



Who is my Neighbor?

M. J. Bilenduke

Guardian
B O O K S

Belleville, Ontario, Canada

Who Is My Neighbor?
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*Many people form our lives each day;
to all of them, thank you!*

Introduction

As we begin this book, we are embarking upon a journey that I hope will impress upon each and every one of us the importance of caring relationships. This does not mean caring only for those in our inner circle—those close to us—but caring for all. In *Who Is My Neighbor?* we expose extreme ends of the spectrum, revealing how relationships affect each and every living person. We look at the destructive forces of jealousy and murder, as well as some lesser examples of destruction. We also reveal how God's blessings and favor are with those who embrace His values for life and relationships, understand them, and live this way.

What ails us—whether we know it and do not acknowledge it, know it and acknowledge it, or do not know it and live in ignorance—is our lack of across-the-board caring relationships. We forget that others have feelings just as we do. To disrespect another is to cause pain, heartache, and sorrow, and failure to keep our word can cause others to feel that they cannot trust anyone. How many of us, on any given day, even stop

to think about the pain we have caused others? Or do we just look at the pain others have caused us?

We rob life of its true meaning when we think life is about *me and mine* rather than *us and ours*. When life's purpose for each individual is about all of us, we will find ourselves making decisions in a more methodical way, taking into consideration how decisions will affect others, making a vast difference in the outcome. We often manage to do this on a small scale, considering our immediate family, but how can we extend this further? The golden rule in life should be that *everyone is my neighbor!*

We all have something to contribute, from the very wealthy to the very poor, from the very young to the very old. Wherever life finds you, this book, if taken to heart, can make a difference—because *you* are the difference. It is all about caring for each other. When you care, little courtesies work in you every day, on a regular basis. You will become more aware of the importance of how you manage your decisions in relation to others, whoever they are and wherever they are.

The Bible—one of our oldest and most widely read books—has much wisdom to guide us in life and in relationships. It speaks of God's relationship with man, man's relationship with God, and man's relationships with one another. In fact, the Bible is really all about relationships—what the outcome is when we do not respect one another and treat one another properly, and what the outcome is when we do.

Everyone is searching for the true meaning of life, the depth and beauty in caring for one another, giving just to give, loving just to love. God is our example. "*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). “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). He is our example of giving first and loving first, because love and giving is who He is.

This book exposes what we can be—the dark side of our nature without a respectful relationship with God—and points us to why we should become who God created us to be, for our good and for the good of all mankind. It also shows us what makes God angry and what will bring His judgment. *It really is all about relationships.* The success of the world depends on the success of our relationships.

Things to Think About and Some Questions to Ask Ourselves

1. Where do we learn hate and selfishness? At home, through peers, through education, through the media?
2. Is hate and selfishness generational?
3. What is the cause of child and spousal abuse?
4. Why do the strong enjoy dominating the weak?
5. Why do some world leaders oppress the people of their countries?
6. What is the root cause of war crimes and criminals?

7. Why can't people and countries get along?
8. Why do we use domination, manipulation, control, and influence to push our agenda rather than honest communication?
9. What are we teaching one another when we do business deceitfully and without integrity?
10. Why is someone who is truthful and honest an exception?
11. Why can't we communicate in a more appropriate, caring way?
12. Why can't we become more flexible in making relationships work?
13. Why do some children want their parents dead, and why do some parents want their children dead?
14. Can we make a difference by setting the example of giving and loving?
15. Who can we count on?
16. If not you, who?

Integrity: It's Who You Are!

*And it came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money." But Naboth said to Ahab, "The LORD forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!" So Ahab went into his house **sullen** and **displeased** because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food.*

*But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, "Why is your spirit so **sullen** that you eat no food?" He said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard*

for it.' And he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" Then Jezebel his wife said to him, "You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and **let your heart be cheerful**; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." And she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth. She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, "You have blasphemed God and the king." Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die.

So the men of his city, the elders and nobles who were inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, as it was written in the letters which she had sent to them. They proclaimed a fast, and seated Naboth with high honor among the people. And two men, scoundrels, came in and sat before him; and the scoundrels witnessed against him, against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth has blasphemed God and the king!" Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones, so that he died. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned and is dead."

And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead." So it was, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab **got up and went down to**

take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite (1 Kings 21:1-16, emphasis added).

In this scenario, we see that some people are not satisfied until they get what they want, regardless of the cost to others. We also see to what lengths some will go to use their power or influence to take what does not belong to them. Ahab was reminded by his wife Jezebel that he could do anything he wanted because he was the one exercising authority over Israel. She arranged the takeover, and he did not interfere. He was happy that he had the vineyard. The fact he gained it dishonestly meant nothing to him. He lost no sleep over Naboth's death and felt no guilt for how he acquired the property.

Consider the plot: They proclaimed a fast; they seated Naboth with high honor among the people; then through lying accusations, they had him stoned. What a cover-up to take away any attention from the king having anything to do with this!

We could try to justify this the way we justify our own actions to ourselves: Ahab wasn't such a terrible person, and Naboth really dug his own grave. After all, Ahab offered Naboth whatever money he wanted for it or whatever other vineyard Naboth might like. It wasn't as though Ahab hadn't tried to be fair in his negotiations. Naboth should have respected the king. However, for a Jewish person to sell something that was passed down in the family was unheard of. This vineyard was an inheritance Naboth had received, and it wasn't something he would ever consider selling.

That's why Ahab was so sullen—he knew he could never acquire the vineyard as long as Naboth lived. Ahab

and Jezebel were in extreme violation of Jewish custom as well as the law of the land when they took property that was passed down from one generation to another.

Inheritance Laws

“And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father’s brothers. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the relative closest to him in his family, and he shall possess it.’” And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the LORD commanded Moses (Numbers 27:8-11).

Ahab was of the house of Israel. He knew the law regarding property. However, he let his foreign wife Jezebel (who worshipped other gods) make the acquisition, knowing full well that he was violating the rights of others and breaking a law of inheritance that went back to the days of Moses.

I am sure Naboth’s family felt powerless when their rival was the king of Israel himself! How much personal pain did they encounter in having to deal with Naboth being publicly stripped of his dignity and integrity, accused of something he had not done, and stoned for it? Would they be able to forgive?

This brings to mind the way people of color were treated in the United States. Much has changed in the

last twenty-five or more years, but are we able to forgive? Are the Jews able to forgive those responsible for the Holocaust? We forget that when we do wrong to others, it creates a situation of difficulty that goes beyond just that period of time. The pain can be passed down from one generation to another, breeding generations of unforgiveness.

In Corrie Ten Boom's book *A Tramp for the Lord*, she described her life in a concentration camp and how she helplessly looked on as her sister was beaten by a guard and later died. Corrie survived the concentration camp experience and wrote books and spoke publicly to share how God helped her through.

One day while at a speaking engagement, she looked down at the audience and recognized the guard who beat her sister, sitting in the front row. She later conveyed the conflicting emotions she went through on the platform, knowing she had to forgive him. She wrote that once she was finished speaking she went to the man, explained who she was and how she knew him, and said she forgave him. The man told her that he had since become a Christian and knew that God had forgiven him for all the terrible things he had done. Corrie's gift of forgiveness, however, brought healing in his life by allowing him to forgive himself. He expressed to Corrie how sorry he was, bringing healing to her. Both were healed through forgiveness.

We should not become paranoid and suspicious of everyone. There are cases where we have opportunity to be healed and/or bring healing. However, we must understand that people can devise wicked practices against one another and cover it up so well that others cannot see it.

I am sure that when Ahab took over Naboth's vineyard, some did not think it was unusual, seeing that it was next door to him. And those who knew the truth and said anything were not necessarily heard or were possibly silenced through intimidation. Making a change would mean challenging the king and government leaders, including the king's wife. Naboth was no longer in the picture to defend the truth, so the authorities would go to great lengths to cover the lie and keep it covered, making it look as though Naboth was a real scoundrel.

I saw a program recently where the topic of discussion was the new "sin" called honesty. It was quite interesting to hear what people had to say about honesty. Most believed it was okay to be dishonest; in fact, in a lot of cases it was better not to tell the truth, because the truth could hurt someone's feelings. This supposedly proved that honesty was the sin, not dishonesty. It was an interesting twist—and the comments were even more interesting—bringing light on how we view right and wrong, good and evil, today. Things are going amiss when good becomes evil and evil becomes good in our eyes, when we are able to convince others that it's okay to lie and cover-up wrongdoing: may the best liar win.

We seem to have a new way of looking at integrity in leadership, people who hold public office or are responsible for making decisions that affect others. The idea is that our personal life is separate from our public life, and it has been voiced publicly. I recall a statement made by a previous prime minister of Canada, saying, "We have no business in people's bedrooms." Why can't we see that the way we handle our personal life

will be reflected in the way we handle our public life? Integrity is something that you have or you do not have, whether it is your personal life or public life. Personal integrity cannot be separated from what we do or who we are—either you have it or you do not! What we value will be who we are.

We do not always say what is in our heart. We can be good at covering up, because our agenda is not always for the benefit of others but for our benefit. We cover our tracks, ensuring the public will not become alerted to our actions. We project an image of how we want others to see us.

We know what is right but justify why we do our business the way we do. We convince ourselves that everything is okay rather than taking responsibility and admitting when we are wrong, even though others can give us sound advice in making a better decision or point us toward taking responsibility. Lack of integrity in relationships will affect others.

A young lawyer came to Jesus one day with the question, “Who is my neighbor?”

*And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” So he answered and said, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’” And He said to him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.” But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “**And who is my neighbor?**”*

Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:25-37, emphasis added).

The Holy Spirit revealed to Jesus the heart of the lawyer, who apparently knew something about God's Word but nothing about God's love and mercy for others. The lawyer, in asking the question, "Who is my neighbor?" possibly was more religious than caring. So Jesus used the examples of the priest and the Levite, religious men, to make His point to the young lawyer. If the lawyer thought that religious people—because they have a title—will do everything right, Jesus was letting him know that this is not always the case. Religion does not make caring people.

Everyone was a stranger to the man who needed help—but one treated the stranger the way he would want to be treated. Note that this can be an inconvenience. I am sure the Samaritan was not expecting to encounter a man by the roadside that day, but because of the type of person he was, he did not make an excuse as to why he could not or would not stop and get involved. The priest and the Levite, two religious people, “*passed by on the other side.*” They kept their distance, showing that they did not think the man was worthy of their involvement—they were too godly. Samaritans were considered unclean by the Jewish people; yet this unclean Samaritan had God’s heart and showed mercy to the man who could not help himself but needed the intervention of another.

When Jesus said, “*Do this and you will live,*” the word *live* means “to be full of exuberance, zeal, bubbling over with life.” This is what loving your neighbor will bring into your life. A heart filled with love that will give and care, regardless, is a happy heart. A religious heart does not understand, or want to understand, God’s kind of love for their neighbor.

Consider this thought that recently came to me: “Come see a man without an ego.” The man is “*Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God...made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*” (Philippians 2:5-8). Wanting to identify Himself with the sinner, the poor in spirit, He was not and is not ashamed to call us His brethren.

How often are we ashamed to identify ourselves with certain people or people groups? We have standards of what is acceptable in education, income, and race. We decide whether certain people are worthy to listen to or to take into consideration, based upon our own personal biases and opinions, which by the way will also influence with whom and what we will become involved. Jesus lived the selfless life. It was not about Him; it was about others. He was not ashamed to let a sinful woman wash His feet with her tears, wipe them with her hair, kiss them, then anoint them with perfume (Luke 7:36-50). This happened while he was at dinner in the home of a Pharisee, a religious leader. The woman was receiving the revelation of Jesus the Messiah while the religious man was questioning within himself Jesus' spirituality.

Both Jesus and the woman demonstrated leadership. She knew she was in the home of a Pharisee and she knew what they thought about women like her. Jesus knew she was a sinner and that the Pharisee would not approve, but He did not stop her from touching Him. Truthful leaders stand out because they are few and they go against the status quo. We are either going to become leaders in what is right or get lost in the deluge of evil and/or religious traditions and doctrines.

Our Heart Condition: Our Value System

We Don't Always See Clearly

“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you

there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us'" (Luke 16:19-26).

It is difficult for us to see through our own eyes what God values and calls beautiful. When we think of ourselves more highly than we should, there can be a disdain in us for others because of our value system.

For a period of time, I worked with men and women who had substance abuse problems, and—could you believe—some of the addicts thought they were better than other addicts because they had not used certain drugs or lived the lifestyle addiction can bring. This became a stumbling block in getting well, because it caused them to minimize their problem. In fact, often they did not even see that they were addicts, because they were not like “those over there.” It is amazing how we can become fooled! An addiction is an addiction, whether you are an addict living under a bridge or one that goes to work every day.

Scriptures to Ponder

The poor man is hated even by his own neighbor, But the rich has many friends. He who despises his neighbor sins; But he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he (Proverbs 14:20-21).

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbor, “Go, and come back, And tomorrow I will give it,” When you have it with you.

Do not devise evil against your neighbor, For he dwells by you for safety's sake (Proverbs 3:27-29).

We Have One Debt!

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:8-10).

Our Heart Condition

It is difficult, at times, to fathom the actions of others. More and more we see the heart of mankind exposed. Today, disrespect against humanity does not surprise many of us, though it does affect us. We just think "What next?" or "What is this world coming to?" At one time we could be shocked; however, today it is an accepted part of what we see happening. There are many events that could be depressing and overwhelming if we let them. I try not to meditate upon the "hardness" of our heart and the lack of compassion, integrity, and caring. When another event comes, I do spend time asking the question, "What kind of person(s) would get pleasure out of this?"

We have all committed offenses against others, and no one is exempt, but if we do not take responsibility

for what we have done, then we become hard and calloused in our hearts. Those with hardness of heart have no—or very little—feeling and are selfish; they have lost their sensitivity and their ability to think in rational ways. This also happens to those who do not forgive.

We respond to others according to our heart condition. When we do not forgive, we become absurd, foolish; we are no longer sensible but become entrapped in our hardness. We then make decisions without taking into consideration the pain and mistrust they can cause others. Our vision for others is limited or may even be no vision at all. Whatever you have done to us we will do to you, or we will get you before you get us.

We must ask ourselves the question, “Is retaliation our automatic response?” Is it beyond our comprehension that working out our differences could be much more profitable for all? I personally feel that, in some cases, we have not managed our relationships well. As a result, over the years we have heaped up resentment upon resentment, leaving gaping wounds that need to be healed. Ultimately we lose faith in one another and find it difficult to trust.

Have you ever tried to warn someone of the consequences of their actions when they desire evil against another? Our behavior and actions will bring consequences, and what we do, good or evil, to someone else is going to come knocking at our door one day. The person bound for revenge or evil either has rationalized their behavior as justifiable and is deluded about the consequences or does not really care. Vengeance becomes “sweet” to them; wicked practices become a way of life.

We must keep in mind what the Bible says:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith (Galatians 6:7-10).

Personal Evaluation

September 11, 2001 (9/11), became a time of intense evaluation for me personally. As I watched the events of that day unfold, I could not believe what I was seeing. I did not think it was possible for anyone to do something so horrific to innocent people for their own vengeance.

I found it very thought-provoking as the world responded. Some people were happy it happened and felt there was a balancing of the books, so to speak. In others, it created hatred, fear, a desire for revenge, or a deep sense of loss. Out of 9/11 came heroes and innocent victims. There was the question of "Whose side are you on?" There were times when you switched sides, finding it difficult to stay on any one side.

The events of 9/11 initiated a new evaluation of my faith and my relationship with God. In the main religious ceremony in New York City, when I heard a rabbi, an imam, and a Christian speak, I thought to myself, "I am so religious." All the right things were said

according to our faith, but I did not know if the heart for one another was really in what was said. What we perhaps were all trying to say is that we do not blame the Jew, the Muslim, or the Christian; these were just a few radicals, but everything is okay between us. While we all might have been sincere in saying this, personally, I felt it exposed my heart. I felt my Christianity had to be more than a religious practice, that I had to have more caring for all mankind, not just a form of godliness. I also needed to demonstrate it more publicly, like Christ did, and be more involved in the well-being of others. Religion will not win the lost, but the love of Christ in us will.

Abraham's Sons

I am not well versed on the Jewish or Muslim faith, but I do know that Abraham had two sons: Isaac, by Sarah (Abraham's wife) and Ishmael, by Hagar (Sarah's Egyptian maid). I also know that *"if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Galatians 3:29). So Abraham had two sons by natural means and many sons by supernatural means, those who believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Abraham is thus our father of faith.

The three sons of Abraham—the Jew, the Arab, and the Christian—all consider themselves children of promise, and we all claim: "God is our Creator," "Abraham is our father," "God is our God," and "There is only one God."

We, as Christians, believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He is our Messiah, our Savior. He came to save us from our sins and the consequence of sin. The Jewish

and Muslim belief is that Jesus was a prophet, a holy man; they do not deny His existence but do not give Him the place of God, Son of God, or Savior. They cannot imagine that God would make Himself man and dwell among us (John 1:14). This is a stumbling block for people who do not accept this truth by faith. When they do, their eyes are opened to the reality of this truth—that Jesus is God and He is the Son of God. It is also a reality that man is capable of evil even when he knows God and is following the religious doctrines and traditions. We were born capable of evil and need a Savior to forgive us and to change us and to work with us.

Jesus came for all mankind, so you can find in all people groups—including Jews and Arabs—some who believe in Jesus Christ as God’s Son. Their eyes have been opened. Jesus did come to make “*one new man*” (Ephesians 2:15).

History gives us many accounts of bad relationships taken a step further into family feuds. Without getting into a lot of detail, itemized are just some of the events that have taken place in history from the reference point of “Abraham’s sons.”

- The northern and southern kingdoms, Israel and Judah, making war against one another (brother against brother)
- The Crusaders expeditions undertaken by the Christians of Europe in the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries, recovering the Holy Land
- The Holy Land conquered by the Romans in 65 B.C.

- The Holy Land conquered by the Arabs in A.D. 634
- The Holy Land ruled by the Crusaders, A.D. 1098-1187
- The Holy Land under Muslim dominion until the defeat of Turkish and German forces by the British at Megiddo in 1917
- The Holy Land under British mandate, 1923-1948
- The Holy land invaded and some territories occupied by Arab forces, 1947-1948
- Israel recognized by the world community as an independent Jewish state—God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their seed, 1948
- The Arab armies of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon defeated by the new Jewish state in the War for Independence, 1948-1949

The events of 9/11 exposed a fight the family has been in for years. It could have been primarily about Israel and Palestine, brothers at war, relationships gone sour. The Muslims do not want Israel to exist as a Jewish state; they believe the land belongs to the Palestinians. Israel says, “It is ours,” and is trying to defend its territory, while brother kills brother. (Some who call themselves Christian have also been guilty of killing their Jewish and Muslim brothers for religious reasons, for which I ask forgiveness.) Most evangelical and Pentecostal Christians believe the land belongs to Israel; Jews believe this also,

because the Scriptures say so, and stand accordingly.

Returning to the issue of the heart, because of the “hardness,” might there be no resolve unless there is a “heart change”? And who is going to be first? Unless a healing takes place between brother and brother, we will not see the glory that could be of a family that can get along when they have the same goal before them.

Personally, my heart breaks for everyone who has experienced any type of loss: Jew, Muslim, Christian, and others. Every one of us has experienced pain at some level and at some time in our life, so we cannot say we do not have something in common. Maybe we think the pain we keep inflicting is not hurting the people we are targeting because they are not real people with real feelings. Or maybe we know they are real and just want to cause pain. They have become objects of our vengeance, which we have justified to ourselves, and the vengeance has become “sweet.” It is like calling evil “good” and good “evil” when we call vengeance “sweet”!

Muslims should not be happy when a terrorist blows up another innocent victim and thinks they are doing God a favor. Christians should not be happy to see the suffering of the Palestinian and Jewish people, descendants of Ishmael and Isaac, or be willing to leave the situation the way it is. Jewish people ought to be careful how they treat their Palestinian and Christian brothers. God does have a resolution that is good for all, but maybe we cannot hear it because of our “hardness of heart.” Radical religion has no mercy or grace; it is all religious righteousness. We make ourselves as gods and kill for the sake of our own beliefs. Our religious beliefs should not

cause us to destroy one another. If this is the case, we need to scrap religion and get the heartbeat of God!

This is a thought well worth pondering: "There will not be any change without a change of heart *first!*" Murder is a serious issue. *The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary* describes murder as "unlawful killing of human beings with malice aforethought." *Aforethought* means "premeditated; prepense; previously in mind; designed." How deep does the murderous desire go?

A martyr is a person who suffers death for a cause. Suicide, as described in the *Oxford Dictionary*, is "intentional slaughter of self." To take your own life and the lives of others for a cause is suicide and murder. Do we call premeditated murder "martyrdom"? Our hardness of heart has caused us to become irrational, and because vengeance has become "sweet," we call evil "good" while, in fact, we are not able to see the evil in our own hearts.

In counseling individuals with substance-abuse problems, one thing that is important to uncover is, "What is the 'root cause' of the addiction?" As a counselor for a few years, I knew if we did not get to the "root" of the problem, our clients would not be successful in remaining substance-abuse free.

Roots are below the surface; you cannot see them, but the fruit is a product of the root. Unless you pull the root out, so it can no longer produce the fruit, you will always have the fruit. To know the root cause makes it easier to deal with the fruit and to destroy both the root and the fruit.

This book is not about pointing fingers or judging. The purpose of this book is to expose how wicked we can become individually and how hard our hearts can

get when we purpose to do evil instead of good. This book is also about individuals caring, getting along, loving one another, wanting good (instead of evil) for all—which is God’s heart. We all need to examine our hearts and our motives, take responsibility for our actions (individually and corporately), and become the difference in society that truly knows what the following commandments mean: “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,*’ and ‘*your neighbor as yourself*” (Luke 10:27).

Oh, that we would have a conscience and do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Matthew 7:12)! I believe we have this mentality: “If the pain is not at my door—in my family, in my city, in my country—I have some sort of immunity, and I do not need to be involved.” We need a reality check—our hearts are *hard!*

When God sent Moses to Pharaoh with the message to let His people go, Pharaoh’s heart became hardened (Exodus 10:20,27;11:10) because of his disobedience toward God. No one is going to win by wanting their own way without caring and consideration for others. God is a God of judgment and justice; He has a harmony between law and grace, truth and mercy.

The psalmist put it this way:

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face. Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O LORD, in the light of Your countenance (Psalm 89:14-15).

A prayer of Moses in the Psalms says this:

*For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; We finish our years like a sigh. The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. **So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom** (Psalm 90:9-12, emphasis added).*

Moses was a man who knew God, who had seen His goodness and His wrath. He knew God's mercy. Moses knew that God was longsuffering and patient but eventually justice would have to be served. We can get caught up in the moment and create a destiny for ourselves, our families, our communities, our cities, our nations. (People do rally together for a cause and strength is in numbers.) That destiny can change when we are willing to take the first step and begin to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind and love our neighbor as ourself (Matthew 22:37-39).

The winners of any battle will be the "lovers" of God and their neighbor. God's love in us—agape love, God's type of love—is a love that considers the other before self. Religious practices alone will not produce love. Knowledge of the *Koran*, the *Torah*, the *Bible*—knowing the written book we look into—will not produce love. Any other form of religious belief cannot produce true love. We can call our religious "good works" love, but they are not true love. Let us not con-

fuse the two: there is a vast difference between God's love and what we call "good works"!

We can also become so religious that hate begins to grow in our hearts because our religious knowledge has made us self-righteous, and we believe we are doing God a favor by destroying our brother! Vengeance truly belongs to God (Psalm 94:1), because He is the only one who has a pure heart and a pure motive as to how the scales are balanced. He will sovereignly work through people, nations, and leaders—but in doing so we must have a God perspective.

God Has a Voice: We Can Know His Presence

Does God Speak to People?
Can We Know His Presence?

It is important that those who say they believe in the God of Abraham know what He is saying. Does God speak? He spoke to Abraham and gave him blessings and direction; He spoke to Hagar when she was going through her trying times with Sarah and then later when she and Ishmael were cast out; He spoke to us through Jesus; and He speaks today through the person of the Holy Spirit to people who are true seekers of God. Yes, God does speak!

The condition of our heart has a lot to do with how and what we hear. Erroneous hearing is dangerous; it means I am hearing according to the dictates of my heart but I believe it is God speaking to me. Unless we are true “God seekers,” not just going through religious motions and religious traditions, our heart is never challenged to repent of its hindrances to hearing. You will hear according to your pain, and

your response will be wrapped up in that pain.

God's Presence, His Person, comes when He speaks. The Holiness of God produces worship, humility, and repentance, as it did in Moses, Joshua, and others.

I have realized that very few people have experienced and truly know the love of God, who is really their Father. No one would know about God's wrath or judgment if we walked in love and only wanted to love with His love. When God's love in us is not the center of who we are, it is impossible for us to give it away.

Personally, I needed to be healed of life's hurts to begin to love like God. The first step was letting God in to love me. I had built my walls to keep people out because of pain and mistrust, but ultimately, those walls also kept God out. I lived my life—up to the point of being healed—with the knowledge of God's love without experiencing His love. This caused me to leave my love response up to my interpretation of what I thought God meant, which was very legalistic and performance related. It was only in knowing how much He loved me and being healed by His love that I was able to see how much He loved others. Only then could I begin to treat others with this same understanding of His love for them. It took His love to remove my hardness and make my heart pliable and loving. This was a journey back through all my experiences in life and their effects on me. It does take time.

As Christians, we are admonished, "*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God*" (1 John 4:7). When we allow the Holy Spirit to challenge us and spend time in His Presence seeking Him, we will know as we interact each

day with those around us if we are walking “in love.” How do we feel and respond when we are in situations that are not comfortable? Can and do we lose sight of who we say we love, know, and have been born of?

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

God Is Our Father—He Has a Presence—
He Has a Voice

“They shall come with weeping, And with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, In a straight way in which they shall not stumble; For I am a Father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn” (Jeremiah 31:9).

There can be a chastening when we stray from the right path, but God is always ready, waiting to receive us back when we truly repent, because He is our Father.

David relayed to his son Solomon what God spoke to him about Solomon building God a house, a place of worship: “He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son, and I will be his Father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever” (1 Chronicles 22:10). So Solomon built a sanctuary, and the Presence of God came into the sanctuary, causing

everyone to fall prostrate before Him. Solomon prayed prayers of protection and repentance to God. God answered, and the Presence of God became so strong the priests could not minister (1 King 8:10-11).

When King Jehosophat was under attack, he gathered all the people, and they went into the sanctuary of God to pray and fast for God to give them direction. God spoke through His prophet, giving them direction and victory for the battle ahead (2 Chronicles 20:5-19). God was in His sanctuary. He heard the prayers of His people, and He spoke—intervening in the affairs of man!

We then see, further on in God's Word, what God said about the sanctuary: "*Do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary?*" (Ezekiel 8:6). His Presence departed. God had left, but the physical structure remained. However, the people had gotten so used to religious practices, they thought they did not really need His Presence; they could do it without Him. They probably did not realize when His Presence left as they gradually took over. We must be very careful not to commit this same error!

Do we enter into His Presence daily and live in His Presence? Or are we so well trained and taught that we think we do not need Him? Are we filled with knowledge that produces religion? Do we hear according to our religion—not according to a humble, repentant, dependent heart? Religious people do not have faith in God's way of doing things. That was why Jesus created such a controversy in the religious community and still does today, even with those who say that Jesus is their Savior. They still have not given up control and forsaken all to follow

Him. Religion is knowledge of God, not knowledge of the living God through a loving, living relationship. We study religion but not relationship, intimacy with God. Unless events occur very close to home, we do not tend to identify with the pain of others; we know only our own pain and build our life around looking out for “number one.”

Out of religion comes erroneous hearing, and religion is very “hard hearted.” In fact, many “blood baths” have occurred in the name of religion. Some of the most uncaring people on the face of the earth are religious people. Religious people have never had a real experience with God. The soil of our hearts must be touched by His Presence to keep it tender and compassionate.

To be able to love God and love my neighbor as myself is going to take an outside touch from someone greater than man. It is going to take the heart of God touching my heart, healing me from all the unnecessary baggage picked up over the years from bad relationships, which prevents me from having a caring heart with His pure motives in all that I say and do. My actions and reactions can be reflections of my pain or the result of my healed heart.

God does not speak just once; He is constantly speaking to us. The question is, are we hearing what He is saying? Religious tradition does not please God; He is pleased by the one who hears “thus says the Lord” and obeys what He says—one who is walking in righteousness before Him. What He says will most always go against what we think, feel, and believe.

“Now the Lord had said to Abram: ‘Get out of your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To

a land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). We will never possess the promises of God through our own power and might. We need to hear what God is saying and expect the supernatural God who parted the Red Sea to fight for us. We will receive God’s promises only through holiness, not through religion. To live a holy life we must know the Holy One personally and have fellowship with Him daily—living in His Presence, hearing, and obeying. We should not feel comfortable outside of His Presence.

God Speaks to Man as Man Speaks to God

But Abram said, “Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir! And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:2-6).

Integrity and Obedience in Relationships

Religious practices will not make us righteous. Religion is “*a form of godliness*” (2 Timothy 3:5), trying by methods and traditions to please God. But hearing and believing (obedience) please Him. God wants fellowship and relationship, not just formalism and tradition. God is love, and He wants to express this love through relationship.

Pure love has a heart that is not selfish but wants what is best for all, without needing anything in return. Does God deal with wickedness? Yes, He does! Does God’s love overlook evil? No! He “*is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9), receiving eternal life. His will is that our end would be pleasing both for us and to Him. The end cannot be favorable without giving attention to the present.

Again, this was Jesus’ response to a question about eternal life:

*And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, **wanting to justify himself**, said to Jesus, **"And who is my neighbor?"***

Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:25-37, emphasis added).

The truly vibrant life is in giving out of a tender, caring heart—giving and loving because this is who we are. Anything less than this is shallow and has very little meaning.

Integrity in relationship is important. The level of our integrity will be tested through our willingness to obey God by doing what He asks and giving Him what we love. God tested Abraham's integrity when He asked him to sacrifice Isaac on the altar.

Then He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Genesis 22:2).

Only after he passed the integrity test did he see God's blessings in his life!

*Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; **for now I know that you fear God**, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And*

*Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided." Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. **In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice**" (Genesis 22:9-18, emphasis added).*

Obedience is the key, and without a desire for a relationship of integrity with God and with our neighbor, we will not obey—we will justify our disobedience. To fear God is to respect God for who He is, what He says, and why He does things the way He does, having complete reverence in our heart that God knows best. Although we might not understand it all, God is sovereign, and He does not make mistakes or lie. He cannot, because He is God!

When I was living outside of Canada for a while, I received a letter from an aunt whom I had lived with while attending college. My aunt always had the Bible open, reading it and writing religious articles that were published in the newspaper.

Somewhere on her journey in life, she fell into error regarding Jesus and God. She concluded that if God was the Father of Jesus and asked His Son to die on the cross, He would be mean, so she stopped believing in Jesus.

However, not long before she passed away I received a letter from her. I believe she knew her time was short; she also knew I was a minister. She wrote, "Mary Jane, I do not know what to believe right now, but I trust you and believe that you will tell me the truth. Is Jesus really the Son of God? Did He really die on the cross for my sins?"

I responded almost immediately, assuring her that Jesus is the Son of God and that He did die on the cross for our sins. It was not long after that my aunt passed away. I know she is with the Lord.

Some Wisdom from God's Word

It is difficult for some to understand God's wisdom in the cross of Jesus, His wisdom in asking Abraham to sacrifice his son, but this is what the Bible says regarding the cross:

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:18-21).

It is through the revelation of the cross and the love of God our Father for mankind and the love of Christ

for the Father and for us that we can come to the place of being healed in our hearts and begin to treat all mankind with God's love.

Abraham's love for God was demonstrated in his act of obedience, in his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac on the altar, just as God putting His Son on the cross to die for our sins is a demonstration of His love for us. It is the sin in our heart that creates the problem of how we will treat others. I am not suggesting that if someone knows Jesus as their personal savior and is "born again," then they will treat everyone well, because this is not the case. However, it should be the case if we are walking with God and have allowed Him to heal our hearts.

Sin has caused us great heartsickness, and though we have been forgiven through Jesus, if we do not change our perspective and allow the Holy Spirit to work on the inside to change us, we will operate only as religious Christians—not as people who know God's love and are giving it away.

When Jesus stepped into public life and began speaking the Word of God, this was one of His first messages:

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus came not only to forgive us of our sins but also to heal us on the inside from our wounds, our brokenness, our oppression, our spiritual blindness, and to free us from whatever would hold us captive. This is a process. Without yielding to God and allowing the Holy Spirit to work, nothing much will change.

We are to be loving, caring individuals. If we never allow healing to manifest itself in our lives, we will continue to operate in all of our biases, prejudices, unforgiveness, and other such problem areas. When we do not allow healing to take place, it prevents us from having the healthy relationships we all need. We need to know that we are loved to be able to love others. Love is the oil that makes life worth living!

Getting and understanding a revelation of God's love for us through the giving of His Son makes us see how special we are and how undeserving of this love. We then are able to love others with this same kind of love. In knowing His heart we become changed in our hearts. We all need to acknowledge that we were born with a sin nature and only in God will this nature change.

Some Wisdom to Live By

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, And put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead, And your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; Remove your foot from evil (Proverbs 4:23–27).

“I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, And find out knowledge and discretion. The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate” (Proverbs 8:12–13).

As righteousness leads to life, So he who pursues evil pursues it to his own death. Those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the LORD, But the blameless in their ways are His delight (Proverbs 11:19–20).

The wicked covet the catch of evil men, But the root of the righteous yields fruit. The wicked is ensnared by the transgression of his lips, But the righteous will come through trouble. A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth, And the recompense of a man’s hands will be rendered to him (Proverbs 12:12–14).

Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, But counselors of peace have joy (Proverbs 12:20).

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good (Proverbs 15:3).

Whoever rewards evil for good, Evil will not depart from his house (Proverbs 17:13).

The fear of the LORD leads to life, And he who has it will abide in satisfaction; He will not be visited with evil (Proverbs 19:23).

It is honorable for a man to stop striving, Since any fool can start a quarrel (Proverbs 20:3).

Evil men do not understand justice, But those who seek the LORD understand all (Proverbs 28:5).

He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy (Proverbs 28:13).

Happy is the man who is always reverent, But he who hardens his heart will fall into calamity (Proverbs 28:14).

Integrity

It would be great if God could say about us what He said to Satan about Job, “[He is] a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil...And...holds fast to his integrity” (Job 2:3). Job put it this way when his integrity before God was tested:

“I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman? For what is the allotment of God from above, And the inheritance of the Almighty from on high? Is it not destruction for the wicked, And disaster for the workers of iniquity? Does He not see my ways, And count all my steps? “If I have walked with falsehood, Or if my foot has hastened to deceit, Let me be weighed on honest scales, That God may know my integrity. If my step has turned from the way, Or my heart walked after my eyes, Or if any spot

adheres to my hands, Then let me sow, and another eat; Yes, let my harvest be rooted out. If my heart has been enticed by a woman, Or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door, Then let my wife grind for another, And let others bow down over her. For that would be wickedness; Yes, it would be iniquity deserving of judgment. For that would be a fire that consumes to destruction, And would root out all my increase. If I have despised the cause of my male or female servant When they complained against me, What then shall I do when God rises up? When He punishes, how shall I answer Him? Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One fashion us in the womb?

"If I have kept the poor from their desire, Or caused the eyes of the widow to fail, Or eaten my morsel by myself, So that the fatherless could not eat of it (But from my youth I reared him as a father, And from my mother's womb I guided the widow); If I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing, Or any poor man without covering; If his heart has not blessed me, And if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep; If I have raised my hand against the fatherless, When I saw I had help in the gate; Then let my arm fall from my shoulder, Let my arm be torn from the socket. For destruction from God is a terror to me, And because of His magnificence I cannot endure. If I have made gold my hope, Or said to fine gold, 'You are my confidence'; If I have rejoiced because my wealth was great, And because my hand had gained much; If I have observed the sun when it shines, Or the moon moving in brightness, So that my heart has been secretly enticed, And my mouth has kissed my hand; This also would be an

iniquity deserving of judgment, For I would have denied God who is above. If I have rejoiced at the destruction of him who hated me, Or lifted myself up when evil found him (Indeed I have not allowed my mouth to sin By asking for a curse on his soul); If the men of my tent have not said, 'Who is there that has not been satisfied with his meat?' (But no sojourner had to lodge in the street, For I have opened my doors to the traveler); If I have covered my transgressions as Adam, By hiding my iniquity in my bosom, Because I feared the great multitude, And dreaded the contempt of families, So that I kept silence And did not go out of the door—Oh, that I had one to hear me! Here is my mark. Oh, that the Almighty would answer me, That my Prosecutor had written a book! Surely I would carry it on my shoulder, And bind it on me like a crown; I would declare to Him the number of my steps; Like a prince I would approach Him. If my land cries out against me, And its furrows weep together; If I have eaten its fruit without money, Or cause its owners to lose their lives; Then let thistles grow instead of wheat, And weeds instead of barley” (Job 31:1-40).

Before his negative circumstances came, Job had relationship boundaries in place that were based on God's views, and regardless of his condition, he did not move the landmarks but held firm to what was right. Remember, God spoke these words about Job to Satan:

“Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still

he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to destroy him without cause” (Job 2:3, emphasis added).

The Oxford Illustrated Dictionary defines *integrity* as “wholeness, soundness, uprightness, and honesty. Integrity can also be described as moral soundness, freedom from corrupting influence or motive; this is used especially for the fulfillment of contracts and the discharge of agencies.” *Integrity* means “unimpaired, unadulterated, genuine in state; entire correspondence with an original condition, language continued long in its purity and integrity.”

God is faithful—but there are times when we will be tested as to whether we will be faithful or not. A few years ago, the Holy Spirit spoke to me about the lack of integrity in our relationship with God. He said, “My people are happy and blessing me when everything is going the way they want, but they question me when things are not going their way.” The bottom line is that God is only God to us in the good times, but we cannot sincerely say from our hearts and lips, like Job did, “*Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him*” (Job 13:15). He indicated to me that our relationship and commitment are shallow and fragile and cannot stand much of a test of our faith in God. In most cases, we would falter, go into unbelief, and continue this way, not feeling we lack integrity in the relationship by not believing. God is God in the good times, and He is God in the difficult times—He does not change, and we should not change either. In difficulties, we should be even more committed, because we need Him more.

This was God's promise to Solomon if he would walk in integrity of heart:

*“Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness, to do according to all that I have commanded you, **and if you keep My statutes and My judgments, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, as I promised David your father, saying, ‘You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel’”** (1 Kings 9:4–5, emphasis added).*

Fearing God and Walking in Forgiveness

Meditations of King David, Solomon's Father

The LORD shall judge the peoples; Judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, And according to my integrity within me (Psalm 7:8).

Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, But establish the just; For the righteous God tests the hearts and minds (Psalm 7:9).

My defense is of God, Who saves the upright in heart (Psalm 7:10).

God is a just judge, And God is angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7:11).

Who is the man that fears the LORD? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses. He himself shall dwell in prosperity, And his descendants shall inherit the earth. The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him,

And He will show them His covenant. My eyes are ever toward the LORD, For He shall pluck my feet out of the net (Psalm 25:12-15, emphasis added).

Keep my soul, and deliver me; Let me not be ashamed, for I put my trust in You. Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for You. Redeem Israel, O God, out of all their troubles! (Psalm 25:20-22).

Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity. I have also trusted in the LORD; I shall not slip. Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart. For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, And I have walked in Your truth (Psalm 26:1-3).

Wouldn't it be great to always have godly men and women in leadership positions, men and women who can hear from God and have a fear of God, men and women of personal integrity?

David sinned against God, but he repented from the heart and God forgave him. As a leader, David was called to war at times, but not without God's direction. David was used by God to balance His books—not David's books. How David walked in relationship with God and man was important for David's sake, so that God could use him.

David's first test was how he would treat Saul, the then king of Israel, who wanted David dead. Saul was obviously jealous of David. His jealousy started when the people began to see how great a warrior David was while David was serving in Saul's army. Saul gave David this position after he killed the giant Goliath.

Now it had happened as they were coming home, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments. So the women sang as they danced, and said: "Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands." Then Saul was very angry, and the saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed only thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" So Saul eyed David from that day forward (1 Samuel 18:6-9).

This is what Saul said to his son Jonathan. Jonathan was the heir to the throne, and he loved David as a brother:

"For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Now therefore, send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die." And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said to him, "Why should he be killed? What has he done?" Then Saul cast a spear at him to kill him, by which Jonathan knew that it was determined by his father to kill David (1 Samuel 20:31-33).

David eventually had to leave secretly because his life was in danger. He had to run and hide because Saul was so determined to kill him. Though Saul was very jealous of David and wanted to kill him, David did not allow the way he was being treated by Saul to affect his heart. David had already received the anointing to be the next

king of Israel by Samuel the prophet, and the Spirit of God had left Saul. David respected that it was God's business to remove Saul from his position—not David's.

The Bible tells us what happened when David had an opportunity to kill Saul, at a time when Saul was seeking to kill David:

Then Abishai said to David, "God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth; and I will not have to strike him a second time!" But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless?" David said furthermore, "As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD's anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that are by his head, and let us go" (1 Samuel 26:8–11).

Once David had put distance between himself and Saul he called out to let Saul and his guard know that he had come close enough to take the jug of water and the spear but did not kill Saul, even though he knew Saul was pursuing him with the intention of killing him. Saul did turn away from pursuing David at that time but tried numerous other times afterwards to kill David.

To forgive and to walk with a forgiving heart is not easy, because we can always justify why we can keep the offense; however, being unable to forgive hardens our heart. Not everything in life will be fair, but God

sees all. If we will keep our hearts right before Him and not allow “hardness” to take over, He will fight our battles for us. God is most interested in reconciliation and integrity in relationships. He is a God of relationship—not religion!

Is it possible for the sons of Abraham to get along? Yes, of course. They might not be in each other’s houses, but everyone will have a better life when someone begins loving first. To begin to love first might mean you have to forgive first.

Good can come out of a bad situation if you will let it. For example, Joseph, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, was hated and envied by his brothers because their father loved him more than he loved them (Genesis 37:4). Then God gave him a dream that caused his brothers to hate and envy him even more (Genesis 37:5,11). They sold him to the Ishmaelites (Genesis 37:28), who sold him to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh (Genesis 39:1). It is reported that the Lord was with Joseph while he was in slavery and that he was a successful man. *“And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand”* (Genesis 39:3).

Being sold into slavery by his brothers was the first test; a false accusation by his master’s wife was the second test. She accused him of lying with her, and being imprisoned for a crime he did not commit was the third test (Genesis 39:7-10). Because he kept what God said close to his heart and did not let his heart become hard, he continued in the favor of God.

Ultimately, Joseph became the deliverer of the people during a time of famine. His father believed him

to be dead, but Joseph was well and enjoying great power and prosperity. When Joseph's brothers ended up in Egypt during the famine because it was reported in Israel that there was food in Egypt, they had to come face to face with Joseph.

Joseph then had the power and resources for vengeance, if he had allowed the family situation to stew in his heart over the years and had been unforgiving. But if he had begun a journey of unforgiveness toward his family, he would not have had favor with God and would not have prospered in the house of Pharaoh. This is what happened when he came face to face with his brothers:

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph: "God has made me lord of all

Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for there are still five years of famine” (Genesis 45:3-11).

A family member once asked me for forgiveness. One statement made was, “We may never be boozing buddies, but we are family and it is not right for me to have something in my heart against you.” I believe the message to me, because I don’t drink alcohol, was, “My life and your life are not the same. We don’t like the same things; we do not do things the same way; we do not even think the same; but we are family, and it is not right to harbor bad feelings in my heart towards you.”

All of us have relationships at different lengths and different levels, for example, the relationship between parent and child, husband and wife, brother and sister, neighbor and neighbor, teacher and pupil, doctor and patient, employer and employee, government leader and constituent, two people on a streetcar or in line at a grocery store. If you understand relationships and you want healthy ones, then it is important to know that God’s love in your heart will produce good things. Does it mean that you will be loved back? Not always! However, when you love unconditionally good results will be produced in the end. The love principle never fails!

Does it mean that you might have to separate yourself from some relationships—either permanently or for a season—if the going gets rough or until something

changes? You might have to, but how you treat them and how you conduct yourself will determine whether you will have God's favor on your life. I often wonder, "How many Josephs never reached their full potential or found their destiny, only because they were not able to find God's purpose in their negative circumstances?" God's promises to both Abraham and his seed were that He would bless them and that they would be a blessing (Genesis 22:16-18). How many sons of Abraham do we have, and what are they being and doing?

God's love can only be lived out through a personal relationship with Him—not a religious practice. Jesus said it this way when speaking to His disciples:

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

Relationships: the God-Result

Relationships will test us. When we take matters into our own hands and do not treat people the way God says we should, we open ourselves up to the wrath of God and His judgment. He is our Creator, and He takes how we treat one another personally.

Whether we believe it, acknowledge it, or understand it, this is the truth:

And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times

of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead” (Acts 17:26–31, emphasis added).

When you study the prophets, you will see that the prophecies were all about relationships, how people were treating God and/or one another. You cannot separate the two!

God took Israel into captivity for seventy years. The prophet Zechariah begins by reminding the children of Israel that their fathers would not listen and, because of this, they were taken into Babylonian captivity (597–538 B.C.). But now, after many years (seventy) and God’s promise of their return to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, He calls on them to repent from their evil ways and their evil deeds, to not follow in the footsteps of their fathers. The Lord promises comfort to Zion and asks the prophet to proclaim these words:

*“Thus says the LORD of Hosts: ‘I am zealous for Jerusalem And for Zion with great zeal. I am exceedingly angry with the nations at ease; For I was a little angry, And **they helped—but with evil intent.**’ Therefore thus says the LORD: ‘I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it,’ says the LORD of Hosts, ‘And a surveyor’s line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem.’” Again proclaim, saying, “Thus says the LORD of Hosts: ‘My cities shall again spread out through prosperity; The LORD will again*

comfort Zion, And will again choose Jerusalem”
(Zechariah 1:14-17, emphasis added).

God is bringing the Israelites back to their homeland, but He also says that He is upset with the nations who helped Him deal with Israel, because they had “evil intent”! The nations that had evil intent against Israel are now facing God’s judgment and wrath if they do not repent. At the same time, Israel is now being exonerated. You see, God is love, and He never deals with us according to our sin, but according to His love and mercy. His heart is pure toward us, and His chastening is for our profit, to bring us to an expected end, a pleasant end.

Zechariah tells us what was happening that caused God to send Israel into captivity, where another nation ruled over them. They lost their land and their freedom because of how they were handling their relationships!

“Should you not have obeyed the words which the LORD proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the cities around it were inhabited and prosperous, and the South and the Lowland were inhabited?” Then the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion Everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, The alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart Against his brother.’ But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders, and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the

*words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. Thus great wrath came from the LORD of hosts. Therefore it happened, that just as He proclaimed and they would not hear, so they called out and I would not listen," says the LORD of hosts. "But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they had not known. Thus the land became desolate after them, so that no one passed through or returned; **for they made the pleasant land desolate**" (Zechariah 7:7-14, emphasis added).*

How they treated others destroyed what they had. However, God is now bringing them back out of a captivity of seventy years to the land He took them from, and He tells them how they should conduct their relationships and what the result will be:

"These are the things you shall do: Speak each man the truth to his neighbor; Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace; Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; And do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate,' Says the LORD." Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, Shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts for the house of Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.' "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities; The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, "Let us continue to go and pray before the

*LORD, And seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also." Yes, many peoples and strong nations Shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, And to pray before the LORD.' Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that **God is with you**"'" (Zechariah 8:16–23, emphasis added).*

Through repentance, we can change God's direction of judgment. Nineveh experienced this when the prophet Jonah came with God's message to them. They heard what the prophet said and went to God with what they knew to be the only thing that would work to change God's direction—and that was repentance.

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor

flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it (Jonah 3:1-10).

Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, was a prophet before and after the fall of Israel and Judah. Jeremiah himself was taken into captivity in Egypt. Jeremiah prophesied about God showing His mercy after His chastening:

*For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. **Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.** I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive (Jeremiah 29:10-14, emphasis added).*

Often it is only after we have gone through some difficult times that we will finally search for God with our whole heart. Once in a while, when we want something from Him, we will give Him little pieces of our heart—but not our whole heart. Consequently, we do not know Him independent of His actions. We need to know the character and nature of God and His ways—not just His acts!

We say we know God, but we are full of unbelief and fear. We continue to operate as if we are in control of our destiny, never surrendering our will and becoming confident in God's destiny and purpose. We are not true worshippers of God who can worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

We need an Isaiah vision—a vision he had after King Uzziah died. Perhaps his sorrow over King Uzziah's death made him available to receive this vision—or perhaps the earthly reigning king had a part of Isaiah's heart. He finally saw the real King! He saw the Lord highly exalted in His majesty and greatness, which brought Isaiah to the place of seeing himself as a man of unclean lips, dwelling amongst a people of unclean lips (Isaiah 6:1-5). He said, "*For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!*" (Isaiah 6:5). Isaiah's spiritual eyes were made open to be able to see the real King, the Lord of Hosts. Spiritual awakening goes beyond knowledge of the Lord of Hosts. Spiritual awakening actually opens heaven to you. You get to see in—revelation becomes a part of your life. You begin to become a "seer."

Only in seeing Him, having spiritual encounters in His Presence, will we see our condition—good or bad.

We need to become aware of and understand what is happening on the inside that will take us into error. It is about having integrity in relationships with God and with one another, rather than letting go unchecked what we think, feel, and do—which causes us to violate the greatest commandments of God. As we have seen, when asked by a lawyer, “*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?*” (Matthew 22:36), Jesus said:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40).

It Is All About Relationships

Not holding fast to integrity in relationships can cause a lack in our life, family, city, or nation. Look at what happened during David’s reign as king and what needed to happen for God to hear and answer the prayers of David and the people of the land:

Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, “It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites.” So the king called the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; the children of Israel had sworn protection to them, but Saul had sought to kill

them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah. Therefore David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement, that you may bless the inheritance of the LORD?" And the Gibeonites said to him, "We will have no silver or gold from Saul or from his house, nor shall you kill any man in Israel for us." So he said, "Whatever you say, I will do for you."...So they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God heeded the prayer for the land (2 Samuel 21:1-14).

We do not need to question where God is when we see something not right in our life, family, city, or nation. What we need is to inquire of the Lord to find out where we have gone wrong and to repent, saying, "I am sorry," from the heart. God has the solution.

When God called Abram (later called Abraham) out of Haran, this is what He said (Genesis 12:2-3):

- I will make you a great nation.
- I will bless you.
- I will make your name great.
- You shall be a blessing.
- I will bless those who bless you.
- I will curse those who curse you.
- In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

The three sons of Abraham have the blessings of Abraham on their lives through promises God gave

them individually, and it is important to be able to see it visibly demonstrated through compassionate relationships.

I recently saw an interview on the CBC with members of a Muslim family whose children had played with Usama bin Laden's children. The father of the family was killed in the Afghanistan war after 9/11. The son—who later became an informant for U.S. intelligence—said that his father wanted him to be a terrorist bomber but something in him said it was not right. He personally did not feel comfortable with his family's reactions to 9/11. He said innocent people were being killed and it was not right.

In a separate interview, his sister and mother admitted that they were happy when they saw what happened and they could justify the killing of innocent people. They stated that the U.S. is their enemy because it supports and funds Israel and does not support the cause of the Palestinians. The mother went on to state, "We are a people of revenge. We will take revenge, even within our own family. This is what we are like."

The weekend after 9/11, I was at a local mall that I visit frequently. There were many Muslims out shopping that day, and they had such confidence and were so happy that the difference was noticeable. It was as if a people who were invisible had become visible. It was not as if we had not interacted before, but the interaction was totally different. I had the feeling that their attitude was that they now had the upper hand. I then got the feeling that they were happy about what had taken place, but up until the interview on

the CBC I had not heard anyone come out and make it obvious.

A few days later the U.S. invaded Afghanistan. I was in a grocery store, and in the same aisle was a Muslim mother with her young son, about seven years old. The mother was back to being invisible, and when her son looked at me he had fear in his eyes. I said, "Hi," to him, but he did not respond. I walked away and said to myself, "This whole thing is crazy! This young boy does not have to grow up afraid; neither does his mother have to live a life feeling oppressed. There is hope for their cause." Their hope can be in a people who have compassion, who understand their plight, and who are able to bring healing. Who will these people be?

To shed innocent blood as a means to an end will never solve our problems. We must also consider what we are doing to our children and what we are leaving for them. If we do not work at making things better, things will only get worse. Bloodshed is not the answer! Not to say that blood has not been shed, but let the bloodshed be God dealing with the wicked, not us taking matters into our own hands and forgetting our roots. God takes family disunity and the shedding of innocent blood very seriously. The sons of Abraham who want to see their brother destroyed are in serious spiritual trouble.

There is a solution when all of Abraham's sons begin to walk in the fear of God. There is only one side we can be on, and that is God's side. As for me, I want to fight in the battle that God is fighting, to be on His side.

Joshua had an experience with the commander of the army of the Lord before he went into battle for Jericho:

And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" Then the Commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so (Joshua 5:13-15).

God is on the side of those who fear Him.

Do we want to fight our own battles or do we want to fight the battle that God is in? God fighting for us means we will see the supernatural happen, the impossible take place. It goes beyond what man can do, and it has a right result. All of the sons of Abraham should know about the supernatural if they know the God of Abraham. Whatever we do must be for a just cause, knowing God will balance the books because of how we have lived before Him.

God's Love and Mercy

What did God do for the children of Israel as they were fleeing the Egyptians?

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land,

*and the waters were divided. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued and went after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. Now it came to pass, in the morning watch, that the LORD looked down upon the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud, and He troubled the army of the Egyptians. And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians." Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, on their chariots, and on their horsemen." And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and when the morning appeared, the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained. But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so **the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses** (Exodus 14:21–31, emphasis added).*

All of this happened because Moses and the children of Israel believed and obeyed. Yes, they had to work through some feelings and thoughts to step into what God spoke, but they did, and through their obedience, God was able to fight for Israel. God dealing with the Egyptians was directly related to how they treated the Israelites while they were in captivity in Egypt (Exodus 3:7-9, 12:12-13, 14:13-14, 19-27).

God saw Hagar's condition after she had fled the presence of Sarah when Sarah had dealt harshly with her:

Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai." The Angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand." Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude." And the Angel of the LORD said to her: "Behold, you are with child, And you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has heard your affliction. He shall be a wild man; His hand shall be against every man, And every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" (Genesis 16:7-13).

When the lad was older and Abraham and Sarah had a son, Isaac, Sarah had Hagar and Ishmael cast out of the home. But God did not abandon Hagar and Ishmael.

So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away. Then she departed and wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba. And the water in the skin was used up, and she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, "Let me not see the death of the boy." So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation." Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink. (Genesis 21:14–19).

God was performing the supernatural for Hagar and Ishmael!

When we look in the Bible we see that in the ministry of Jesus the dead were raised, the deaf heard, the blind saw, the lame walked, the loaves and fishes were multiplied, the demon-possessed people were set free, and all sinners who believed were liberated. Whoever came to Him then and whoever calls on Him today and

believes will see a demonstration of the same things as in the days of old. Miracles have not ended; we have just stopped believing! To love God's way is not natural; it is supernatural.

To take matters into our own hands and not do it God's way means we have trespassed and could be guilty of shedding innocent blood. Let's see how God feels about the shedding of innocent blood:

“And this is the case of the manslayer who flees there, that he may live: Whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, not having hated him in time past—as when a man goes to the woods with his neighbor to cut timber, and his hand swings a stroke with the ax to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies—he shall flee to one of these cities and live; lest the avenger of blood, while his anger is hot, pursue the manslayer and overtake him, because the way is long, and kill him, though he was not deserving of death, since he had not hated the victim in time past. Therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall separate three cities for yourself.’ Now if the LORD your God enlarges your territory, as He swore to your fathers, and gives you the land which He promised to give to your fathers, and if you keep all these commandments and do them, which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and to walk always in His ways, then you shall add three more cities for yourself besides these three, lest innocent blood be shed in the midst of your land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and thus guilt of bloodshed be upon you. But if anyone

hates his neighbor, lies in wait for him, rises against him and strikes him mortally, so that he dies, and he flees to one of these cities, then the elders of his city shall send and bring him from there, and deliver him over to the hand of the avenger of blood, that he may die. Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you” (Deuteronomy 19:4–13).

The prophet Ezekiel said:

*Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir and prophesy against it, and say to it. ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, O Mount Seir, I am against you; I will stretch out My hand against you, And make you most desolate; I shall lay your cities waste, And you shall be desolate. Then you shall know that I am the LORD. “**Because you have had an ancient hatred, and have shed the blood of the children of Israel by the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, when their iniquity came to an end, therefore, as I live,**” says the Lord GOD, “I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you; since you have not hated blood, therefore blood shall pursue you. Thus I will make Mount Seir most desolate, and cut off from it the one who leaves and the one who returns. And I will fill its mountains with the slain; on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines those who are slain by the sword shall fall. I will make you perpetually desolate, and your cities shall be uninhabited; then you shall know that I am the LORD.*

“Because you have said, ‘These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess them,’ although the LORD was there, therefore, as I live,” says the Lord GOD, “I will do according to your anger and according to the envy which you showed in your hatred against them; and I will make Myself known among them when I judge you. Then you shall know that I am the LORD. I have heard all your blasphemies which you have spoken against the mountains of Israel, saying, ‘They are desolate; they are given to us to consume.’ Thus with your mouth you have boasted against Me and multiplied your words against Me; I have heard them. Thus says the Lord GOD: “The whole earth will rejoice when I make you desolate. As you rejoiced because the inheritance of the house of Israel was desolate, so I will do to you; you shall be desolate, O Mount Seir, as well as all of Edom—all of it! Then they shall know that I am the LORD” (Ezekiel 35:1–15, emphasis added).

This book has not been written for a select audience; it is for everyone. I am sharing about Abraham’s sons to reflect a real-life situation. If we choose to do evil, evil will follow us all the days of our life until we make it right. Evil begets evil, so we keep digging a deeper hole for ourself unless we make it right.

When we do wrong, we sin against God. That sin encumbers our life, our future, and our hope. It is passed down to our children and our children’s children. They demonstrate our behavior and beliefs. Somewhere along the generational line, the belief and behavior must

change to break the cycle of evil. We must acknowledge before Him that we have done wrong.

God is love. Look around you at the sky, the moon, the sun, the clouds, the mountains, the trees, the birds, the flowers, the sea, the rivers, the waterfalls, the sunset. Every day, God is speaking to us through the beauty of His creation, saying, "Love one another as I have loved you. Give to one another as I have given to you." Some of us may not know God as a loving Father. We might think of Him as punishing, judging, angry, a real tyrant. God will not permit evil to go on; He will deal with it, but love is who He is. He will deal with the wicked to protect the innocent: this is a responsible God! That is why it is so essential for us to understand the significance of our heart condition, because when we fail to do a heart check, we could put our self in harm's way. This will produce a distressing result, causing us to wonder why we are having such hard times.

Remember, one day we will stand before God and be judged for the good and the evil we have done. Today is the day to judge our hearts so that we repent today and do not have to be judged for evil when it is too late.

Psalm 133 puts it this way:

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing—Life forevermore (Psalm 133).

Proverbs says this:

These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren (Proverbs 6:16–19).

In the book of Jeremiah, the Lord speaks, saying:

“Cursed is the man who trusts in man And makes flesh his strength, Whose heart departs from the LORD. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, And shall not see when good comes, But shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, In a salt land which is not inhabited.

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, And whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings” (Jeremiah 17:5–10).

Without a fear of God, nothing will change, because we are not looking at the condition of our heart. We hide it all well and make our actions look like

“someone made me do it.” No one takes responsibility for what is going on “inside”; everyone is pointing to the brother on the “outside.”

Do We Even Care?

Who Is My Neighbor? began to be birthed in me in March of 1997. When it had become full grown in my heart, I felt it was time to prepare it for publication. I awoke early that morning, and coming with all my notes and scraps of paper in hand, I opened my e-mails before I settled down to write.

Before me was an e-mail with a scene of a bus bombing from the day before, January 29, 2004. As I looked at the picture of another terrorist suicide attack in Israel, something within me was stirred to take a good look and ponder what I saw. The photographer was exemplary at capturing the devastation of the people and the wreckage. I looked at the mangled piece of metal that was once a mode of transportation for many and thought, "What a mess this is! How could one suicide bomber create such havoc?"

My eyes then caught all the blood on the injured and possibly dead. I pondered this for a moment, thinking about what their pain could be like and how those who had lost loved ones must feel: children,

wives, husbands, and families under attack.

Then something exploded inside me when I saw the living among the carnage, working at preserving life, and the blood of the helpless and the dead on the workers' clothes, hands, and faces. My eyes were fixed on the picture—studying postures, facial expressions, and body language. But most importantly, I was impacted by “the blood.” Not everyone in the picture was a medical professional or an ambulance worker. Many were ordinary people like you and me, willing to get so close that the blood of others had soiled them. What mattered to them was helping to save the lives of others.

I sat there and prayed, “God, help me to do something to make a difference.” It is my hope that this book is one of the “somethings” that will make a difference!

That evening I received another e-mail, an article written by a man for the *Jewish World Review* after a suicide bombing on December 3, 2001. He was one of the victims in the January 29, 2004, bombing. The title of his article from December 2001 was, “Because if you don't cry, who will?” This gentleman left behind a wife and seven children.

The question I ask is, “*Who* is going to be the first to *love* and the first to *forgive*?”

Tears can be a sign of either tenderness of heart or painful anguish that will produce revenge. To be able to murder the innocent is a sign of a heart of stone—hardness, no feelings, the loss of all sensitivity and sensibility. We are murderers and the “fear of God” is not in us. To understand their pain and cry for those we don't know is compassion and, hopefully, a willingness to become a solution to the problem.

You might feel *murder* is a strong word to use, but some of us have murder in our hearts. Some will carry it out by outward violence with guns, bombs, etc. Others will just pull out the sword every so often and take another piece out of their opponent or stab them one more time in the heart through poison-filled words. This can happen every day, even in our homes.

How do we speak to one another—spouses, parents, and children? When we hold things in our heart against one another, we respond out of our offenses. Our home becomes a place of unrest for our family, and we do not even notice it or do anything about it. We just keep arguing and killing one another emotionally. The tongue is a weapon that can speak either life or death (Proverbs 18:21) through sabotage or accusations—lies that are unfounded. Or we can let God help us to be sensitive, caring people, treating people as we would want to be treated.

Murder is a serious issue, and the opposite of hate is love. As long as we have our foot on our brother's neck, we are going *nowhere*! He cannot move, and neither can we. Greatness comes in letting God deal with our enemies. Unfortunately, today the condition of many so-called believers of God is that they have no faith in God. Their religion does not have faith—it has works, only works. Religion knows the law without the spirit of the law. The spirit of the law of religion is, "God so loved that He gave."

Faith must hear what love (God) is saying and then obey. These are the true sons of Abraham—those who have been called to be blessed of God and to be a blessing. God says, "*I will curse him who curses you*"

(Genesis 12:3). I wonder how many of us have taken matters into our own hands and put God's name to it? Can we bring God's wrath upon our self, upon our nation, upon our people? Yes, of course we can—through not caring for people, through not handling the offenses that have made us angry and hateful in an appropriate way.

A while ago I was watching a television program on which a family of five—a husband, his wife, and their three children—were being interviewed. They were from an American white upper-middle-class family and wanted to do something good for the poor, so they decided to do a few weeks of volunteering in Kenya. They interviewed all the family members, but something struck a note in me when one of the children, a young boy of about twelve, spoke of what this experience meant to him. He said, "At first when I went there, I saw myself as different then them. They were black and I was white; they had nothing and I had everything. However, as time went on and we were taking turns pumping water from the pump, I came to realize that we were the same—our needs were the same no matter where we lived." He realized that he was no different through the fact that they both needed water to live. Their needs and his were the same: if neither had water, they would die.

If we could have the same revelation and begin helping one another instead of harming one another, we would see blessings in the house of Abraham's sons. Hardness in your heart will make you very angry—angry enough to kill! Keep in mind that we can kill

others in their spirits and souls through mean, oppressive words, stripping people of their dignity and self-worth. What do you think is the root of our problem?

Exposing the Heart: We Need to Change!

I am going to use some real-life scenarios from the Bible to show that *“the heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?”* (Jeremiah 17:9).

I am sure we have all had to deal with jealousy at times in our lives. Jealousy is as cruel as the grave (Song of Solomon 8:6), but love is a stronger force, that one would be willing to die for the object of their affection, as Jesus did on the cross—not taking lives with Him but liberating mankind from sin and eternal death.

Set me as a seal upon your heart, As a seal upon your arm; For love is as strong as death, Jealousy as cruel as the grave; Its flames are flames of fire, A most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, Nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love All the wealth of his house, It would be utterly despised (Song of Solomon 8:6–7).

Jealousy can also produce greed and covetousness. To the extent that we have allowed this negative emotion of

jealousy to work in our lives, it will be lived out in trying to destroy others.

God has promised blessings to all the children of Abraham. How many covet the others' blessings because they are jealous of the God favor that they do not have due to their "heart condition" before God? Love, God's love in us, is a much better way!

How many of Abraham's sons have fear operating in their hearts—causing them to believe negative things about the others? Or their fears are real because of what they have had to contend with regarding one another? Knowing the perfect love of God will cast out all of that fear (1 John 4:18), because we trust Him for His wisdom and know He fights our battles.

I am outlining many examples of people's heart conditions, what they may have thought and what they did, as examples and lessons for us. I hope that what you read will touch your hearts enough to let the Spirit of God in to do some personal examining.

First we will look at a psalm of David. David, king of Israel at the time, committed adultery with Bathsheba, another man's wife. When David learned that Bathsheba was pregnant with his child, he tried to cover up his sin of adultery. First he called Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, home from battle, intending that Uriah would sleep with her and assume that the child was his own. However, Uriah, being a man of integrity, felt that because other men were at war and not able to be with their families, it was not right that he be able to spend time with his. When David's plan did not materialize, murder was the alternative to cover his lie and sin. He had Uriah put on the front lines in battle, where he was killed. Uriah was

one of David's most trusted men and would have done anything for David; yet David could not be trusted.

Nathan was the prophet God sent to uncover David's iniquity:

Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: "There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity."

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have

taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon (2 Samuel 12:1-9).

It is interesting that Nathan used the example of a lamb to reach David's heart. David understood the love of a shepherd for his sheep because he once was a shepherd and still had a shepherd's heart somewhere under his sin. David's response to Nathan about the penalty a person who would do such a thing should receive was directly related to the love he had for lambs. When Nathan said, "You are the man!" David saw his sin. Nathan was masterful at exposing it, and David did repent. Psalm 51 is David's expression of repentance as he speaks to God:

Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight—That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, That the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not

cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise. For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise (Psalm 51:1–17).

True humility before God and man is evidence of something spiritually mature happening inwardly, whether it is individually or corporately. It is also evidence of fearing God, respecting who He is and His commandments. The Bible says that David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). With the exception of this situation, David always obeyed God—because David had a heart of obedience. He had a fear of God, a respect for Him. Even though David sinned, as we all have, he took responsibility before God. This is a choice we must make in our life, regardless of the cost!

Proverbs expresses it this way:

Two things I request of You (Deprive me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches—Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny You, And say, "Who is the LORD?" Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God (Proverbs 30:7-9).

Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones (Proverbs 3:7–8).

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7).

Because they hated knowledge And did not choose the fear of the LORD, They would have none of my counsel And despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, And be filled to the full with their own fancies. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, And the complacency of fools will destroy them; But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, And will be secure, without fear of evil" (Proverbs 1:29–33).

In mercy and truth Atonement is provided for iniquity; And by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil. When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him (Proverbs 16:6–7).

Let us look at some of the things mankind is capable of doing because of the condition of our hearts. Until we have a fear of God—a respect for Him and what He says—we will not depart from evil. Nothing changes if nothing changes!

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD." Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller

*of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, **sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.**" Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. **Am I my brother's keeper?**" And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth" (Genesis 4:4-12, emphasis added).*

A few observations that I have made from this are:

- Man had the potential from the beginning to hate his brother, to be jealous, and to murder him.
- Man had the potential from the beginning to not fear God and to disobey Him. After all, Cain's parents had already done so.

- Man had the potential from the beginning to fear God and to please Him by his actions. Abel was an example of this, even though he grew up in a home that was noted for disobedience and a lack of a healthy fear of God.
- Looking at the beginning, we find out the fear that Adam had before God was a fear of being caught in his sin. You will note that neither Adam nor Eve took responsibility for the actions they committed against God. Adam blamed Eve (Genesis 3:12) and Eve blamed Satan (Genesis 3:13).
- Man has dominion over sin. God said that it can be at our door, but we must become master over it.
- The blood of the innocent (Abel) cried out before God. I believe this is true whether we have committed murder literally or have murder in our hearts.
- God expects us to be our brother's keeper.
- Men's actions can cause them to become fugitives and vagabonds; this can be both spiritual and literal.

The final analysis is that we all have choices. As Joshua said to the children of Israel once they had possessed the land God had promised them:

“Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your

fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:14-15).

Going into a house of worship does not make us holy people or people who have an obedient heart. How we live our daily life and treat one another will demonstrate whether we are sincere about the God we say we serve. Character and integrity must be present—not religious righteousness and/or membership in a denomination or sect.

Jesus was radical in the things He said, lived, and did. Sometimes I wonder why people cannot believe He was the true Son of God and God Himself. Who could put such radical thinking out there and then demonstrate it by the life He lived? Jesus talked like a man who had been drinking! He made no sense at all. Now the key is this, if you are drunk with the “new wine” of the Spirit (Acts 2:13), you too will be radical and make no sense—but God will back you up with the life of the supernatural. Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak

also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:38–48).

We all need mercy, and mercy will not be available to those who cannot show mercy. God will set us up every day to learn a lesson to keep our hearts right and help us to be humble before Him, if we will only listen! So often, when I thought I could get on my “high horse” and begin religiously dictating, the mercy of God would come to me with a circumstance to bring me back to spiritual reality. There cannot be any self-righteousness in this relationship with Him—only true humility before Him. The Bible says, “*For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment*” (James 2:13).

As mentioned earlier, this book was being birthed in me in March of 1997. The Spirit of the Lord began to show me through Athaliah, who murdered her grand-

children so that she could succeed her son on the throne (2 Kings 11:1), that people are capable of wickedness at unimaginable levels. My understanding was that grandmothers love their grandchildren even more than they love their own children. It was as if God was saying to me, "Do not be surprised at what people can and will do."

Jealousy, a desire for power, and wickedness in man's heart are as cruel as the grave. We fail to realize that when we dig a grave for someone else, we are at the same time digging our own.

I am taking you on a little historical journey of some people who were in power and how they mis-handled it. Note that this history can also be found outside of the Bible, even today, because people are the same today as they were long ago. One thing we must all come to terms with: a person who has not completely surrendered their will and heart to God is capable of any evil or wrongdoing.

The story begins like this:

And Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. Then Jehoram his son reigned in his place. He had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azaryahu, Michael, and Shephatiah; all these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. Their father gave them great gifts of silver and gold and precious things, with fortified cities in Judah; but he gave the kingdom to Jehoram, because he was the firstborn. Now when Jehoram was established over the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself and killed all his brothers with the sword, and also others of the

princes of Israel. Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for he had the daughter of Ahab as a wife; and he did evil in the sight of the LORD (2 Chronicles 21:1-6).

Jehoshaphat made a mistake in using the marriage of his son Jehoram with the daughter of Ahab, Athaliah, to ally himself with Ahab—his son taking on the evil of his wife's family.

Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance; and by marriage he allied himself with Ahab (2 Chronicles 18:1).

He [Jehoram] was thirty-two years old when he became king. He reigned in Jerusalem eight years and, to no one's sorrow, departed. However they buried him in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings (2 Chronicles 21:20).

Then the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his place, for the raiders who came with the Arabians into the camp had killed all the older sons. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, reigned...He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother advised him to do wickedly. Therefore he did evil in the sight of the LORD, like the house of Ahab; for they were his counselors after the death of his father, to his destruction (2 Chronicles 22:1-4).

When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal heirs. But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's sons who were being murdered; and they hid him and his nurse in the bedroom, from Athaliah, so that he was not killed. So he was hidden with her in the house of the LORD for six years, while Athaliah reigned over the land (2 Kings 11:1–3).

Ahaziah was the king and Athaliah was his mother, the wife of the late King Jehoram, making her the Queen Mother while Ahaziah was king. We are told that when Athaliah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed *all* the royal heirs. This means that she murdered all of her grandsons. Their lives posed a threat to her being able to have the power of ruling and reigning in her son's stead. That was fast thinking on her part—or had she been eyeing the throne while her son reigned? She might even have had things in place beforehand. If she had the means to murder her grandchildren, people were already following her dictates before the death of her son.

When we look back in Athaliah's lineage, we find a family of swift thinkers and military might. Her grandfather, Omri, was commander of the military, later to become king of Israel. Omri reigned for twelve years, and this is what was said of him: "*Omri did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than all who were before him*" (1 Kings 16:25).

After Omri's death his son Ahab became the new king to take his place. Ahab was Athaliah's father and

Jezebel was her mother. This was said of Ahab:

Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. Now Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. And it came to pass, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. Then he set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a wooden image. Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him (1 Kings 16:29–33).

In this brief synopsis, we see generations of wickedness, heartlessness, murder, and insensitivity. In total, through these lives, we have close to fifty years of wicked rulers committing heinous acts, both inside and outside the family. How could this be?

It did not just stop there. Remember, Joash, the grandson of Athaliah, who was hid away:

*But Jehoiada grew old and was full of days, and he died; he was one hundred and thirty years old when he died. And they buried him in the City of David among the kings, because **he had done good in Israel, both toward God and His house**. Now after the death of Jehoiada the leaders of Judah came and bowed down to the king. And the king listened to them. Therefore they left the house of the LORD God of*

*their fathers, and served wooden images and idols; and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem because of their trespass. Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them back to the LORD; and they testified against them, but they would not listen. Then the Spirit of God came upon **Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest**, who stood above the people, and said to them, "Thus says God: 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He also has forsaken you.'" So they conspired against him, and at the command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD. Thus **Joash the king did not remember the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him**, but killed his son; and as he died, he said, "The LORD look on it, and repay!"*

So it happened in the spring of the year that the army of Syria came up against him; and they came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the leaders of the people from among the people, and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus. For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men; but the LORD delivered a very great army into their hand, because they had forsaken the LORD God of their fathers. So they executed judgment against Joash (2 Chronicles 24:15–24, emphasis added).

Recap

- Jehoram murdered his brothers after his father Jehoshaphat's death.

- Arabian raiders killed Jehoram's sons with the exception of Ahaziah, his youngest son.
- Ahaziah killed.
- Athaliah, mother of Ahaziah, kills Ahaziah's sons—her grandsons—so she can become Queen.
- Joash, the only living son of Ahaziah, is hidden in the house of the Lord. Jehoiada is the priest.
- Athaliah killed.
- Joash, the hide-away grandson of Athaliah, the son of Ahaziah, becomes king.
- Joash has Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, who kept him safe in the Lord's house killed for prophesying "thus says the lord!"

Even though we can say we know God, we worship God, and we are called of God, this does not make us good people with pure motives, unless we have a heart change and begin to:

- Love God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind
- Love our neighbor as ourself
- Do unto others as we would have them do unto us

Don't be shocked at how we treat one another—it's normal; be shocked when you see someone loving as

God commands. I am not sure we know how to do this, because religion cannot produce a tender heart. Truly, out of our hearts spring the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23). I have noticed that some fruits and vegetables begin to rot from the inside out. They can look good in the store when you purchase them, but when you cut them open you find that rot has begun on the inside, never to be detected by looking at the outside.

Jesus put it this way when invited to the home of a religious leader for dinner:

A certain Pharisee asked Him to dine with him. So He went in and sat down to eat. When the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that He had not first washed before dinner. Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness. Foolish ones! Did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you. "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone (Luke 11:37-42).

Jacob had a wrestling match with "a man"—a God-Man—and this is what He said to Jacob:

*So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for **you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.**" Then*

Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And He blessed him there. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Just as he crossed over Penuel the sun rose on him, and he limped on his hip. Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which is on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank (Genesis 32:27-32, emphasis added).

Esau was the firstborn twin brother of Jacob. Esau's due, because he was firstborn, was the best of the blessing from their father Isaac, but Esau sold his birthright to Jacob one day when he was starving and thought he would die. Jacob took the birthright and gave Esau food (Genesis 25:29-34). Isaac had no knowledge of this. When it came time for Esau to receive his firstborn blessing from Isaac, Jacob stepped into place and pretended to be Esau. Isaac, being old and unable to see, blessed Jacob, the second born, with the firstborn blessing (Genesis 27:1-29).

Isaac and Esau found out Jacob was the one that Isaac blessed when Esau showed up for his blessing. Esau did receive a blessing, but not the blessing of the firstborn, and as a result he intended to kill Jacob once their father died (Genesis 27:30-41). This led to Jacob leaving home to live with their mother's family in another country (Genesis 28:1-5).

Before Jacob could come back home to the promises God made to him and to his inheritance, he had to be reconciled to his brother, Esau. It was his wrestling with

the One who appeared to him that prepared him to meet Esau. He had to have an encounter with God and be changed on the inside, which resulted in an outward change—Jacob now walked with a limp and had a new name, Israel. He was no longer the old Jacob (Genesis 32).

I believe that many of us have not handled our business right but we still want God to bless us. We fail to see that until our relationship with Him and our brother is right, there are going to be a lot of unexplainable things in our life that are not pleasant or healthy. Fasting, praying, giving of our substance will not bring a God-response when what we really need to do is have a wrestling match with God where we decide to let go of all the sin in our life and *repent!*

A few years ago, I asked the Lord “what is revival?” and how will I know when it comes. The Lord said to me, “You will know you are in revival when brother goes to brother and says, ‘I am sorry’ and sister goes to sister and says, ‘I am sorry.’” It comes down to relationships. When our heart is convicted to get our relationships right, revival will begin in us and spread from us to others.

I was collecting some donations from businesses to help with a project we were involved in a few years ago. We were giving tax receipts for their charitable donations. An owner of one company called, asking many questions. Subsequently, when I picked up the box of gifts—which we were thankful for—he also gave me his invoice for the goods he wanted receipted. When I returned to the office and opened the box, I found we could not use almost everything he had donated because they were soiled, water stained, and used

looking. I then looked at the invoice. He had put an unreasonable price on the goods, and he wanted the receipt made out to him personally.

I sat there looking at the “stuff” along with the invoice, and the Holy Spirit spoke to me. This is what He said: “Have you ever wondered why this man’s business has never prospered?” I thought about how long he had been in the location and in business and what had changed. It seemed like he was just getting by. So, my response to the question was, “Yes, I would like to know why.” The Holy Spirit said to me, “Do you see the way he does his business? This is the reason why.”

It is not good when God forsakes us because of what He sees. Some of our hard times or times of no change could be because God is speaking but we are not hearing.

This is what God thought of some things that were going on in Israel, which He revealed to Ezekiel the prophet:

*So He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall. Then He said to me, “Son of man, dig into the wall”; and when I dug into the wall, there was a door. And He said to me, “Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there.” So I went in and saw, and there—every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed all around on the walls. And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan. Each man had a censer in his hand, and a thick cloud of incense went up. Then He said to me, “Son of man, **have you seen***

what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land'" (Ezekiel 8:7-12, emphasis added).

The result of our life will be the result of the integrity of our relationship with God and with mankind.

Made in God's Image: We Have Value!

God places great value on people and life; in fact, in Genesis He gives us His thoughts before creating us:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:26-27).

Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day (Genesis 1:31).

Not everyone is enlightened to know who God is, but for those who know Him, He has names such as "offspring" (Acts 17:29), "son" (Matthew 5:9), and "the apple of His eye" (Zechariah 2:8). God does not have

favorites, but He does deal with bad behavior in our relationships. God takes how we treat each other personally, because we truly are His offspring, His sons and daughters, and the apple of His eye. Like a responsible father, He must not allow injustices but must deal with offenses if we are not willing to take responsibility.

Why does God judge our actions and the actions of nations and people groups toward one another? Because we have value and are special to Him. When we do not place the same value on one another as He has placed on us, God gets involved to protect the weak, the oppressed, the poor, the vulnerable, the righteous, and the innocent. This goes across the board—in nations, governments, families, schools, the marketplace—in every aspect and segment of life.

Nothing goes unnoticed and untouched by God. It might not seem like it to the onlooker, but there is a day of justice and judgment in the here and now, because God is a just God. God sees the pain caused to others by uncaring people with hard hearts. He also sees and knows why people have become uncaring and hard in their hearts. He is patient, wanting to get our attention so we will take responsibility before we experience His discipline. That was one of the functions of the prophets, to warn people to turn from their wicked ways to avoid God's wrath. This is the function of God's Word today—to point us in the right direction.

How can we stop practicing religion and have a relationship with God so that we become caring, kind people—not just caring about those whom we like or those who are like us, but caring about all mankind, treating everyone as equals?

This is what Jesus said to the religious people who saw Him and witnessed evidence of His miracles:

Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you." At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:20-30).

A relationship with God requires taking into our heart the person of Christ, who died on the cross for our

sins—our inappropriate actions toward God and man—taking responsibility and asking for forgiveness. We will then come into right relationship with God, who is our Father. This must be not just a religious belief but a personal relationship with God, daily walking in agreement with what He calls good and not with evil.

Repent is the word Jesus used, meaning taking responsibility and then taking on who Jesus is, His very character and nature—His gentleness, His kindness—knowing His love and knowing God’s love, as well as knowing God as Father.

God’s Love: Before the Foundations of the World He Knew Us!

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made (John 1:1-3).

*He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. **But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.** And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:10-14, emphasis added).*

Mankind is God's creation. Not everyone knows this or believes it, but it is true. When we do not know this or acknowledge it in our daily lives and decisions, we place ourselves, and those whom we influence, in the hands of a God who believes in justice and judgment. When we know God but behave contrary to His nature, we open ourselves up to His judgment. We might feel justified and think we have balanced the books by our actions, but we have now placed ourselves in the balances of God.

Placed in the Balances

This is what Daniel, an Old Testament prophet, stated as a message from God for King Belshazzar, the son of the late King Nebuchadnezzar:

*“O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. And because of the majesty that He gave him, all peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him. Whomever he wished, he executed; whomever he wished, he kept alive; whomever he wished, he set up; and whomever he wished, he put down. But when **his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened in pride**, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him. Then he was driven from the sons of men, his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys. They fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and appoints over it whomever He chooses. **But***

you his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, although you knew all this. And you have lifted yourself up against the Lord of heaven. They have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them. And you have praised the gods of silver and gold, bronze and iron, wood and stone, which do not see or hear or know; and the God who holds your breath in His hand and owns all your ways, you have not glorified. Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of each word. MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.” Then Belshazzar gave the command, and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold around his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old (Daniel 5:18-31, emphasis added).

Relationships

Then God said, “Let Us [God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit] make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over

all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them (Genesis 1:27).

The *New King James Version Nelson Study Bible* translates from the Hebrew to English the word *image* as meant by the writer of Genesis. “*Let Us make man in Our image*” (Genesis 1:26). In ancient times, an emperor might command statues of himself to be placed in remote parts of his empire. These symbols would declare that these areas were under his power and reign. So God placed humankind as living symbols of Himself on earth to represent His reign. We may not make images of God, for He has already done so! We are His images; it is we who are in His likeness. This is the reason God values people so much: we are made to reflect His majesty on earth, to have dominion, to rule as God’s regent. That is, people are to rule as God would—wisely and prudently—over all that God has made. Therefore, when we touch one another in a religious way or any other inappropriate way—not a God-fearing way—we are not just touching the person; we are touching the very image of God!

The religious do not know how to have godly relationships because they are indoctrinated in the law of religion. Jesus said it like this:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without

leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?" (Matthew 23:23-33).

We neglect *"the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith."*

Not long ago I received a prayer request for a family in Israel who had just lost their daughter to a terrorist bomber. The names have been changed, but here is the essence of the request:

Norma and I attended a funeral today and had the very sad experience of the grief that follows terrorist attacks here in Israel. Our friends Eli and

Sarah lost their daughter, Mena, in the suicide bombing in Tel Aviv last Friday night. Mena was only twenty-eight years old and engaged to be married within a few weeks. Her parents were planning for the wedding when suddenly they had to plan for a funeral.

Please pray for Eli and Sarah for great comfort from the Holy Spirit. They have been through so much as they live on land bought by Eli's father long ago. Now, however, their Muslim neighbors have been very aggressive in attacking them.

Just a few months ago, we prayed there with them after a Muslim neighbor had plowed over some of their land. The neighbor woke up the next day blind and had to have surgery. He has since left them alone. But last week another neighbor led several of them to hold Eli at knifepoint while they plowed up his wheat harvest and threatened him that they would take his house and land.

In the words of his wife Sarah: "You see, beloved intercessors, when the Israeli government decided to remove the Jews from Gaza, that made the Arab Palestinian villagers believe they have the right to do the same thing here."

We were asked to pray that God would pour His grace into Eli and Sarah, to be able to truly forgive, and that God would somehow bring good out of Mena's death. Pray for the healing of Mena's fiancé, who is fighting for his life in the hospital.

This is just one of many stories we hear about people being mistreated. A few years ago while traveling in

Israel we saw the poverty of Palestinian families, little children along the side of the road begging for food and money. Our tour guide was from Israel, and he himself told us that the Palestinian people were suffering. I could see the pain and compassion on this man's face, a Sabra Jew, as he told us about the many sufferings of the Palestinians. You had the feeling that if it was possible and in his power to do something to change things, he would. The one thing he did do was stop the vehicle we were driving in so we could give the children money and food. We did not ask him to.

There are some who will spoil it for the many, but there are also those who are doing what they can to make things better.

For Love

I mentioned earlier that people rally around a cause; there is strength in numbers. Probably by now you know my cause—the language of love: God’s love in us for mankind—the Muslim, the Jew, the Christian, and as important, the elderly, unborn babies, children, families, coworkers, business community, schools, colleges, and universities. The list of those who are a part of our world can go on and on.

Love is who you are and what you do. We all want to receive love, but we do not know how to give it; therefore, no one truly feels that they are always loved. We question the love that we receive and see. We even question God’s love. But this is love!

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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:16-17).

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6-8).

What kind of love is this? It is a gift of love to us when we had done nothing to earn it. Our thought is this: love those who love you; test the waters and only love if you feel you will be loved in return. But this is what Jesus said:

*“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. **And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.** But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be mer-*

ciful, just as your Father also is merciful (Luke 6:27-36, emphasis added).

God is a radical lover! He is not asking us to do something He is not already doing. He is not willing that any should perish, and love is the ingredient that will change people—even the most difficult.

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

The offering of animal sacrifices, as was done in the Old Testament, will not cleanse and change man's heart; religious practices will not cleanse and change man's heart. Doing all different forms of worship and offering gifts will not change and cleanse man's heart. It is only the work of the Holy Spirit in us, after we have yielded to God through the sacrifice of His Son, that will change a man's heart. Having a personal relationship of integrity with God will change our hearts to treat others with integrity of heart.

We need to recognize when we have offended and done wrong to others and take responsibility, asking God, as well as them, to forgive us, because He takes how we treat others personally. You may as well have done it to Him—that is how much He cares about people.

This love is not man's love; it is God's love living in us and through us. Without the Holy Spirit working in our hearts to make us new on the inside, we will never be able to love with this kind of love.

Our religion often tells us that we just need to ask God to forgive us, or that our righteousness comes out of our religious doctrines and traditions, following our religious laws, but it is more than this. It is also about humanity. It is about how we treat others. Treating others with kindness and love is what pleases the heart of God. We are now living out His love toward one another here on earth.

A man's heart is hard and selfish when he can take another man's wife and not feel any grief for the suffering caused to the ones left behind, including young children in a lot of cases. A woman can have a relationship for her own selfish needs and, when it does not work out, walk away and get into another relationship, having no remorse for the person she has wounded deeply, causing him to never trust again. Some children are not able to trust the advice, lifestyle, or care of their parents. This list can go on and on, with scenarios of all kinds. Who is going to be the first to love and never stop loving?

To be able to love unconditionally requires help from God and the Holy Spirit. We need to be healed of our wounds from others. This can only happen as we personally receive the love of God into our lives and learn how to forgive others just as God has forgiven us. When we realize we have offended and hurt others—which is sin—and that God has forgiven us because of His great love, we can forgive others, beginning the healing process in our lives. It has to begin somewhere: if not with you, who? If not now, when?

We have to make a decision whether we are going to live out our God relationship in faith and humility or

the opposite, which is self-preservation, the survival of the fittest, doing what is best for self and only self. Living that way makes our world very small—often we are the only one in it—while at the same time we are crying out to be loved. Love has taken on many different meanings, but the true meaning of love is found in God, because God is love.

If you do not know God in a personal way as your loving Father, you will not know love, because love is more than a word; it is a demonstration of giving. Love cannot help but give and care. God's love has a way of looking at things quite differently from our views.

What Kind of Love Is This?

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

God's Love: Surrendering to It and Being Healed

How would I like to be treated? I cannot do to my neighbor as I would have them do unto me if I am wounded and hurting, needing to be loved. I first must be healed of my “love deficit” before I can become a giver of God’s love.

Healing begins when I realize the great love God has for me while I am unlovable—that He loves me regardless. It is in surrendering to His love and giving up control that I allow Him to take me beyond the walls and barriers I have erected to keep people out and protect my heart from being hurt again.

We all want love, but we also have been hurt, making us reluctant to abandon ourselves to receive love and give it away. Even God is not safe for us when we begin our journey of healing. We realize that God just wants to love us, but we do not trust Him. We struggle in giving up control and loving Him back; yet, at the same time, we do not understand why we are afraid to let God love us. Surely He must be safe!

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:18-19).

He has to massage our hearts and make them tender so they begin to be able to love back.

And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also (1 John 4:21).

But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked (1 John 2:5-6).

The journey will take you to places where you have to look at decisions you have made in life because of someone having hurt you and look at how you have treated others because of your selfish desires. How many people have you used or walked on to promote your cause? You will be amazed at what will be uncovered as you allow God to draw you closer to Him and you get the revelation that He really does love you and it is okay to be honest with Him—it is a safe place, and He does understand!

Only when I am healed will I be able to extend my borders beyond myself. I must understand that my pain, if not addressed, will cause others pain.

We have an account in the Bible of a man whose name was Jabez (meaning “pain” in the English language):

*Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain." And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, "Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, **that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!**" So God granted him what he requested (1 Chronicles 4:9-10, emphasis added).*

Unresolved issues or lack of character will cause pain for others and for you. Take seriously what Jesus said:

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Luke 4:18-19).

A lack of character is a virus that mutates and is worse than the AIDS epidemic in Africa or any other epidemic we have seen. It is a relationship crisis/sickness that erodes and destroys health in society.

In Canada, our national anthem says, "God keep our land glorious and free." We call ourselves one nation under God. The United States has "In God we trust" on their currency. Yet, in North America, there is so much wrong in how we perceive things. For some reason, what God says in His Word does not have much influence on how we make decisions.

Jesus came as a man to bring us into a relationship with God and Himself. Before this happened through

His death and resurrection, He demonstrated relationship between men and between man and God. He spoke against religious practices of His time, exposing the hardness of man's heart, pointing man to what was right—not only by telling it but also by living it Himself.

"Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; And do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate," says the LORD" (Zechariah 8:17). We have to decide if we want relationships to work and if we will do anything to make them work. It will only happen through godly character. A person who has a personal relationship of intimacy with God will separate from those who want to speak evil and give false oaths. There must be agreement for relationship. Evil and false oaths will come out in our actions.

"These are the things you shall do: Speak each man the truth to his neighbor; Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace" (Zachariah 8:16). We must expose evil and not partner with it, but work at bringing about truth, justice, judgment, and peace to all in every situation. We will not be able to do that without compassion and integrity working in our hearts, because not every decision we have to make will be an easy one. Only a relationship with God can help us do this.

When we only apply religion to the actions of others and do not value mankind as a whole, we cannot teach anything to anyone. Many people hate religion and are longing for a loving relationship but do not know how to have one based on honesty, truthfulness, and integrity.

Democracy does not have healthy boundaries in a lot of instances. We speak about equal rights, but often

the rights for one violates the rights of another. Choice for women who do not want their babies does not protect the right to life of the ones who are being aborted. The problem with democracy is that we have not established a moral, ethical code of values: character in a person and the character of a law enforced.

The Bible is not a religion. It is a way of life, full of values, with right and wrong ways to treat one another. What if we taught about character in intimacy and that intimate relationships should be reserved for marriage, with our effort in teaching the reasons why rather than making it a religious belief that is optional, a standard only for religious people? What if we taught that life begins at conception and put some substance into “why” again, valuing life and individuals, not just the mother but also the unborn baby? Teaching character and values of life—this goes beyond this scenario to any scenario where life is involved. It is all about relationships.

I have met many women who, having chosen the convenience of abortion, today are broken over having taken this step and, if they had it to do over again, would never go in this direction. Some of them felt overwhelmingly trapped and helpless, not knowing where to turn. They confessed there was no one to honestly and openly share with them the intense feelings and emotions they would experience later in life. They felt that their only option—as a teen—was abortion. They were told they were not capable of caring for a baby or providing a quality standard of life for their child. Deep down in their hearts they did not want to abort, but they were afraid not to, given the absence of

any other alternative being made available to them. Whether we know God or not, abortion will cause a change in who we are and in what we will become—and, believe me, it is definitely not for the better!

When we violate what God says is good, He must respond. And not only does He respond, something happens in our heart—we become different people when we choose evil. God's response is to help us see the error of our ways and lead us to repentance.

God gives us the choice of how we will manage our lives. He gives us the guidelines but does not impose the choice. I believe He knows what we are like and how we would complain that He really does not understand the circumstances we are in, that His way would not work to achieve the result we want.

Instead, He lets us suffer the consequences if we choose outside of His guidelines. He is always there to help us get up and go on, fix the problem by taking responsibility, and then make the right choice. However, if we do not let God influence the next choice we make, we are headed for another crash.

There does come a time when we will have to evaluate our life. For some, it is on their exit from here. We might have put together the best retirement package and be in the finest retirement position but find, as we reflect upon life, that it really did not have that much to offer. We can be left very lonely and alone—trapped in our life of decisions.

It is only our sincere investment in one another—for the good of all, without prejudice—that will stand and bring value, a feeling that life was worth living. Religious righteousness will not bring joy into our lives.

But a true relationship with God, knowing how much He loves mankind, brings full meaning in life and helps us make unbiased decisions based on His values and principles. This is life!

If you have not experienced God's love—received the revelation of how special you are to Him—you can begin by meditating on John 3:16, *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life,”* and Romans 5:8, *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

What kind of love is this love? When a man would hardly give their life for a righteous person, who would give their life for an unrighteous one (Romans 5:7-8)? It all begins with our pardon by and from God, because He wants to have fellowship with us and to bless us. We cannot learn this by written text; we must have a personal revelation of how special we are. When this revelation comes, will you begin to give up control, let God heal you, and begin to love Him, becoming a full partner in the relationship?

Through knowing God's love and that He is truly your Father, you will begin to know the love of Jesus and the love of the Person of the Holy Spirit. All three Persons of the Trinity are individuals with whom you will have a relationship; they are the same in character and nature but different in their relationship with you.

I am convinced that until we know the love of God our Father, we will not know the true meaning of life. Our lives should be focused on knowing God's love and giving it away to others.

Conclusion

We all know it is humanly impossible to love the way God is asking us to. We need to have a clear vision of where we are and where we want to go. We must take seriously what God means when He asks us to love one another and to treat mankind as we would want to be treated.

We could feel, “I will always have to give! And what about me? What if no one loves me the way God is asking them to?” However, we must not fail to realize that God blesses our loving, even if man does not. So, to love God’s way will always be a blessing—whether you see it immediately or not. Psalm 133 states that unity—getting along, loving one another—is like precious oil, which is a way of describing the anointing upon us. “*It is like the dew of Hermon,*” again describing the Presence and anointing of God. It also says that in unity the Lord commands His blessings on us, even “*life forevermore.*”

God’s kind of love working in us will require the supernatural.

Where Is the God of Elijah? (2 Kings 2:1-14)

Elisha was mentored by the prophet Elijah. He walked with him and was taught by him, a man who walked and lived by faith. Elisha observed firsthand how God worked in Elijah's life and what God would do to bring about the impossible for those who would simply believe.

When it came time for Elijah to be taken up by God, Elisha's request was that he wanted a double portion of what Elijah had. Elisha wanted to see manifested in his own life all that Elijah had and more.

Elijah granted him the request, but it was conditional upon Elisha being able to see when Elijah was taken up. Elijah's ascent was spiritual. The chariot that was picking him up could not be seen with the natural eye. Elisha had to have an ability to see things through spiritual eyes.

Elisha did see the chariot of fire that came for Elijah, and he also saw the mantle that was left behind by Elijah for him. Elijah would no longer need this mantle, which represented God's anointing, a mantle to do the impossible. Elijah was going to be meeting Him face-to-face. Elisha, however, wanted and needed it to carry on in Elijah's stead.

They initially had crossed over the Jordan to come to the place where Elijah would depart, and Elisha saw how Elijah had taken the mantle and parted the Jordan with it.

Now Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water; and it was divided this way and that, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground (2 Kings 2:8).

When Elijah was gone, Elisha had to get back over the Jordan. So these were his actions and words:

Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over (2 Kings 2:14).

Where Is the God of Jesus?

Those who believe in Jesus have a mantle to be able to live and do the impossible. And those who do not know Jesus the Son of God as the Messiah, their personal Savior, can ask Him into their life and receive this mantle of living and doing the impossible.

When Jesus left, He sent us the Holy Spirit, who would be our guide, teacher, and constant companion: the One who would live in us and be with us (John 14:16-18). Also, Jesus gave to us the same glory the Father gave to Him (John 17:22)—His mantle to live the impossible and to do the impossible.

Religion that does not include Jesus will not result in a changed heart or a renewed mind. It takes the work of the Holy Spirit. We can have all of our facts accurate but often cannot see: we have not received revelation regarding our facts. The natural mind is not able to understand the things of God—it takes His Presence, it takes relationship, it takes intimacy with Him to see.

We all must be seers. It will take a personal relationship with God, entering into His Presence. It will take the mantle of Jesus. It will take the faith of Elisha. It will

take a life of intimacy with the Father and His Son.

My concern today is this: do we have the time, or take the time, to cultivate a relationship of intimacy? We are a very busy society—and a society that is used to being entertained. Can we be still before God? Will we spend quality time waiting upon Him? Will we, like Moses, be a people who will say the following to Him?

“If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth” (Exodus 33:15-16).

It will take faith in God to walk this walk of love and forgiveness, mercy and truth. It will take an uncompromising kind of commitment. It will take leaders.

The question I want to leave with you is this: will it be you? If not you, who?

Safety in Abiding in the Presence of God

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.” Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler And from the perilous pestilence. He shall cover you with His feathers, And under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler. You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, Nor of the arrow that flies by day, Nor of the pestilence

that walks in darkness, Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, And ten thousand at your right hand; But it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, And see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made the LORD, who is my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place, No evil shall befall you, Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling; For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone. You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot. "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, And show him My salvation" (Psalm 91).

It is important to understand that if we do not live our life in God's Presence, where there is safety, we will live like any other unrenewed person. To live outside of His Presence is to live outside of His love and protection. To live without His Presence being my daily guide and place of renewal means that I have only myself, my thoughts, and the thoughts and opinions of others who are like-minded. It then can become every man for himself, becoming predators by nature rather than lovers and givers.

Take time to practice the Presence of God and develop your relationship of intimacy, because it really is all about relationship!

Jesus' Prayer (John 17:20-26)

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

True Intimacy:

- Desires to give 100 percent in a relationship
- Is selfless, not selfish
- Wants to do what is best for the other
- Is transparent
- Communicates honestly, always taking into consideration the feelings of others
- Is guided by love for others

- Makes decisions with others in mind
- Does not intentionally hurt or disappoint others
- Would die for others

Intimacy with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will cause you to operate in this manner in your life. You will love what they love, and you will respond the way they respond, because you are so in love with them that you cannot help yourself. There is great joy and glee in this relationship. Your life is filled with the pouring in and the pouring out of this union. Love is the center of everything.

God did not create us to have relationships outside of intimacy with Him first. When we step outside of this boundary, we begin to operate in what we believe to be good and evil (Genesis 3:1-24) instead of what God says is good and evil. Intimacy with Him is the basis for knowing how to conduct our relationships with others.

- To respect
- To forgive
- To love
- To cherish

Wholeness on the inside produces wholeness on the outside. A respectful relationship with God (a fear of God) teaches us how to respect others.

*In mercy and truth Atonement is provided for iniquity;
And by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil
(Proverbs 16:6).*

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. For by me your days will be multiplied, And years of life will be added to you” (Proverbs 9:10-11).

Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom (Psalm 51:6).

Religion Can Do and Say All The Right Things...But Where Is Love?

The Apostle Paul wrote First and Second Corinthians. Before He came to know Jesus as His personal Savior, the Messiah, the one prophesied about in the Old Testament, he was a very religious man. He said he was a Pharisee, knowing the religious law and blameless when it came to the law, but gave it all up for Christ (Philippians 3:5-7). This is what he says about religion without love:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

Paul knew the difference between religion and love.

He also knew that without love, even doing the right things is what he calls sounding brass or a clanging cymbal—just a lot of noise, something that could become very irritating.

To walk in love and live in love you must know the lover of your soul, the God who created you, our Father. Anything outside of this is empty and does not reach the mark.

Abraham, God's Friend

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God (James 2:23).

Who Are Abraham's Sons?

Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham (Galatians 3:6-9).

For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love (Galatians 5:5-6).

Personal Evaluation:

- Do you know how much you are loved?
- Do you have a walk of faith?
- Is your walk of faith secure?
- Are you God's friend?

Summing Up Our Choices

Forgiving AS A Choice: Knowing Our Father's Forgiveness

"Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil (Ephesians 4:26-27).

This Scripture is interesting. It allows us to be angry but tells us not to sin or give place to the devil. How can one be angry and not sin? It is possible, if you are not vindictive and do not allow unforgiveness to creep into your heart, giving place to the devil.

Jesus Warns of Offenses

Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little

ones. Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:1-5).

Let us look at some Scriptures on forgiving as a choice.

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. "But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants

*saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. "So My heavenly Father also will do to you **if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses**" (Matthew 18:21-35, emphasis added).*

The owner had a right to ask for what was due him. It would have been wrong for the debtor not to pay what he owed. However, we have to realize that there are some debts that are not possible to pay—the person who owes it cannot pay it. In this case, it was money he owed and did not have, but in some cases, it could be lost years or broken dreams a person has been robbed of. It was not wrong for either man to want payment for something that was due them. However, how they handled the matter was important to their own personal outcome. The first man forgave the debt; the second man got angry but did not forgive, imprisoning himself, even though he had been forgiven. His imprisonment was an unforgiving heart and an inability to realize he also will need forgiveness in life.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, Jesus said, *"In this manner, therefore pray...And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors"* (Matthew 6:9-12). This lets me know that we will always have debts and debtors,

but what we do with our debt or our debtors has a very significant result in our own personal lives.

If you were significantly involved in treating someone wrongly, then you have affected and robbed their life. The debt could be a violation of one's person through abuse: sexual, verbal, or emotional. The debt could be a divorce due to adultery committed against you, leaving you with the children, the bills, and no support. I leave it up to you to decide:

- What is the debt that is owed you?
- How could it possibly be repaid?
- Is the person capable of paying the debt?
- Have you imprisoned them because they have not "paid up"?
- Do you owe others a debt that you cannot pay?

Forgiving as a Choice

Guess what prison you put others in for not paying the debt—the prison of your heart! That is why we are encouraged in Ephesians 4:26-27 not to sin in our anger nor give place to the devil. We too need to be forgiven, and our forgiveness is attached to our ability to forgive—they work together. My freedom is connected to how I can free others, by asking them to forgive me when possible, as well as asking God to forgive me. It is also the ability to release and forgive others who have hurt me.

Loving AS A Choice: Knowing Our Father's Love

- You are special to Him!
- You are always on His mind!
- You are “one of a kind”!

Often, we can find ourselves having prejudices and/or biases. God is an authority, the ultimate of any authority we will ever encounter in life. He is also our Father, as the Bible states, and He is holy. Keeping all three of these thoughts in mind, how would you relate to Him on a personal level? He wants to have a personal relationship with us, but can we really—taking all things into consideration—relate to Him on a personal level?

Stop and spend a few moments putting on paper your view of God. God is spirit, and it can be difficult to relate to spirit, since most of our experiences come through our five senses. We usually view things filtered through our own life experiences; therefore, if we have had some harsh authority figures in our life, God becomes more of a punishing dictator in our perspective. If someone who said they love us has done nothing but disappoint us, can we really trust that God loves us, without fear that He will reject us or neglect our need to be loved and understood? Will God come through for us?

God is asking for an intimate relationship. He will give all of Himself, but at the same time He wants all of you, heart to heart. This is why it is so important to understand the type of love God is talking about when we read Scripture.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

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).

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10).

Questions

- Do I have prejudices against God, biases about God?
- What is my perspective of the Father?
- Am I trying to recreate what I think love is?
- Am I trying to fill a void?
- Do I love from a point of need and wounding?
- Am I walled in, protecting myself from love?
- Is there such a thing as genuine love?
- Am I able to handle intimacy with God and with others?
- How close and transparent am I in relationships?

Restored Relationship

*John 13:34-35, John 14:15-18, 23-24,
John 16:25-28, John 17:20-26.*

The Father's lovingkindness is one of the most important concepts in the Old Testament. The opinions of notable scholars differ. Were the tenets of God's covenant with Israel stipulated only as an agreement that was restricted to Israel, to which God remains true and to which He demands loyalty, or were they eternal principles, which stemmed from God's nature and His creation, to which all men are obligated and accountable? The real question is whether the passages ascribe God's *Checed* (lovingkindness) to His covenants or to His everlasting love. Love is a covenant word, and God is love (1 John 4:8,16). The term is closely related to the forgiveness of sins. God was obviously in a covenant relationship with Israel and expressed this relationship with *Checed*, which was eternal (Psalm 136). *Checed* does not necessarily involve a covenant; nor does it necessarily mean fidelity to a covenant. It is more the attitude of love that contains mercy (*The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, p. 1593).

God's Thoughts

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11).

Questions

Do we know the true meaning of love?

Do we know God's love?

- Love on our terms
- Love on God's terms
- A river of His love
- Lavish love
- Extravagant love
- Unconditional love
- Undeserved love
- Love without limits
- God is love

Falling in Love:

- Hearts hardened to love cannot receive love or fall in love.
- I keep looking for love—not in You, but in others and other things: erroneous love.
- You keep drawing me by Your love; I let You draw me or I resist your drawing. I do not trust or want to give up control, or I give up control and become one with You.
- Have I stopped looking for love or believing in love?
- Nothing else matters but love.

“Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know”
(Jeremiah 33:3).

Great: more than, to make large, in a various sense advance, promote, grow up, increase, to make large, in body, mind, estate, honor, exceed, magnify, nourish, wax great (*Strong’s Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*, p. 25).

Mighty: to clip off, to gather grapes, the grape crop, vintage, harvest, inaccessible by height or fortification, strong, walled up (*Strong’s Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*, p. 23).

His Promises: Your Destiny

A bruised reed [cracked in pieces, broke, crushed, discouraged, oppressed, struggling] He will not break, And smoking flax [to grow dull] He will not quench
(Isaiah 42:3, additional material from *Strong’s Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*, p. 54, 110).

Sing to the LORD a new song, And His praise from the ends of the earth (Isaiah 42:10).

Do not remember the former things...Behold, I will do a new thing (Isaiah 43:18-19).

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent (John 17:3).

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:7-8).

And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).

The Now Generation

- Jesus is our example of our Father's love (Luke 4:18-19).
- The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is the new wine; we are the new wineskins (Luke 5:36-38).
- *Do not worry...But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Luke 12:22-34).*
- *You, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend...the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:17-19).*
- *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).*
- God's love is more than a miracle.

- Those who are loved by God—who know the love of God—will be the healed generation.
- No more religion, no more form, no more methods to know God; no more works, no more performance, no more hiding.
- Freedom, joy, peace, health, healing.
- Love is the greatest and more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31).
- I must know how special I am to the Father, how much He loves me, by experience, not by head knowledge. This is the key that unlocks all doors.
- Our Father is waiting to lavish His love in and on you.

