick to repent and to please Him)
- Love: it is the music/melody of the dance
- Faith: it is the rhythm/'heart 'beat of our dance

Prayer:

Lord, You are inviting me to dance with You. I say 'yes!' to that glorious invitation. Take the lead,

Lord, I will follow. I trust You.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE SONG OF THE BRIDE

In a previous chapter David's dance as the ark of God was returned to Jerusalem, was mentioned.

Read: 2 Samuel 6

In those days the functional purpose of the ark was as a container for holy objects (e.g. it carried the Ten Commandments, a sample of the manna of the wilderness and Aaron's budding staff). In the tabernacle it was understood to be the footstool to the throne of God. It was treated with great reverence. David loved God and bringing the ark back to Jerusalem must have been a highlight of his life and reign as king of Israel. The ark was the symbol of God's Presence. That is what we are looking at – David's *response*. We can see two ways in which he responded from this chapter in 2 Samuel.

First we note that he was grieved, offended and afraid of God after Uzzah was killed by touching the ark as he tried to steady it. (See 2 Samuel 6:8 & 9) So afraid that he first took it to the house of someone else (possibly to see what will happen?). After he heard that the Lord blessed Obededom's house and all that belonged to him because of the ark (v. 12), he went and brought it back to Jerusalem.

I believe we can learn from this man after God's heart to even in our most intimate and joyous moments with God, never to be irreverent. Always to remember that He is GOD! We are fragile, human beings and we have not seen Him with our physical eyes for Who He truly is. He is holy, awesome, magnificent Creator of all things and we happen to be loved by Him. We dare not be familiar (in a disrespectful way) with Him. Through what Christ did we have full access to Him so it is essential to always bear in mind Who He is...the great I AM, the One Who was and is and is to come, the most Holy GOD.

Secondly, we can see David's exuberant joy on display.

“And David and all the house of Israel **played** before the Lord **with all their might**, with **songs**, lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets, and cymbals.”

“...So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the City of David with **rejoicing**.”

“And David **danced** before the Lord **with all his might**, clad in a linen ephod [a priest’s upper garment].

So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with **shouting** and with the **sound of the trumpet**.”

2 Samuel 6:5; 12b; 14 & 15 Amplified Bible (emphasis mine)

Allow me once again to show his response to the disdain of his wife at his behavior as I believe it shows us his heart.

“David said to Michal, It was before the Lord, Who chose me above your father and all his house to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord. Therefore will I make merry [in pure enjoyment] before the Lord.

I will be still more lightly esteemed than this, and will humble and lower myself in my own sight [and yours].

But by the maids you mentioned, I will be held in honor.”

2 Samuel 6:21 & 22 Amplified Bible

No royal pomp for David! No kingly robes, sitting high and lifted up on his throne (and he had one!), regal and proud, separated from the people behaving dignified, as the ark returned to Jerusalem.

No, just the opposite!

“...I will make merry [in pure enjoyment] before the Lord...I will humble and lower myself in my own sight...”

Oh, if we could learn from David and let this be the Biblical foundation for our heart song to our God.

What then is the song of the Bride in response to His Song to us?

Our lives, a song to Him:

Abiding in Him and bearing good fruit. Just *being* who He created us to be and walking in the good works He prepared for us beforehand.

Our words, a song to Him:

Whether we are praying, worshipping, praising or simply making conversation with Him.

Our words to others: encouraging, edifying words of life and our testimonies.

Our homes/environments where we live/work/play is a song to Him.

As creation is His song to us, the places where we dwell can be our song to Him and the world.

- Atmosphere (loving, warm, welcoming – filled with God's Presence)
- Artwork (paintings, music, books etc. glorifying Him)
- Beautiful plants/garden
- Simply neat, clean and fragrant homes/offices etc.

Our love is a song:

The love we love Him and others with is our love song.

The song of both the Bridegroom and the Bride together is glorious. The best example we have in God's Word of this must surely be Song of Songs.

So, in conclusion let me quote from Song of Songs and then end off with what our heart's cry as Christ's Bride, as a response to His awesome love towards us is:

"[Joyfully the radiant bride turned to him, the one altogether lovely, the chief among ten thousand to her soul, and with unconcealed eagerness to begin her life of sweet companionship with him, she answered] Make haste, my beloved, and come quickly, like a gazelle or a young hart [and take me to our waiting home] upon the mountains of spices!"

Song of Solomon 8:14 Amplified Bible

"The [Holy] Spirit and the bride (the church, true Christians) say, Come! And let him who is listening say, Come! And let everyone come who is thirsty [who is painfully conscious of his need]...; and whoever [earnestly]desires to do it, let him come, take, appropriate, and drink the water of Life without cost."

"He Who gives this warning and affirms and testifies to these things says, Yes (it is true). [Surely] I am coming quickly (swiftly, speedily). Amen (so let it be)! Yes, come, Lord Jesus!"

Revelation 22:17 & 20 Amplified Bible

COME, LORD JESUS!

Disclaimer

All Scriptures quoted are from The Amplified Bible (1987), NLT Study Bible (Second Edition - 2007) and the Spirit Filled Life Bible NKJV (1991).

Any other references from other resources are clearly marked within the text.

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