

Capturing God's Heart

by Cyndy Lavoie



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Capturing Courage International

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With prayers and blessings,

Cyndy Lavoie

Founding Director at Capturing Courage International

*"But the wisdom from above is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no favoritism and is always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness."
James 3:17-18*

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21. Volume Twenty-One: Scandalous Love

God's ways are not our ways.

It takes many years to really come to understand the heart of God.

Even though we have been given the Bible (God's love letter to mankind), we tend to read the Bible through our own cultures, the lies and hurts that have been laid on us through the years as well as our own developmental process.

So our understanding of God's ways are often inaccurate. We grow and move in understanding God in the same way we grow and understand ourselves and life.

When Jesus was on earth he met and spoke to people within their current understanding of life. God is still doing this today in and through and for all of us.

All of the stories of the Bible for instance, are told within the context of the time in which it was told and written. This means that to really understand the story's of the Bible, to understand God's heart, we must first understand the context.

Let's look at the story of the Prodigal Son for instance.

Take the time to read **Luke 15:11-32**.

Let's look at just one part of that story today. When those of us in the west read this story we do not understand the significance of the father running to greet the son in verse 20.

**“So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.”
Luke 15:20**

It is very easy for us in the west to skip over this, for in the west father's run towards and with and for their children all the time.

But in the east the culture is that fathers and important figures never run. In fact the more important the person the slower they walk.

When I was in Uganda I witnessed this very slow walking, and it helped me to understand the Bible and this story even more. Context is everything.

Here in this story, and for the people of that time, Jesus turned their expectations of God the Father upside down.

This was a shocking story that Jesus told.

For instance, not only did the father run to meet his son, but to do so he would have had to lift the hem of his robe that he was wearing.

This would have revealed his ankles. Something that was also never done at that time. And even today there are many cultures the same.

Yet essentially, Jesus was telling us through this story, that God loves us so much that he leaves off his 'importance' in order to run to meet us, he doesn't worry about what people 'might think' as he comes near, and that all 'correctness' and 'decency' is cast aside in his love for us.

How might this change how you view God today?

How might this change the way you interact with others?

Thing is, God does this all the time. God meets us within the context of our lives, and then shows himself so much different than what our understanding would allow.

The many people around us also have their own context of living. They have the culture, the expectations, the hurts of their lives as well as being in their own developmental process.

Learning from God's example, how might we meet people where they are?

How might we be shocking in our love for others?

How might we leaves off our 'importance' in order to run towards others?

How might we cast aside the worry of what people 'might think' in order to come near?

And how might we choose something even better than 'correctness' and 'decency' as we seek to love others?

Simply put, are we able to put aside our ideas about life so that we can meet people where they are at, in the context of their lives?

Context is everything. By understanding context we can meet people in a way that our rules and our expectations will never manage.

"This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: Judge fairly, and show mercy and kindness to one another." Zechariah 7:9

Like God we enter into service of others. We ministers to hearts and lives in unique and possible frowned upon ways.

“Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.” Romans 3:24

All I have to say is to be bold in this. Meet others where they are at. Love them without your agenda of changing them or making them ‘better’.

“We prove ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and by our sincere love.” 2 Corinthians 6:6

Remember the parable of the father and the son – the father ran towards the son even before he knew if his son was sorry or not or wanting to change or not. He went towards him just because he loved him.

But that we would be the same.

It is not our job to fix people. It is not our job to change people. It is our job to love people. To express our own passionate gladness of who they are. The Father running towards his son reveals no agenda except to love.

“Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13

Oh that we might have the same freedom of heart and spirit.

“For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” 2 Corinthians 3:17

As we meet others in the context of their lives, we live from compassion and gladness and we are all simply changed.

22. Volume Twenty-Two: Faith

I've had a request to write about Faith. When I think about faith I think about our hearts. The core of our lives comes from our hearts. Our hearts experience many things. It is with our hearts that we feel and decide and go forward in life.

It is also in our hearts that we find darkness and lies and fear.

In essence life springs from our hearts. In Proverbs 4:23 we read, **“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”**

Every part of our lives is an outworking of our hearts. It is why it is so important that we get our hearts right with God. That we align our hearts with God's heart.

The Psalmist in Psalms 119:2 says it well, **“Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart.”**

It is in pretense that we come to God with only part of our hearts. For we are told over and over that to really walk with God we must do so with our Whole Hearts.

In fact, in Mark 12:33 we are told that even when we make sacrifice and offerings if these things are not done in whole-hearted love for the Lord they mean nothing.

“And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Earlier in this same chapter of Mark we read that the greatest commandment of all is, **“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” Mark 12:30**

Sometimes when we have known about God for a long time, we can think that to bring a part of ourselves is okay and that we can get away with a half-hearted life. But this doesn't work.

And so we also find in the Bible many promises of God to help us with our hearts. For instance in Jeremiah we read this, **“I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.”**
Jeremiah 24:7

Faith then is simply giving over our whole hearts to God, accepting the love of Jesus Christ to change our hearts, and then living out the truths about God through our hearts and lives.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

In Ezekiel we read a great verse and another amazing promise from God,

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” Ezekiel 11:19

What we find is that we give God our whole heart and then God takes care of our whole heart.

We ourselves cannot change our own hearts. There are parts of our own hearts that we cannot even access and do not even know about. But God does. And so it is God who takes on the care of our hearts when we invite and accept and live in the life of Jesus Christ given over for us.

And in **Romans 8:26-28** we find more of God’s promise for us,

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

Because God can take all of our lives, the good and the bad, we offer up to the Lord all of our lives. Even the bad things, even the sad things, even our broken places and our failures are used by God for good when we give them over to the Lord.

So we simply bring God all of us. We do not hide any parts of our hearts. We do not need to hide in fear or pretend that we are something we are not. Rather we come in honesty and openness and with our whole hearts.

And when we do this we will find that God is big enough for all of our lives and our hearts.

“God we come to you today in the name and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We acknowledge you as Lord and Saviour of our lives. We say yes and amen to your work in our hearts. We thank-you.

Today we bring to you the things we have been afraid to bring to you. We bring you our bitterness, we bring you our hatreds, we bring you our fears and our worries.

We declare our trust in you God and declare your love for our hearts. Thank-you Jesus for dying for our hearts, for our lives, and being the one who carries all our darkness and the evil in our hearts. We give you our whole hearts today. Amen”

May you be encouraged today to not keep any parts of your hearts from God. For God passionately loves you and will make you whole and strong from the depths of your heart.

“I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise.” Psalm 138:1

23. Volume Twenty-Three: In Weakness

It is hard being a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

For within the role is the dynamic of all of God and then all of who we are.

All of God are the miracles and the signs and the wonders.

All of us are the aches and pains and the loss and the sorrow that we each personally have.

We preach healing and we experience sickness ourselves.

We declare healthy lives and we struggle with estranged relationships.

We teach and lead others to Christ and then can barely find him for ourselves.

I am reminded of Elijah in the book of 1 Kings chapters 18 & 19.

Elijah was a mighty man of God. He walked in obedience and risked his life time and again to bring the word of the Lord.

For instance, in 1 Kings 18 we find him battling it out with the priests of Baal with a mighty result,

“Immediately the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench!” 18:38

A great work of the Lord to be followed by another miracle (Read 1 Kings 18:41-44) and then special strength,

“Then the Lord gave special strength to Elijah. He tucked his cloak into his belt and ran ahead of Ahab’s chariot all the way to the entrance of Jezreel.” 1 Kings 18:46

All of this simply shows the Holy Spirit pouring through Elijah. As God and Elijah worked as one, mighty miracles took place and a great witness of the Lord’s power was established.

And then that particular work was over and Elijah went off into the wilderness and we read,

“I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.” 1 Kings 19:4

After the great works of the Lord Elijah finds himself despondent and oh so very human. He is dejected and tired, to the point of wanting the Lord to take him.

Don't we all feel this in our persons? After a work of God pouring through us we are simply reminded of our humanity and the frailty of our hearts and minds and lives.

Praying healing over a crowd, speaking God's heart to your congregation, visiting the sick and the down-trodden, all this and more carries a mark of God upon it, and when the work ceases for a time we must simply rest.

I suggest that the exhaustion after God's work is simply very normal. It is something we can in fact expect. Always remembering that in that exhausted place the Lord cares for us.

"Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, "Get up and eat!"⁶ He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.

⁷ Then the angel of the Lord came again and touched him and said, "Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you."

⁸ So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. ⁹ There he came to a cave, where he spent the night." 1 Kings 19:5-9

Ministering the Lord to others is not about us being larger than life. It is about the extraordinary of God stirring through our very ordinary lives.

If we expect to be extraordinary, we will be disappointed and disillusioned.

No, rather it is our God who is extraordinary. And in fact, when we feel very human, we can be sure we have just encountered our living God.

For it is the contrast of us and God that reminds us of our weakness.

The good news is that where we know we are weak there the Lord is strong indeed.

Time and again we find in the Bible promises and hope for those who are weak:

"He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless." Isaiah 40:29

Paul himself said this, **"Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. ⁹ Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. ¹⁰ That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:8-10**

In all this we come to find that there is nothing to fear in weakness.

We find that our humanity and the frailty of being human is exactly what God wants to harness for his Kingdom.

When we know our weakness, when we feel our humanity, that is when we depend on God more than ever before, and that is when there is more room for God to work.

And through it all, the hardships, the deprivations, the sacrifice we find as the Psalmist did,

“My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever.” Psalm 73:26

Be strong in the Lord today, as you bring him your weakness. Allow the Spirit to inhabit all of your life and simply be blessed today.

24. Volume Twenty-Four: A Long Life

The Bible speaks many things about living a life unto God and when we do this the good fruit we experience.

Today I'm outlining just five principles that lead towards a long and prosperous life.

1. Honoring the Elderly

We will begin where the Bible begins, with one of the Ten Commandments given to Moses for the People of Israel. In Exodus we have record of the Ten Commandments with the fifth commandment,

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." Exodus 20:12

In Ephesians 6:1-3 we find this commandment repeated and noted as the first commandment with a promise.

We find that honoring our parents is critical to our future satisfaction with life for honor is of God. God honors all individuals, and there is a special honor for those who have lived life before us.

The essence of this command ties into the law of sowing and reaping. For instance,

"The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." Galatians 6:8

The law of sowing and reaping determines that when we sow (plant) honor, we will reap (receive) honor ourselves one day.

While we may in our flesh want to ignore our parents, despise the elderly and simply get on with our lives, we are told that this does not please the Lord. Dishonor does not work in the Kingdom of God.

"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap." Galatians 6:7

Learning to reap unto the Lord begins as we grow a deep respect for the Lord.

2. Deep Respect for the Lord

It is our honor of others that shows whether we have a deep respect for the Lord, or as it is said in Psalms 128, as one who fears the Lord.

“Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.” Psalm 128:1-2

A fear of the Lord is all about understanding that one day we will stand before God and answer for our life. This is not something to be afraid of, so much as something to understand and realize with much sober mindedness.

The fear of the Lord spurs us on to live a life pleasing to God, a life that is ordered around the Lord’s principles and heart. What God loves we love, what hurts God’s heart we stay away from.

In a very simple way it is the same deep respect that we would give to a family member, a good friend and our marriage partner.

It is about living in such a way that we do not purposefully break fellowship with our Lord. A fear of God compels us to make good decisions, to weigh choices carefully and to walk in honor of our Lord.

When we do this we will ***“be blessed, and it shall be well with you”***

3. Integrity and Truthfulness

Our deep respect for the Lord begins to show up in our speech and the attitudes of our hearts. God is all about integrity and truthfulness.

“Does anyone want to live a life that is long and prosperous? Then keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies! Turn away from evil and do good. Search for peace and work to maintain it.” Psalms 34:12-14

God asks here, ‘Does anyone want to live a life that is long and prosperous?’ Then here is what you do:

- do not speak evil
- do not tell lies
- refuse to participate in evil
- be a peacemaker

Peacemaking comes into this conversation because where there is evil there is no peace. Where we tell lies we cause trouble for ourselves and for others. And when we speak evil we agree with the enemy and not God.

God has taken the initiative to overcome evil with good, and we are called to do the same.

This is the way to a ***“long and prosperous life”***.

4. Obedience to the Lord

All of these things so far, are the very ways we are to obey God. Obedience is not often about what we do and where we are going. While our physical choices are certainly an element of obedience, the core of following the Lord is:

- to live in a manner where our hearts are 1. Honoring our parents and the elderly.
- where we have a 2. Deep respect and holy fear of God
- where we 3. Walk in integrity and truthfulness

“But this command I gave them: ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’” Jeremiah 7:23

Walking in God’s ways is not about the letter of the law, but rather in the spirit of the law and the change that must come to our hearts. When we do not pay attention to what is important to God and go our own way, this is what we experience,

“But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.” Jeremiah 7:24

The good news is, that our lack of obedience, our inability to hear God’s heart, our lack of honor and the lies we live and the truths we avoid, can all be confessed and renounced.

We bring ourselves to the cross of Christ and we find healing and wholeness.

While we know how to live, we are unable to live it. In and of ourselves we will violate every single one of these principles.

This is why Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead. To become our righteousness.

5. Trusting on Christ for our Righteousness

“He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” Psalm 23:3

It is the work of Jesus Christ that saves us, that makes us holy, and that restores us unto righteousness (right living). It is Christ that we serve.

“He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” Titus 3:5

“Jesus we welcome you into our lives today in a new and fresh way. Where we have dishonored our parents and the elderly around us, please show us honor, teach us to honor, may we have new habits of honor.

Where we have not respected you or sought your ways, we ask that you would show us who you are in a fresh way. Enable our hearts to understand your might and your holiness. May we learn a holy fear of who you are, and may we not disregard the amazing opportunity and invitation to do life alongside your ways.

The times we have operated out of falseness and in lies, where we have lacked integrity and truthfulness in our dealings with others, we bring ourselves to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We lay down our dishonesty today and renounce it in the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Build in us new sensitivity to truthfulness and honesty. May we not manipulate or lie to get our own way. But rather may we trust you with our lives as we live in honesty.

And where we have heard your voice and felt your compelling on our lives, but have not taken action, where we have not obeyed we simply bow to you today. We are sorry. Restore to us the ability to walk with you, to hear your voice clearly and to follow you. May we simply be obedient people, those who show the heart of you in everything we do, the ways we talk and the ways we love others.

In all this, we declare our dependence on our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our salvation and the one who makes possible our life unto God. Jesus we thank-you today for making a way for us to walk with our God. Holy Spirit, please breath through our hearts and thoughts and lives today. We invite you.

With all glory and honor to God and God alone, amen and amen.”

25. Volume Twenty-Five: Honest Prayers

We find intimacy with our Lord through prayer, and yet for many of us we are unsure how to pray. We worry that we are not saying the right words. We may think that the burden of prayer lies with us. We may not understand how conversational prayer works.

While we do not have time for a full study of prayer here, we will look at a primary principle of prayer: – Come before the Lord with a commitment to honesty -

“Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.” Psalm 51:6

Opening our inner being before the Lord is much of what prayer is about. How can we expect intimacy with God if we are pretending deep within ourselves?

Admitting to our own thoughts and desires in quiet before the Lord, breaks down the barriers between us and him.

We need not worry about having our lives in good order first, for God knows more than us how unholy our inner person is. Our part is to admit and acknowledge all that is not okay.

Jeremiah asked, **“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?” (17:9)** and the answer is, God knows.

It is therefore best to come before the Lord without pretense. In fact, we find some pretty strong language about how God feels about pretense and hypocrisy.

**“I hate all your show and pretense—
the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies.” Amos 5:21**

Pretense and hypocrisy are the difference between our outer lives before the Lord (and others) and our inner hearts. To walk with God we must put aside our pretending and simply come in honesty and truth before the Lord.

King David who wrote many of the Psalms is our master teacher in coming before the Lord in all honesty of heart and mind. Consider this passage,

“O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day? how long will my enemy have the upper hand?” Psalm 13:1-2

Haven't we all wondered at times where God is? Well, David wasn't afraid to say this to God. He knew that God was big enough for his doubts and his fears and he brought his whole heart to the Lord. He refused pretense (pretending) and chose honesty.

David later gave this advice to his son Solomon,

“And Solomon, my son, learn to know the God of your ancestors intimately. Worship and serve him with your whole heart and a willing mind. For the Lord sees every heart and knows every plan and thought. If you seek him, you will find him. But if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.” 1 Chronicles 28:9

Every relationship is built on honesty and trust. It is no different with God and us. In fact, God also works at intimacy with his people. In John we find Jesus telling us this very thing,

“I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me.” John 15:15

In fact, in Amos we find this amazing statement,

“Indeed, the Sovereign LORD never does anything until he reveals his plans to his servants the prophets.” Amos 3:7

God reveals himself to us, and invites us to reveal ourselves to him.

In the midst of our honesty before God, when we take courage to speak what we are thinking and feeling, we come to find the peace of God stealing into our hearts.

David's cry to God in Psalm 13 concludes this way,

**“But I trust in your unfailing love.
I will rejoice because you have rescued me.
I will sing to the Lord
because he is good to me.” Psalm 13:5-6**

And as we read many of the Psalms we find this same progression again and again.

1. God I'm really having trouble here
2. Where are you?
3. Help me!
4. I commit to your goodness
5. Thank-you for being my God

We start out blaming God and throwing our hurts and accusations before him, and then, once we have spoken our minds we find the Spirit of God softly coming alongside, validating and putting an arm so to speak around our hearts; we know we have been heard.

In fact, we are told,

**“the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words.”
Romans 8:26**

Not only does God hear our prayers, but he joins in with our prayers and in fact intercedes for us in an even deeper way than what we can do ourselves. Our Holy Spirit advocates on our behalf as we cry out to God.

We become partners with the God-head as we pray. Jesus himself has entered into our struggles and has experienced all of what it is to be human,

**“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”
Hebrews 4:14-16**

Amen and amen.

Come to the Lord in the honesty of your heart today. Speak your mind and heart. Welcome dialogue. Listen for what the Spirit is saying to you. Allow validation. Release anger. Accept grace and peace and comfort.

Your life will be infused with greater courage and trust as you go forward with the Lord in this way, day by day. Be blessed.

26. Volume Twenty-Six: A Glad Heart

2 Corinthians 9:7 reads, **“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”**

It is the cheerful heart that intrigues me.

While this verse speaks about money and our tithes and offerings, I wonder how might the ‘glad heart’ principle apply to the rest of our life?

It occurs to me that there are three things that the principle of a glad heart guide us in:

1. It Challenges us to Check our Hearts.

What are we believing and feeling about any given situation, and how might we adjust our attitude in order to find and express a gladness of heart?

It takes maturity to overlook the assumptions, expectations, and ignorance of others. But in order to give with a glad heart this is often what we must do. It is, after all, what God has done with us.

Despite our offensiveness and sin God rose above all that to give to us with a glad heart.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3:16-17

And while we are not God we can have the Lord’s help with our hearts at any time. The Psalmist cried out, **“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” Psalm 51:10**

While we cannot change the core of our hearts we can come in honesty before the Lord. It is honesty before the Lord that purifies and refines us.

While we cannot mandate another’s heart, we are to be responsible for our own. In this we find God working on our behalf.

“...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12-13

The principle of a glad heart is highly personal. It is something for each of us to work through with the Lord for ourselves.

2. It Guides our Giving.

For many of us, generosity is a way of life. Yet, because of this there may be many who simply come to expect, and take for granted, this in us.

When expectation, without respect, is placed on us by another, our hearts alert us to this difficulty – our hearts are not able to be glad.

When we are unable to give gladly it is time to step back from giving. Perhaps we are burnt out. Perhaps we have been taken advantage of. Perhaps we feel compelled and manipulated. Perhaps we intuit that our giving would end up with regret.

Here we are warned away from a generosity that would suck our life-force from us. If we cannot give gladly, it is better to not give at all.

In some instances gladness will return, other times not. What is inferred in **“each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”** is honesty and integrity in our inner core.

Our decisions and our actions must clearly align with our hearts, otherwise we are living falsely. This doesn't bless the Lord. And it doesn't ultimately bless others.

We refuse to give under compulsion, or guilt, manipulation, not grudgingly or with regret.

We put boundaries against those who would dishonor us. We do not allow ourselves to be taken advantage of. We ensure an honesty in our giving. For we understand that it is our job to ensure we can remain in a gladness of heart.

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” Proverbs 4:23

“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;” Hebrews 12:13

Do what you are glad to be doing. Allow your heart to lead you in the activities and service you are to be about. There are many good things to do in this world, but which good thing makes you glad?

Go after that. Invest in that. For therein lies your passion and the calling of your life. Here is where there is honest living for you, and true blessing towards those you serve.

“For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.” 2 Corinthians 8:12

Keeping in mind that we do this to the extent of what we have. While many may demand and expect of us much, we must always remember to give of what we have.

Do you have wisdom, perhaps money, expertise in crops, business savvy – a heart for school children, for other leaders, for women, for education, for trades and technical skills... what is your heart for? Work from there.

3. It Reminds us to not become a Weight on Others.

When others cannot engage with us gladly, then we know something is off. The lack of gladness in others reminds us to back off, to fix our approach, to reckon what might be wrong, and to give full respect for the generosity of others towards us.

We can watch for this gladness in others in a variety of situations.

While applying to our financial giving, it also applies to any situation, from the gifts we give, to help with chores around the house, and even to sexual intimacy in marriage.

I once heard it taught to men how to recognize the willingness of their woman in regards to sexual intimacy – it was this: *Look for enthusiasm*. When a woman responds with enthusiasm, know that she wants sex as much as you. Without enthusiasm, you are bordering on rape at worst, and blatant disregard at best.

Gladness of heart in the bedroom reveals the core of a marital relationship. Gladness of heart in the bedroom indicates the level of honor and respect in the relationship.

In addition to this example from marriage, consider how this applies to leadership. There are a number of verses throughout the Bible admonishing us to work in cooperation with our leaders, and I am convinced that gladness of heart is at the core of these requests.

“Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.” Hebrews 13:17

As a leader, a teacher, a mentor, when is it most amazing to lead?

When we can do so from a glad heart.

As people, we want to increase other’s gladness. Leading is hard enough, there is no need to make it any harder. Take care not to erode the gift of gladness to those who are spending their lives on our behalf.

For as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians, the point is so that mutual give and take, blessing and being blessed, can flow back and forth within the Christian community.

We give with a glad heart out of what we have, knowing that God is taking care of us just the same.

“Your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness.” 2 Corinthians 8:14

We cannot ever force another to have a glad heart. In fact, remaining in someone’s face demanding their gifts in a gladness of heart, ensures a less glad heart.

In every area of life, pushing for what we want, means we get less of what we want. While perseverance is good it is always to be worked out in the context of relationship with each other. It does us no good to get what we want but to break fellowship along the way.

Gladness of heart ensures a right attitude as we give, and as we receive, and as we work and live and love alongside others.

When we invest in our own glad heart, respect the glad hearts of others around us, and when we refuse to diminish the glad hearts of others, we find a deep gladness for life itself.

“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Colossians 3:15-17

27. Volume Twenty-Seven: Holy Spirit

In the Amplified Bible we find Jesus telling his disciples,

“But the Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengthenener, Standby), the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name [in My place, to represent Me and act on My behalf], He will teach you all things. And He will cause you to recall (will remind you of, bring to your remembrance) everything I have told you.” John 14:26

In a regular dictionary we find the following definitions of these adjectives describing our Holy Spirit:

1. **Comforter:** A person or thing that provides consolation
2. **Counselor:** A person trained to give guidance on personal, social, or psychological problems
3. **Helper:** a person who contributes to the fulfillment of a need or furtherance of an effort or purpose
4. **Intercessor:** (mediator) a negotiator who acts as a link between parties
5. **Advocate:** A person who publicly supports or recommends a particular cause or policy
6. **Strengthenener:** a device designed to provide additional strength
7. **Standby:** Readiness for duty or immediate deployment

Even in this simple way we can see the immediate kinds of help that the Spirit of God brings to us.

There is much to say about the Holy Spirit. Too much for this simple study, so let’s look at just a few of the marks of the Holy Spirit, how we can recognize the Spirit of God in our lives.

The very first place where we find the Spirit is in our salvation. When we come to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we are told that the Spirit seals us in him.

1. The Spirit Marks us and Seals us in Christ:

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” Ephesians 1:13-14

This is important because when we first come to the Lord we are immature in our faith. Sometimes it takes years to mature and to grow to our full stature in Christ, and God understands this.

God knows that growth is a process and that while we go from immaturity to maturity, even in that process, we are marked as belonging to God by the Holy Spirit.

“Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” Hebrews 7:25

Because of the intercession of the Spirit, one of the first ways that we experience the Holy Spirit is in the inner sanctum of our hearts. Paul in Romans gives this blessing:

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” Romans 15:13

And it is in the inner experience of joy and peace and hope that we are assured of God’s presence in our lives. We all know that we cannot conjure these things on our own. Rather, joy and peace and hope are gifts from God and come to us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And it is out of this joy and peace and hope that we are healed.

2. The Spirit Heals us:

Isaiah records it this way,

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit, that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.” Isaiah 61:1-3 (Read all of Isaiah 61)

Consider how the Psalmist describes it:

“You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever!” Psalm 30:11-12

God in his power and majesty and by the work of the Holy Spirit enters into the depths of our hearts with comfort and joy and dancing.

In the power of God we are given back celebration and worship. We are enabled to praise him and to experience in that praise a deep gladness of heart that transcends all that we know and understand.

I am convinced that when Peter says, **“always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” 1 Peter 3:15**, that we are to answer the basic question, “how has God made you glad?”

We might know all scripture, understand the ancient texts and languages, but if we do not know how the Lord has brought gladness to our hearts, if we do not know where our mourning has been turned to dancing, then perhaps we are missing an elemental component of walking with God.

If nothing else, know this day the impact and the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart.

It is from this touch of the Spirit to the depths of our hearts that we then walk in wisdom and understanding.

3. The Spirit Teaches us and Gives us Wisdom:

“And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” 1 Corinthians 2:13 (Read 1 Corinthians 6:6-16)

Life is complicated and fraught with confusion. It is therefore good to know that we do not have to do life on our own understanding. Rather we have access to the wisdom of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Isaiah in his foretelling of the coming of Christ said this,

“And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.” Isaiah 11:2-3a (Read 11:1-10)

We come to reverence in the Spirit of God. Our understanding is opened to the might and majesty of God and we are never the same. We learn obedience and how to walk in sync with the living God.

How God moves we move. What God is concerned about concerns us. The manner of compassion and grace of our Lord becomes our own. There is something different about those who walk in the Spirit. We find in Galatians,

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Galatians 5:22-23

Our very manner of being takes on the mark of our Lord. In this we give tangible evidence to the Holy Spirit in our lives. This depth of the Spirit in our lives is important to God. Consider the words found in 1 Corinthians,

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

We may have good deeds, prophecy, knowledge, and even faith, but if we are not walking in the manner of the Holy Spirit, the place where our hearts reveal the fruit of the Spirit as Galatians teaches us, then we are missing the greatest point of walking with God – change within our inner person.

Christ didn't die on the cross to get us to heaven. He died and rose again so that our entire life might be redeemed and restored to the original vision of God, and this begins with the infilling of the Holy Spirit, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit one to another.

I'll leave off with Peter's blessing:

“According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.” 1 Peter 1:2

28. Volume Twenty-Eight: Repentance

There is a time for celebration and rejoicing and for worshiping God, and then there is a time for mourning and grieving and laying bare our deeds before the Lord.

Consider what James says,

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” James 4:8-10

Admitting that we have done wrong is one of the most freeing experiences. Repentance is deep intimacy with The Father.

Yet it is not a normal human response to admit wrongdoing. In fact, our natural response is to cover up and to hide our sins.

But think about it, when we cover up our sins we still have them with us.

They bury into our hearts and minds with the memory and emotions. We are never free of our sin when we harbor it in our selves.

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.” Proverbs 28:13

At the very beginning when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden we see this propensity to cover over our sin. We read,

“Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.” Genesis 3:8

We have been hiding ourselves ever since.

“But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” Genesis 3:9-12

Do you notice the excuses, the blaming, the rationalizations? Don't we all continue in sins of avoidance and fear, of shame and covering over?

The man blamed the woman, the woman blamed the serpent, and ever since we have been making excuses and blaming others. We have been unable to admit our wrong and have carried death as a result.

God saw this and understood the depths of the problem. Shame was coiled around us, guilt was heaped on our heads, and we were emotionally and psychologically unable to admit wrong. We are fearful of the exposure that confession requires.

Then in verse 21 we read, **"The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them." Genesis 3:21**

In one amazing act of grace, God, who made all things unto life, now kills an animal/s in order to provide a covering and to remove shame.

In a powerful prophetic act looking ahead to the cross, God takes on our sin and death so that we might be all that God originally intended.

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21

God was committed to our covering and our keeping right from the start, and has since played that out through Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Our sin is buried with Christ when we accept his salvation and turn from our wrongs.

In fact, the blood covering of Christ is the only thing that truly covers our sin and washes it away.

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." 1 Peter 2:24

Imagine in your mind's eye the cross of Jesus Christ. And imagine the blood that fell from Christ onto the ground at the foot of that cross.

Imagine that you bring your sins and lay them down at the foot of the cross, and imagine that Christ's blood, as it soaks into the ground, takes your sin with it.

Burying the sin, washing the sin away, covering over the sin.

This is the work of Christ, not us. We cannot bury our own sin. We cannot cover over our own sin. Only Christ can do this.

When we try to cover over our own sin we simply become hardened of heart. In trying to keep our sin secret we build a wall between our self and God.

READ all of Psalm 32

If you think that you are above sin, consider this verse, **“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Luke 5:23**

It is imperative that all of us, no matter our station or influence, allow repentance. The leaders amongst us should be the first on our knees before the Lord, the first to repent and to enter into a contrition of spirit before the Lord.

Let us never forget that, **“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” Psalms 34:18**

And that, **“As the scripture says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6**

We are given a conscience, a knowledge built into us, of right and wrong. And when we violate this sense of right and wrong we have only two choices.

One, we labor under the sin, trying to get free, cover it over ourselves, hide it, but then like anything that goes bad we are simply left with a poison in our hearts and minds. We are not free, we are caught. And there is a deep divide between ourselves and God.

There is a better way. Our second option is to confess our sins to God and each other.

““Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.” Joel 2: 12-13

Bringing our sin out into the open allows the light of Christ to come upon it and us. And in the shift deep within our being as we bring our wrongs into the light, we find that we are given the gift of sorrow and grief and mourning. We come near to God in humility and repentance.

We grieve over our sin. We acknowledge it. We say, “I did this.” And without excuse or blame we simply stand before the living God.

“As for me, I said, “O Lord, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you!”” Psalm 41:4

Instead of trying to cover over our own wrongs, we find that God then covers over our wrong. Jesus (who already took it over 2000 years ago) takes our sin and washed us clean with his blood. Our wrongdoing is buried along with Christ's sacrificial death and we are free.

"I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah" Psalm 32:5

And in our acknowledgement we experience and really come to know that God is for us.

The Psalmist put it this way, **"But You, O LORD, are a shield about me, My glory, and the One who lifts my head."** Psalms 3:3

God surrounds us and lifts us up. We come broken on our knees before him, and we find ourselves standing beside the Lord.

Repentance is the key to this sort of freedom. Repentance enables us to receive God's grace.

Nothing else can do this. Without repentance we are simply stuck in our sin.

But with repentance we find life.

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound..." Isaiah 61:1

With repentance we are rich in heart and mind. We find ourselves, as this verse declares of the Living Christ, our broken hearts are bound up, our captivity to sin is turned into liberty of life, and the prisons and bondage of guilt are opened and freed off of us.

As we accept and agree with the sacrifice of Christ, the forgiveness established on the cross over 2000 years ago becomes our own. Repentance is our hearts position to receive all the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Without repentance we are merely in contempt of the cross, and against the work of the Lord. But with repentance we find the habitation of God in our very lives and we receive his gladness throughout our whole life.

"For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite." Isaiah 57:15

"God I come before you today in the name and the blood of my Lord Jesus Christ, bringing my sins (they are....) to the foot of your cross. These sins, my guilt, and my shame have weighed us down and crippled our hearts and minds.

We are tired of our sin and wrongdoing, and today we say, "No more" in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ. Today I declare enough is enough and I release my sins unto you God. We enter into a contrite heart and we ask for a deep repentance before you.

Leaving our sins at the foot of your cross, declaring them covered by the blood of the Lamb, they are washed away and cancelled by the power of our Living Lord Jesus Christ.

I take unto myself your salvation to every part of my being. We receive your grace and give praise, declaring all glory to you God. Amen"

29. Volume Twenty-Nine: Agreement

The basis for all of our spiritual work and authority is the principle of agreement.

The foundation of all our spiritual work and authority is the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6

In his death, burial, and resurrection, we have been given the keys to life in Christ, relationship with Father God, and the Kingdom of God on earth.

The key is agreement.

When we agree with the work done by Christ we come under the gifts of the cross and of his resurrection.

“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” John 10:28

Without agreement we have nothing.

The power of agreement is laid out time and again throughout scripture.

Initially we are introduced to the principle of agreement through the Jewish laws that declared there must be two or more witnesses before a charge could be laid.

“This will be my third visit to you. Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” 2 Corinthians 13:1

Agreement amongst a few was necessary, and all that was needed, to go forward in matters of business, family, and village life.

Jesus Christ affirmed this and added to it the instruction of agreement in his name as that which would accomplish anything.

“Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.” Matthew 18:19

Jesus could say this because he represented God the Father in his life and work on earth.

It is in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all heaven and hell is moved.

“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

Acknowledging this, working under this, agreeing with this, is our only work. Everything of any value flows from the work of Jesus Christ.

“Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.” 2 John 1:9

As believers and ministers of the gospel our agreement begins with the work of Jesus Christ, and then continues on out and over others.

Agreeing with Jesus regarding our own being is powerful.

Agreeing with Jesus regarding others is world changing.

So we must ask, what does Jesus say about you and I?

To what are we agreeing?

1. First we agree that we need a savior, that there is waywardness and sin in our lives and that we cannot be rid of these things on our own.

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

2. Second we agree to the character and goodness of God. That no matter how it might seem to our natural eyes, that God is indeed good and worthy of our praise and allegiance.

“For the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness.” Psalm 33:4

3. Third we agree to God’s creation of us as sons and daughters of The King. Agreeing with this we embark on a journey of discovery, finding once more our place within the Kingdom.

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,” Romans 8:16

4. Fourth we agree to our value and worth and purpose within the Kingdom of God. All people are invaluable and esteemed by God and created for good things.

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10

5. Fifth we agree to the Father's heart over humanity. We agree to the spirit of God that seeks all mankind and loves all people.

"Who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." 1 Timothy 2:4

6. Sixth we agree, and give our lives over as a testimony to the goodness and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Father God.

"And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Colossians 3:17

And as we work out our lives in agreement with the heart of God we find peace and joy, purpose and celebration, belonging and deep gladness.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Romans 15:13

Regardless of our life circumstances we find God's presence burrowing deep into our hearts and thoughts and understandings. And even in the midst of difficulty we find that God's presence makes all the difference.

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

We are strengthened, given wisdom, made glad.

Agreeing to the heart of God, the work of Jesus Christ, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is powerful.

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

Our lives are not the same.

We are transformed.

"Dear God, thank-you for sending your son Jesus Christ to be our salvation. We receive fully and completely the work of the cross into my life this day. We agree in the name and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Kingdom of God in our lives. We say yes and amen to the love of the Father, the encouragement of the Spirit, and the covering of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask this day for your favor and grace. Bless us with your peace, make our hearts glad, remove from us worry and strain, we give our whole hearts to you this day. Jesus Christ please come and live in every nook and cranny of our lives.

We thank-you, we love you, we worship you. We agree to your goodness, we agree to your salvation, we agree to your plan over our lives, we agree to life and we disagree with death from this day forward.

We welcome you Lord Jesus, Thank-you.”

30. Volume Thirty: Holiness

Holiness is the call of those who claim to know God.

Holiness is the work of the cross done first in our own lives.

Holiness is our personal proving ground before we head out with the gospel to others.

Before Christ we were enslaved to our flesh. Our hungers were focussed on our physical body and our heart sins. We lied, we cheated, we were licentious and gluttons.

It was easy to hate. It felt good to slander. We brought others low so we could feel big. We were consumed with how we could bring pleasure to ourselves.

Then we came to know Christ. The Spirit of the Living God moved into our own hearts and minds and we began to change. Even our bodies began to submit to holiness and our living God.

“So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” 2 Timothy 2:22

No longer could we hate. To slander felt bad. We now knew that lying was wrong. And focussing on our own pleasure came with sorrow.

Holiness is the mark of the believer. It is an ability to live above the sins by which we once survived.

“So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.” 1 Peter 2:1

Holiness is given us by God. Holiness is received by us. Holiness is maintained and grown through an honest relationship between us and God.

Personally and intimately we bring our flesh thoughts and appetites to God. We acknowledge them before him. We do not hide our sin from God, rather we bring it out into the open.

God is big enough for this.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:1

And as we bring sin out into the light it loses its hold on us. Sin withers in the light of Christ and we find new ability unto holiness.

“We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.” 1 John 5:18

It is a matter of what we are feeding. Feed sin and our flesh and it will grow. Feed holiness and God’s heart in us and that will grow.

“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.” 1 Corinthians 10:21

Which do you want to be growing?

It is not enough to just remove sin from our lives and habits, we must replace sin with something; we replace it with holiness.

But this is not easy. And in the shift from sin to holiness we come across our own inability and resulting sorrow. We find we are disgusted with ourselves. Who we want to be in the Lord is confounded by what our flesh wants in this world.

But this too we simply bring before God. We bring our flesh to the cross, relinquishing our desire to self-gratify, and we call upon the name of the Lord for the ability and the courage to follow hard after God.

“Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” Psalm 32:2

In the beginning this is hard. Everything in us cries ‘no’, but as we commit unto God’s way, as we stand against our own licentiousness and greed these things begin to die and God in us begins to grow.

And over time it gets easier and easier. The choices you and I make every day are the small things that add up to big things. Living holy is the biggest way to be living.

Holiness requires restraint. Choosing to live unto God has us growing our strength unto right living.

But we must never forget that the power for this comes from God and from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and it is God we must choose and rely on each and every day.

And in Him we can do it – we can grow in holiness.

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” 1 John 1:7

Holiness requires a bigger picture than just today. Our flesh cries out to be satisfied today, but unto holiness and we put aside the urgency of today in service to eternity.

Holiness doesn't live for now, it lives for eternity.

Holiness doesn't live for ourselves, it lives for others.

Holiness is our investment in the Kingdom of God. Holiness is our agreement with the Kingdom of God.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” Galatians 5:22-25

It is a manner of righteousness that honors God, that praises him through the choices we make, that proves him Lord in our lives.

And the farther we move into leadership and ministry the holier we must be. For where there is any 'flesh' in our manner of being, this is what the enemy can grab hold of.

Living in The Spirit and there is nothing for the enemy to grab. In the flesh we are destined to attack and confounding.

May we simply choose holiness today. In this we reveal our love for the Lord.

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8

“God we simply come before you today confessing to this difficulty unto holiness. Sometimes we are worn down by the constant struggle. Sometimes we feel stuck in our own flesh.

But today we acknowledge that you are bigger than our flesh. We agree and say 'yes' and 'amen' to your holiness through our beings.

We invite you to make us a holy people. We bring our flesh to the cross of Christ and we declare it this day crucified with Christ. In the power and the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we say 'no more!' to sin and its hold over us. We say 'Yes!' to purity and truthfulness, integrity and honor.

May we honor you with our bodies, with our thoughts and with our choices. May we honor others as we honor you.

Thank-you Jesus for making a way for us. Without your death, burial and resurrection we would not have a way through our sin and suffering, but you have made a way, you are The Way, and we give you honor today and we claim the blood covering of our Lord Jesus Christ over us today.

With all glory and honor to you God. Amen”