

THE PATH OF FREEDOM

Few find it. Fewer walk it.
Be one of the few.



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AUTHOR NOTE

I wish to make a quick note about Scripture use throughout this work.

I believe in the power and authority of the written Word of God. My pursuit of understanding into the subject of Freedom has been rooted in this Word. That being said, I have seen the Bible used far too often as a weapon – causing more spilled blood and division than just about any other “thing.” It is painfully obvious that equally well-intentioned Christians can read the same text, and come away with vastly differing convictions and understandings. My understanding of what I read in Scripture may not be yours. It is not my effort, nor my ability, to convince you of anything by *any* form, least of all by using Scripture. Only Holy Spirit can do that.

Therefore, I have felt led to not make this work Scripture reference heavy. I am writing from a place of what I feel Holy Spirit showing me, *including but not limited to the extent that involves Scripture*. This book will certainly draw upon Scripture; and you’ll be able to see where that is (for the most part in the *purple italicized font*), but it has been intentionally demonstrated in more of a flowing narrative, limiting reference form. If you want to dig into the Scriptures that are hinted at for yourself, you can, and should, do that. You don’t need Chapter and Verse reference from me.

Please join me in my prayer and lets all ask Holy Spirit to testify to Truth as you read – Scripture and *all other* written word.

Thank you.

INTRODUCTION

*“So if the Son makes you **Free**, you will be **Free** indeed.” -
Jesus Christ*

MY STORY

I grew up in church. In fact, my earliest memories include being in a church building with my family. Sunday's and most Wednesday's in Bible class or a pew was a fixture of my childhood experience. My attendance chart was crammed full of stickers. I knew all the stories. I was among the best of my peers at memorizing the Scriptures. I believed in God, and more importantly, I believed in His Son, Jesus Christ – and that He came to earth as a man, and as God – to die on the Cross for my Salvation. So, at 16 I made a statement of this belief and was baptized.

But I was not Free.

I was one of the “good” kids, even an “on fire” kid. I was never in trouble, made straight A's, was a good athlete, and a respected leader. As the oldest of six kids in my family, I was mature beyond my years, and given adult-like responsibilities. I handled everything with excellence. I tackled each area of my life with Type-A ferocity, control and organization. I had it all together – nothing bothered me, nothing was beyond my ability to handle. Everything was neat - all had its place.

Including God.

He had His compartment in my organized, controlled life of overachievement. I satisfied my duty to Him by continuing to go to church, and by trying my best to read the Bible and pray. He was there when and if I needed Him. Otherwise, I was doing just fine, thank you very much.

But I was not Free.

I got older, graduated college, married my high school sweetheart, started a career, bought a house, had 2 kids – and generally continued to conquer life. I had success. I had prosperity. I had the dream.

But I was not Free.

It was during this stage of life that, well... life happened. I found out that I was adopted as a child. My parents got a divorce. I “handled” these stresses alongside the more routine stresses of graduations, career choices, marriage and kids – the same way I had “handled” things all my life. *I got this.*

But I was not Free.

These stresses opened up the door to indiscretions, and my heart walked through it. For the first time in my life, really, I was wading into waters of what I knew to be “big” sin. *And I kept on wading out.* It wasn't long before I was drowning, even though it took me a long time to recognize it. When I did, I stopped wading out, and began heading back in to “shore,” repentant before God. I was forgiven and right with Him, and I knew that...

But I was not Free.

I was 31 years old. A lifetime churchgoer from a family of Christians, a Christian myself for half of my life... and I had no concept of Freedom. Truthfully, I had no concept of Jesus Christ, my Lord.

Not until my eyes were opened to see Him. And receive Him. Not until I surrendered, *really* surrendered to His Lordship.

This did not happen until I was *broken*. My "handling," my *I got this* approach to life had finally lead me into a dark despair. The choices I had made had caused much pain, and were rendering death to my lifelong aspiration to achieve and control. In the still, dark morning, on the couch in the living room of my quiet house, I was reading...

WHEN I REALLY MET JESUS

(Excerpted from part of my written testimony)

*"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin."*

My eyes would get heavy and I'd start to drift off...and a bird would hit the window beside me, startling me awake. A bird? At 1:30 am?

*"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place."*

("Read, Brandon")

I didn't know if the voice was mine or not, but I felt compelled to obey it. And I'd start to read again...

*"Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity."*

I needed cleansing. I wanted to be whiter than snow - but I wasn't there, yet. Instead, I felt the depth of my iniquity being on full display before the Lord - there was no hiding of His face. I was getting naked before Him for the first time in my life. I wanted to vomit. Joy and gladness felt like fairytale characters and the brokenness of my bones was choking me from the inside out.

I got sleepy again...

...and the pages of my Bible fluttered. There was no fan on, or air moving in the room.

("Brandon, read...")

By now, I felt sure I was hearing God whispering to me.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

No, that's not Psalm 51 anymore. That one, dear friends, opens Romans 8. And I was reading that too on my couch that night. Over. And over. And over.

My internal thought - (*If there is no condemnation in Christ, then why do I feel so condemned? Am I in Christ?... Jesus?*)

"Because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives Life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not Live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who Live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God."

My entire life to that point was now flashing before me. I had been living so as to fulfill a "requirement of the law" - the law of expectations, pressure, success, to never fail, to "be good," to live up to the standards of others, to live up to the standards I put on myself.

I had no concept of what "living according to the Spirit" meant. (The "Spirit desires" something?)

My mind had become so set on the "desires of the flesh." But:

*"The mind governed by the flesh **is death...**"*

*"The mind governed by the flesh **is hostile to God...**"*

*"Those who are in the realm of the flesh **cannot please God...**"*

Cannot. Please. God. The desires of the flesh are the very definition of a prison.

I was living a "requirement of the law of the flesh" that was reduced to pleasing - others and myself. And now I was staring death in the face...

"You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God Lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives Life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is Living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give Life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who Lives in you."

As the weight of my sin was bombarding me as death, I began to beg this Christ - to whom I'd given an intellectual and apathetic head nod of agreement during my lifetime of performance before Him, as well as before the world - to lift me out of the realm of the flesh, where death was knocking at my door - and into this realm of His Spirit, where Life is found...

*"For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. **The Spirit you received does not make you slaves**, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."*

I had been a "slave" for too long. And here was my ransom, right there in black and white, tear-stained ink on the page.

Adoption.

Abba, Father - reaching out to me, even while I was broken in my transgressions - offering me Adoption into His Family, into His Life. To be His Child. To be His Son.

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God."

What do you pray?... How do you pray when you are too broken to muster words? How do you approach God when you are naked and ashamed? When your entire catalog of conversation to the Creator of the Universe and of your very flesh has been rote and distant to that point - what can language offer you?

How do you say the unsayable? How do you articulate that which you now know you need, but have zero practical concept of actually being able to grasp?

The Spirit groaned in my weakness...

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."

(Can You work good out of this God? Out of the pain and mess of this wreckage I have wrought? Can You choose me? Even now?)

(I. Love. You. Can You love me? Can You work good in me?)

*"Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me."*

Purity felt far from me. I felt so dirty. So worthless. So selfish. So deceived.

I had never known the need to be renewed as much as in that moment. I had never longed to feel the presence of Jesus that much - transcending even the preservation of life.

I wanted to be restored, to know, perhaps for the very first time, or all over again afresh - the Joy of His Salvation.

He asked me to trust Him more. He asked me to bring more into His glorious Light to be healed.

He had healed all along. Through pain and betrayal that I will likely never know, I had been offered Grace. This Grace was more than I had read about or heard about in Sunday School. This Grace was *real*.

This Grace was Jesus.

I began to see Him in the flesh, and to know His eyes when they are looking at me.

But He wanted more. Once I let Him in, just a little, He started wrecking shop.

An unhealthy by-product of my past, my makeup, and my experiences was that I had become really, really good at lying. I didn't think of it that way - but I was a man of secrets and cover-ups and half-truths.

I also had a pride issue. I sought my *own* pleasure, to the exclusion of others.

When Jesus was in the early stages of his reconstruction project on my heart, He began to reveal to me the reality of the condition it was in.

So after several days of me wrestling with the Lord to come into full agreement with Him about my condition, Jesus finally got it all out of me.

I was full of lust. I struggled with addiction. I was a liar. I was prideful. I was a fraud. A poser.

And so I found myself on the couch in the middle of the night...

Reading these words over and over and over again.

Until I finally allowed myself to agree with what Jesus had been showing me...

...***I do not have this.*** I cannot do this life. I have made a mess of me, and have hurt those I love. I can do nothing. I need to be saved. I need Your Life.

I surrender.

*"My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise."*

My heart was truly broken. Truly contrite. Like King David, I had been convicted and slain in my depths. **I gave up.** I surrendered at the altar of the Lord a sacrifice.

This broken-hearted sacrifice laid down before His feet - my need to be best, first, liked and the pressures of all of those - and rested in the knowledge of His acceptance of me just as I am.

This broken-hearted sacrifice laid down before His feet - an entire paradigm of religiosity - rote prayers and stories and songs; and an intellectual agreement toward Him - and let myself lay back in the lap of relationship with my Lover, as one Beloved.

This broken-hearted sacrifice laid down before His feet - the confusion of being adopted - and welcomed my Adoption in Him.

This broken-hearted sacrifice laid down before His feet - the pain I had carried over the failed marriage of my parents - and thanked Him for resolving my bride and I toward a different result.

This broken-hearted sacrifice laid down before His feet - my pride, my lust, my impurity, my lying tongue and my secrets - and I received purity and Truth.

This broken hearted sacrifice laid down before His feet - my very life, crucified in Him - and picked up Resurrection Life, His Life. **Free.**

"What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

*For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.*

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God is for me. He justifies me. There is no condemnation in Him. Nothing, *nothing* can separate me from the love of Jesus Christ, in whom I am more than a conqueror.

In whom I am Free.

He's got this... and me.

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Right then, I saw Freedom in Its beginning realization.

I didn't necessarily have knowledge of Freedom, or have the language to articulate It in that infant moment – but I was Free. For the first time, in a lifetime of religion, and 16 years a "Christian," I was Free.

I had received Freedom, and Freedom was a Person, Jesus Christ.

I share this with you not because I had figured out something unique in that moment, or that I have fully captured it all now. But I share it to let you into my heart and my world a little deeper, that you might see a little bit through my eyes the *change* I saw in myself.

I didn't know what it was, but it was Christ as Freedom. Freedom *changes* things. Jesus changed me. Freedom's taste changed me. And as powerful as the initial taste was – I would later learn that Freedom, as Christ, was to be *continued in* - a Feast to forever partake of – and a reality to daily receive and grow in.

OBSERVATIONS IN MINISTRY

In the years since that time, I came to recognize and have the words to describe that what I had received was Freedom *in Christ*.

As I chased the Lord, He began to open up opportunities for me to share my testimony as an encouragement of overcoming to others, men in particular. This developed into a ministry in which I was a part of a special move of the Lord amongst men in my church fellowship at the time, and my city.

The distinct characteristic of this ministry was to partner with the Lord to point men toward Freedom – from sin and bondage – and to the Victorious, Overcoming Life God had for them.

I was honored to witness the Lord move in the hearts of many men – delivering them from years of struggle – into Freedom.

For some, this newfound Freedom manifested itself in a life that could clearly be described as nothing other than a “*new creation*,” with much fruit. Sadly, and strangely to me, for many others – this Freedom was fleeting. Old habits, sins, hang-ups, struggles, wrong behavior and beliefs eventually sprang back up – sometimes stronger than before – where Freedom had been.

And thus began a search for understanding and discovery into a growing burden of mine:

Why do so few of us “Christians” seem to know Freedom?

Why is the Fruit not there, abundantly evident in our lives?

If we are Free in Christ, why is it seemingly so rare that this Freedom is lived out, and instead, struggles over areas we are supposed to be free from remain?

What is Freedom anyway?

How is it entered into, received?

How is it kept?

How is it grown in?

Why is it important?

THE MOTIVATION BEHIND THIS BOOK

I believe the Lord is faithful to answer and give Peace and understanding toward these questions above, and more.

More importantly, I believe He desires to see His children rise above a simple understanding of Freedom, and into a Life that exhibits It.

The majority of Christians, as you observe their lives – are like I was – having little to no concept of Freedom. Of the few who *have* tasted and seen Freedom, for many, it is fleeting. Very precious few appear to *grow in*, and *live out of* the Freedom they have received.

Why?

It reminds me of a story I heard several years ago. An elderly man of Hispanic heritage had been arrested in Texas and deported back to Mexico some not so insignificant number of times during his life. While in jail, awaiting deportation once again, it was somehow discovered that this man *was actually an American citizen!*

He spent his entire life trying to gain access to “freedom,” but he *was* “free” and didn’t even know it. He was risking his livelihood to chase a citizenship that was already his. What a shame.

The same is true of many Christians today, and this is a far greater shame.

Let it not be any longer. Let us know Freedom. Let us know our citizenship. Let us grow in it, and Live out of it. Let us understand Freedom, and receive what is rightly ours.

This is our quest together, friends. As I have sat with the Lord in earnest, pleading for understanding, I am thankful for His faithfulness in providing it. I do not wish to proclaim to have Freedom fully wrestled to the ground in understanding, to have perfected it in knowledge, or to live a life of sinless perfection out of it. No, far from that. But, I can testify that my vision of Freedom today is abundantly more clear than it was a few months, and certainly years, ago. To God be given thanks.

What I feel like I understand Him to have shown me has blessed me tremendously, and I pray that it will be a blessing in some way to you, and to the Body of Christ. Your interest in engaging to this point blesses me. Thanks for coming along for the journey.

Which begins... **With a Purpose...**

PART 1 - THE PURPOSE

*“This was in accordance with **the Eternal Purpose**, which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – The Apostle Paul*

WHAT'S THE POINT?

God created for a reason, a purpose. He had a certain intention in doing so. In seeking to understand Freedom in Christ - indeed the entire Christian life - we are wise to have an understanding *first* of this Eternal Purpose.

Purpose yields Freedom. When you apprehend a purpose for your existence, you are more likely to live with intention toward that purpose. This intention gives forth a higher likelihood of Overcoming. When you see a Purpose, a "Why" that is greater than yourself - that is Divine - your beliefs, thinking and behavior will be less likely to be swayed from the Victory of that Purpose.

Who am I?

How did I get here?

What is my purpose?

How can I achieve it?

These foundational questions are at the heart and core of our being. Whether we consciously recognize them or not, they are crying out from within to be asked... and answered.

And these?...

What is God's purpose?

What provoked Him to create in the first place?

What does He want from me (us)...really?

What is the POINT of Christianity?

Any Christian who has a sincere and seeking heart for the things of God will ultimately be confronted with these as well. And in a spiritual nature, they are crying out evermore to be asked and answered.

As human beings, we all want to know who we are and *why* we are - and how to fulfill our destiny.

As Christians, we should want to know what is the very pounding of the heart of the Father - and how we fit into His desire.

In my journey I have asked similar questions. By His Grace, I have been given many answers, and in the process, I have been repeatedly pointed in a specific direction....

...God's Eternal Purpose.

I believe that this topic is God's choicest wine. It has been aged in His cellar to perfection, and He is calling us to drink. In fact, He is calling us to become intoxicated by It.

Let me be clear – I want to repeat that I've seen but a glimpse of this Eternal Purpose, and I am certainly not an expert. The truth is, there are no experts. Just as we will spend all eternity exploring the depths of the inexhaustible riches of our Lord Jesus – we could (and should) spend the rest of our days growing into a deeper revelation of God's Ultimate Intention. Needless to say, we will only uncover here but a fragment of the fullness of the topic. But this is a topic that the world and the Church need to be pursuing above all.

Indeed, the knowing of Jesus and the knowing of God's heart and Intent are really one in the same!

The quest for Freedom begins with an apprehension of this Eternal Purpose.

If you poll most Christians today and ask them, "What is the Eternal Purpose of God? What is His goal? What is His heart beating most passionately for?" I think you'll hear a few common responses:

- *"To save the lost."*
- *"Demonstrating His love."*
- *"To make us like Jesus."*

These are all good, and true, but they are NOT God's Eternal Purpose. Consequently, the Christian life has been watered down to:

- Get saved, and then go find other sinners and get them saved.
- Go to church more, read your Bible more, pray more, help those less fortunate than you more....all in an effort to "get" God's love.
- OR, Try to "be like Jesus," which is impossible in our own strength.

Most of Christendom happily traces its story's beginning back to Genesis 3, the Fall. You know the familiar refrain, right?...

...Adam and Eve sin and create the need to be saved from that sin... God comes to Earth in the form of a man, Jesus, His only Son, who dies on a Cross for the forgiveness of our sin... He is raised to life after 3 days and one day will come back to reign on Earth forever with all those who will believe in Him as Personal Lord and Savior... In the mean time, we wait, try to live by the counsel of the Holy Spirit, “be a good Christian and make the world a better place.” God is still Holy and we are not – so we “go to Church” and we work really hard to please God and go to Heaven and not Hell one day.

Does that about cover it?

Is this all there is to being a Christian?

Well, not completely. There is more, *much* more.

We’ve gotten off track by starting from the wrong place. While man’s, and creation’s beginnings are found in the Garden, a discerning search for Purpose, on our way to finding Freedom, takes us beyond the Garden, beyond time itself, into the very counsel of God *before* He created.

I mentioned that most of our faith is often celebrated from the “genesis” (pardon the pun) of the Fall of man. This was in Genesis 3, and, of course, that leaves out the 2 earlier Chapters.

In those Chapters there was no sin, and therefore there was no need for redemption. It is only in Genesis 1 and 2, as well as in Revelation 21 and 22 that we find Scripture about the universe outside of sin – and it is here that we find hints into the Eternal Purpose of God. (Do yourself a favor and go compare the elements you find in the first 2 Chapters of the Bible, and the last 2.)

From the Beginning (Genesis 1 – and before) God has had a Secret, an Intention and a Purpose. This Purpose remained a “*Mystery*” hidden in His Son, Jesus Christ. This Mystery was not revealed to Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, angels or demons. No one knew but the Triune Counsel of God...

...until Paul of Tarsus.

“...By revelation there was made known to me the **mystery**...” – Paul

“According to His **Eternal Purpose** of the ages, which He [the Father] realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Paul

Paul’s entire life, temporal and eternal, was transformed by this revelation. He spent every remaining breath he had exhausting known language to proclaim the glory of this “*Mystery*” he was charged to “*steward*” and unveil. With a careful eye, you’ll see that all of his writings (which make up 2/3 of your New Testament) cascade from the heights of this Purpose.

And yet...so few Christians know anything about it. I for one, have been “in church” since I was “in diapers.” I had never once heard anyone preach, teach or write about the Eternal Purpose or Mystery of God. It is not that the topic is completely absent, but it is certainly not mainstream.

So what is, exactly, this Eternal Purpose? It is...

- A Bride for the Son
- A Home and Dwelling Place
- A Body for Jesus
- A Family for God

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GOD’S ETERNAL PURPOSE: A BRIDE FOR HIS SON

Whether you realize it or not, you are in the middle of an epic, sweeping romance. God’s Word opens with a Husband and his Bride - and it closes with a *Husband and HIS Bride*.

The theme of weddings, husbands and wives, Brides and marriage are littered throughout all of Holy writ. This is not an accident. The Holy Spirit was testifying through each writer to an Eternal Purpose. He was giving us pictures and glimpses into the Divine Romance in which we find ourselves.

God did not deem it “*good for man to be alone.*” So, He created for man a companion. God knew that Adam would never be happy simply having dominion over created life. One by one, Adam named all living things – and they all had a companion. He did not. God is not a God of loneliness, and so He pulled out of Adam’s side another of his own kind, but one more beautiful.

God had hidden the mystery of a woman inside the man – to be revealed in her glory *to* man, and to receive the passionate love *of* that man. She in turn would return that love *back* to her lover – out of the capacity of love that was in her, *in him*, from the beginning.

Sadly, there are still those who interpret the creation of humankind as “man *first*, woman *second.*” This has had all kinds of unfortunate and just plain wrong manifestations throughout history and today.

The truth is, woman was created *with* man, but hidden inside him until she was to be displayed.

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.” - Paul

God is a Lover. He is, in fact, Love Itself. And from eternity past, before He ever created, God was there. His Son, Jesus, was there too, and the Holy Spirit. God poured forth all of His passion and Love into His Son. Jesus, in turn, returned that Love back to His Father. Holy Spirit shared in their Oneness and Love-fest.

But Jesus wanted a created being to whom He could pour out His Divine Love. He was in this sense, like Adam.

And so God created.

Out of the motivation to give His Son a companion - a Bride to pour out His Life and Love upon - God created.

Frank Viola, in his book *From Eternity to Here*, paraphrases the scene Scripturally like this:

"It was as if God the Father said:

'It is not good for You to be alone, My Son. I will make for You a companion who corresponds to You. One like You, but not You. I will give You one upon whom You can pour out the passion of Your being. But there is only one way I can accomplish this task. I must remove a part of Yourself out of Yourself and build another You. And You will no longer be one. There will be another, a She. She will be you in another form. She shall be the object of Your unbridled passion. You shall be her Lover, and She will be Your beloved. Indeed, She shall reciprocate Your own passion, just as You reciprocate My passion.'"

Jesus Christ came for far more than to save us sinners. He came for His Bride. He came to have the Object of His passion. He came to be the Bridegroom that the Apostle John describes:

"He who has the Bride is the Bridegroom...He must increase, but I must decrease."

John said Jesus Christ HAS the Bride and IS the Bridegroom. This can only be if the Lord Jesus had His Bride hidden *inside* of Him all along! He obtained His Bride just as Adam obtained his - through the bringing forth of Her from His side. Jesus went to the cross, enduring the *"joy set before him"* (She was His joy), and when the spear pierced His side, out poured streams of blood and water (signifying purity and Divine Life), and the Bride of Christ was revealed in all Her glory.

Jesus walked out of the tomb with His Beloved (you, me, His Church) and His unbridled passion and Love found Its place to be poured out upon, for eternity to come.

This Bride is the most beautiful woman in all of creation. She is Jesus Christ in His companion form. She personifies *"all things new,"* as She has taken on the *"new creation"* nature of God's people, a new race. She is *"a masterpiece and God's workmanship."* She is completely intoxicated by and devoted to Her Lord, and He to Her. She is flawless and perfect – in every way. She exists for the Lord, and derives Her Life from Him. She is the glory of the Lord. When you see Her, you see Christ.

Paul said, *"Woman is the glory of man."* In the same way, the Bride of Christ is the glory of Her Husband, Jesus – and this glory will fill the universe with Him in the fullness of time.

We *must* appropriate this Truth, by receiving our position as the Bride of Christ. We *must* see ourselves as He sees us. We *must* receive His furious love, and reciprocate it.

In doing so, we will stand in the earth and express His love, making Him irresistible and eternally glorified in the entire universe.

In John's Revelation we read about the Bride being made ready for her Bridegroom. Our destiny as the Church is to be fully united with Christ and His Father in absolute oneness.

Friends, if that doesn't sweep you off your feet, well then I don't know what will.

GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE: A HOME AND DWELLING PLACE

The entire Bible reveals God the Father on a quest for a house.

He desires a place to rest. He wants to live in a comfortable home, in which He can express Himself freely. He wants to have a place to be welcomed, received and to release His Presence.

The Garden of Eden is the Lord's lot on which He intended to build in creation. We find there the Tree of Life, a river, gold, pearl and precious stone.

In Revelation, we see these same elements fitted together in the House of God, and the same Tree of Life and flowing river.

The Eternal Purpose of God was for Adam and mankind to eat of the Tree of Life – thereby entering into Divine Life – and to dwell with God. When Adam chose to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, God was made temporarily homeless. The earth was given over to Satan and sin.

But God has never let go of His Purpose for a dwelling place.

The Lord called Abraham to leave everything he knew and had – to go to a land that the Lord would show him. This new land would become the building site for God's House.

Later, Jacob fell asleep on a stone and had a dream where he saw a ladder with angels of God *"ascending and descending"* on it. This ladder connected the realms of Heaven and earth. What was established in the Garden of Eden (God connected with man) was seen again here.

Jacob awoke and exclaimed, *"God lives here! This is God's house!"* He anointed his stone with oil, and called the place *"Bethel,"* the *House of God.*

Oil speaks of the Holy Spirit and Life. By pouring oil on a dead stone, Jacob established the first of the *"living stones"* that Peter said we, the Church are.

Later, when Moses was raised up to bring God's children out of captivity and through the wilderness – he was to lead them back to God's site for His dwelling place. In the process, he was given a specific glimpse into a picture of God's house – the Tabernacle.

The Tabernacle contained the Holy of Holies. Inside the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant, and here was where God's presence dwells.

Many years then pass, and Joshua led the Lord's people into the Promised Land, Canaan. Another 400 years go by, and the Lord rose up David as King. David was consumed with finding a home for his God:

"Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent." - David

"I will not go home; I will not let myself rest. I will not let my eyes sleep nor close my eyelids in slumber until I find a place to build a house for the Lord, a sanctuary for the Mighty One of Israel." - David

David rescued the Ark of the Covenant, and created the Tabernacle of David as its new resting place. For 40 years David established exuberant worship and praise in and around the ark - around the clock. There would no longer be a restriction to only the Priesthood making petitions in the Holy of Holies. David approached the throne of Grace in all its splendor and awe with a romantic intimacy. This was a man who unashamedly said that he would be *"even more undignified before his Lord"* while dancing and singing.

The lesson is that **where the House of God is built, there is unbridled Freedom,** a freedom that expresses itself in joy out of an overflow of intimacy and love.

Of course, David's son, Solomon, ended up realizing David's dream of building the Temple of God. God had a building on earth, but as the Temple was eventually destroyed and then rebuilt, it was still just a picture of His dream House.

Enter Jesus Christ.

*"I am the **house** of God." "I am the **temple** of God." "God **lives in me** and I live in Him."*

Jesus is "*Emmanuel*" – *God with us*. He is the House of God.

The Garden of Eden, Jacob's ladder, the ark, and the Temple were the spaces in time in which God met man in dwelling with them, but they were fragments. Jesus Christ, living now outside of time and space, is the fullness of God's dwelling, through whom He abides in and with man.

Jesus is the "Cornerstone" of God's eternal House.

By the "*Life-giving Spirit*" of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit will "*fit together...living stones*" to form the habitation of God.

This is the Church. *The Ekklesia*.

The Apostle Paul laid hold of this Eternal Purpose desire of God to have His Home among His people. His language is ripe with the terminology of "*building*":

*"You are God's **building**...as a master-builder...I have laid the **foundation**...take heed how you **build**...lay no other **foundation** but Jesus Christ..."*

*"You are the **temple** of God, and the Sprit of God **dwells** in you."*

*"You are members of God's **household**, **built** on the **foundation** of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief **cornerstone**. In Him the whole **building** is **joined together** and rises to become a holy **temple** in the Lord. And in Him you too are **being built together** to form a **dwelling** in which God **lives** by His Sprit."*

*"The **house** of God, which is the Church of the living God, the **pillar** and **ground** of Truth."*

Paul was exhorting the Church to take part in God's restoring His House on earth. He was joining the plea of the Lord Jesus Himself, who said:

*"Foxes have holes, and birds have nests, **but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.**"*

The goal of so many Christians is to live in such a way as to "get to Heaven." But from eternity past, God desires to "get Heaven to earth." He wants to dwell *here, with man*.

This will happen. It is His Eternal Purpose and it is our destiny as His children.

*"And I heard a great voice out of Heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is **WITH** men, and He will dwell **WITH** them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be **WITH** them, and be their God."*

Let us be about the building of God's House. Let us individual *"living stones"* become *"built together"* to form the House of our Lord.

After all, the Lord's cry to the prophet Isaiah has profound application to His people today:

"Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool. Where then is a house you could build for me? Where is a place that I may rest?"

GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE: A BODY FOR JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ was God incarnate. He expressed the Life of God in a tangible, visible form on earth. He said if you have seen Him, you have seen God.

God wanted to express His Life into the earth, and He chose a human body in which to do so.

The sole purpose of a body is to express the life it carries.

Jesus expressed His Father's Life during His earthly ministry. He did many amazing things – so many that *"the entire world could not hold the books that would tell the tales,"* according to John. Remarkably, Jesus did all of this as fully God, but still fully man, and thus was limited to the space and time He occupied over a 3-year period.

Following His death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus is now Spirit, but still craves expression. He still wants to make His Life tangible and visible.

He, too, does this through a Body – by inhabiting a human's spirit and dwelling, and making His home in it. And therein lies the genius of God. When the Spirit of the Lord dwells in a body, or better yet, *in many bodies* – He is magnified in His expression. He is no longer bound by time and space, but is expressed in eternity – around the clock and around the universe – through the Body of Christ.

This Body was birthed in Acts on the day of Pentecost, and is charged with continuing the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. John said, as Jesus was in the world, so now is the Church.

We clearly see the seriousness of this when Jesus confronts Saul on the Road to Damascus. He does so with painfully personal words, *"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting ME?"*

This is astonishing. The Lord makes no distinction between His own self and the Church. When Saul was persecuting the fellowship of believers on earth, called the Church, he was persecuting Jesus Christ Himself!

This same man, Saul, became the regenerated Paul of Tarsus. And Paul wrote exhaustively about the "Body of Christ."

"Don't you know that your bodies are members of Christ Himself?"

*“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and **all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.**”*

Just as a physical body is one unit having many members, so also is Christ. Or in other words, Christ is a body with many members. Christ is the Church, and the Church is Christ – a *Person* who lives and expresses Himself, as the Head, *and* through His many parts.

As the Father loved the Son (the Head), so too, does He love the Body. The Head and Body cannot be separated. They share the same Life – and it is Divine Life.

The Body is the *“fullness”* of the Head. In that way, we, the Church, are called to fill out the completion of the Head on earth.

How different would your life look if you lived out of an unshakable belief in the Truth about who you are? **How different would our world look if humanity lived as if they embodied Christ in the earth?** How would the Church look today if the “Body of Christ” lived out of the Life of Its Head?

The world is in desperate need to see the Church expressed as the functioning Body of Christ. For this to happen the Church must make Jesus the pre-eminent and practical and functional and all-encompassing Head of Its Life.

“He is the Head of the body, the church...so that in everything He might have supremacy.”

“And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

The supremacy of the Lord Jesus is the Eternal Purpose of God - that all things are created by Him, for Him, and to Him – and are to be summed up in Him. When we as the Body submit to His Headship, all of the created universe will follow suit and be filled with His supremacy.

GOD’S ETERNAL PURPOSE: A FAMILY

God the Father was so enamored with and in love with God the Son that He desired to clone Him.

God wanted to have kids – to have a family.

He accomplished this in His Church. This Church, or family, is made up of an entirely new species, a *“new creation.”*

We are described as a new humanity in the Family of God throughout Scripture:

"God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved."

"...Adopted as His Sons through Jesus Christ."

"...Fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household."

"His purpose was to create one new man."

"There is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all."

Jesus Christ is the firstborn of a new species, so that in the fullness of the Family of God, *"He would be supreme."*

He announced, *"His Kingdom is not of this world."* He is a Ruler from another realm. But more, He proclaims that He was sent to establish a people of His kind, which will rule with Him on earth. To do so, they must abandon their former life and be *"born from above,"* or from His realm. They will then inherit Life from that Kingdom, and become a part of His species.

C.S. Lewis describes it like this:

"Christianity is the story of how the rightful King has landed, you might say in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in His great campaign of sabotage."

God made Jesus the *"firstborn among many brothers"* because He wanted to have children to bear His glorious Son's image.

He wants a family to share in His Divine fellowship.

Fulton J. Sheen in his book, *The Divine Romance*, says this:

"Away back in the agelessness of eternity, in that day that had neither beginning or end, God was enjoying infinite communion with truth and love in the amiable society of the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

God's dream is to expand that *"infinite communion."* We have been invited into this Life of Truth and Love – the eternal love affair between God the Father and God the Son through God the Holy Spirit.

We are God's chosen kids. His Sons and Daughters. We are in His Divine Family and we receive the fullness of the Love that endlessly flows between the Father and His Son.

This is incomprehensibly glorious news! This is “Good News!” This news should rip the cover off of conventional Christianity and ignite a reciprocal passion of Truth, Love and Family – to the Heavens and in the earth.

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I pray that you see His Ultimate Intention, His beating heart Love affair, His Mystery revealed, His Glorious Plan and His Eternal Purpose.

Even a fragment of an understanding of God’s Eternal Purpose changes everything. An understanding that God created the world, and us, with an Intention that far exceeds rescuing His creation from sin - is circuitry blowing. It should reverberate from your spirit to the Heavens and back - shaking everything you’ve ever thought you’ve known about God, Jesus, the world, yourself and Christianity.

It should unveil the “point” of Christianity.

It should begin to set you Free - to be about the business of fulfilling God’s Eternal Purpose. The *best* reason to believe in Jesus and follow Him is to join Him in the establishment of God’s Ultimate Intent. The highest calling for the Church to exist is to live out and express and proclaim that which God carried in His heart from before time.

Anything short of this forfeits the very essence of God’s passion.

Jesus gave us the keys to the Kingdom and a directive to bring Heaven to earth, to proclaim the Will of His Father be done, *here*. I believe He was speaking to the Eternal Purpose. If Christians will rise up as the Bride of Christ, the House of God, the Body of Christ and the Family of God – we will see Heaven on Earth. His Kingdom will come and His Will *will* be done.

Freedom will Reign.

You are the Bride of Christ, to whom Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom.

You are the House of God, of which Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone.

You are the Body of Christ, of which Jesus Christ is the Head.

You are the Family of God, of which Jesus Christ is the Firstborn.

You... are a part of the Eternal Purpose, in which all things are summed up in Jesus Christ.

And with this as our foundation, we enter... **The Gate...**

PART 2 - THE GATE

"I am the Gate. Anyone who goes through me will be cared for—will freely go in and out, and find pasture. A thief is only there to steal and kill and destroy. I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of." – Jesus Christ

WE NEED THE GATE

We have seen that Father, Son and Spirit had a Divine Intention from before time, before Genesis, before Creation, and before the Fall, to expand their Triune Fellowship into a larger Family – a Family that would come from created human life.

God (and here I mean the full Triune God) is the Highest Life in the Universe. He is superlative, with nothing and no one greater, or before Him. As He spoke creation into being, we see God doing so with an ever-expanding ascension in life forms – from plants to fish to birds to animals – to human. Each Day of creation brought about a new life form, and an increased awareness, intelligence and consciousness. The pinnacle of His creation was human. Mankind was created to bear God's image and manifest His dominion over all other created life in the earth.

God wanted humans to express His Life and share His Authority.

Adam and Eve were given full reign over the Garden, and existed in intimate Fellowship with their Creator. While they were obviously a lower life form than the Highest Life of God, the Intention was for them to grow into a *sharing* of that Superlative Life. While Man would never *be* God, they were invited to have the *Life* of God dispensed into them, to reflect His character and share in His image and authority. For this reason, planted in the middle of the Garden was the Tree of Life.

While Adam and Eve *were prohibited in one thing only* – do not eat of the *other* tree, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – they *were invited to partake* of the divine fruit of the Tree of Life. This tree contained God Himself – His Life, His energy, His nature, His character.

But, as we know full well – man fell. We are never told whether Adam and Eve ever chose to partake of the fruitful Tree of Life. We must assume they did not. But on that fateful day, we know that they were deceived and ate of the wrong tree.

We've been speaking of Life and life forms. A significant life form that we have not mentioned is that of angelic life. By whom, or by what, were Adam and Eve deceived to take of this tree? By an angel. There was another kind of life in the Garden, and this life had a power that was greater than that of human life – only subservient to the Highest Life of God. Man was "*created a little lower than the angels.*" And so when man encountered a higher life form than his – *having not partaken of the Highest Life form available to him* through the other Tree – he was no match for the serpent. While God's Intention for man was to "*subdue all the earth,*" including the "*creeping things*" – *he had not yet received the Life within himself that had been offered to do so* – and in failing to partake of that Life, but instead choosing to disobey their Creator, man partook of death.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil set off a tragic instant chain reaction in humanity. No longer was human creation dependent upon the Highest Life of their Creator God – but they became *independent* beings with their own ability to judge good and evil. Right or wrong was *known*, and from that moment, doing "good" and avoiding "evil" became an act of the *Self* – dependent fully upon its *own* strength.

Freedom was lost.

What was intended to be Free from death and decay, from pain and sorrow, from struggle and strife – was now dying and decaying, would be subject to pain and sorrow, struggle and strife. Man was now in bondage to the enemy - the fallen angel of Satan, who gained dominion over man and the earth - and also in bondage to sin and death.

The Garden was closed, the Tree of Life within, and Man left to wander outside, continuing to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil...

...Not Free.

Enter Jesus Christ.

Somewhere in the mystery of the Divine, while God Intended no Fall for His created Man, in His all-knowing, He also foreknew Man's rebellion and thus his separation from God's Intention.

So He had a Plan. A Plan of Redemption. A Plan to restore His Eternal Purpose. In the Goodness of God, He allowed and allows His children to have free will – to chose Him or reject Him. This was true of Adam, and it is true of us today. While the sin of Adam placed all of mankind in dis-fellowship with God, the redemption of Jesus Christ restores that fellowship.

The Fall of Man, while closing off the Garden and the Life of God to Man temporarily, was eternally restored in the death, resurrection and Life of Jesus. *The Garden and the Tree of Life were made available to Man again in the Person and work of Christ.* Jesus said He was the Life. He was the Vine. All who partook of Him would share in His Life. He was The Way back into Divine fellowship. He was the Threshold back into the previously locked Garden.

He is The Gate.

By Him and through Him, all who enter in have access to eternal, uncreated, Zōē Life on the other side.

All who receive Jesus Christ are - by Grace, through faith - saved from the effects of the Fall as to their eternal destination. This is glorious news. "Good News."

But this *part* of the "News" by itself does not release Freedom in the life of a Christian. As we've seen, there are many who have been *saved*, but who do not live *Free*.

Might this be in part because we have focused too exclusively on the element of our being *saved* in Christ, and not nearly enough on the *Purpose of our being in* Christ? Have we not apprehended who we are *in* Him in order to move forward *with* Him? Have we not exercised our Sonship, and instead chosen to live as orphans? Are we working to enter in, or stay inside, that which we've already crossed into? Are we fighting for a Victory that we should be resting Victoriously in? Are we holding onto control, perfection and independence – rather than handing those over in a life of dependence? Do we, at our core, doubt the Goodness and Love of God?

For many, the answers to one or more of the above are a resounding yes.

THE IDOLATRY OF SALVATION

Salvation has become an idol for many in Christianity. How? We value it above the Lord Jesus. The root of this idolatry can likely be traced back to The Protestant Revivalist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, along with the massive influences of evangelists such as D.L. Moody and Billy Graham. While these movements and men are certainly to be celebrated for their contributions to the Kingdom of God, it is fact that their gospel had but one message – salvation for the sinner. The goal, and the only goal, was to “save as many souls for the Lord” as possible, by any means. While not wrong in and of itself, a negative outcome notwithstanding was the rooting of an *individual* Christianity – one that was “me” focused:

- *I* am a sinner
- *I* need to be saved
- Now that *I* am saved, *I* need to go find others who need to be saved and
- Go live *my* individual Christian life.

Where is Jesus in all of this?

Most of the books, conversations, teaching and preaching in the Christian community today is still centered in man, man’s Fall, man’s needs and God’s provision for meeting those needs. Man is central and *God is for man’s benefit*. The result of Adam and Eve eating of the wrong tree was a prideful orientation toward Self for humanity – and this attitude pervades today – even into that which we hold most dear in our Christian story: our Salvation from the consequence of the Fall.

As we’ve outlined, this was never God’s Intention – for Adam – or for us.

In God’s thought, redemption and our Salvation has been but a brief “dip” down on the eternal upward sloping line of His design and Intent. He has had from eternity a glorious Purpose *for Himself*, which amazingly *includes* man. Salvation is not the end, but only a recovery back to (before) the beginning. It is but a parenthesis in the grand narrative. His mind has “leapt” over the whole story. We are saved in Christ, and praise and thanks be to God for that! But He has His heart set firmly on another Purpose, one from before time.

If our hearts and eyes are set anywhere other than the same Purpose, even on the glorious gift of Salvation, we are guilty of idolatry. By focusing on our Salvation as the finish line, and not recognizing that *the gift of Salvation but makes a way for us to continue on with the Lord beyond Salvation*, toward the fulfillment of His Purpose - we place ourselves in bondage.

We are not realizing Freedom.

God has His heart set firmly on His Son, in Whom all things are, and in Whom all things will be summed up.

So, too, should we.

APPREHENDING OUR IDENTITY IN CHRIST

Those who have entered into The Gate and received the Life of Christ are in desperate need of apprehending their New Identity.

When you know who you are, you can be Free. Knowing and Living out of a True awareness of your value and worth are keys to Overcoming Liberty.

God is the great *"I AM."* He knows who He is and is secure in that. Jesus made many of His own "I am" statements while on earth. Among those He said He is Light, He is The Way, He is Truth, He is Life, He is Bread, He is the Vine. And yes, He is The Gate. Jesus knew who He was and was secure in that. Secure enough to take it all to a Cross and lay it down.

We would do well to follow Them, Father and Son, and receive by faith who we are.

Paul addressed the carnality of the Corinthian Church by saying, *"are you not walking like mere men?"* His statement was that they were not beholding their nature of Christ within, and were instead choosing enslavement to their flesh – remaining as mere men.

Oh, that the Body of Christ would receive, and Live in faith from the Truth of our identity.

But how does one learn this identity? Well, how does a child learn to know their name, to know who they are? They are held close by a loving parent and told over and over again who they are.

Identity in Christ is the same way. Our Loving Parent, Abba Father, has spoken over and over again who we are to Him in His Word. It is ours to draw near into His lap and be held close – receiving by faith what He says about us.

Then, we can know:

Who am I?

- I am the salt of the earth*
- I am the light of the world*
- I am a child of God*
- I am part of the true Vine, a channel of Christ's life*
- I am Christ's friend*
- I am chosen and appointed by Christ to bear His fruit*
- I am a slave of righteousness*
- I am a son of God; God is spiritually my Father*
- I am a joint heir with Christ, sharing His inheritance with Him*
- I am a temple – a dwelling place – of God; His Spirit and His life dwell in me*
- I am united to the Lord and am one spirit with Him*
- I am a member of Christ's Body*
- I am a new creation*
- I am reconciled to God and am a minister of reconciliation*
- I am a son of God and one in Christ*
- I am a saint*
- I am God's workmanship – His handiwork – born anew in Christ to do His work*
- I am a fellow citizen with the rest of God's family*
- I am a prisoner of Christ*
- I am righteous and holy*
- I am a citizen of Heaven, seated in Heaven right now*
- I am hidden with Christ in God*
- I am an expression of the life of Christ because He is my life*
- I am chosen of God, holy and dearly loved*
- I am a son of light and not of darkness*
- I am a holy partaker of a Heavenly calling*
- I am a partaker of Christ; I share in His life*
- I am one of God's living stones, being built up in Christ as a spiritual house*
- I am a member of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession*
- I am an alien and stranger to this world in which I temporarily live*
- I am an enemy of the devil*
- I am a child of God and I will resemble Christ when he returns*
- I am born of God, and the evil one – the devil – cannot touch me*
- I am not the great "I am," but by the grace of God, I am what I am*

A failure to agree with God as to our identity once inside The Gate is a special form of bondage and, indeed, lacks Freedom.

To see who you are changes how you Live and walk. To believe who you are releases the Freedom from which you Live.

FROM ORPHANS TO SONS

Outside The Gate we were dead in our sins, separated from God - orphans. But through faith in Christ, by the gift of Grace we step through The Gate that is Jesus, and something incredible happens.

We are adopted. We become Sons. We receive Sonship. (Of course, I mean this inclusive of male and female.) We are seated with Christ in Heavenly places.

We have a place at the Table.

The orphan spirit is one that continues to fight. The spirit of a Son rests in the receiving of the gift of his Father. The orphan spirit seeks to protect what is "theirs." Sons entrust all they have, indeed all they are, to He who is Protection. Orphans continue to submit themselves to a yoke of slavery. Sons see that they are set Free, for Freedom.

How many have walked through The Gate, yet do not by faith exercise and Live from the Truth of Sonship - and thus remain in a yoke of slavery - never progressing in Freedom for Freedom's sake?

FAITH VERSUS WORKS

The intersection of the idolatry of Salvation and the lack of receiving identity in Christ manifests itself squarely in the struggle, and thus lack of Freedom, that many have with the concept of Faith versus Works.

If your view of the Christian life is limited to the end game of Salvation, there is great temptation to continue to "work" your way into, back into, or to stay in that state. Let me express it like this...

...If, through faith you have entered Jesus, The Gate, you are *in*, saved. You never *have* to "do" anything else. You cannot be put back outside The Gate. No work on your part opened the Door to The Gate. Grace did that. It was a free gift from God. Your belief that The Gate was open to you moved you inside.

A Christian, continuing to work to stay in the good graces of God (working to stay or to get *back* again), inside The Gate - is most assuredly not Free. The Grace of God opened that Door, your faith moved you in, and no amount of work, or lack of work, can change that.

FIGHTING FOR VICTORY VERSUS RESTING VICTORIOUSLY

A significant element in my early journey into understanding my new creation in Christ was grasping onto an identity of a "Warrior," as one who "Fights":

- To overcome my sin
- To "battle" temptations
- To "war" against the enemy
- For my family and brothers and sisters

So much so that I even own a huge sword, a bona fide sword – and was known to carry it into prayer meetings like I was about to cut the head off of some demons.

“I am a mighty warrior, fully armed and ready to do battle with the forces of darkness!”

It all sounds pretty awesome, right?

It feels even better.

There are few times I’ve had an adrenaline rush as epic as raising a sword high in the air, joining other’s swords, and bringing forth a guttural battle cry of victory.

“Frrreeeeedddooooommm!!!” (Think Braveheart.)

But I came to see that there was not yet full Victory there, Freedom was not fully captured in this.

I felt supported in this identity. After all, Christian culture is replete with books, DVDs, teachings, T-shirts, etc. espousing the virtues of “Taking up Arms” for Christ – with promises of the gore and glory of battle.

It has become very mainstream and “cool” to be a Warrior. We even teach our kids to sing, “I’m in the Lord’s Army...Yes Sir!”

Further, there is plenty of Scripture in the Bible describing war, warriors, weapons and fighting. God Himself is even called a “Warrior”:

*“The Lord is a **warrior**, the Lord is His name.”*

And here, also, in one of my favorite Scriptures:

*“The Lord your God is in your midst,
A victorious **warrior**.
He will exult over you with joy,
He will be quiet in His love,
He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.”*

I fell in love with Nehemiah’s charge to his ragged remnant bunch, admonishing them:

*“Do not be afraid of them; remember the Lord who is great and awesome, and **fight** for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses.”*

So I wielded my sword like the “Soldier” that I had come to believe I was, loving every minute of the adrenaline-pumping, action-packed, testosterone-inducing movie I had produced for myself to star in.

Enter Jesus.

As He is apt to do, Jesus messes everything up. Everything. He came from the Future to bring His Future into the now. The Future doesn't look like the past, and it doesn't look like the present.

But The Future is now. It *is* Present. It (He) Lives inside of me. And you.

He brings with Him a new Life, one that made that old life obsolete, in fact, dead.

To live His Life and to walk through The Gate is to be dead to all the war and warriors and fighting and weapons found in the Old Testament, and before The Gate.

To live His Life is to be dead to all the teaching of and participation in warrior and fighting mindsets of the present.

To live His Life is to be alive to the reality of the Victorious Lamb, Freedom – resting in and declaring of the triumph that is already ours in Him.

Make no mistake; there *was* indeed a battle. There *was* absolutely a fight.

But *“it is finished.”*

The message of the Gospel is that God Himself “fought” for us. He “warred” against sin and “battled” death for His Beloved Bride. And now He Lives and Loves and Rules and Reigns – Victorious.

His Life is our Freedom.

And since we have been given His Divine Life, we are called to Live *from* that Freedom.

What are we still fighting for?

Jesus, the Prince of *Peace*, said to put our swords away – that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. He said that in His Life, the sword is meaningless, and that appealing to His Father and submitting to His will was all the “fighting” He would do.

He also said things like turn the other cheek, love your enemy, and do good to those who hurt you.

He never raised a fist, let alone a sword. Shouldn't we take notice of that?

Jesus was able to Live this way in the flesh and make these claims because He knew what was ahead of Him, the Future, Freedom – ultimate Victory. A Victory that is now complete, and ours in Him. We don't have to fight anymore because it's already been fought for, and won – and the glorious spoils have been given over to us.

Freedom.

Jesus never described His followers as warriors, but instead exhorted them to be child-like, full of Love and people of Peace.

“God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.”

Jesus never said once to fight for Him or anything He came to give us. Repeatedly, He simply asks us to Believe.

I am convicted that it is wrong belief that fuels our carnal desire to fight. We don't believe in the finished work of the Cross and the Resurrection – the finality of it – the most pre-eminent “Battle” ever fought.

So instead of resting in the belief of what is already done, we fight. And because fighting as warriors is more culturally attractive than resting in Love, we perpetuate the culture of “onward Christian Soldiers.”

This false belief is shrouded in a mask of virtuous warring, when the truth of its root is an unhealthy emphasis on *me, us*, what *we* can do in *our* strength – and on *our* spoils and receiving glory from *our* conquests.

Jesus is noticeably absent in that. And we can do nothing in our strength.

We need to repent (change our minds).

After wrestling with God over this, the limp I now carry tells me that “fighting” in the Eternal is testifying.

“(We) overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the Word of our Testimony.”

We testify to what is already True.

This is what Paul had in mind when he penned the words about donning the “*full armor of God.*” We've become enamored with the armor itself – what each element means, and how to practically “put” (pray) it on. But the reality is that Jesus *is* the fullness and fulfillment of each element (Truth, Righteousness, The Gospel, Peace, Faith, Salvation, The Sword of the Spirit, The Word), and by entering The Gate, we already *have* Him.

“Putting on” is believing in and testifying to Him, who lives *inside* of us.

Paul doesn't describe this armor to exhort us to "charge out into battle and fight!" He is saying recognize and believe that Christ *is* your armor, that He is not only *on* you, but *in* you, and that He *is* Victory!

He says to TESTIFY to Freedom within.

We are "***strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.***" We "***stand firm***" already "***having***" all that we need in Christ.

Stand. Testify. Plant your feet on the Truth and just *stand*. Rest. Believe. Proclaim.

Testify.

Paul is telling us to drag Satan through the trophy room, where the armor is on display, proclaiming the Victory. Freedom is already ours via The Gate. He can come all he wants, but we'll just keep showing him the blood on that armor, and reminding him that it's his.

We don't have to keep cutting Satan's head off. It's already been done. He is powerless against us in our belief and stance on the Truth and finality of our Victory in Christ.

I get what John's Revelation says – that Satan will be judged and cast into the Lake of Fire and that Jesus Himself will do this on His white horse with swords coming out of His eyes. I get that. That *is* the Eternal future.

Again though, the Future is now. I believe Jesus has brought that Future and the prophecy of Isaiah into our reality in the present, and He desires for us to Live it out by Him.

*"In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's house
will be the highest of all - the most important place on earth.
It will be raised above the other hills,
and people from all over the world will stream there to worship.
People from many nations will come and say,
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of Jacob's God.
There he will teach us his ways,
and we will walk in his paths."
For the Lord's teaching will go out from Zion;
his word will go out from Jerusalem.
The Lord will mediate between nations
and will settle international disputes.
They will hammer their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
**Nation will no longer fight against nation,
nor train for war anymore...**
...Let us walk in the light of the Lord!"*

If we believe that, we will walk in this Light and the Victory and Freedom that is already ours. There will be nothing to fight for. No weapons and battles and wars. No warriors or soldiers. Just Sons (Daughters) of Light and Freedom and Victory.

Sons from the Future, living simultaneously in the present, that “fight” not with the weapons of the world, but like this:

- Love
- Prayer
- Confession
- Forgiveness
- Submission
- Surrender
- Death (to Self)

Set down your sword, beloved Son. Come in from the battlefield. Lay back in the lap of your Victorious King. Receive the spoils of Victory that are already yours in Him.

Freedom is Free. We don't have to strive for it or go to war for it. Freedom is a Man. Freedom is Jesus Christ.

Rest. Proclaim. Believe.

Testify.

Be Free.

INDEPENDENCE IS NOT FREEDOM

Notice that in resting in the Victory that is ours in Christ there is an intentional lack of independence. This Freedom in Him has nothing to do with our own merit, work, efforts, or ability. It has nothing to do with our control. In fact, **Freedom is received as a reality in our hearts when we come to a place of *losing* control – of being fully *dependent*.**

In stepping through The Gate we must drop our baggage of control, perfectionism and independence at the threshold, and never pick them back up.

The irony of this dependence is that when it is placed in the hands of He who holds the universe – no enemy of any kind can influence this Freedom. It is not circumstantial. It is not testified to by our feelings. It is not provided for by any institution (such as church, government, etc.). It is not found in striving to be perfect, but in Him who is Perfect.

To be Free is to be dependent. To be Free is to lay down our perfectionism and desire to control. When we seek to be independent, we wrestle away that which God does not have for us to hold, and Freedom is compromised.

TRUSTING THE GOODNESS OF GOD AND HIS LOVE

“God is good.”

“God is good, all the time. All the time, God is good.”

“God is great. God is good. Let us thank Him for our food.”

No matter the expression – you’ve no doubt heard it said, and maybe even said it... a bunch.

But do you *believe* it?

I have often found myself engaged in ministry in two situations – one to professed Christians, and the other to those who are not sure what they believe, but it’s not Christianity, and if there is a god, they are pretty sure they hate him (it, her, whatever).

In doing my best to reveal Jesus in both of these very different situations, to these very different kinds of people – I find it interesting that Holy Spirit ultimately prompts me to the same place. A place that He knows we need to struggle with *together* in order to move forward – a reasonable, new starting point, if you will – from which further discussion could be launched. A place, birthed from a question:

“What do you believe about God?”

While my Christian friends certainly believe *in* God, and yes, in His gift of Christ – they are nonetheless still operating from an understanding of God that is something less than in the fullness of Grace.

“God is always messing with me.

“What does God want from me?”

“How can God love me?”

“Why is He making life so hard?”

“What do I have to do to make Him happy with me?”

My heart hurts.

I’ve been there.

These are not isolated angsts. Countless Christians struggle through life with these very same questions, these very same fears, these very same doubts. I have too. Have you?

Many of us - Christians or non-Christians - have an understanding of God that is something other than “God is Good.”

It makes a catchy slogan. It sounds good in church. It’s a funny little prayer to teach your three-year-old. It’s an awesome sign to buy at Hobby Lobby and hang in your house. And it is TRUE. But I ask again... is it something we *believe*?

Do we believe that God is Good, and that He has Good intentions toward us? If so, then I think we must respond out of that belief with repentance (changed minds, hearts, vocabulary and action). **You will act out of what you believe.** If you believe God is something other than Good – then your thinking and your life will bear that out.

And you will not be Free.

However, if you can *receive* that God is Good (yes, all the time), then your thinking and your life will bear that out too.

And Freedom will be at hand.

Thankfully, this is not a gray area. This isn't a relative thing we are talking about here. It truly is black and white. God. Is. Good. Period. There is no qualifier, no prerequisite, no buy-in, no bogey, no hurdle. He is Good. It's His very nature. He can't be something else. He just can't.

He is Good.

All we have to do is *receive* that as Truth – and live in it.

Sadly, it is possible to accept the idea of Jesus as Salvation – and never really *receive* (agree with) God's Goodness from which that Salvation came – and even more tragically – the Life that is there for living abundantly within that Goodness.

This is anti-Freedom.

When we as Christians find ourselves looking over our shoulder, wondering what God is "*doing to us*," or performing our way to His "*approval*," or managing or negotiating our sin based on our expectations of Him (or our perceived expectations of Him), or living a "*hard*" life, or asking God "*Why?*" – then the root behind all of that is a belief that God is something other than Good.

But here is Truth:

God is not messing with you, or doing anything to you – other than loving you perfectly, pursuing you passionately, and preparing for you exceedingly and abundantly more than you could ask or imagine... in other words, being Good.

God does not expect you to "*do*" anything other than receive His Love – and respond out of that Love... that Goodness.

God will never love you more, or less, than He does right now. He can *only* delight in you, and has no expectation of you other than to believe Him, to trust Him... to trust that He is Good.

God does not give you "*hard*." His "*yoke is easy and His burden is light*." If you are experiencing "*hard*" and "*heavy*," you are carrying something He never intended you to carry.

Give it to Him... He's that Good.

When you ask God "*Why?*" you question His character. You question that your circumstances are something outside of His mind and heart and ability to walk you through. Instead, ask Him "*What?*" "*What are You doing here Lord. I know that You are Good, and Your intentions are nothing but Good toward me. I trust You. What do You want to show me in this?*" Thank Him for the trial, because it is for your growth in Him, and for His *good* and perfect plans.

For my other friends, while believing *in* one true God may still be a leap – the question, or starting place – is no less the same. Ultimately, of all the wonderful Truth I could share with them – the only thing that matters first, and that they will eventually need to wrestle to the ground before moving forward with any conviction, (thus, the only appropriate message for me to share and most importantly to live out in front of him) is that:

“God is good. He is nothing but Good. He loves you, and has Good intentions toward you.”

Upon wrestling with those words – considering if they are true, a response of receiving it, or rejecting it is necessary.

For all of us, life and the world have a way of spinning us out – making us seem disoriented, confused, out of control. This is true no matter our faith. The good news is that we *can* trust something. One thing. One Truth. A fixed point in space – which we can re-orient back to. A solid rock – which we can anchor to.

God is Good.

Where do you find yourself? Is God Good? Really?

“Taste and see...”

Ultimately, Freedom in the Christian Life includes an agreement by faith:

1. Honestly with God about our condition.

When we fail to agree with God about our sin condition outside The Gate, and even once inside – we try in our own strength to do right and be good and please God and others. We pose and hide from our struggles. We must be honest with God through confession. This is the beginning of Freedom from sin and its associated guilt. God is not afraid of our sin. Contrary to popular teaching, He can, and is, in the midst and presence of our sin. He is so because He is Good, and Loves us, and thus hates what sin does to those He loves. He is there, ready for us to invite Him into our condition – in agreement with what He already knows and sees – so that He can Free us from it.

2. That God loves and forgives us no matter what.

Honesty with God about our condition opens our eyes to see that even in our sin condition, God loves us. Even before our confessions, we were forgiven. We simply had to come into His way of seeing and believing. We had to receive what was already true. As long as we remain in fear or doubt that God can or will forgive us – then we are in slavery to this fear, doubt, and, ultimately, sin. But seeing and agreeing with God as to His Love and Goodness is the beginning of Freedom – as sin and bondage have no power in His Love. There is no limit to Grace and forgiveness. Just as God is, they are... infinite. We simply must believe, and receive.

3. That as we rest in the Love of God in intimate relationship with Him – we are being moved beyond The Gate of Christ, into His Life.

Intimate honesty and fellowship with God, in His Love, moves us out of do's and don'ts in our own strength, and into abiding in His. We exit religion and enter Relationship. His Life flows where previously ours did. We become less, and He becomes more.

We must come to the end of ourselves and gain confidence in the Goodness of God. Agreeing with Him as to His nature, character and of our need for receiving Him and His Goodness is a threshold of Freedom.

“GOOD NEWS!” - THERE IS MORE BEYOND THE GATE

It goes without saying that outside The Gate, we are doomed. We are worse than slaves. Without Freedom, we are eternally separated from God. Praise be to Him for the opening of The Gate!

While it is true that just inside The Gate we instantly receive a new creation life -justification, Sonship, the finality of His Victory, and an eternity with Him in Heaven – it is also true that we still can live not as Free for Freedom's sake.

When we are mature enough to see beyond ourselves and our own Salvation – into the restoration of the Eternal Purpose of God, Freedom is more at hand. Freedom is a present reality once we know who we are, and what is ours in Christ. *“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Freedom.”* **But to step fully into this Freedom requires one to believe in Christ as more than The Gate.**

The term “Personal Lord and Savior” is very familiar today. Too familiar, in the sense that we don't fully acknowledge the completeness of the phrase. We readily receive the *Savior* aspect of Jesus, but not so readily His *Lordship*. We are not to simply call upon Jesus as *Savior*, for the Salvation of ourselves. We are also to call upon Him as *Lord*, for the following of His Life into the fulfillment of His Divine Intention.

When we are content to walk through The Gate, and to sit down safely just inside – we are saved, sure – but we remain in bondage in so many ways. Our faith is Authored by Jesus, but is not being Perfected. We receive a preferable eternal destination – but forfeit a destiny of Eternal, Kingdom realization in life, now. We will end up in Heaven one day, but will not enter the Kingdom of God, today.

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to Life, and there are few who find It.” – Jesus Christ

The Gate offers us justification, free from the judgment of sin. But to receive Freedom from the *power* of sin, and other taskmasters, we must move *beyond* The Gate aspect of Jesus. We must go further into Him.

To receive the restoration of rule and reign in Life with Christ, as Brothers and Sisters, co-heirs, co-creators, and co-laborers – we must keep walking.

To receive more of our inheritance of Freedom, we indeed must walk... **The Path.**

PART 3 - THE PATH

A person is walking away from the viewer on a path made of large, reddish-brown rocks. The path leads into a dense fog that fills the upper two-thirds of the image, obscuring the background. The overall atmosphere is misty and ethereal.

*"For the gate is small **and the way is narrow** that leads to Life, and there are few who find It." – Jesus Christ*

THE GATE, AND THE PATH

The Way. Jesus said He is the only Way to Life. We've explored this from the initial aspect of Grace making this Way possible to enter in via The Gate – and once in, all the amazing truth about our identity in Christ, as the object of God's Love, for the partnership toward His Eternal Purpose.

But Jesus didn't stop there in His counsel on Life. He said He is not only The Way as The Gate, but that He *additionally* is The Way as The Road, or The Path. Just as The Gate is narrow, and few find it, so too is this Path narrow, or difficult, and few find it, and walk it.

Notice that there is a Gate *and* a Path. **Jesus is both.** Upon entering *in*, we continue *on*. By Grace through faith we *enter*, and by Grace through faith we *walk*.

If The Gate is an appetizer toward Freedom, The Path is the meat – the main course.

The Gate is the portal, the threshold into Life. This element of Life is eternal, in the sense that its Gift allows for Salvation. But the Life offered by the Path is something altogether more. It is eternal still, but more than a promised future. It is **Abundant**. It is **Zōē**. It is a present reality. It is a Life that is no longer human, but shared in oneness with the Divine. It is a promise of rule and reign with God now, on earth, as it is in Heaven. It is what it means to be a new creation, a new species. It offers Freedom. It is more than going to Heaven when you die - it is Living as a citizen in the Kingdom of God *now* - and forever.

HEAVEN AND THE KINGDOM

The idolatry of Salvation has a trickle down effect towards misappropriating another spiritual tenet - that is of the nature of Heaven and The Kingdom. When we view life through a Salvation lens - we see things and read Scripture with a focus on getting ourselves, and then others, to Heaven. We read the Bible and see words about proclaiming Jesus as Lord, following Jesus, taking up your cross, eternal reward, inheriting the Kingdom, life in the Spirit, faithful living, and on and on and often equate this with "eternal life" as a place, Heaven, a future destination that importantly is NOT Hell, where those who believe in Jesus will one day go.

In Acts, the Angels ask the disciples a profound question following the Ascension of Christ,

"Why do you stand here looking up into heaven?"

The disciples were being directed by the Angels to look around, forward, to watch and see and join in the work of Jesus that was *ongoing, here and now* – the Kingdom of God.

We easily forget that Scripture, especially most of the New Testament, was written to believers – those who *already* had eternal life as a destination - Heaven.

But what exactly is it we are to be *"seeking first?"* Heaven? Salvation? No! *"The Kingdom of God."*

In making this mental shift, we begin to view Life from a different lens, a Kingdom lens – one in which we see things and read Scripture with a focus on Living by a Life that indwells us, seeing, declaring and Living in the rule and reign of a Kingdom that is among us, at hand.

We begin to see how Scripture shows us how we should Live as followers of Jesus so that we can realize the Freedom of His Life that God meant for us to live in the earth.

This is the essence of the Highest Life of God intended through the Tree of Life in the Garden. This is the Superlative Life of the Triune Fellowship that we have been invited to partake of by way of Christ.

This is Zōē Perissos – the Abundant Life – Life to the full that Jesus said He came to bring. It goes beyond eternal life as in getting to Heaven. It speaks of Eternal Life as getting Heaven into us – and then overflowing from us into the earth.

The Lord's Prayer is a prophetic call for the Will of God to be done on earth, as it is in Heaven. This Will is Eternal, ever expanding, present and at hand – by Christ in those who Live to express His indwelling Life within.

We must move beyond a mindset of eternity being a future destination, and into Eternity being our present, Abundant Life reality, authority, rule and reign with Christ, now.

Heaven as eternal life is a free gift of God. The Abundant Life in the Kingdom of God is a prize to be won.

Receiving Heaven as an eternal destination is through faith alone, one time, for all time. Living an Abundant Life in the Kingdom of God is through faithful living, every day, the rest of our lives on earth.

Heaven is ours through justification. The Kingdom of God is ours through sanctification.

Jesus paid the price in death on the Cross for our ticket to Heaven. Followers of Christ pay the price in death to Self by the in-working of the Cross for Abundance in Life in the Kingdom of God.

Eternal life as Heaven requires belief in Jesus, as *Savior*. Eternal Life as Abundant in the Kingdom of God requires belief in Jesus, and following Him, as *Lord*.

So, eternal life as going to Heaven is something far different from Eternal, Abundant, Kingdom of God/Heaven, Zōē Perissos Life.

As we detailed from the start, the beating heart of God is His Eternal Purpose, which did not originally include the need to save His created man. Thankfully, The Gate is offered, and the Eternal Purpose beats on.

The question is, do we have eyes to see that there is Life beyond getting to Heaven? Do we see that there is Life beyond The Gate? Do we see that realizing *this* Life requires receiving Jesus as The Path as well?

Our seeing more of the Freedom inherent in that Abundant Life depends on it.

DISCIPLESHIP

It would appear that our exploration of Jesus as The Path would fit neatly into a popular area of Christian study today – that of Discipleship. And it may.

But despite the intense focus around Discipleship, it nevertheless remains an elusive mystery to the Church today. As we've seen, one reason for this is because we lack the previously outlined apprehension of the Purpose of God for followers of His Son. Also, as we'll see, another reason is that the Lord's own prescription of Discipleship is not "easy." And we like our Jesus easy.

Our previous look at Salvation being the end game and idol of much of the Christian life is manifested in our evangelism – where saying a simple prayer means one has entered into the Life of being a Christian.

But while this may indeed move one into The Gate - and sure, Heaven later - the New Testament painted no picture of one remaining there, and being contented to do so.

In fact, according to the New Testament, disciples *are* Christians. It is the presumed default mode for all of those who follow Christ to be "disciples" – "followers."

Following presumes walking behind. Walking a Path, The Path. In doing so, the destiny that was the Lord's is ours. **His experience becomes our destiny.** As He walked His path up a hill, with a Cross, so too will our walking His Path include a Cross, and our death.

As Jesus himself said:

"If you love me, you will obey what I command."

"You are my friends if you do what I command"

"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me."

"And why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord', and do not do the things I say?"

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Jesus' Gospel was one of the Kingdom, which, again was something more than being saved from Hell, into Heaven. It was that the Kingdom of God had come to Earth and that by following Jesus you could enter this Kingdom here and now. This is why those who "follow Him" were called "Disciples."

Jesus was not, and is not concerned with our precise definition of "discipleship," but instead was and is solely concerned with His followers being transformed into His likeness. He never had in mind a "sitting just inside The Gate," – yet-in-bondage existence for Christians – but instead an "up the hill Freedom march." This requires much cost.

THE COST – CARRYING OUR CROSS

But the cost of following Jesus is great. While Jesus Himself has a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light, there is no "easy" in the eyes of our flesh toward His Life.

It requires much. In fact, **it requires all**. It requires death.

When Jesus spoke of the cost of following Him, of discipleship, of walking The Path, He said He had no place to lay His head, that the dead would bury their own, that as He was accursed, so would be His followers, that a sword of division would the household of a follower see, that giving up all possessions would be required, and that the Self must be denied, and a Cross carried unto death.

In walking The Path, there would be no consideration for comfort, for earthly family, for the dignity of status, for possessions, for even life itself. **The Path would be windy, rocky, uphill - into a foggy unknown (much like the cover of this book depicts) – but for those who chose to follow Him in walking it, Life would be found. Real Life.**

It is here that most Christians choose to remain just inside The Gate. It is here I may well lose many readers, those who have not diverted from our quest already. They look ahead and see this Path, and its treacherous terrain – and they elect to stay safe, just beyond the threshold of the Door. But what they may not realize, however, is that in making that choice, and it is their own free choice, they place themselves in slaved bondage. They lose ground in the Freedom gained to that point. They may be back just inside the Garden, but they are not to the Tree of Life in the center of the Garden.

Continuing on in Freedom requires walking on with Jesus along The Path.

TWO SIDES TO THE CROSS

The Path of Jesus led Him up a hill with a Cross on His back. Ultimately, He would be nailed to this Cross, and breathe His last upon it.

Those who seek to come after Him will assuredly encounter the same.

"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps"

Most Christians are only familiar with one side of the Cross, that being the side of Christ bearing the weight of the world's sins, ultimately to death, for our atonement and Salvation. Thank God for this finished work that makes us one with Him.

But Christ was not only on the Cross, suffering *for* us; He was on the Cross as an *example for* us. **The first side of the Cross is for the sinner; the second side for the follower, the disciple.** The Gate was for the sinner; The Path is for the follower.

Jesus said the way to The Path, The Gate, was narrow. He is the *only* Way. But as The Gate is narrow, so too is The Path, and few find it. But Jesus said that Life was at the end of The Path, not at the beginning, just inside The Gate. Again, He was speaking of something much richer than an ending destination of Heaven versus Hell. He was speaking of an Eternal reality of Divine Abundance in Life in the Kingdom now. This is a process. This Life, while promised at the end of The Path, is realized little by little along the Way – as He is increased, and we are decreased. This is the Law of Life. He will become more; we will become less. Life and Freedom are manifested in the process.

Jesus is both Substitute and Example; both Savior and Lord; both Author and Perfecter; both the Narrow Gate and the Difficult Path.

If there is any doubt as to the reason for a lack of Freedom in our lives as Christians, we need only examine our ultimate posture towards the Cross. **Is the Cross something that Jesus saved us *from*, or something that Jesus saved us *for*?** The fruit, or the lack thereof, will bear witness either way. The fruit of Freedom cannot be ripe and abundant without the full, two-sided work of the Cross.

So we may ask: Can we enter the Gate but not walk the Path? Can we be saved and go to heaven but not follow? Can Jesus be Savior but not Lord? I believe, as I've said, that these answers are yes. But this forfeits so much, and is most assuredly not Freedom. So my question to these questions, then, is...

...How Free do we want to be?

Freedom is not merely embracing one side of the Cross - the side for Salvation - or simply Jesus as The Gate, as Savior. We must "continue" in His Word. We must put what we say we believe into action. We must make our faith seen in works. Jesus said make disciples, not simply believers. He wants a people who will follow Him in The Path, not just step through The Gate.

Jesus' side of the Cross was done for us, 2000 years ago, once and for all, for our Salvation, the forgiveness of our sins – The Gate. Our side of the Cross is required of us daily, a continual following in discipleship, for our Spiritual Growth, maturity and Freedom – The Path.

Jesus came to announce a new King and a new Kingdom. This is the full Gospel. When we die, we then are raised – new species as citizens of this new, upside-down Kingdom, where:

- wisdom is foolishness
- winning is losing
- lower is higher
- servants are leaders
- power is weakness
- Life is through death

The Kingdom Way, the Way of Freedom, is not to be delivered *from* death, but to be delivered *by* death, and *through* death - resurrected into a new Life - one that is no longer ours. An acorn must fall to the ground and die to fulfill its purpose, that not only a new tree would grow in its place, but an entire forest of trees!

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” – Jesus Christ

TRIALS, TESTS AND TRIBULATIONS

In understanding the connection of what we’ve been saying about Freedom, and also death through the Cross, we must look at the purpose, then, of trials, tests and tribulations.

The temptation (which by the way, is never from God) is that in living a Life of Freedom and Overcoming, we would immediately seek to be “free” of or “overcome” every trial or test or tribulation that presents itself in our life.

The Path of Freedom, however, goes *through* these. Sons of Freedom understand that the Kingdom of God is entered in to *by way* of such as these. The reason is that on our own, in our flesh, of our Self, perhaps just inside The Gate – we can sometimes muster enough strength to move around these. But that is the Law of Death. When we realize we can do nothing in our own strength that is fruitful, we quit trying. We instead abide on the Vine, our Source of Strength, and we encounter and move through all trials and tests and tribulations – knowing the Vine Himself is the One moving us.

He is increased, and we are decreased. In such, more ground along The Path is taken, and Freedom is expanded.

In seeing this, we can agree with James when he says to *“consider such as these pure joy, knowing they seek (from God Himself) to develop in us perseverance, and to make us complete, lacking nothing.”*

WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF OUR TRIALS?

The Life of following Jesus, while abundant, is therefore not without hardships. Jesus never promised that choosing Him as The Path would mean the end of our problems. In fact, many times, He tells us that *in choosing* Him, we would *invite* problems. This is part of counting the cost of taking up our Cross to follow.

The glorious flip side is of course that in His Life, we are One with Him who has overcome. His Victory is our Victory. His Freedom, our Freedom. We can be *confident* of this in the supernatural, and are to *contend* for it in the natural through declaration and testimony.

But what about those times of trial and difficulty that we will inevitably walk through in the earth? How are we to receive and respond? Is the Testimony of a Victorious Life, of Freedom, one that frequently looks for, and even expects, adversity to be from “the enemy?” Or, could there be something else that is the source of our present struggle? How do we discern the difference?

In a posture of Freedom, let us not start with giving too much credit to Satan. Instead, *“let’s fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,”* shall we? Of course, we love that verse. Well, that is to say that in practice, we love Jesus being the *Author* of our faith. But how do we like Jesus being the *Perfecter* of our faith? Interestingly, in context, the writer explains that in following Jesus, we can strip off the weight of sin that entangles, but *after* having been disciplined by God.

Could your present difficulty be the *discipline* of a Father who loves His child?

“My child, don’t make light of the Lord’s discipline, and don’t give up when he corrects you. For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.

As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? If God doesn’t discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn’t we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever?

For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God’s discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.”

Walking The Path in the eternal perspective, with our faces turned toward God, yields considering Him *first* when challenges or issues arise. Sons of God who walk in Sonship (terminology inclusive of male and female) welcome the wisdom and correction of their Daddy. Instead of immediately assuming we are being “attacked,” and that there is a Devil to rebuke – we kneel before a loving Father to inquire, *“What are You doing in this? What are You saying and teaching? Is this from You? How would You have me respond?”*

Is Father opposing a prideful heart? Is this a result of disobedience to Father’s plan?

I am not suggesting we exist in a place of looking for our sin all the time. That is the definition of anti-Freedom and not overcoming. There is no condemnation. But when trial comes, consider the Lord and His instruction, if any, *first*.

Could your present difficulty be an effect of natural law?

Every time there is a natural disaster, God gets questioned or sometimes blamed. His character is challenged, and His goodness undermined. God is good, and His intentions toward us are always good. In light of a world that was set in motion in a fallen state – things happen. *Natural* things happen.

They are not always huge and news-making either. If you lay out on the beach without sunscreen for too long... you are going to get sun burned. That is the natural law at work.

And these are not God punishing you.

Consider this possibility when faced with difficulty, and discern the difference and distinction.

Could your present difficulty actually be from Satan?

Ah, yes. We cannot dismiss completely the hindrances and opposition of the enemy. To do so would be foolish and naive. He is the ruler of this world. He is very good at what he does – lying. He is the hinderer and his ways are legion. And yes, he can, and probably will, oppose you at times.

It is important to respect this (in an acknowledging way). It is more important to receive your place in Christ, responding from His Victory – stand, resist, declare, testify... and overcome.

Satan only has words. Learn to distinguish his lying tongue from the Voice of Truth -and you are mere rejection of the lie and a turning to the Truth - from walking Free.

Too many Christians, in responding to difficulty, *start* with the sword toward Satan. This is an orphan spirit not living in Freedom. I'm suggesting that we consider his attack as a *last* possible source, and if you discern an attack from the enemy as the source – then respond with Truth and Light – overcoming the lie and darkness.

Lastly, could your present difficulty be a test from God, for His glory, and your growth?

We've acknowledged here to start this discussion that, in following Jesus; we will "*bear the Cross.*"

None of the above are examples of bearing the Cross with Christ.

Discipline from God, natural law and opposition from Satan are all unsolicited. **Bearing the Cross – walking The Path - is a choice.**

The Divine Life is never imposed, but continually extended as an invitation. To enter into It, to approach the Abundance of this Life, is to embrace the inwrought Cross – both as a completed Triumph, *and* as an ongoing, continual process of death. We appropriate our *confidence* in participating in the death of Christ, and Triumph over sin in Resurrection. We *contend* for His Life in the earth by choosing to die to our self – so that He may be poured out through us.

Following Jesus is costly. And when one *chooses* Him over relationships, position, money, status, reputation, possessions, comfort, etc. – the Cross is being embraced. There will be loss. But there will be Glory.

The Lord does not tempt, but He most assuredly does test – and we are to receive His testing with thanks and gratefulness – as He intends for our approval through the test, into Freedom.

To Conclude:

In this life, you will face trials of many kinds. As a follower of Jesus, this is perhaps even more true. In Living His Overcoming, we are to discern and receive the true source of these trials.

Some difficulties are meant to teach us. Others are oppression of the enemy that we are to stand against and declare Victory over. Others are meant for our repentance.

In choosing the Way of the Cross, in choosing the Life of Jesus in us, in choosing to walk The Path of Freedom – we can know that nothing reaches us without His permission. Consider it pure joy then, in these trials – in bearing His Cross. For we know that in the testing of our faith, we are growing our endurance through perseverance. In so developing, we are being made complete, lacking nothing.

Let us seek His wisdom about our trials, and in everything give thanks.

THREE LAWS (ROMANS)

I love Paul's letter to the Church in Rome. As you saw in my testimony, Romans 8 gave me Life when I was teetering on spiritual death. It shone Light into my deepest darkness. The astonishing thing about that, looking back, is that in my relative lack of spiritual depth, reading and understanding Romans was difficult to say the least. In many ways, it still is. But through all the "Greek," if you will, I still found enough Life to begin to set me Free.

Romans 8 is all about living by the Life of Christ, through the Spirit and Law of Life within. But to fully appreciate that Chapter, and the Life and Spirit and Law that it unveils, a discerning reader and seeker will do well to dig into the 7 preceding Chapters.

Romans 1-5 speak to justification, the deliverance from the penalty of sin, of those who choose Christ. In other words, Romans 1-5 speak to The Gate of Christ. Paul spends 5 Chapters attempting to illustrate the purpose of the Law of Moses (or Law of God), which was given to show man the utter foolishness and impossibility in being right before God in trying to live so as to keep that Law. In that way, the Law had a purpose of revealing a prison to those who sought to respond to God's Love. The Law could not be perfectly kept, and in failing even to keep 1 of the 613 Laws, one was not right with God. Only One could keep this Law, and He, in fact, came to fulfill it and bring with Him a New Law.

Living by the Law of Moses was bondage. Christ came to set us Free from this. That is Grace.

That is, The Gate.

When Paul moves into Romans 6, he takes us beyond The Gate. Shall one continue to sin so that this Grace may increase? Shall one sit contentedly inside The Gate and otherwise not move forward along The Path? Let it not be!

And then Paul reveals something so few have truly grasped. Even to this fine day, though I receive this in faith as Truth, it blows my mind.

*“...Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus **have been baptized into His death?** Therefore we **have been buried with Him** through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that **our old self was crucified with Him**, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin. Now **if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him**, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. **Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**”*

Yo?!

I don't know about you, but it wasn't until recent years when I felt the full weight of that passage. When it moved from an intellectual understanding down into my spirit *as an actual fact*, the earth where I stood shook.

When Christ died on the Cross, you were in Him. Somehow, some way, literally in Him. When Christ was laid in the tomb, you were there too. Blessedly, when Christ walked out, *alive*, so too did you, friend.

These are true, whether you can wrap your belief around them at this point or not. But I submit that once you do believe this, Freedom will become clearer.

The New King James translation uses the word “reckon” here to describe how we are to approach receiving this truth. We do not reckon something to be true only after seeing it happen, but we are to reckon it to be true *before* we see it happen. Is God a liar if, after reckoning ourselves dead to sin, we soon after fall back into sin? Does this nullify God's Word? Most would indicate so, as most become disappointed and quit. This is not Freedom.

Instead, we can repent and go right back to reckoning – which is to say trusting what God says is True, even when we don't feel like it, or see evidence of it.

Here's what happens: God rewards our reckoning. That faith and trust in what He has said opens the door toward the *evidence* of that faith - fruit. He delights to see us believing in (reckoning upon) His Word, even and especially when it seems impossible! He wants us to believe having not seen - so that then we can begin to see the truth of that which we have believed. Eventually we begin to see that our reckoning starts to produce fruit. Sin will be broken, not just as a theory, but as reality. Freedom will be ours, not just in principle, but in fact.

There is a newness of Life that you have been resurrected into, where there is no longer a slave relationship to sin as our master. This Eternal, Abundant, Kingdom Life is that which we have been speaking of as a present reality, a present Life. It is Christ – The Gate *and* The Path. It is Freedom.

In Romans 7 we can appreciate the angst picture that Paul paints – that of the wrestling of two seemingly opposing natures within us. If we begin to appreciate and even believe what we've seen Paul show us up to this point, why then do we do the very things we do not want to do, the very things we hate?

We are born into a marriage union. Just as in the covenant of man and wife, where two are enjoined as one in the spiritual, and in the Law – there is nothing, save death, that should separate, or release those bindings of the Law. We are bound to our spouse while living; but if our spouse dies, we then are free to be married to a new spouse.

We enter this life in the natural, bound, in slavery to (married in Paul's metaphor) the Law. We are held captive by the attempt to fulfill this Law, all the while doing so in our own flesh and strength. This is impossible. This is death, spiritually. There is a force indwelling that is beyond our natural ability to overcome it. This is the sin Tree – the nature of The Knowledge of Good and Evil that our kind deposited into us in the Garden. Remember, this is enlightened human life form, and is no match for the satanic, angelic life form that lies, tempts and accuses us.

So while we try our best to “do good” and “avoid evil” in the knowledge of our flesh and the power of our own strength – we fail – because it is impossible to overcome in this way. We are in bondage, slavery to this indwelling nature. The Law of sin and death will reign every time when approached on this ground.

So many camp out in Romans 1-5, content to be “saved,” pleased to sit inside the threshold of The Gate. Frequently, though, this approach is wrought with bondage because, while an eternal destination may be secure, Freedom in Life is not found there. We stay married to the wrong force, under the wrong Law.

For many others who see The Path, and begin its trek, we can commiserate with Paul in Romans 7. We try. Hard. But we cannot do it. The walk is too hard, too uphill, and too treacherous.

Yes.

This is good. It is good for us to realize our utter incapability on our own. That we would all reach this kind of despair, to where we can place zero confidence in our Self and flesh, and begin to look Up for Help - and reach the point, as Paul reached of:

“Oh wretched man am I! Who can save me?...”

It is good to see that our basic human condition is self-indulgence and self-centeredness. It is Self. Period. When we take up our cross and follow Jesus, when we walk The Path, we deny this Self. We decrease, He increases. Christ takes preeminence. No man can serve two masters. **Freedom is self-centered people becoming Christ-centered people.** This is the Plan, the Purpose. The Self is a body of death, and it hinders the Eternal Plan of Christ.

"Who will set me Free from this body of death?"

Enter Jesus.

"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin."

What Paul has been building in the first seven Chapters crescendo in the magnificent Chapter 8.

The Law of Moses or God, and the Law of sin and death cannot deliver us from bondage, into Freedom. In fact, their very purpose is to point us toward that fact, that reckoning – that there must be another Law, another betrothal, whereby Freedom is found.

Gloriously, there is, and it is the Law of Life.

As we reckon our death to our old man, our death with Christ, and subsequent being raised the same with Him – we may begin to see our rightful release from the old Law, and the sin Law indwelling.

When we reckon in belief the new Life we are enjoined in, Christ, which is God's very Life in us – we may begin to see that no other life forms, including satanic, angelic life – have power over this new Life.

The Spirit and Christ and the Father are in us. All Three. His Life, His nature, His character, His power, His Love, His holiness – in us. Divine, Superlative, uncreated, eternal, Abundant, Kingdom, Zōē Life. *In Us*. God's Life triumphs over all others – including the sin Tree, and the Self. The Law of Life Frees us from all other Law's. Once we can reckon this as True, we can be Free.

*"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus **has set you free** from the law of sin and of death."*

The Christian Life is no longer one of trying. We realize that we cannot "do good" and "avoid evil." Instead, we turn to our inner man, that is Christ and His Life, to overcome. We are Free in this:

"It is not I who lives, but Christ who lives in me."

Freedom is not something to work for, to achieve by doing one thing and avoiding another. It is not something to be fought for, or won. No, **Freedom is instead a reality to die in to.**

In walking The Path, we reckon, we choose to believe and follow, and in doing so, little by little, we die. Self is given over to Christ as He is increased, and we are decreased. The Law of religion, and the Law of sin fall under the crushing weight of the third Law, the Best Law - the Law of Life.

RELIGION - THE SPIRITUAL “GHETTO”

While it is gloriously true that we can realize Freedom by choosing It's Law of Life (by dying into It), it is also true, that we can remain in the Law of religion, and not realize Freedom's fullest.

Sometimes this is chosen. Sometimes it is simply remained in as a byproduct of being brought up in it, contentment, naiveté, or ignorance.

There is a socioeconomic dynamic that is sometimes referred to as “*the culture of poverty*.” This theory expands upon the cycle of poverty and seeks to explore why poverty perpetually exists in cultures despite widespread and improved anti-poverty measures.

Closely related to this area of study is the idea of a “*poverty trap*,” which describes any self-reinforcing mechanism, which causes poverty to persist. This is also known as a “*welfare trap*.”

I started exploring these themes some time ago after I heard the Lord whisper to me a curious phrase while riding on a bus in rural Costa Rica.

“*Spiritual Ghetto*.”

It was vague, yet strangely directive. I knew what He was showing me, but I also knew that He was still inviting me to uncover it a bit.

The word “Ghetto” traditionally means something along the lines of a neighborhood, usually where people of like class live. It later became synonymous with “inner city.” But in recent years, the term has taken on more cultural-slang relevance – usually pointing out someone, someplace or something that is dirty, lazy, strange, lacking, run-down, etc.

Perhaps, something or someone that is less than Free?

Cora Daniels authored a book entitled *Ghettonation: A Journey into the Land of Bling and Home of the Shameless*, in which she says that “ghetto” is now not where you live, or exclusive to race or social status – but instead a poisonous mindset, the *way* you live.

In this way, “**ghetto**” is a **mindset that is set against Freedom**, oftentimes without knowing it.

In learning all of these angles, I could see that it was in *this way* - a *ghetto mindset caught in a culture of poverty* - that the Lord was showing me the “*Spiritual Ghetto*.”

In the natural, we see examples of people groups that are perpetually poor. They are around the world, and in your very town. Oftentimes, these people groups are several generations old. Those born into the group and its conditions and standards of living are never given opportunities, never taught other perspectives, never shown a higher vision – to break the cycle. In fact, in many ways, the condition deepens with each generation.

To be sure, there are well-intentioned efforts to help people who are a part of these groups. But sadly, oftentimes the help itself is a contributor to perpetuating the culture of poverty (see the excellent book *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor*). Those in the cycle have now grown up in the cycle. They do what they saw their parents (or whomever raised them) do. Their parents did as they saw their parents do.

What develops is a two-sided attitude of:

- apathy/contentment
- ignorance/dependency

Because they know nothing different, they have adapted into life as they *do* know it, become content with their lot in that life, and have little desire or motivation to move beyond that life. Because they receive *enough* help to get by (via social support structures, or aid), and because of their station of apathetic contentment – the need to advance in knowledge or achievement is drowned out in a swirling cycle of contented ignorant dependency.

And so it is, sometimes, with the “church” system, which can be the sneakiest instrument of the Law of religion.

If we make simply being saved an idolatrous object of the finish line for all Christians – **we can be subject to apathy** toward walking the narrow Path with Jesus toward Life.

If we do not teach a Gospel message that includes carrying our Cross daily – **we may be content** to sit at the foot of the Cross, inside The Gate, and be ok with staying there.

If a church building, a denomination, or traditions make up the totality of our understanding of “church,” and of the Christian life, – **we could be subject to ignorance** toward the *Ekklesia* Jesus is building.

If we rely on “professional” clergy to teach us, to lead us into worship, to preach to us, to pastor us and to tell us what to think – **we can become dependent** upon others to “feed” us.

Man has spent two thousand years fashioning an organized, religious system of Christianity, much of which has been made in *man’s* image. As with many (all?) efforts of Self, we have tended to mishandle this. Years upon years of misinformed, misguided, mismanagement (with our eyes on *us*, and on our spiritual “leaders,” - versus eyes on Jesus, *The Leader*) have served to erect a machine that can sometimes have a very negative side effect. A “ghetto” effect. This unintended consequence has yielded fruit precisely the opposite of what it desires and claims to yield.

Instead of Freedom, the system can actually contribute to holding its adherents in bondage.

Churches, ministry staff and church attendees will almost unanimously tell you that the mission is to grow closer to God and to bring Him glory. This is sincere. It is well meaning. It is good.

But it is missing something. It is not Life. It is not the Lord's highest.

It is not working, when it is presented and approached as the fullness of God's mind and Purpose for His people.

Indeed, not everything done in the name of the Lord actually has the Lord in it, or gives Him glory. And *"not all who call on Him, 'Lord, Lord,' will see the Kingdom."*

Showing up to a building, which houses a non-profit institution, "led" by executive staff, to have a religious meeting once or twice a week, will not alone grow us into the Grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

To bear the Cross of Christ in our lives is more than staring at the back of someone's head in the pew ahead, or at the same Pastor's face week after week.

Sonship in the Kingdom of God is not realized if we are rarely empowered to exercise God given gifts, because tradition dictates that sitting passively by to watch "ministers" do ministry is "church." Or, worse, that if we're a woman, we can only do so much.

If we must be led into worship on Sunday morning, as opposed to ministering to the Lord in every area of our lives, we forfeit a great deal of new revelation of the Head and Body of Christ.

We can miss the creativity and caring, generous heart of God if putting a tithe check in a plate is our full understanding of partnering with God in stewardship and giving.

Sometimes, what we consider to be, and practice as "church," does not set The Lord Jesus as Central, Supreme, Pre-eminent and Head. Instead, my experience is that "church" is often *religion* – if not in understanding and recognition of such – then as structure and practice. It is in this way, that what we "do" as a community of God's people can be one of the single biggest deterrents to spiritual growth and maturity that a follower of Jesus will encounter.

If "church," built and received in this way, is where we live in the Lord, then Brothers and Sisters, we are living in the ghetto, the Spiritual Ghetto. We are being held back, abused, kept down and lulled into a false sense of security as to the fullness of the Fellowship of the Divine our Lord intends for us.

We are apathetic. We are content. We are ignorant. We are dependent.

We are in slavery, not Freedom.

Instead of growing *"into the gathering together as one all things in Christ,"* we are being spiritually retarded, trapped in a false gospel – and may not even know it.

In the movie, *The Shawshank Redemption*, the character, Brooks, was a lifetime prisoner who was released into the free world as an old man. Finding his new life too unfamiliar and daunting, he longs to return to the cage he'd become comfortable with. Finally, he ends his life by hanging himself. It's a tragic story, one that is hard to wrap your mind around, especially if you're not an incarcerated person. Wanting to go *back* to prison?

Spiritual Ghetto is like that. It's like this:

*"These prison walls are funny. First you hate 'em, then you get used to 'em. Enough time passes, gets so you depend on them. **That's institutionalized.** They send you here for life, that's exactly what they take. The part that counts anyways."* - Ellis Boyd "Red" Redding, on Brooks' sad reality

Many of the people of God are institutionalized, in bondage, by the self-reinforcing mechanism of organized religion today, causing spiritual poverty to persist. And it's taking our lives. The part that counts anyways.

We have traded the riches of Christ for the spiritual perpetual poverty of churchianity. We are in a trap.

We must break the cycle. We must break Free.

THE REMNANT, CALLED OUT INTO THE WILDERNESS

In walking The Path, there is a legacy of God calling those who would walk, "out." Out from where they are, and into or toward something More. This is certainly true of leaving religion, the spiritual ghetto, and it is also true of the overall nature of The Path.

Freedom is, at some point, leaving where you are, to follow Jesus to some Other place.

This Path will always involve passing through the Wilderness.

We can see in Scripture that God has frequently called upon a remnant, a few, of His people, to bear His heart and mind and Purpose into the earth.

- Noah was asked to leave not only his homeland, but the very earth altogether, and trust God to show him a new land ahead.
- Abraham was called to leave the land of his father, and to go to a new land, which the Lord had promised him.
- Moses was called from the wilderness to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt, through the Sinai wilderness, into the Promised Land.
- The Israelites, having established their Promised Land, were exiled to Babylon when the Temple was destroyed. The Lord called them out, to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. Only 42,000, a remnant, of the estimated 1 million plus, returned.
- John the Baptist was a voice crying out in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord.
- Jesus Himself was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted, before announcing His ministry publicly.

- Paul spent time in the wilderness unlearning his religion and reckoning upon being visited and called by Jesus, before launching out on his missionary journey.
- Followers of Jesus were called out of Judaism, to be “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a set-apart people.”
- God is today calling His people out of the spiritual ghetto, the man-made system of religion, division, denominationalism, and idolatrous worship - into a spiritual house, not made with hands, but of living stones being fitted together – the Ekklesia.

*“We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin, are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through His own blood. **Therefore let us go to Him outside the camp and bear the reproach He endured.**”*

We are offered a choice between comfortable bondage and uncomfortable Freedom. In choosing to stay “within the camp,” - where we start, where we are, in religion, in the spiritual ghetto, just inside The Gate – we choose a comfortable bondage. We are pleading to return to Egypt, to stay in Babylon, to remain in the land of our fathers, to not get on the ark.

But in choosing to walk The Path, we go outside the camp. We wander through the wilderness, which serves to reduce us to Christ. He increases, we decrease. This is the purpose of the wilderness. It is to be embraced. It is to be welcomed and received. It is to mold us into the character of Christ, that He may increase and be seen in us.

God calls us all to this. It is for the “whosoever” will. Many will not, however. So the remnant that has always been, will remain, until all things are submitted to and fulfilled in Christ.

I don’t know what your “camp” is. But in walking The Path as a remnant, to go further in the Lord, you will be faced with a choice of remaining there, or following Him *outside* that camp - moving in Freedom.

FREEDOM HAS A HABITAT

Where do you live? What is your habitat?

hab-i-tat

noun

- *The natural environment of an organism; place that is natural for the life and growth of an organism*
- *the place where a person or thing is usually found*
- *a special environment for living in*

Every living thing, every species, has an environment in which they are designed to live. This environment offers custom-made nourishment, shelter and conditions in which its inhabitant can survive and grow. Should a species find itself living in an environment that is different from that which it was designed to live in, it is not Free – it suffers, or worse, it dies.

Fish cannot live outside of water. Further, saltwater fish cannot live in freshwater, and vice versa. An arctic animal would never survive in my Texas home, and a Texas Horned-Frog (go TCU!) would never survive in Alaska. You get the picture.

So what is the habitat for a follower of Jesus Christ, the environment custom-made for our survival, nourishment, protection and growth? In what conditions are we designed to Live? What is one of the reasons we are called out of old habitats, through the wilderness, into a New Habitat?

Jesus Christ, Himself.

A follower of Jesus is part of a new species – not human any longer. We are a new race. A new humanity. We have been given new Life, are new creations, one with Christ. We are born of God, created in Christ Jesus, a branch on the True Vine. We are hidden with Christ in God, a citizen of Heaven. We are held in the hands of both Father and Son and nothing can separate us from that loving hold.

Jesus encouraged us to *“abide in Him.”* “Abide” means to have one’s abode; to dwell; to reside. Jesus is saying *He* is our Home, our Protection, our Nourishment, our Peace, our Rest, and our Life. Living in Him is what He designed us to do – and in that Living, to bear much fruit.

Apart from Him, we can do nothing. In other words, when we live anywhere other than securely on the Vine – we are not Free, and we die.

Freedom has a Habitat, and that Habitat is Christ.

I am currently deeply invested in the life of someone who laments “life.” They hate this world. They hate people. They hate their surroundings. They hate their life. They express this all as hate toward God. But underneath the perversion and twist of perspective lies a beautiful recognition of eternal Truth. My friend is living in a habitat that he was not created to live in – and it is killing him. God is calling him out of the world – to live in Him, in His Kingdom – the habitat custom-made for him.

My friend, a non-Christian, is certainly not alone. In fact, many Christians today are still stuck in the wrong environment, the wrong life, the wrong habitat. They continue to struggle with elements of an old life, in a habitat that is unnatural to their co-Life in Christ. As a result, the spiritual Life is stunted, or it dies altogether, having not been postured in an environment to be cultivated toward Abundance.

To me, one of the declarations one makes in water baptism is that of leaving the world system to receive the Kingdom of God – an authoritative, intentional exchange of habitat. Yet, it is possible to exit the old habitat of the world in this way, and still allow traces of that life to reign in the heart. This is remaining standing at The Gate, instead of walking The Path. The world will always hunt us down, even after we’ve exchanged citizenship.

The Christian Life will not be Free, however, outside of Its natural habitat in Jesus Christ.

John captures the essence of this in his 1st letter:

“Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.”

In Christ, His followers have been delivered from this world and its system. We have a new habitat – and it is Christ Himself. In Him we live and move and find our being. In Him we are joint-heirs, fellow Kings and Priests in His Kingdom. Our call is to reveal that Royalty, and the reality of Heaven into the earth – and even into old habitats – as partakers of the Divine, Eternal nature.

Perhaps the best part of this? The most astonishing part? **God has a habitat too – with Jesus and Holy Spirit. Do you know what it is?**

It is you. And me. And all His children.

As mind-blowing as it is that we Live and find our Life in the fullness of the Triune God – it is even more astounding that They take up residence in us! In fact, from Eternity Past, this is one of the elements of the beating heart of God – to live with and in and among His children. It is part of the Eternal Purpose of God. Jesus remarked that foxes have holes and birds have nests but that the Son of Man had no place to lay His head – He had no habitat. That is, until His Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension, and the pouring out of His Spirit onto all flesh – a Life-giving Spirit that would turn dead stones into Living Stones being fitted together for His House.

A House, His Church, the Ekklesia – that He would Live in and through. From before time, this is God’s ultimate intention.

It turns out that, habitats are, in fact, very important to the Kingdom of God – you might even say that the Kingdom of God *is* the ultimate habitat.

Followers of Jesus, those who walk The Path, have a natural environment for Life and growth – a place where we should be expected to be found, to thrive – and to be Free. That environment is the habitat of His Kingdom – His Life. He is custom-built for us to dwell in, to abide in, to find nourishment and protection in, and to grow and mature in.

He is “home.” And as Dorothy famously put it, there is no place like HOME.

INCREASE DECREASE

The Eternal Purpose of God shows that everything that has been done, everything being done, and everything that will happen from the Will of God - is for Jesus to be increased; and everything else that is *not* Jesus - to be decreased.

This eternal principle is beyond our agreement with it, understanding of it, or belief in it. Jesus *must* increase, will increase, and is increasing. All else then, *must* decrease, will decrease and is decreasing.

While it is an eternal inevitability of this increasing and decreasing, irrespective of our agreement with it; our quest of Freedom depends on seeing, and Living in the flow of this Law.

Does this Christ increasing and us decreasing mean we achieve a sinless perfection? No. It means we can, however reckon ourselves dead to sin, rendering sin powerless to keep us enslaved to it. We can be Free from the bonds of sin. This is the choosing to Live by the New Law, New Life that indwells us in Christ.

Does "*not I, but Christ*" mean we are robots, without a personality, character, or ability to think and express? No. The Lord gave us these as gifts – unique, perfect and wonderful in their making – and they are to be used and expressed. But the increasing of the Lord will decrease the self-centeredness of us – which would be revealed through these gifts in a natural, perverted way.

The increase of Christ is a mindset we are to apprehend through reckoning. Once the mind is renewed in the Truth of the Law of Life, our lives will bear testimony to this reckoning – and the attitude toward this Law will become Truth in our Spirit.

We already have all of the fullness of Christ within us. He is there. It is a misnomer to say, "Give me more of Jesus." You can't get *more* of what you already have *all* of. To receive the "more of Jesus" this expression calls for is a spiritual thing – one of taking up the Cross daily. Choosing to live from Christ-centeredness, rather than Self-centeredness on a daily basis removes the veil that hinders sight of the increase of the fullness of Christ that is already in us.

To deny Self is to return God's Love back to Him, rather than toward Self. **Ultimately, we obey that or whom we love.**

This is the heart-attitude of The Path aspect of the Cross – which is "*not my will, but Yours.*" This is being decreased: death. To Live in Resurrection, we must first have death. As Jesus passed through the Cross, into Life outside the tomb – so too do we.

FREEDOM IS BEING IN CAPTIVITY TO ANOTHER

I mentioned in the Introduction that what originally drove my desire to understand Freedom better was that I have noticed something troubling...

...That is, that *if* Freedom is stepped into, it is not easily *remained* in.

By this I mean that, all too often, a life observed some time after coming down from the mountaintop of Freedom is not, well...Free.

- The baggage of guilt and shame are picked back up and carried around.
- The walls of hurts and hang-ups stand ever strong.
- The sin that so easily entangled before is even easier in its entrapment now.
- Sonship is traded in for an orphan spirit.
- Serving God is not worship, but instead is out of a motivation to perform, or to gain for Self.
- What is supposed to be a “new creation” is not new at all, but looks and acts very much the same.
- The fruit is not there

Part of this could be explained away by the natural progression of the “terrain,” if you will. If one is standing on a “peak,” their next step in either direction is going to be “down.” I believe that Jesus walks us into and out of mountaintop and wilderness (valley) seasons in our lives. We’ve previously looked at such examples. Even Jesus Himself began His earthly ministry in a valley (being tested in the wilderness), and ended it on a mountaintop (His Ascension). We are called to experience both, and are shaped by both. Properly received, however, there is tangible evidence of lasting Christ-like change and growth following *both* an experience of leaning on the Lord in trials, and in being overcome with His Presence in rejoicing.

I also freely acknowledge that as we trudge down the side of the hill following a particular moment of glory at the top – that the muck and the yuck of the world await us at the bottom. And the “ruler of the world” (the enemy) stands ready to chunk all manner of dirt clods at us – attempting to dirty up our fine, white linens of righteousness.

To be sure, attacks against a child of God are frequently elevated right before, and just after, a breakthrough revelation into more of Christ. So, sure, another part of this “lost” Freedom could be chalked up to being overcome by increased oppression against the Freedom itself.

But here is my heart — no matter... **Jesus does not give us Freedom so that we will eventually lose it.**

Or does He?...

I believe He does, but not in the manner of “losing” Freedom as described above.

We saw this in the Garden of Eden...

Adam was created and lived already on a plane of “Freedom.” God’s intention was for Adam to *progress* onto a higher plane – the Plane of Divine Life. He had a choice before him – to eat of the Tree of Life, and enter into a *Captivity of Love* with the Triune God; or to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, thus becoming in bondage to the law and self. In making the wrong choice, instead of progressing onto the higher (Highest) Plane of Divine Life, Adam, and all of mankind *regressed down* onto a lower plane of bondage.

The way back to Freedom is thus found when we realize the finished work of Jesus Christ on Calvary. He paid the price in full, and when we lay hold of that Truth, we are moved from the plane of bondage to the law and to self, onto the plane of Freedom.

Unfortunately, this is where most Christians stop, and in stopping, are ironically and sadly - not Free at all.

Once again, we see The Gate versus The Path, the destination versus the eternal reality, heaven versus the Kingdom at work here.

Just as God intended Adam to step up onto His Plane of Divine Life, He intends the same for us. Adam was never supposed to move down onto a plane of slavery, *and* he was never supposed to *stay* on the plane of "Freedom." He was supposed to move onto the Highest Plane of Love union, *with* God.

How was Adam to achieve this move upward? By freely giving away that which was his to give - Freedom. **How are we to achieve a *lasting* Freedom? By giving it away.**

The difference between victorious Christians who are truly Free, and those who forfeit Victory, is that some recognize the Divine ownership of their lives (Freedom), and others are still their own masters.

When we emphasize and appropriate our Freedom from a perspective of what we have been saved "*from*" (bondage), rather than what we have been saved "*to*" (God's Life of Love), we are in effect living for ourselves. If we are living for ourselves, then we are not Free. True Freedom is living for (or better, by) a Life that is higher than ours. It is Living on another Plane.

Just as we have free will to receive God's Grace - and move from the plane of bondage onto the plane of Freedom - we also have free will with *what we do with* that Freedom. If Freedom itself is the end-game goal, and we keep that Freedom for ourselves - living our lives out of a posture of what we can do for, or get out of God, in our strength and by our will - we will inevitably find ourselves back in bondage. If however, we see Freedom as a stepping-stone - The Path - on the way to a Life that is not ours at all, but a Life lived by Another, in response to a Love that lives in us - then we are never in bondage. Counter intuitively, we are not even in *our* Freedom - we are CAPTIVE by that Life of Love. We are *truly* Free to Live *for* and *unto* God's Eternal Purpose.

True Freedom is stepped into, and remained in, by surrendering It for a Life of Love-Captivity.

I think this is the essence of what Paul has in mind in writing to the Galatians:

"In [this] freedom Christ has made us free [and completely liberated us]; stand fast then, and do not be hampered and held ensnared and submit again to a yoke of slavery [which you have once put off]."

For we, [not relying on the Law but] through the [Holy] Spirit's [help], by faith anticipate and wait for the blessing and good for which our righteousness and right standing with God [our conformity to His will in purpose, thought, and action, causes us] to hope.

For [if we are] in Christ Jesus...only faith activated and energized and expressed and working through love (count for anything).

*...For you, brethren, were [indeed] called to freedom; only **[do not let your] freedom be an incentive to your flesh** and an opportunity or excuse [for selfishness], but **through love you should serve one another**.*

*For the whole Law [concerning human relationships] is complied with in the one precept, **You shall love your neighbor as [you do] yourself**.*

*...But I say, **walk and live [habitually] in the [Holy] Spirit [responsive to and controlled and guided by the Spirit]**; then you will certainly not gratify the cravings and desires of the flesh (of human nature without God).*

*For the desires of the flesh are opposed to the [Holy] Spirit, and the [desires of the] Spirit are opposed to the flesh (godless human nature); for these are antagonistic to each other [continually withstanding and in conflict with each other], **so that you are not free** but are prevented from doing what you desire to do.*

But if you are guided (led) by the [Holy] Spirit, you are not subject to the Law.”

Paul is saying to the Galatians, and to us:

- Don't stop in the Freedom Christ has given you, abusing His Grace by living for yourselves out of this Freedom.
- Because doing so is no Freedom at all, but bondage and slavery!
- Instead, live by the indwelling Life of Christ, through the Holy Spirit in you.
- This is a Life that is not yours at all. It is a Life of Love - toward God and others.
- In living this Life, you will never be in bondage to slavery again, but truly FREE – in Him!

Paul described himself as *“a bondservant (slave) of Christ.”* He recognized something that we would all be wise to join him in seeing:

We are all in bondage to something, or someone. The question then, is - to what, or to whom? What or who are we serving? **Freedom is only realized in being a bond slave in service to the Lord Jesus.** You cannot serve two masters. Freedom is submitting oneself to Love, to serve *The Master*.

My prayer for us is that we have first chosen the Freedom in Christ; that we walk through The Gate. I further pray that we have *also* “lost” that Freedom, not in the sense of living out of the nature of our old lives, but in the sense of exercising that Freedom by “giving it away,” walking The Path - placing ourselves in Captivity to the Life of Love that is Jesus Christ in us.

Because life lived by any other basis is not truly Free, and is no Life at all.

LET US GATHER OUR BEARINGS

We have covered much ground together to this point in our journey, and are nearing a turning point.

In Part 4, I want to change gears from knowledge, understanding, paradigm shifting and renewed thinking – toward practical application. If we begin to receive what we've explored so far as true, how then should that change or affect our thinking, belief, behavior and living in a going-forward way? This is where we are headed.

But it may be wise before doing so to summarize what we've seen and picked up together along The Way to Life:

There is a point to Christianity, a purpose. It is not for us, but for the Triune God. It is the Eternal Purpose. God is summing everything up in Jesus Christ. Astonishingly, human creation is intimately invited into this glorious fulfillment. We are the Body for Christ to express Himself through. We are the House, the resting place of God. We are the Bride betrothed to the Bridegroom Christ. We are adopted into the Family of God.

This Purpose was intended in the Garden with Adam and Eve. They were born into Freedom, with the offer to eat of the Life of God, from the Tree of Life – thus moving higher and deeper still onto His Divine plane. When they ate of the wrong Tree, not only was this higher plane lost, so too was Freedom.

Jesus came to undo that fateful bite. He Himself became the incarnation of the Tree of Life. All who will receive Him, The Gate – are restored to the initial Garden intimacy and Freedom – with the offer to eat of Him and move on to His own, uncreated, Divine Life, *real* Freedom - The Path.

But man has failed to receive our identity in Him. We have made an industry out of being saved and salvation. Christianity has been watered down to saying a simple prayer, believing as far as to walk through The Gate – only to sit down safely inside and wait to go to Heaven after death. We have not apprehended our Sonship, and live like orphans. We continue to work for God's favor. We fight to gain what is already ours, or to control what is not ours to control. We desire independence over dependence. We doubt God's Goodness.

It is true that, outside The Gate, we are in sure bondage. But most, having received The Gate, choose to remain in bondage by not receiving Christ as The Path as well. Having gotten *in*, there is very little moving *on*. Heaven has replaced the Kingdom as our focus.

Because The Path is rocky, windy, and uphill with a Cross into a foggy unknown – we choose not to take It. Instead of a Freedom march we remain yoked in a bond of slavery.

The Cross? We've read how we are to carry ours, but fail to apply Its truth. The foot of the Cross of Christ is much easier to sit in front of, than carrying our own in the shadow of His.

Because of this, when trials come, we are quick to point the finger – at the enemy or some other attack. We fail to consider a loving Father using the Cross in our lives to grow us, shape us, make us complete in the image of His Son.

There are three Laws at work – that of The Law of Sin and Death, The Law of Moses and The Law of Life. When Christ died on the Cross, so too did you – and the power of The Law of Sin and Death over you. When Christ walked out of the tomb, alive, so too did you – and access to His very Life. The Law of Moses revealed the utter impossibility of accessing God on our own power. It is beautiful in its purpose toward that end – but its own special form of bondage when remained in beyond that realization. Those who receive Christ can still choose to live under any of these three Laws. Only the Law of Life offers Freedom.

Sadly, the Law of Moses is alive and well in the form of religion today, and often keeps its adherents in a form of spiritual ghetto. While mostly well intentioned, organized religion is the single biggest deterrent to growing in Christ, as it serves to place Christians in a cradle of infancy in their faith.

For this reason and more, throughout history, God has repeatedly called a remnant, a small group of followers, to perpetuate His Purpose in their age. More truthfully, God calls all, but only a remnant responds. The Path, after all, is narrow. The great moves of God are routinely seen and entered into by a very few – often in opposition to the religious norms and “leaders” of the age.

But God is about His Purpose, restoring the Garden and more into the earth. This is the Habitat of every believer who would choose to follow Him. Christ will be all, and in all. This is the destiny. This is the reality. Eternity is now in Him. The Kingdom is here, and coming. He must and will increase. All else, including those who follow Him, must and will decrease.

Freedom is only real Freedom when It is lived in captivity to Another.

With these being fresh in our minds, if even not yet settled in our belief – let us move ahead, and continue... **The Walk...**

PART 4 - THE WALK

*"Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord,
so walk in Him." - Paul of Tarsus*

ONE PATH, MANY WALKS

If you've entered The Gate and perhaps see in part The Path before you, knowing Freedom is realized along Its Way – you may rightly ask, “How? How do I walk that out? What does it look like?”

At the risk of disappointing you, here is my answer...

...I don't know.

I just don't know, for you, and for everyone else. Your walk will be different from my walk. They will not look the same. But before you quit reading, counting our journey a waste of time, be encouraged.

While my walk will look different from your walk, and all others' walks – we all share the same Path, as a Person.

Do you hear my heart there? Jesus is your Path. He is my Path. He is The Path toward Life, Freedom. In Him and Him alone will you find It. He alone knows what the walk looks like for you, and how you will walk The Path out. And since He lives inside of you, and you have uninhibited access to Him, and can trust that He wants to be inquired of, and wants to show you how He can be your Life – you should rejoice!

Turning to Jesus as your Life *is* the summation of this Part. **He is *the* answer to the question, “How?” and every other question.** So, our practical discovery together will be centered on not “how” to walk The Path – but more on the mindsets and practices to turning to The Path Himself – to guide us along our walks.

KNOWING GOD'S VOICE

In order to relate to another person, one must be able to communicate with them. Of course, this can mean verbally but, as you likely know, it goes well beyond that. You have to know the “voice” of another to be in loving, respectful, healthy relationship with them.

We've said that beyond The Gate of Jesus, we are invited to walk The Path with Him. We are called to follow.

Therein lies much difficulty and confusion. It is extremely hard to follow something or someone that you can't see or hear. So it is for many in learning to follow their Lord.

Following Jesus is hard. We need eyes to see, and ears to hear.

It is the hearing Him that I'd like to dive into here, and explore some practical keys to understanding and discerning God's Voice.

Discernment involves not only knowing what *is* the Voice of God – but what is *not*. Is God speaking? Is Satan? Or is it just me? As we listen, how can we know which voice is speaking? How can we filter out the wrong voice, to focus on and listen to the Right One?

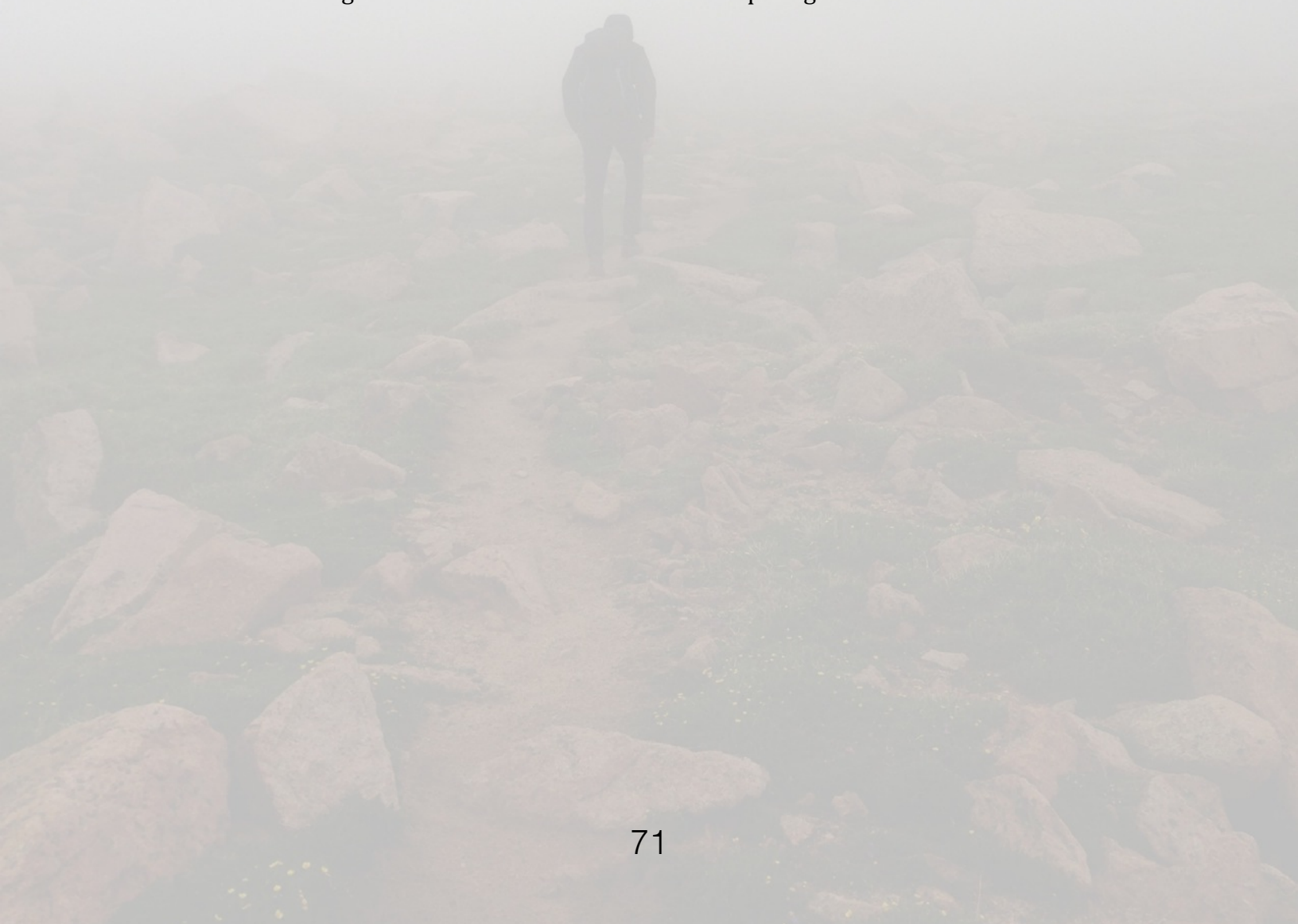
Consider the words of Jesus in John 10, the story of the shepherd and his sheep. Jesus tells a parable of sheep being led by a voice they know, and trust – the voice of their shepherd. The sheep are conditioned to only follow this voice. Strange voices are not followed, because they don't know these voices.

From an Eternal perspective, Jesus is showing us that He is not only The Gate by which we, His sheep enter into Life, and Life Abundantly; He is also the Good Shepherd along The Path. We are to know, trust and follow His Voice as He leads us.

In entering The Gate, then walking The Path of His Life, the sheep leave the old life... and old voices become "strange."

We become conditioned to hear His Voice above the voice of the enemy - the wolf, the thief, who comes to steal, kill and destroy - and our own, fleshly, old man voice.

Consider the following table of characteristics of these competing voices:



God (The Good Shepherd)	Satan (The Thief)	Self (The Sheep)
Loving, inviting	Driving, forcing	Desiring attention
Encourages	Intimidates, demands, threatens	Unreasonable expectations
Clear and specific	Exaggerating, vague, confusing	Over-analytical
Calls us by name, intimate	Derogatory, negative, critical	Self-promoting, or self-demeaning
Truthful	Lies, attacks, diminishes	Manipulative, controlling
Conviction of specific sin, offering Grace	Vague condemnation, blames	Justifies, rationalizes
Supernatural	Magic, mystical, tricks, spells, sensationalism	Reasons, uses logic
Hopeful, strong	Fearful, doubtful	Relies on self, prideful
Stretches you beyond natural ability	Limiting, "You can't"	Limiting to natural ability
Does not compare, celebrates uniqueness	Always compares	Compares to others, justifies based on others
Assures of having all we need, provides	There is never enough	Materialistic, self-sufficient
Wants you to trust Him only	Wants you to trust anything but God	Wants you to trust yourself
Wants all the Glory!	Wants all the Glory!	Wants all the Glory!

Thank you to [Fellowship of the Sword](#) for the inspiration behind this chart.

As you read those profiles, can you begin to “hear” these voices? Can you detect the differences?

Hearing and trusting God’s Voice starts with understanding and being unshakable in His character. He is Good, and His intentions toward you are Good. His Voice will always reflect that character.

His Voice is the one to trust, to listen to, to obey, to follow. There is no safer place than being led along The Path by your Good Shepherd.

Conversely, the voice of the devil will always come from his character, evil. He is the opposite of Good - he is evil. His intentions toward you are evil. His voice is the one to reject in the name of Jesus, and overcome as a Son of God. All Satan has are words. His words are lies. They accuse. They distort. They tempt.

They have no power over you in Christ. There is no need to battle him, or to fight him or his words. Victory is yours in Christ. Freedom is at hand. Rejecting the voice of the Thief means simply testifying to, and declaring that Victory.

The voice of our flesh will scramble to ascend the Throne. It is fed by the lust of the flesh and eyes, and the pride of life. They will be provoked by and encouraged by the voice of the enemy – because they will be set against the will of God, which is surrender, death to self, and the in-working of the Cross – The Path.

All of these voices have one thing in common – they all want ALL of the glory! But Glory is reserved for the Lord.

Growing in intimacy with Him allows hearing Him to become easier, more natural. It will feel and sound like conversation with your spouse, in Oneness, or with the closest friend. Conversation you love, and can trust.

Relational intimacy, Oneness with Jesus, our Good Shepherd - means trusting, knowing and following His voice alone, above all others. It is there we can hear. There we can see. There, we can Live in Grace, and He gets all the Glory.

SIN, SATAN AND SELF

In Living by Christ as Free, we are Overcomers. By His blood, and our Testimony of Jesus... we overcome.

Is the enemy only Satan? No. Overcoming does not confine itself to simply triumph over the devil. Our “enemy” goes beyond the demonic to include Sin and Self. All things contrary to Christ and His Life can ultimately be placed at the feet of Sin, Self or Satan.

We’ve seen how Sin is our enemy. We were born into its snare because of the Fall. Through The Gate, though, because we were crucified, buried, raised, ascended and seated with Christ, this enemy is defeated. We are to simply believe in the Truth of our being in Christ and Live.

The enemy, as Satan himself gets far too much credit, his power notwithstanding. But he has been defeated, and we can resist him.

“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

In our flesh, we are no match for angelic life, even fallen angelic life. But in Christ, we've seen we have only to Testify to our Victory in His finished work. Satan only has words. When we reject them to receive the Truth, he is powerless against us. Satan will most assuredly come with lies, accusations and temptations toward you. But you can, and are, encouraged to resist him. Did you notice what must happen *first* before we can resist, though? Submission. We submit to God, which is denying Self. There is order. We submit and *then*, having submitted to, received from, and Lived out of God's Life - resist Satan.

But what about Self? As an enemy, Self is not addressed nearly enough. This is the paradox of the Cross. Again, The Path is difficult, narrow, and few find it. The most glaring omission in Christianity is encouragement and exhortation along the lines of denying Self and taking up the Cross. As a result, **more than Sin or even Satan, Self is likely our most dangerous enemy.**

“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”

We more easily accept the blood of Jesus and our Testimony as keys to Overcoming. But not loving our lives – even to the point of death? Few go here. It's just too hard. Or, we are afraid of failure. Can I show you some Freedom? God is not caught off guard or upset when we fail. In many ways, He is waiting for us to fail in order for us to see how insufficient Self is, so that we may be reduced to Him alone. He increases, we decrease. The Grace of God is big enough to cover our failures, which God already knows full well. We simply must come to the end of ourselves, and acknowledge our weakness. It is here that Self is crucified, and He is made strong.

This is a significant key to Freedom, and Living His Life.

Do you “see” this? Looking at Self with natural eyes is pride. Pride is the only sin mentioned in Scripture with the additional warning attached that God actively opposes it. Looking at Self with spiritual eyes, eyes of faith, eyes of our heart – illuminates the reality of Self's disaster – the reality that the enemy of Self must die. God wants us to move from natural seeing to spiritual seeing – from looking at ourselves to “seeing” our Self, and crucifying it.

“Seeing” is Overcoming. “Seeing” is Freedom. When we see with the Lord's eyes, we can Live with His Life. When we “see” who we are, we know what to do. Christ has provided all we need to Overcome Sin, Self and Satan. We lack nothing. To Overcome, then, is to demonstrate the sufficiency and pre-eminence of Christ in us.

“See” that Christ over all things is our Freedom from Sin, Self and Satan.

FORGIVENESS

One of the most common spiritual forces that keeps Christians in bondage is unforgiveness. For many of us, a significant part of our life, journey, and even Testimony involves being hurt badly, by another person, persons or circumstances.

But holding on to this bitterness, these wounds, these hurts, this unforgiveness – leaves our hands closed and unable to receive Grace being offered to us from Father. We cannot receive Freedom because we are holding so tightly to slavery.

Hurt is generally the first negative emotion we feel. If unresolved, hurt escalates to guilt and shame. Then fear, anxiety, and insecurity. Then condemnation, sometimes from ourselves. Then bitterness and anger. When all of this piles up, our cup runs over, literally. Sin spills forth from our cup of emotions because we have allowed these negative feelings and wounds to stay there. Your wounds, of course, are not your sin. But they are not an excuse to allow sin to bubble out of your cup as a result of unresolved unforgiveness from those wounds.

We need to empty our cup.

How? Forgiveness.

“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

What’s fascinating about this passage is that the original language has three different translations for our English word “forgiveness.” The first kind speaks to the unconditional forgiveness from God: Grace. This is not the kind spoken of here in this Verse. You have that. God has forgiven you. Nothing can take that away.

Sometimes, a significant element of forgiveness is forgiving yourself. Walking in Grace is walking without condemnation, without the yoke of guilt and shame and unforgiveness over yourself. This must be received in faith to be Free.

But the other two kinds of “forgiveness” speak to a “gaining of liberty or freedom,” and of “being set loose or free.” Wow. These are the kinds of “forgiveness” referenced above.

Do you want to be Free? Forgive and gain liberty. Do you want to be released from bondage? Offer forgiveness, set loose those chains, and be set Free.

Forgiveness is for you, for *your* Freedom.

How many times should this be done? 70 times 7. In other words, as often as it takes. If you’ve previously forgiven someone who has hurt you, but you feel those wounds fresh, that pain anew, that anger rising – offer up that forgiveness again and again.

Do you know that many physical illnesses are rooted in spiritual issues? **Cancer, for example, while complex and obviously difficult to understand, has been traced in some studies to an unresolved bitterness or unforgiveness.** When they say that not forgiving is like swallowing poison, hoping the offender dies – it is truer than you might think.

Forgive, again and again, and be Free.

CONFESSION

Confession unlocked the doors of my prison, opening up Freedom to me. When I was living in sin, I was living in *secret, private* sin. I asked the Lord for forgiveness, and knew I was forgiven, but vowed to keep it there. No one else could know my darkness.

I lived in this cage for many years. Finally, I said yes to the conviction of Holy Spirit, and brought to light via confession to those I had wronged, and to other Brothers and Sisters to whom I knew I could entrust my heart.

An interesting thing happens in the spiritual when confession is made to another person. Healing. Freedom.

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

This is one of those passages where we do well to *“be doers of the Word, and not just hearers.”* We confess to God for forgiveness and, in doing so, simply agree with Him and receive what He’s already offered. But that is not always enough for healing. This requires bringing sin to light, exposing it, so that it cannot remain in darkness. When we speak our sin, it becomes loosed, and we can be set free. Darkness cannot remain where there is Light. This is what happens in confessing sin one to another.

Then, we pray. The laying on of hands, and prayer of righteous saints avails much. Healing happens here. Freedom happens here. Healing breaks down strongholds and prevents momentum back toward them.

I am not suggesting every sin we commit needs to be immediately confessed to another person. You don’t need to run someone down every time you sin in order to be healed. In my experience, as you walk The Path, and grow into the likeness of Christ, God, through the Holy Spirit, will highlight for you through conviction, areas of your life that need, *ahem*, attention. Going back to the Voice of God, we learned that this will be gentle, but specific. This is your signal to sit with the Lord and listen to what He has to show you about this area of your life. In this moment, confessing to Him, and agreeing with Him over needed repentance (change of mind) and adjustment may be all He has for you.

But, as He gently and specifically prompted conviction over awareness of your sin, He may additionally gently and specifically prompt confession to another person(s). Again, this is your signal. Simply say, “Yes” to Him. Go to the specific individuals to whom He has prompted you to make your confession public, or if not a specific person, to one or more of your closest Brothers or Sisters in Christ, and confess. Freedom is the ability to raise your hand and be transparent before another, calling your sin a sin. The Freedom is in the transparency *about* the sin, notice, not the absence *of* the sin.

This usually does not look like elicit details. God is looking for you to call your sin what He calls it. Lust, Adultery, Pride, etc. However, I would encourage you to seek the Lord for the root of the sin. So often, we easily can identify and thus confess “leaves and branches” sin. The enemy would love nothing more than for you to simply get at these leaves and branches, confessing over and over – but never being Free because the root is strong and healthy. We can chop these leaves and branches off, but they too often grow back – stronger. The goal is to get to the bottom, the root. You can’t do this on your own, but Holy Spirit wants to reveal it to you, and will when you seek Him.

Light defeats darkness and protects Freedom. Expose these root sins to the Light, thank the Lord for His forgiveness, and then ask the person(s) you confessed to, to pray over you. Ideally, this prayer would thank God for opening your eyes to receiving the *opposite* of that which was just confessed. For example: Purity, Faithfulness, Humility, etc.

There is Freedom in healing, which is received via prayer from righteous men and women following confessing sin one to another. If God has put His finger on some area of your life, bring it out of the darkness where it wants to stay and grow, and into His glorious Light where its chains are broken.

DISOBEDIENCE

Obedience unlocks Freedom. Saying “Yes” to God flings the door wide open to the things of Him. **The Freedom you live in is proportionate to the *obedience* you live in.**

Conversely, disobedience locks the door. The cage of slavery you may have erected for yourself is surely shut if you fail to say “Yes” to the Lord.

Did you know the Holy Spirit has emotions? As He dwells in you, He lives, and as He lives, He experiences feelings and emotions. One of these emotions is grief. The chief work of Holy Spirit is to point you to Jesus. In effect, Holy Spirit helps light The Path as we walk out following Him. Through conviction, promptings, confirmation and comfort, The Spirit leads us down The Path, toward Life.

When we are veering from The Path, Holy Spirit sends us signals to warn us. This is our cue for obedience. Spirit leads us to the Leader, Whom we are to be following. To follow requires seeking, asking, listening, hearing and obeying. When we do not follow well, when we disobey that which we know Spirit has led us to do – Holy Spirit is grieved.

What if depression is sometimes a manifestation of a grieved Holy Spirit? He is jealous for your affections and obedience. When these are not returned, His grief is physically *felt*.

Some of you have no idea any more what the Voice of God sounds like. You haven’t heard or felt the Holy Spirit in your life in a long time.

Perhaps He is grieving due to a lack of obedience?

If this is you, be honest with God (and thus, Holy Spirit). Confess and repent of your disobedience. Ask Him to bring to your mind the last thing you were asked to obey, and if that is still what He would have you do. Return to that, and this time, say, “Yes.”

In that moment of turning and obeying - Freedom is right there.

GOD’S WILL FOR YOUR LIFE

In seeking to be obedient, many will earnestly desire to know, and follow God’s Will for their lives. Perhaps you’ve been taught, and believe that God has a perfect Will for your personal life – and your duty is to find it, and walk in it. You think there you will be Free. But if you miss His Will? Not Free.

The belief that God's Will is so narrow for each of us can have a very negative effect on our Freedom. When we live in such a way as continually guessing, deciphering, doubting, questioning, second-guessing every little move we make as to whether it falls within some precise directional arrow from the Lord – we are chained.

It is true that God has a Will. We've already spent much time looking at this glorious Will - remember the Eternal Purpose? That's it. Everything God has done, is doing, and will do is toward the end of the pre-eminence of Christ in all things. This Purpose, or Will, includes you, yes. But as we've seen, this is a gift of Freedom, not bondage. If you are being formed in the likeness of Christ - He is increasing, and you are decreasing - you are in God's Will. If you are Living from the Royal Law of Love, which is the Law of Life and Christ, to the exclusion of other Laws available to you to live from - you are in God's Will.

You need not be held captive by waiting on God for every decision you make in life, for desire to do His Will. If what you are considering engaging in is Loving (serving another to the sacrifice of yourself), if it moves you into a posture of more of Christ and less of you, if it serves to reveal and manifest the Body, the Bride, the House and the Family – then friend, it is IN God's Will for you.

His Will is not narrow, like a track. It is true, that The Path *is* narrow – that is to say that following Jesus toward Life is a difficult Path that few find. **But the Will of God for you within walking that Path gives much Liberty.** Consider the Garden. Adam and Eve could *Freely* go and do and choose and decide. They had boundaries, yes, in fact, only one boundary. But within that boundary was offered much Freedom of choice, all of which was captured in the Will of God.

The Good Shepherd *leads* His sheep, yes, and we are to know and follow His Voice. He leads them away from danger and death – there *are* boundaries. But He leads them into *pasture*, where there is room to roam and run and make decisions using His given creativities and personalities. Inside the pasture is *inside* God's Will. Inside the pasture of God's Will, there are decisions and choices we are all Free to make – that all have God-honoring potential.

As you learn and listen to and follow the Voice of the Lord, you will better and better discern when you are being led inside His Will, into pasture. This leading will be from Love, and will have inward thoughts or impressions by Holy Spirit, that can be outwardly testified to by Scripture.

Parents have a will for their children. They desire them to stay safe, to be honoring, to grow into and live out of who they were uniquely created to be, and to make a meaningful contribution to their age. This is the will, and these are the boundaries. As babies and youngsters, children are given much instruction to inform and reinforce these boundaries. But as the children grow older and mature, good parents allow their children to have more liberty in making decisions, and even mistakes, to grow their character.

It is similar with God's Will for us. As babies in the faith, we learn His boundaries. As maturing Sons, we have Freedom within those boundaries to rule and reign, reflecting His mind and His Purpose.

SEEK WISDOM

Being Free in the pasture, you will still encounter many “big” life decisions, all of which you are Free to make your own choice about. When you are in the pasture of God’s moral Will, most choices you make from that Freedom can honor God. But they may not all be *wise*. For questions in life that are not of a moral nature, which God has already promised to lead us in to - **we must rely on wisdom**. Thankfully, He has promised this as well.

“...If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting...”

In faith we ask, and in faith we receive. **Jesus Himself is our Wisdom**. In depending on Him for Life, we may discern and make righteous judgments – even without receiving specific, supernatural “words” or instruction from Him. As fellowship is spent with Jesus, His Life within becomes more recognizable, inwardly and outwardly – and decisions made from the Wisdom of that abiding will not only be in God’s Will, but also bear the most fruit.

GOD’S COMMANDS?

I phrased that as a question on purpose. **Does God “command” anything of us, really?**

This word is used plenty in Scripture, and yes, it is often tied to God, or Jesus. The most recognized perhaps being that of The Ten *Commandments* or The Great *Commandment*. But I question whether our usual thinking of commands and commandments, and what they mean – really line up with the character and nature of God.

We’ve already seen that God is Good, and His intentions toward us are Good. God is Love. Love is *who He is*. Jesus came to show who the Father, God, is.

Does Love “command” anything? Is it still Loving to “command” someone toward an action or belief or behavior? You could argue that commanding, and giving commandments is activity akin to a tyrant. And God is not a tyrant. If God is a tyrant, then we can never be Free.

Instead, He is a Father, and invites us into His nature of Love, as Free Sons. It is in this pattern that I believe we have seen the “commands” of God through too small a lens. They are less an order, or forced direction – and are more an invitation toward something Good.

The Ten Commandments were very simply the “words” of God to His people. These words were given as advice for godly living. When Jesus came, He fulfilled all the Law, not only those 10, but the other 603 as well. His “Commandment” was this:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

He said this was the first, and greatest “commandment,” and that to love your neighbor as yourself is like it. He said that everything written in the Law and the Prophets could be summed up in this.

The “Commandments” are summed up in one thing, which is One Person, Jesus, who is Love.

When Jesus speaks of this “command,” the word carries a meaning of “authoritative prescription.” **Jesus is, from Love, inviting us to take a prescribed medicine that will heal us of all things.** He invites us to Love, Himself and others. He does not force this. We are not *made* to take this invitation or prescription, despite the authority from which it is offered.

True Love always leaves room to be rejected.

So, sure, God and Jesus “command.” But these are not orders against our will or not for our good. These are prescriptive invitations from Love, for Love – for our Good, and Their Glory.

LEGALISM, LIBERTINISM AND FREEDOM

Walking The Path is not directed by rules and regulations. If we try to please God by staying in line with a man-fashioned bunch of these, managing our sin and conduct in our earnestness to please Him, we are in slavery to Legalism, and not Free.

Legalism often produces judgmentalism, which looks down upon everyone else, who may not be living up to the high standard we feel like God has set for us – and that we ourselves are living by. This approach feeds the will, our own ability to be right with God, and ultimately feeds only the flesh, the Self.

Walking The Path, conversely, is not the complete absence of the *prescription* of a Godly lifestyle. If we live in such a way as to abuse Grace, that is to say, since we are under God’s Grace, what we ultimately do or say or think does not matter in this life – then we are in slavery to Libertinism, and not Free.

Libertinism is a watered down faith, a mental ascent of belief in Jesus, which leads to living life out of our own effort to do the best we can, while really only serving to feed the flesh, the Self. The Voice of God and the promptings of Holy Spirit are muzzled, and ultimately, this approach of “anything goes” leads to much bondage and grief.

The Path is neither of these, it is instead Forward, it is Freedom, Christ. **Freedom is an altogether different Life, a new creation.** In this new creation we realize we *are* right with God, and He *is* pleased with us. Therefore, there is no desire to receive His instructions as demands, and place them on others. In this new creation we realize, *also*, that His invitations to His Life are for *our* Freedom and *His* glory and Purpose, and so we submit to this, in captivity, to be Free. We leave the world, our Self, the Law of Moses (legal), the Law of Death (libertine), and enter the Law of Life (Christ) and His Kingdom.

Freedom is a renewed mind, which knows we are a part of a new creation. Jesus Christ lives in us, and we live in Him. Our old, fallen, flesh nature is dead. It was crucified with Him. We have been raised and seated with Him in heavenly places, with a heavenly nature, having put off the old. Therefore, our conduct can be not our own, but His – a Higher Life indwelling.

Therefore, Live like it.

This Life is a Life of Freedom, rooted in the identity of Jesus. It sets us Free from being good. It also sets us Free from doing bad. It sets us Free *to* an abiding fellowship with the Lord of all – who is our Freedom.

RECEIVING WHAT WE HAVE

We've spoken much of this identity we have in Christ, early on, and just now. So much of Freedom is realized in apprehending just *who* we have been set Free to be. Much of the Christian life, and the realization of its Freedom, is receiving what we already have.

Or, this Life of Freedom is becoming who you already are.

Paul's letters continually reminded his readers, the early Church and believers, who they were in Christ. Often, Paul was addressing a specific issue or problem within a local gathering. But he would never address these head on. Instead, he began with reminding these saints who they were.

He continually edified them to receive what they had – to act like who they really were. We must also continually edify one another in this regard. It is too easy, and too often that we allow the natural, flesh, Self to order our opinion and receipt over our identity. We need each other. We need to remind each other the Truth. This is the essence of "*speaking the Truth in Love.*" Not a command of judgment, but an invitation to speak Life into one another, that we may be reminded of our worth in Him.

What does it mean to *receive*? It means to agree by faith with what God has said. **There is a chasm of difference between mental, human acknowledgement, and spiritual, eternal agreement or receiving.** One can say in their mind and with their mouth that they are a forgiven Son of God, and are worthy and loved. But when this moves from the mind into the spirit, is said from the heart, with faith, and is acknowledged as a Testimony of words – receipt has taken place.

I was sitting outside on a cliff overlooking a river a few years ago, alone with God when He said, "*Brandon, you are my Son. I love you, and am proud of you. Can you receive that? Can you receive Me?*"

It wasn't until I could say in faith, "Yes! I *receive* that, and You," that I tasted the Freedom at hand. The Freedom was there within me. I *was already* a Son. I *was already* loved. He *was already* proud of me. I just hadn't agreed with it, and Him...*yet*. When I agreed, by receiving what He had long ago, before time, said was True, I *received* what I already had. Does that make sense? I hope so.

What do you have that you haven't *received*?

THE KEY

I'm about to share with you what I consider to be probably the most significant piece of this Freedom puzzle I've learned. This is the key that unlocks the door to most of what we have been talking about.

While, particularly in this Part, I am doing my best to be as practical as possible in laying out some principles for Free Living, admittedly, it is an impossible task, and one that, no matter how well I paint a picture, or attempt to inspire – will fall far short of exhausting the full subject. The reason? I can't, nor can any other person, move you to a place of "less of you, and more of Him." We've said that this sums up the essence of Freedom. "Not I, but Christ" is the secret. And no one can take you there. Only you can do that, and it is truly the only *doing* that you are invited in to by God.

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

There is the key. Do you see it?

"By Faith."

To be Free is to live not by your Self, or an old Law of bondage – but it is to Live by Christ and the Law of Life. How? By faith that this is true. Though we remain in the flesh in appearance in this life, by faith, we move from temporal to eternal in all things, and Live the Life of Another.

By faith, we receive that we have been crucified, buried, raised, ascended and seated with Christ. By faith, we see the Eternal Purpose. By faith, we eat of the Tree of Life and thus receive the Highest Life in us. By faith, we live not for a future heaven, but *in* a present and coming Kingdom. By faith, all idols fall as we take our eyes off of them and affix them to the One. By faith, we know our identity as Sons and Daughters. We know our place at the Table as Priests and Kings. By faith, we know it is finished. The work and the fight are done. By faith, we rest, dependent upon our Vine. By faith, we know God is Good.

By faith, we *enter in* through The Gate. By faith, we *continue on*, walking The Path with Jesus. By faith, we receive the saving side of Christ's Cross, and by faith, we embrace the carrying side of *our* Cross. By faith, we engage trials with joy, knowing they serve to make us complete, lacking nothing. By faith, we the Remnant, follow the Leader outside the camp into the Habitat of His Life.

By faith, we walk. By faith, we hear God's Voice, know it, and follow it. By faith, we Overcome sin, Self and Satan. By faith, we forgive and are set Free. By faith, we confess and are healed. By faith, we obey. By faith, we know God's Will and access His Wisdom. By faith, we RSVP "yes" to His prescriptive invitation to Love. By faith, we choose Liberty over Legalism and Libertinism. By faith, we receive what we already have.

By faith, He is increased. By faith, we are decreased. By faith, we are Free.

Faith is the key. *"Without faith, it is impossible to please God."* But with faith, *"all things are possible."*

Faith moves mountains into the sea. Faith makes nothing impossible. Faith answers prayer. Faith activates signs and wonders. Faith satisfies God's righteous requirements. Faith unlocks salvation. Faith overcomes the world.

If you are to realize Freedom from anything revealed to you thus far, or ever, or at any point in the future - you must realize it by faith.

This Walk we are on, the one taking us along this Path toward Life? *"We walk (It) by faith."* The same faith that brought you through The Gate, takes you down The Path, and supplies what you need for the Walk. We've been after Life, the Life of God that is along The Path and at the end of Its road.

Life is received by faith.

So what is faith, then? As critical as it is - the key as we've said - how do we define it and act upon it?

"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

We are given this in Scripture, of course, but how do we receive this? Faith comes first by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Jesus Himself supplies our faith. Receiving faith, then, is itself an act of agreement with what God has done and is doing. We act upon a spiritual sense from Another Place, depending upon the Tree of Life. It is a knowing, even when we don't know.

Jesus seems to use faith and belief interchangeably, and often in Scripture. He is both seen rebuking for a lack of faith/belief, and rejoicing for a demonstration of faith/belief. Interestingly, it was usually those who were not presently following Him that exhibited this faith. It was the outcast, the blind, the beggar, the bleeding, the sick, the lame, the lost, the orphan, and the poor. Those closest to Jesus struggled with belief, even though they were the ones who saw His Glory up close and in person.

Nevertheless, Jesus stated that belief was the only requirement of the Father - that *"we would believe in Him whom He has sent."*

If you study the words faith, faithfulness, believe and belief as used throughout Scripture, you will find that at its core, faith and belief are this... **Trust.**

The Lord is Faithful. He is Trustworthy in all He is and does. He has firm adherence to steadfast devotion to us. He is uncompromising in His faithfulness, and we can trust, and have reliance upon that, and Him.

Our faith, then, is firm adherence to steadfast devotion to God. We uncompromisingly trust and rely upon Him. We trust that God is who He says He is and that He will do what He says He will do. Of this we have assurance and confidence, no matter our circumstances.

Faith and belief in this way define *relationship*. Freedom is not a religion; it is relationship of Love with Father, Son and Spirit. A marriage cannot be healthy, cannot be Free where Trust is lacking. It is the same in our eternal relationship with the Triune God. Trust lives in the intersection of God's unswerving commitment to us, *and* our unswerving commitment to Him.

Faith is less something you can do, and more a trust posture to die into.

Did you ever play the “Trust Game” as a kid? This is the one where you stand, back to a “trusted friend” and without looking or bracing yourself, fall backwards and “Trust” that they are going to catch you. You can “believe” all you want in your mind that this person is indeed standing behind you, and will keep you from hurting yourself. But letting go and falling back? That’s *Belief*. Trust is knowing all the bad things that *could* happen – they are not trustworthy at all, they may drop you, what if they are not looking, etc. etc. – and falling backwards *anyways*. The difference is that God never drops you. He is always looking. He is Trustworthy.

Faith then, is - knowing all the intellectual, emotional, physical, rational, etc. reasons *not* to believe – and trusting God *anyway*. Freedom is in walking through the questioning and doubting of your faith, of God, of Spiritual things – finding God in the midst of these – and trusting to walk *with Him* through them to the other side, with faith. God can handle your doubt and fears and questions. In fact, He desires to enter into those with you. It is there that you will find Him unswerving in His steadfast devotion, and belief is built.

As you’re picturing this “Trust Game,” visualize the body posture you would normally take to fall backward. Upright, erect, arms outstretched to the side. Remind you of anything? This is how the body hangs on a Cross.

To Trust is to die. To Trust is to fall; to be crucified and buried. To Trust then, yields resurrection, and new Life.

The bottom line is that we all “believe” in something, or someone. This is true for natural, as well as Spiritual things. If you are alive, you have belief, whether you acknowledge it or not. The remaining question then is if your belief is counterfeit, or True. Freedom is a reality of being that requires faith that it is True. If you are in Christ, you are Free – you just may not be Living Free because your belief is pointed in the wrong direction, at the wrong things. Faith does not make you Free, but lack of Faith will keep you from realizing that Freedom. Only in pointing our faith, belief and trust toward Jesus is the reality of Freedom fully uncovered for us.

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Freedom.”

This is true, whether you realize it, or believe it or not. A “free” man can walk into a jail cell and close and lock the door behind him if he wants, but this does not change the nature of his being “free.” Was Peter Free as he sat shackled in the cell of a dungeon? He was. When you can see beyond your physical, temporal circumstances into the eternal realities of the things of God, you see Freedom. If you are in the Lord, His Spirit is in you, and where His Spirit is, so too is Freedom. Freedom, then, is within you.

“Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”

Belief is the key that lifts the veil from your eyes so that you can “see.”

When we *“walk by faith, not by sight,”* we see not with our natural, fallen, fleshly eyes – but with the eyes of our heart. We see as the Lord sees. We see, therefore we Overcome. We see, therefore are Free. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. He is simultaneously both the Beginning, and the End. We cannot fathom this with natural eyes. But with vision, His vision, we see the beginning from the end. The end includes you, friend, Free and seated with Him in glory. Freedom in Life now, then, is appropriating, by faith, that reality as truth, now.

How can one expose a counterfeit object of belief? Only by a revelation of Christ. When He is beheld in His glory, when we are looking for and seeing Truth, the lies and deception of the counterfeit pales in comparison.

If faith is how we walk, then sight, natural sight, is the opposite of how we are to walk. Where we see in the flesh, we doubt, we worry, we fear. Physical sight is opposed to spiritual seeing, which is faith. Physical sight yields fear, which is the opposite of faith.

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“Fear is not real. The only place that fear can exist is in our thoughts of the future. It is a product of our imagination, causing us to fear things that do not at present and may not ever exist. That is near insanity Kitai. Do not misunderstand me, danger is very real, but **fear is a choice**. We are all telling ourselves a story and that day mine changed.” – Cypher Raige, to his son Kitai

This quote appears in the movie *After Earth* with Will Smith. Do you hear Jesus in that? I did. I love when Jesus invades the seemingly meaningless and temporal, to reveal Meaning and the Eternal.

- Fear is not real.
- It can only exist in our thoughts,
- about future events that may, or may not occur,
- as a product of our imagination.
- This is likened to being insane.
- Danger is real.
- But, fear is a choice.
- We are all telling ourselves a story, choosing how we respond to perceived danger,
- and we can change how we choose.

“Fear” may indeed be “real,” but like so many things, misunderstood. I think most of us approach the concept of “fear” from the definition of *an unpleasant emotion from the threat of danger, pain or harm*. And I think this is the “fear” that Smith’s character was speaking to.

So many of us are in bondage to this fear. It may not present to us as a response to a physical crisis, an attack, an accident, or intense war of some kind. But how many dreams die on the sword of fear? How many lives go unfulfilled because of fear? How many times is a “yes” to the voice of God inside never said – because of a “yes” to a fearful voice inside instead?

We are all telling ourselves a story... We are all listening to voices. What story, and what voice are we obeying?

Sadly, too often the Story and Voice is not the One who said, *“Do not worry about your life, or tomorrow, or your welfare, or what you will wear, or what you have to eat. Trust in My Life in you, and abide.”*

Someone once told me that there are 365 Scripture verses (one for every day of the year) that say some variation of “*Do NOT fear.*” Depending on translations, that may or may not be true – but a brief word search revealed that there are indeed many more references to “fear” than 365 – and yes, many, many of those are couched in the theme of “*Do NOT,*” or “*Have NO.*” The others reference “Fear” of the Lord, which we too often wrongly assign the limited *emotion from threat of pain* definition.

Holy Spirit is indeed extremely interested in our posture toward fear.

We indeed have a choice - between two “fears” - one false, one True:

- We can choose to reject the lie of fear that is our flesh response to a perceived unpleasantness.
- And, We can choose to crucify that flesh, and Live by the Spirit in a state of True Fear – which is reverence and awe for God’s Love.

When we worry, are anxious, or live in fear – of anything – we are responding from the flesh in unbelief. Instead, when we can rest and Live from the Love that indwells us – in a LIFE-style of worship – then we are choosing to believe and trust God’s Goodness, His Sovereignty, His Lordship, His Protection, His Provision, His Plan, His Love...

...And THAT is the only Fear we *should* choose. And in choosing wisely, fear is indeed not real, and Fear becomes our Life and our comfort.

In the movie, choosing to reject fear (the negative one), was known as “*Ghosting.*”

Interesting... *Ghost.* Some have used that term to describe a Person *Holy*, Who lives in us. Choosing Him is Living by the Spirit, where we are not given over to fear – but to Power, Love and a Sound Mind... Fear.

Cypher Raige’s story that he was telling himself (hearing and listening to) changed that day. He changed his mind. That is repentance. His mind... became Sound – free of fear. He quit believing the lie.

He changed where he placed his faith, belief...trust. Thus, he realized Freedom from fear.

Like Cypher, we must change our minds about fear. When we choose fear, we make an agreement with a lie – a lie that tells us we are not cared for or protected or right where we should be. This agreement places faith in that lie, as all faith (right and wrong) must have an object. Agreement with fear, the lie, is faith in the Liar – Satan.

Fear (the kind we should choose) is faith in the Lord. It is responding to His reality. “*Perfect Love drives out all fear.*” God is Love. Beholding the Lord and His Love leaves no room for fear to remain. His reality is Love, and it is Love we choose in Fear.

What we fear, we worship. What we worship, we become like. Those closest to God, Fear Him most, and most reveal His Kingdom.

Let us not allow fear to steal our crown. Let us Holy *Ghost*. Let us reject the lie of fear; and choose the Truth of Fear.

In doing so, *After Earth* (Heaven), will be revealed.

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The heroes of faith in the Bible were not heroes just because of what they *did*. They were heroes of faith, heroes because of what they *believed*. They ultimately, despite seeing and rationalizing all the negative outcomes that were possible, and without knowing how or why, placed their *trust* in the Lord. In doing so, they exercised faith; they put Love in action, and were proven Free.

You have the same hero capability in you that they did. They were no different. They had nothing more than you have, and in some cases, had less, as the Holy Spirit was not yet indwelling for them. What they had was faith, and they received it and exercised it. Faith works by Love. These heroes received Love, and responded to It.

Do likewise. Be a hero. Be Free.

The key to Freedom is within you by faith. Faith is walking out Love along The Path. Belief, the kind that yields Freedom, cannot share its affection. We often want to make belief, and following Jesus down The Path about *us*. When we do this, our gaze is on the wrong person. We must look up from ourselves and ahead toward Him. Freedom is where surrender sets its eyes on Him to whom we are submitted. Freedom is lived from in increasing proportions when you can move from knowing *what* you believe, to knowing *why* you believe, to finally know *WHOM* you believe – and never looking up from Him.

*“My eyes are ever on the Lord,
for only he will release my feet from the snare.”*

He is the Author of that faith. He is the Perfecter of that faith. Fix your eyes, know *WHOM*, and be Free.

GRACE IS FREEDOM IS CHRIST

You may be somewhat overwhelmed at this point. I’ve spent thirty-five thousand words attempting to uncover the elements of stepping into, remaining in, and growing in Freedom, and then I *just* hit you with twenty-five hundred more words summing it up to faith, the kind of faith the Heroes of it had. Perhaps it all feels a little bit out of your reach?

I understand. Take a deep breath; I’ve got good news... There’s Grace for that.

The truth is, it *is* out of your reach. Kind of. You see, **Christ is the fullness of Grace. He is Grace personified.** If you have Him, you have Him because in the Grace of God, He was given, and you received Him in faith. You could not go *get* Jesus, Grace, on your own. He’s out of your reach. But you *received* Him, by Grace, through faith.

God *gives* Grace, as unmerited favor and mercy - as a free gift. Christ *is* Grace, as the power of God - and He lives inside of you.

Grace as Divine power is, by definition, that which you cannot do on your own. It's outside of your reach. So how do you obtain it? You probably guessed... By faith. Grace is Freedom.

Freedom is within. You have Grace. You have Freedom. Christ within is both. It's less something to *get*, and more a present reality to *grasp*. Reckon. Believe. Trust. Grace within can be a transforming reality when submitted to. The power of God inside of you is an untold glory to behold! Faith is the portal that gets you there.

By Grace through faith you walk through The Gate and are saved. By Grace through faith you walk The Path and are sanctified. By Grace through faith you realize Freedom and significance - the co-rule and co-reign with Jesus, in His present and coming Kingdom.

Grace allows you to see things the way they were, are and will be from God's way of seeing; so that you can be who God called you to be; to do what God has called you to do; to bring the glory to God that you were created to bring to Him in His Eternal Purpose.

Grace is the favor that empowers us to be what we cannot be on our own. He is increased, and we are decreased. Grace grows and, so too, does Freedom. As there is no shortage of Christ - He is unsearchable in His riches, we cannot get to the bottom of Him - so too, is Grace and so too, is Freedom. As we grow in Christ, as He is increased, we grow in Grace, and we grow in Freedom. There is an everlasting Source and Supply. By faith we access it. By faith we steward it. By faith we receive more and more.

Christ is our Freedom. He supplies our Freedom. He sustains our Freedom. He grows our Freedom. All of this is done in a relationship of trust, which is faith, by Grace.

ABIDE

The Grace of God, as His unmerited favor and mercy, has freely given us access, by *initial* faith, to *more* of His Grace, the power of God. This additional Grace is also accessed by faith, and is best realized through abiding.

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

A branch apart from its vine dries up and dies. It is fruitless. Unless a branch abides on its vine, it will have no life.

Christ, is The Vine. We are in Him, as branches, and He is in us, as Life. A Christian who, for any length of time, attempts to derive their life from any other source but their Vine, is dying - is not Free. The very nature of a Vine-abiding branch, though, is not to die, but to grow, to have life. If we abide in Christ, we can't help but grow. We can't help but have Life. We can't help but bear fruit. **We can't help but be Free.**

There *will* be growing along The Path. It is a process of growth all of our days. But this is not dependent on time along The Path. It is not a reward for years of faithful following. It is not a result of behavior or conduct or feelings. It is, instead, a matter of eternal reality, and abiding therein.

As a branch on The Vine, we have the Life of the Vine. All of It flows from Him, into us. As the branch rests and trusts in the Vine to produce its Supply and Source, the branch is allowing the increase of the Vine. There is nothing to be done to speed up this process – it will happen naturally at the giving of the Vine.

But we can certainly hinder, quench, delay or otherwise thwart this process. And therein realize less than Freedom. If at any point a branch is looking elsewhere for Supply and Source, it ceases to Abide and receive Supply and Source from the Vine. This free choice of wrong belief and misplaced trust, in this way, removes them from the Life of the Vine, and the Vinedresser cuts them off. Life, Freedom stops flowing until abiding begins again.

When Jesus is your Food and Drink, you will grow, and you will be Free. If you eat of any other tree, you will die for lack of Life, and be in slavery.

Freedom is not the growth. The Vine supplies the growth, it is His work. No, the **Freedom happens in the moment of abiding**, which *allows* for the growth and Life of the Vine to come.

Trusting, dying to Self, resting, waiting, seeking, asking, knocking, hoping, turning to, beholding, looking for, submitting, surrendering... The Cross we carry... The Path we walk... These are abiding. In these, Freedom is realized. Out of abiding, Growth and Life flow from the Grace of the Vine.

Abiding requires a total commitment, no looking back.

“Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Abiding makes The Vine a singular focus. Abiding eliminates distractions. Ask of all things in your life, “Is this leading me further into Christ?” If yes - continue and abide and grow. If not – let it go – or it will ultimately lead to your branch being broken off.

We become what we abide in. **We become what we worship.** Abiding, at its core, is ultimately worship.

WORSHIP

Worship.

Whether we realize it or not, we all do it. We all worship something or someone. We all give our adoration and honor and even our lives to an object to which we ascribe preeminent worth.

In the Christian world, we would say that we worship God, or hopefully more specifically, Jesus Christ. Mostly, we do this by “going to” or “attending” *worship*, in which *worship* is the part of “church” where we sing.

Common vocabulary often reveals that this is the predominant belief as well. But worship is so much more than something to be attended. Worship is far more than the singing of songs, which is better defined as praise.

Praise *can be an element* of worship, but worship is not exclusively praise. When you are offering songs of praise to the Lord, by yourself or gathered with other believers, you *could be* bringing an offering of thanks and praise to Him. Or, *you could just be singing words on a screen.*

As with most things, it’s about your heart posture.

“Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name.”

A heart of thanksgiving moves us beyond the threshold of the gates of the Lord. That thanks expressed in praise carries us further into His courts.

But to enter the Holy of Holies, to know the Presence of the Lord in Its fullness, is a deeper thing than even thanksgiving and praise. This Fullness moves beyond the expression of what has been done *for us*, into an expression of awe simply because of *Who He Is*. It requires more than a response of thankfulness and song that can be conjured up in our strength. It requires something more than we have to give.

It requires sacrifice. It requires loss. It requires death.

The Eternal Purpose of God is to have us, His creation, for Himself – as a Body, a Bride, a Family and a House. These involve making ministering *to the Lord*, blessing *Him* – our response out of His first Love of us. By Him, all things were created for His pleasure and glory. You are made by God, for God – to love Him and minister to Him forever. God longs for us to come to Him for Himself, instead of only for what He has done, or can do, for us.

Can you see the distinction? The difficulty? The... impossibility? To love the Lord in this way cannot be done. We try, we really do. We are a culture of Martha’s, working ourselves to the bone with the sincerest of intentions, to *do* something for God. We thank. We praise. We serve. We do. And these are all *good*. But Jesus is sitting in the other room, beckoning our *being* with Him – to empty our jars of oil and perfume and tears upon Him... in *worship*.

What Mary had realized in that room was that loving the Lord could not be done in her flesh. She had to die to that, allowing His Love of her to Live through her, back to Him, and into the world. This is the death that is required, the sacrifice and offering that *is* worship.

The Lord is Spirit. The Lord is Truth. The Lord is seeking worshippers who worship Him in Spirit and in Truth. It is possible to work and serve and do and thank and praise in our flesh. But:

“...No flesh should glory in His presence.”

To Love and to Be and to *Worship* requires Living from Another within – Living by the Spirit and the Truth who indwells us. It requires abiding.

This is *“presenting ourselves as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God – our spiritual service of worship.”*

This Divine Fellowship in which we Live and move and find our being – exists in a continual state of worship. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are continuously pouring out Their worship upon one another. **We are invited to join in. To be there. With Them. In Them. One with Them.** To realize this unity is to submit to the rhythm of Their worship. It is to Live Their Life.

This Life will be expressed through us into the world. Since this Life is Love, *is* Worship, this means when we are sacrificed in our flesh, and submitted to Live by this Life – everything we do can be a spiritual service of worship.

- Can you worship the Lord without words, in silence?
- Can you worship the Lord while sleeping?
- Can you worship the Lord in your first waking, conscious moments in bed?
- Can you worship the Lord brushing your teeth?
- Can you worship the Lord eating your breakfast? Every meal? (What *is* “communion” anyway?)
- Can you worship the Lord while driving in your car?
- Can you worship the Lord while working?
- Can you worship the Lord with every conversation you have, and in every relationship He has in your life?
- Can you worship the Lord in your marriage? (What *is* submission and dying for your spouse anyway?)
- Can you worship the Lord when you make love to your spouse?
- Can you worship the Lord while you parent your children?
- Can you worship the Lord while wrestling and tickling your kids?

We could go on and on. I didn’t even mention singing or raising hands or praying or Bible reading or many other things typically given to the term of Christian “worship.” The point is, the Lord Jesus Lives within you. He does so with a desire to express Himself through you, as worship, to the Godhead, and as Love to the world. In responding from His Life inside, you will Live in such a place of continual communion with Him and abiding on the Vine, that *everything can be* worship.

Worship is Life. It is LIFE-style.

Worship is giving to God something because He is worthy. It is giving to God your very life, so that He can Live His.

Friend, God created you for worship. You were created to worship Him, in Spirit and in Truth. You were created to Live a Life that is not your own. Until this is realized, you will be frustrated and restless. Until this is realized, you will be in bondage. Once it is realized, you will never lack Joy and Peace. Once it is realized, you will be Free.

Seek ye first then, the Kingdom of God... and *Worship*.

Abiding and ministering to the Lord is our calling. Period. All of Life and Fruit and Freedom flow from this. Anything else has our hand in it, and it is defiled. We must be broken of Self, and realize our Life, submitted to The Vine.

SPIRIT AND TRUTH

The Lord desires Spirit and Truth worshippers. To worship in Spirit and Truth means to seek and glorify and magnify the Giver, the Treasure, for His sake alone – and not for the gifts and treasures that come by His Hand.

Spirit and Truth worship leads to Spirit and Truth Living. Living by the Spirit. When we slay the idol of Self and all others, moving from Self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness, we choose to walk by faith in the Spirit – rather than by the flesh.

Natural people, those outside of The Gate, not having Christ at all, may receive spiritual things, but cannot receive things of The *Holy* Spirit, the Spirit of God, or the Spirit of Christ.

Carnal, fleshly Christians - those just inside The Gate - have the Spirit, but do not follow It. They deny walking The Path. All Christians start here. Most, unfortunately, stay here. There is no room for steak, because they can only digest spiritual milk. These are babies, spiritual infants, and they often are crying to be fed. The mind, will and emotions drive the bus - the Law of Self reigns. The Cross has not been carried enough in carnal people, and their lack of Freedom Fruit proves evidence.

Spiritual people, and by this I mean those filled with, and led by the Holy Spirit, are those not only in The Gate, but well down The Path of Christ. The Law of the Spirit of Christ and Life drive the bus here. Spiritual people have been filled, and are continually filled. They abide. The Vine Supplies. There is no limit to the things of Christ, and the Teacher brings us into all Truth, giving ability to understand, to see and to hear.

“The anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.”

Spiritual people obey. Having been filled, and having been taught, they follow. Their “yes” is a continual act of worship, and this stewardship unlocks further seeing, hearing, knowing and Freedom.

Spirit and Truth worship and abiding is an ongoing cycle of rest in and seek, ask, listen, hear, obey...

Christ is the Vine in whom we rest in and seek. Christ is whom we ask. Christ is whose Voice we listen for. Christ is whom we hear. Christ is whom we obey. Christ is whom we receive more of each time this cycle is played out in our lives.

PRAYING IS THANKING

I don't know about you, but I distinctly remember having an entrenched thought and belief that what the Lord was after in "abiding" with and in "worship" of Him – was prayer. More and more prayer time. My belief went – *"If I just spent more time talking to God, I would be Free. If I don't talk to God more, bad things happen."* Or something like that.

But as I've seen Freedom more clearly, I've noticed something about prayer, prayer life, prayer habits and prayer posture. Something new, different, deeper... better. To fully explore it would probably be to write another book, but this discovery has blessed me, and opened my eyes.

I've noticed that as I go deeper into Jesus, my prayers look and sound and are offered differently. Namely, **I am asking for far less from God, and I am thanking Him for far more.**

I can think back on my conversations with the Lord, and certainly recall that giving thanks has generally always been an element of prayer. But often, those thanksgivings would be checklist items.

Thank You God for:

- Jesus
- Mommy and Daddy
- My brothers and my sister
- Our house
- My food
- Our health
- My new (fill in the blank toy or other thing I was loving...)
- Forgiving me of my sins
- For guiding, guarding and directing me

Maybe you get the idea, and can relate. In so many ways, these prayers of my youth became the script of my prayers into adulthood.

There was no maturation there. The conversation never went deeper. Hold up, *conversation?* Haha. Really, it was just my side of the talking that I was acknowledging.

I'm not certain exactly when things started to change. It was organic and progressive. But I know that the change correlated to seeking the Lord, drawing near, surrendering to Him my life, receiving His nature and character as Good, learning to hear His Voice, walking with Him in relationship, having conversation (*real* conversation with Him), becoming comfortable being naked with Him, and dying to myself and my life so that He could Live and express His in me.

It correlated with abiding and worship and Spirit and Truth.

Not only did prayer expand from a set apart time in a quiet place into an ongoing dialogue whenever and wherever I was – I noticed that the posture and the words shifted too.

“Now you have every spiritual gift you need...”

“We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything.”

“All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.”

I read these and things shift for me. The Psalms are rich with thanksgiving throughout. And Jesus Himself promises that in seeking the Kingdom first, we have everything we need.

We’ve said, the Christian Life is about receiving and becoming who you already are. In this way, **conversing with the Lord in prayer will begin to look like much more recognition of, receiving of and thanking for what is already ours in Christ.**

Does this mean we should never approach God with a need, or a request, or to ask Him for anything? I am not suggesting that at all. We are to *“pray about everything.”* Because God is Good, He wants to hear from us on anything and everything. He desires for us to be in dialogue with Him (even the us-to-Him one-way dialogue), because He loves us, and loves to hear us speak to Him. You know what? This is even true when we are mad at Him, or tell God we hate Him.

God loves *any* communication and fellowship with His children.

Parents – imagine your young child. You likely delight in them coming to you in all things. Sure, there are times when this can be exasperating and you just want to lock yourself in a closet. But you love your children, and you delight when they come to you, ask you for things, have conversation with you. You love when they crawl up in your lap, look into your eyes and make requests of you.

God is the same way. So ask of Him. Anything, and often.

But *also*, as you mature in knowing Him, and more importantly, knowing who *you are in Him* - learn to approach prayer in the posture of thanks for what is already yours. This is Worship. This is testimony. This is Victory. This is Faith. This is Belief.

This is Freedom.

Need provision? You have it. You can ask God to provide. *You can also thank Him for having provided.* You can come in thanks and praise for provision in advance. You can worship Jesus as Provision Himself.

Need wisdom? You have it. You can ask God for it. *You can also thank Him for having bestowed it.* You can come in thanks for access to His mind and will. You can worship Jesus as Wisdom Himself.

Need rest and strength? You have it. You can ask God for it. *You can also thank Him for having given it.* You can come in thanks for Him being the Vine on which you abide, receiving nourishment; for being the Rock on which you are planted, receiving strength. You can worship Jesus as Rest and Sabbath and Strength Himself.

Need protection? You have it. You can ask God for it. *You can also thank Him for protecting you.* You can come in thanks for Him having His Wing and His Shield about you; for being your Fortress. You can Worship Jesus as the Protector Himself.

Do you see the difference? For almost anything we come to the Lord for, in an *asking* posture – we can come to Him also in a *thanking* posture – one that acknowledges in faith who He is, and what we already have in Him.

We indeed love our young children to come to us for anything they need – but we desire to see them mature into a place of contentment, receipt, acknowledgement, confidence, wisdom and *thanks* for what they already have. The Lord desires the same for His children. To see from His perspective. To Live from His Life. To walk Free.

And to converse with Him in prayer accordingly.

ALL SCRIPTURE POINTS TO CHRIST

So Freedom in abiding is not found in praying *more*, but in approaching prayer *differently*.

What about reading the Bible, then? Next to “pray more,” hasn’t this been written out for you on the prescription pad of Freedom just as often? *“If you’ll just be in the Word more, you’ll be Free.”*

HOLY BIBLE.

This is imprinted on the Genuine Leather cover and spine of most Bibles you’ve ever picked up. It’s so ingrained (pardon the pun) that there is a good chance you’ve taken for granted what exactly that might mean, or why it’s there?

On the surface, it makes sense, as we tend to attribute all things associated with the Divine as “Holy.” But I am wondering if we misunderstand this? Is there a point where we misuse this term or idea? How should we approach the Bible with regard to its holiness?

And is the Bible itself sometimes a barrier to seeing our Freedom?

Ho-ly:

- declared sacred by religious use or authority; consecrated: *holy ground.*
- dedicated or devoted to the service of God, the church, or religion: *a holy man.*
- saintly; godly; pious; devout: *a holy life.*
- having a spiritually pure quality: *a holy love.*
- entitled to worship or veneration as or as if sacred: *a holy relic.*

In looking at the definitions of “Holy,” it’s almost as if the Bible does not fit, at least too well. In fact, these definitions support the query I am exploring here. Can something be declared sacred and consecrated, to the point where it becomes worshipped and venerated? Is this ok?

I believe the answer is yes, unequivocally. And, it depends.

Is it ok to view the Bible with reverence? With appreciation? With love? With respect? Yes.

Is it ok to worship the Bible? No. That is idolatry.

And this is where I get torqued up about the idea of the “Holy” Bible. **We worship it, above the Purpose and the Person it has been given to reveal** – Which are the Source and Fullness of “Holy” – and all deserving of such praise.

I want to be clear. I love the Bible. I am thankful for it. I believe it is inspired by the Divine, is profitable for His people, and is relevant and revelatory. It is my favorite Book of all time. *I see revealed in its words the narrative of God’s eternal plan of love and of the reality of His Kingdom. I see in its pages the Person of Christ and His indwelling Lordship of my Life, and Headship of His Body. I see the Gospel of the Kingdom.* In this sense I think the Scriptures are Holy. This holiness is rooted in the revelation of the grand narrative of God the Father’s Ultimate Intention, and of Jesus the Son as Lord – all inspired by, and testified to as Truth by The Spirit, *Holy*. But holiness is lost when this text itself is set as loftier than These.

This happens, a lot, and is maddening.

Have you ever thought about the Bible? *Really thought about it?*

40 authors. 1400 years between authors – yet all of eternal history covered. 66 books. 2000 years since the last author lived.

The remarkable way that this collection of people, over that period of time would all testify to the Truth – is awe-inspiring. It truly is worth respecting. It is worth worshipping the Author Himself.

But the way the Bible is approached today so often waters down that which is worth worship. We translate. We paraphrase. We dissect. We look for root word meanings. We hunt for historical context. We take a document that is just over 400 years old in our language and try to make Eternal Truth fit into our understanding.

All of this is good. But too often this is done to “know the Bible more,” rather than to allow the Holy Spirit to testify to the revelation of Christ and the Purpose of a Holy God to be *known*. This has caused much blood to be spilled. This has torn apart families. This has been the banner flown proudly above many a crusade. This has divided.

This has weakened the Body of Christ and kept us from Freedom.

Oh that we would see that our Father, His Son and the Holy Spirit are much bigger than even the inspired words They have given to point us toward Them.

The Kingdom of God cannot be contained in the pages of your Bible. The Kingdom of God lives in you. And me. And in eternity beyond time and space.

It is possible to receive this Kingdom and Its King and never open the Bible, ya'll. When the Bible *is* opened, it is received as confirmation of what is already true about this King and His Kingdom.

It is possible to meet Jesus Christ without ever seeing, touching or reading Scripture – because He *is all*, and is *in all*.

I can't trust a text that leaves no room to question or doubt or not believe something because there is the word "Holy" on its cover. I can't receive a Lord that won't allow me to wrestle with Him, to challenge and be challenged – to be shaped and transformed – because the book He gave "*says...*"

Sadly, these are the tales of many who have been hit with "the Bible," and never really given a chance to encounter the Person of Christ the Bible was given to reveal.

How many remain shackled, never approaching Freedom, because they are in bondage to something they have heard, been told, read into or perceive the Bible "*says*"?

Hear me - I am not challenging the Bible itself. I am challenging a *mindset* about the Bible and the hindrance that mindset imposes on the Purpose and the Person the Bible intends to point us to. I am challenging a mindset about the Bible that keeps us in bondage.

So much effort is spent on driving Christians to be in the Word more, to read their Bibles more, to study the Bible... You know what? Some of you... **Some of you need to put your Bible down. You need to walk away. Take a break.** Look for and find God's Word (Jesus Christ) in nature, people, rest, quiet. Learn to hear His Voice apart from the words in your Bible. Learn to abide and to worship.

Re-learn faith and trust.

There is Holiness there. Freedom too.

Then, you can come back to these words, this Bible, with new eyes, fresh eyes, eyes that have been opened, eyes that see not with natural sight, but eyes of the heart. These eyes will revel in the unsearchable riches of Christ found in the pages of Scripture. These eyes will see from a heart that is less concerned with being an expert in holiness, an expert in the Bible – and instead delight in and Live out of True Holiness Indwelling.

These eyes will read and see and write new "Truth" being Authored today – in you, in me, in us, in eternity – as we see, declare and Live the Life of Christ – and as the Spirit testifies to such infallible Truth – even outside the pages of Scripture.

The Bible is nothing more than ink on a page. It is simply a collection of words. It is history. It is poetry. It is literature and letters. But when the Spirit reveals the Purpose of God and the Person of Jesus through the ink, in the words, as both our history and our future (our eternity), as a Poem and a Letter of Love – the Bible is more...

...Then... It is Holy. There... You see Freedom in its pages.

COMMUNITY/FELLOWSHIP

Having looked at prayer, and Bible study as common objects of Freedom prescription, and rethought them somewhat, let us now spend some time looking at another commonly given word of advice. *“Find a church, go to it, and get plugged in.”* Heard that one? Here’s what often happens when someone receives Jesus as his or her Lord, entering The Gate:

- They get handed a Bible and a “Next Step” kit with a CD or some other media
- Which exhorts them to pray and read their Bible more
- And they are hurriedly “plugged in” to a small/life/home/huddle group of some sort
- And told, *“Best of luck! See you in Heaven!”*

You’re right; I’m being over-dramatic, but not much. A version of this is what most Christians have experienced at some point early in their walk with the Lord.

How many are still there – stuck in a never-ending vortex of apathy and spiritual infancy – the ghetto we spoke of?

So what is the problem? Well, usually, we are asking too much of this process – expecting it to sum up what the Lord prescribed in walking The Path toward Life and Freedom. And it fails, miserably. It fails because we are asking the process to do something it just cannot do – that is to be The Vine. To *be* the Lord.

This is the central deficiency with “community” or “fellowship” as it is commonly practiced. For most, the human, relational aspect of this is terrific, welcome and valuable even. Friends gather together for food, drinks, conversation and fun. Sports, kids and weather are discussed, good times are had by all – and then all return to their individual lives.

When the goal is to gather spiritually, and the Lord *is* discussed, men typically lead the discussion, perhaps guided by a book or a study booklet. Because this so often involves carnal men, approaching Spiritual things, apart from the leading of Christ – the discussion does little to move us into Freedom’s ascent.

In the Christian paradigm, we have a difficult time separating fellowship and community from our idea of “church.” Certainly, there is the Sunday gathering of the saints, which is the centerpiece event. But the gatherings that typically are billed as fellowship and community are offshoots of the Sunday showcase. They are so closely intertwined that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the dynamic between them. Sure, the “order of service” may look different – but the names, faces and spirit behind them are decidedly similar.

I had gone to church all my life. Sunday mornings. Sunday evenings. Wednesday nights. Pot Luck Suppers. You name it, if those doors were opened, we were going. As far back as I can remember, my family went to church, and I went with them – even with the exception of a brief time my parents didn’t go – I still had them drop me off so that I could.

We fellowshiped. We had community time. Going to church was what I thought I was supposed to be doing – so that, you know – the Devil wouldn't get me.

In college, I was the only person in my dorm *alive*, let alone awake, it seemed, on Sunday mornings, as I faithfully trotted off to a local church fellowship near my campus.

As an adult, newly married, Marie and I dutifully searched for and visited many churches, hoping to find that *just right* one that we could then spend our Sundays and Wednesdays... going to.

I was motivated to keep going to church. Motivated by fear that if I didn't, my life would fall apart, or that, sure enough, that ole Devil would indeed get me.

The irony, looking back, is that despite all my faithful "going to church" – the Devil was not only getting me, he was devouring me.

Some Freedom, huh?

The reality was that my going to church had very little to nothing to do with Freedom, actually following Jesus, or staying out of the clutch of the enemy.

Everything changed after I truly surrendered to Jesus several years ago, when I decided to get up from inside The Gate, and begin walking The Path. As He was making me new, He was simultaneously stoking my desire for "More" – more of Him, His Life and His Kingdom. I needed More, More being Jesus – and He told me I could have as much as I want – because He is inexhaustible in His riches.

There is *always* More. This is the beauty of Freedom – it is ever enlarging, ever expanding.

Once I received that I was a beloved Son, He opened my eyes to also receive that my showing up once or twice per week to a scheduled service to be a spectator to a scheduled and predetermined order of worship had nothing, *nothing* to do with moving the needle of acceptance by my Father. It never would, nor would anything else. My place at His table was eternally set, and I could eat as much of the Feast as I wanted.

I was Free. And Free Sons respond out of an overflow of Love from Father – to His Life in them. He told me very clearly,

"Take a break, and follow Me."

So, I entered the wilderness He beckoned me to, quit "going" and started to let Him show me how to "Be" and simply abide and draw near. And in my drawing nearer of seeking that More – He began to reshape old paradigms – including elements of religion... and church.

There was More beyond the confines of the denomination I had spent my entire life in. *What were denominations anyway? And why did they exist?*

There was More than sitting idly, listening to the same person speak to me each week on Sunday morning.

There was More than singing the same old songs, with predictable verse and cadence, and being told when I should sit and when I should stand.

There was More than Bible Studies and Sunday School classes – where knowledge in the head never seemed very effective in changing hearts.

There was More than another small group meeting – where a few dominated the talking, a few never said anything, and *almost* all were there punching a clock, hoping to skate by without having to be exposed or be real in any way, waiting until they could be home again to watch Grey's Anatomy or whatever...

There was More than the buildings and the schedules and the budgets and leadership hierarchies and “professional” ministry and check-the-box Sunday/Wednesday faith.

There was More than the “going” to church. There was More than what I had come to believe was fellowship and community. More – Life – He was showing me, is realized in “BE-ing.”

More dwelled and was revealed in an organic nature of learning to Live by Divine Life, together – like the First Century Christians did “church.” Once I had begun to taste that and see that – it left everything else tasting and looking like a dry, stale cracker. More became my Dream, and it looked like this.

What I had tasted and seen was Jesus Christ Himself. I had been transformed by His Life. I had now become a part of the flow of the Kingdom – and It was *real* in those occasions when I was gathered with Brothers and Sisters, and we would just let Jesus do *His* thing amongst us, with no regard to what *our* expectations, or “thing” was. This was happening spontaneously and virally in living rooms and across lunch booths and in golf carts and in offices.

This was eternal fellowship and community. Freedom was here.

I was seeing blind eyes opened. I was seeing the dead raised. I was seeing the captives set free. I was seeing Heaven on Earth. And it was all happening frequently, as the Lord led, every day of the week, any minute of those days.

And I had never seen anything like any of that when I was just “going to church.”

Consequently, I became flat out bored with the “going to church” mindset. The old paradigm of fellowship and community was dead. There was no Life in it. Don't get me wrong, I love and have cherished relationship with the Brothers and Sisters that I was “going” with. My boredom had nothing to do with them, or even the “church” fellowship per se. However, I found myself increasingly crawling out of my skin with a desire to halt all the mundane and predictable proceedings – gather those precious people in a circle, pray that Jesus would lead – and then shut up and watch what He had in mind.

But stuff like that sounds like “chaos” to the “going” mindset.

No, it had everything to do with walking in an incomplete paradigm – about Jesus, and His Life as expressed through His Body.

For me, **going to church became rote and empty because I was “going to” or “doing” something that I simply, already am.** You cannot “go” to something that you *are* – and you become frustrated when you realize you are trying to “do” something that is already sown in your *Be-ing*.

We either *are* the Church – or we’re being called by It. In the shadow of the Cross – we no longer *go* to the Temple, we *are* the Temple.

“Church” we read about and are in wonder over in the New Testament is called *Ekklesia*, and is a “gathering” or “assembly.” When followers of Jesus Christ gather together, just 2 or more, under the Headship of the Lord, with no agenda other than to glorify Jesus, to learn of Him mutually together, and express His Divine Life into the earth – “Church” happens. To be sure, sometimes that happens in a building on a Sunday morning.

But, the pounding of my heart is for the prevailing mindset that a building that we “go to” on a Sunday is *all* that the Church is called to – be blown up. I long to see fellowship and community become More – flowing from Divine *Fellowship* and Eternal *Community* already within. From abiding. My heart beats to see *Ekklesia* and Divine Life exploding and happening around the clock, around my city (and yours) – *beyond* the Sunday morning, institutional mindset.

I am not suggesting that everyone should leave their own church fellowship, or never attend a Sunday worship service. I am, however, calling *The Church* to be alive by Christ 24/7, and to walk everywhere, all the time, in a mindset of “Be-ing” rather than “going.”

So, I am not going to church anymore. Instead, I am the Church.

As such, I am a member of Christ’s very Body, revealing His Divine Life into this earth. I am a citizen of His Kingdom, with all authority in Heaven, and every spiritual blessing in Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. I carry His Life, His Kingdom and His Church into every place and into every relationship and into every circumstance I am in.

Church is Jesus. Jesus is Life. Life lives in me. Church lives in me.

I don’t go to church; Church goes with me.

What about you, friend?

Part of making this shift from a “going” to a “being” mindset is allowing the Lord to unravel much of what you thought you knew about His things, including our concept of fellowship. When the Lord calls you outside the camp along The Path, part of what He is after is your letting go of needing to fill yourself with “church” as you’ve known it – and begin filling yourself with Him alone.

Because of this, **sometimes Freedom will require a necessary process of breaking down the idolatry of community or fellowship.** We may need to be broken of the delusion of a “perfect church” or fellowship. No such thing exists. We may need to be released from the shackles of meeting for meeting’s sake. If we are meeting for any other reason but for the Lord’s Mind and Need – then we may not need to be actually meeting. We may need to be released from the lie that community is for what *we* will get out of it. A “going” mindset is a “getting” mindset, and it needs to have the Cross move it to a “being, giving and serving” posture.

This mindset and posture transcends form or style of fellowship, community, and even “church.” There are countless people who are isolated and know nothing of community – but that have their butts in pews, surrounded by people every week – or are even “plugged in.” Conversely, some of the most relationally connected and healthy people can be those who never attend a “formal” gathering.

This all speaks to authenticity, transparency and trust. Community and Fellowship at their core are Father, Son, Spirit – and you. From there, if you walk this Life out in that kind of intimacy with just a *small* handful of others, in addition to your spouse and kids – you will indeed be rich, and Free. To attain this is a far greater treasure than being amongst hundreds of others to casually *fellowship* and *commune* with.

Very simply, it is all too easy for groups of people in any form, institutional or not, to become inwardly focused and ingrown. It is human nature for fellowship to be Self-centered. It is common for community to become our God. Freedom is not found in these. Freedom is Fellowship in and with the Divine, and Community in The Vine.

Is Jesus enough? Your answer will reveal much about your receipt of Freedom. Without question He *is*. If you were to spend the rest of your days in human isolation, you would have everything you need, and all the Fellowship you’d require – in Him.

This likely will not be your journey, however. As we spent a great deal of time uncovering, God is after a Family and a House. Jesus is after a Bride. We will all Live in a Kingdom. We all are part of a Body, branches on a Vine. Fellowship and Community are our destiny, and reality in Christ.

But we must receive this in proper order and posture. Jesus is the Firstborn in this Family and the Cornerstone of this House. Jesus is the Bridegroom to this Bride. Jesus is the King in this Kingdom. And Jesus is the Head of this Body, the very Vine Himself. Fellowship and Community approached on this ground is Freedom. Fellowship and community approached on any other ground is just a potluck or a ball game – and Freedom dwells there not.

GETTING NAKED WITH GOD

The abiding, Fellowship, and Community the Lord is after is not fully captured in the natural, but we do see perhaps its closest picture in a common, natural relationship.

Imagine...

A bride... a groom...

The big day has finally arrived. The wedding. For months, years perhaps – love has been rising. For the girl, it started as a cautious curiosity – her heart being intrigued and wooed – her mind at first thinking too much, then not thinking, falling in line with the heart.

For the boy, it was mad love from the get go.

He pursued her furiously, without measure of consequence – with reckless abandon. His love for her was wild. It was Free. Ultimately, it was intoxicating – overcoming any of her tentativeness.

A proposal was offered, and accepted. Rings were bought. Invitations mailed. And now guests and flowers and gifts had all converged to witness promises, vows and a rejoicing recessional – followed by celebratory dancing, drinks and a feast. A glorious, magical wedding feast.

Finally, the newlyweds speed away in a fancy carriage of steel – and retreat to a room to be alone, truly alone, for the first time – a man, and his bride.

Days and weeks and months and years of budding love and closeness, are lit as a fuse – ready to explode. The intimacy of their courtship to be consummated in nakedness and glorious union. The husband, wild with anticipation, has come unclothed, laying himself bare...

...But the bride... presents herself still clothed, allowing her husband's passionate advances – but never removing her garments.

Intimacy, is therefore not fully received. It was never given the chance.

While unlikely in our experiences and understanding of weddings and marriage unions – this is sadly how we, the Bride of Christ, have often presented ourselves to our Husband, Jesus.

He has pursued us furiously, with reckless abandon, and without measure of consequence – from before time. His love for us is wild. It is Free. Ultimately, it is intoxicating – overcoming our initial cautious curiosities and tentativeness. We fall in love with Him. We accept His proposal. But sadly, somewhere after that we tend to lose the significance in the feast, the celebration – but more – we have not received His invitation to intimacy. He is pregnant with lustful anticipation of seeing His Love of us returned to Him – and has laid Himself bare before us.

And we have received Him with most of our clothes still on. **It's time to get fully naked with God.**

God's Eternal Purpose includes a romantic intimacy with His creation, you and I. While you might be tempted to hear and understand this intimacy from a sexual point of view – His idea of intimacy goes far beyond that. It's not sexual at all – it is Divine. It is a Fellowship that is more than companionship – it is Oneness. The consummation of His intimacy is super-abundantly more than the beautiful picture of it He has given us in marriage union – it is a Bride for the Son. Yes, it is more than the metaphor I have painted above for you. But like that story, we can never receive the fullness of His Intention for us with our clothes still on (and yes, I am speaking metaphorically there).

God in His Triune Fullness, walked in this intimacy with Adam and Eve in the Garden. Here, we see a romantic glimpse into His plan. The “*cool of the day*” that God strolled in through the Garden with His creation spoke of more than a walk – more even than a romantic handholding stroll.

It was a One-ness.

Of course, this was disrupted at the Fall. With a bite of the forbidden fruit, man became aware – and this knowledge of good and evil brought with it recognition of a broken Fellowship – and of nakedness.

So Adam and Eve clothed themselves. They were shamed, fearful, full of guilt, and hiding from God. And despite the blessed Truth that God reversed the effect of the Fall in Jesus – thus also reversing the broken Fellowship – many of His Children have yet to receive the depths of that reality – and take their clothes off.

We are wearing shame. We are wearing fear. We are wearing guilt. We are putting on religious duty and obligation. We are still hiding. Our nakedness isn't covered by fig leaves anymore – but make no mistake, in many ways, the Body is fully clothed – in layers even.

In Christ, we are the Bride. Beloved. Flawless. Gorgeous. Perfect. Ravishing. Our Husband is raving mad passionate for us. His deepest desire is to express His Love through intimacy with us. He is naked before us – and though He knows our body full-well – He waits for us to *know* Him full-well, to receive His advances, His unending Love – and return it to Him... naked.

He is waiting for us to take off everything we continue to wear in hiding from Him, to believe that He sees no flaw in us – and to be finally and fully united in the Oneness of His Divine intimacy.

From before time, God has purposed to restore the Garden intimacy – the cool of the day Fellowship He briefly shared with Adam and Eve. In Christ, it is ours to receive.

The Groom has shut the door behind Him. His Bride stands before Him in radiant splendor. His Love and desire for Her is beyond words – it is Eternal. He is naked, He always has been. Consummation of Intimacy beckons. He is willing...

...Is She?

SINGULAR FOCUS

One of the big, nasty ironies of this Freedom paradox is that many (most?) Christians really, sincerely *try*. They want to be in the right. They want to do good. They want to serve God. They love Him as best they know how. They work really hard at it.

But in all of this activity, programs, ministries, striving, meeting, planning, doing, working, and energy spending... we are easily misdirected. Our gaze is moved from the Lord of the work, to the work of the Lord. We invoke the name of Jesus, but do so in asking Him to bless *our* work, our effort, our goals, our plans, and our ministry.

Seldom is there a focus on the Lord Jesus Himself, for His sake and glory alone – His Work, His finished Effort, His Goal, His Plan and Purpose, and ministering to Him. The Lord said, and continues to say, despite your intentions and trying, *“you have lost your first love.”*

Most of us do not understand pre-eminence, or how to live from an abiding in that of Christ's, into the world. As such, we suffer from chronic small and short sightedness. Our gaze and vision has been on ourselves – what we can get from the Lord, what we can obtain from His blessing, how we can be served and fed from His people. In looking this way for so long, our sight has become impaired. We see, think, believe and live small. Thus, God is small. Jesus is small. The Kingdom is small. Life is small, and not Free.

We need new vision, new sight. We need a continual, mind-blowing revelation of Christ.

Of Him, there shall be no end. He is ever expanding, ever increasing, ever revealing. If our eyes are fixed on Him, always looking, our vision will never lack for His pre-eminence. Thus, our seeing, thinking, believing, and Living will also be ever enlarging. We will never get to the end of God. We will never plumb the depths of Christ. We will never reach the bottom of The Kingdom. Life will be continually exploding forward and upward. Freedom's march will go - on and on.

*“Of the increase of His Government and peace **there shall be no end.**”*

If Christ is not pre-eminent, chaos and confusion will reign – not Freedom. If He is pre-eminent, His *“Peace will have no end”* – Freedom.

The beauty of this is its simplicity. Christ is all. The growing and expanding and enlarging are His. Ours is simply to behold Him, continually. He is our singular focus, and He orders all things from there. We see as He gives us Sight. We think as He gives us Thought. We believe as He grants us Belief. We Live as He supplies Life. The pre-eminence of Christ, His Purpose and His Kingdom become our present reality as we “look” from His perspective.

Almost every force and thing that diminishes our realization of Freedom are ultimately rooted in our eyes wandering off of the pre-eminence of Christ, and onto something or someone else, including Self.

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols” could be one of the deepest, most profound instructions ever given for Freedom's sake. Here is another version:

“Little children, keep yourselves from idols (false gods)–[from anything and everything that would occupy the place in your heart due to God, from any sort of substitute for Him that would take first place in your life].”

The Eternal Purpose is for Christ to fill all things, to have pre-eminence. Anything, *anything* else – including Self and all of the *good* things of the Christian life – are idols once they occupy a place in the heart that only Christ fits. When this unique place of dwelling for the Lord is filled with something counterfeit, these many things, Freedom is not realized, and bondage is the result. Freedom is unveiled and grown in when Christ, the One Thing, is pre-eminent in the individual follower, then in a marriage, then a home and family, then into the local Body, then into the Body around the world, then finally into all creation. This is the Order.

Christ *first* – all else beneath Him. Christ All in All.

Anything that usurps this Eternal Order is antichrist, and anti Freedom.

“Keep yourselves...from anything and everything that would occupy the place in your heart due to God, from any sort of substitute for Him that would take first place in your life.”

Anything. Everything. Keep yourselves from placing any and all ahead of the Lord. This is Freedom’s Path. Defeat is so easily realized – simply place anything in the place the Lord is to occupy *first*. Even and especially the *good* things, the “church” things, the things “for God,” the family things. Any. All.

If you have built your house on anything but the Rock, it will ultimately be torn down.

He is either Lord of All, in All – or He’s not. Freedom’s realization hangs in the balance.

THE FRUIT TELLS THE STORY

So can we *know*? Can we know when we are walking The Path, and realizing Freedom along Its way? Is there evidence that would comfort and confirm us in our journey?

Yes. *“You will know them by their fruit.”*

A faithful Life is a fruitful Life. A fruitful Life is a Life of Freedom. The fruit evidences what *is*. Fruit trees are fruit trees as soon as they are sprouted – “born.” As the tree receives Life, it grows, and fruit is the byproduct. If it yields bad or spoiled fruit – something is wrong. Similarly, a follower of Jesus walking The Path toward Life and Freedom will receive the Life of the Vine, grow in Him, and yield His Fruit. If the fruit instead is rotten or counterfeit to the nature of the follower as a born again new creation – something is wrong. Freedom is lacking. We can know this because the fruit is lacking, or foul.

The Lord desires that we bear His fruit, and much of it. *“By this, His Father is glorified.”*

Life in the Spirit, by the Law of Christ, is a fruitful Life. A fruitful Life is evidenced by *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”* If you can observe and Live these in your walk, you are realizing Freedom. Conversely, if you can observe and live *these* in your walk, *“sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these,”* then you can know you are walking by the old nature, the Self-centered nature that produces death.

What you do proves who you are. Words are not enough. What you say you believe is not significant in the light of how you actually live (or, Live).

There is good fruit, and there is bad fruit. Spiritual fruit, and natural fruit. Eternal fruit, and temporal fruit. Fruit of the Spirit, and fruit of the flesh. When one is walking by Christ along The Path in Freedom, the fruit will be good, spiritual, Eternal, and of the Spirit. When one is walking by Self or the world or sin or Satan – *even though they may very well be “saved,”* a Christian, inside The Gate – the fruit will be bad, natural, temporal and of the flesh.

It comes down to a matter of reaping and sowing. In the spiritual, you reap what you sow. If you sow to the flesh, you reap of the flesh. If you sow to the Spirit, you reap of the Spirit. If you feed Self and the flesh, you will yield fruit thusly. But if you feed the Spirit, you will yield His Fruit. When we deny Self, we deny feeding the flesh, and sowing to the Self. As a result, He is increased, as the Spirit is fed instead. To feed the flesh is to feed anything that is *not* the Spirit. We must feed the seed of God that is implanted in us at new birth. If we feed to any other, the fruit will tell the story.

The fruit will tell the story, either way.

While walking The Path is not easy, the Lord and His burden *is* – *“His yoke is light.”* If life feels hard and heavy all the time, this fruit also evidences a lack of Freedom, and something is wrong in the abiding. The Lord’s Voice is calm, loving, reassuring, convicting and specific. If you are listening to voices that are not of these, then again, consider the fruit, and trace it back to its root.

Follow the fruit, and you’ll find the (non) life. Follow the Fruit, and you’ll find... **the Life...**

PART 5 - THE LIFE

A person is standing on a rocky path in a foggy landscape. The person is wearing a dark jacket and pants, and is looking towards the camera. The path is made of large, reddish-brown rocks. The background is a dense fog, obscuring the horizon and the sky. The overall mood is mysterious and contemplative.

"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." - Jesus Christ

JESUS, THE LIFE, OUR EXAMPLE

I have made an effort in this work to paint a picture of the Fullness and Glory of Jesus Christ. I hope that it would be difficult to read this, and not come away with an expanded appreciation, and desire for Him.

We have discussed Him as both The Gate, and The Path. He is The Gate into Life, and The Path toward Life. He is in fact, The Life Himself. He is The Way. He is The Truth. He is the Summation of The Eternal Purpose. He is The Fulfillment. He is The Tree of Life. He is The Bridegroom, The Cornerstone, The Head, The Firstborn. He is Salvation and Grace (mercy), and He is The Kingdom and Grace (power). He is The Identity. He is Rest, and He is Good. He is The Source and The Supply of faith. He *is* Faith. He is The Vine. He is The Leader. He is The Law of Life. He is our Habitat, our Garden. He is Light, and He is Love.

We could go on and on – because He *does*.

If I have failed to make it abundantly clear, let me try as explicitly as I can:

Jesus is Freedom. Freedom is Jesus.

There can be no other way, because He *is* The Way.

Oh, what a Christ! We can hardly fathom in ourselves the depth of Him – He that is simultaneously the Way *in*, the Way *on*, and the Faith and Grace to move into it *all*.

The Pre-eminent One is alive and at work, friends. And mind-blowingly, He is alive and at work – in you. In me. In us. *“Not I, but Christ.”* This is the key, the Truth, whether you believe It, and Live It – or not. Freedom is received in the Belief and the Living. Bondage is at work in the absence of these.

While Jesus is Present and Real in us, today, welcome and waiting to be received as Life – it is also true that we have preserved for us a record of Jesus Himself Living by an Indwelling Life, also. Our Path of Freedom is not a maiden voyage. This Path has been walked before – by none other than He who walks It with us now. Jesus.

The Tree of Life, the Highest Life, was in Jesus as He walked the earth incarnate. Not only was God’s Life in Jesus, but also Jesus was the very embodiment of God’s Life.

“This is the Testimony. God has given us Eternal Life, and this Life is in His Son.”

Jesus Christ, *“He is the true God and Eternal Life.”* Christ, though man, carried Divine Life inside of Him. He didn’t just come to offer forgiveness for our sins – He came to offer us the Life He had inside. He did not just speak to life after death – but to an abundance of enjoyment of Eternal Life as a present reality.

Eternal Life was God, and it dwelled in Jesus, and He Lived by It. Eternal Life became a Person in Christ, visible, One to be tasted, touched, eaten of and drank from. In His Resurrection, He dispenses this very Life into those who would Believe, and takes up residence in them as *“a Life-Giving Spirit.”* It is by this Spirit we *“Live and move and find our being.”* It is by this Spirit we are Free.

But before that Resurrection, while Jesus was human, He Lived and moved and found His being by Another Life too.

“By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear...for I seek not to please myself but Him who sent me.”

“My teaching is not my own. It comes from Him who sent me.”

“I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.”

“I did not speak on my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.”

“I am in the Father, and the Father is in me. The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing His work.”

What do these sound like to you, now? Faith, Belief, Trust, Abiding, Denying Self, Decreasing that Another might Increase? Jesus, fully human, remember, was utterly Free, and His Freedom's key was this:

“Not I, but the Father.” “It is not I who lives, but God who lives in me. And this Life I live in the flesh, I live by Faith in the Father, who loves me.”

Let Freedom ring.

Jesus Lived by an indwelling Lord, His Father. He Lived His Father's Life, from a place of abiding and trusting in Him. He had every opportunity to feed Self, to turn to sin, to listen to Satan – and He did not. He continually ate of the Tree of Life within Him, rejecting other trees. His Vine was God, and He had His Source and Supply. As He was decreased, the Father was increased, and the Life and Freedom were evidenced by Fruit – the greatest Fruit – Freedom's Fruit.

I said before that His reality is our destiny in Him. We spoke of this as taking a Hill, with a Cross, to die and be buried – to then be raised, ascended and seated. Blessedly, this reality can be our destiny in the area of Life by Indwelling too.

“As the living Father has sent me, and I Live by the Father, so he who consumes me shall Live by me.”

As Jesus Lived by His Father's Life, so too we may Live by Christ's Life in us. It's the same Life – Divine, Uncreated, Superlative, Highest Life. The Gate grants us access; The Path removes the veil to receiving It.

It is there, on the Table. The Feast is set. We have a place there. All we “have to do” is consume. Eat.

Friend, you are in possession of the greatest Gift of all: Life. Further, you can freely Live by this Life. Let me say that another way... You are in possession of Freedom. Further, you can Freely Live Free.

Freedom is about “seeing.” When you see, you Overcome. As we saw, “Seeing” is about looking in faith with eyes of the heart. It is Spiritual Sight. With this Sight, life is not a matter of “What should I do here?” or even, “WWJD?” Instead, Life is about “seeing” what Jesus is doing, and joining Him in that.

Can you see Him? Can you see Freedom?

TURNING TO THE LORD

We’ve established that Jesus is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega of All things. For the purpose of our quest to understand Freedom, we’ve seen that Jesus is the beginning and end of It as well.

We’ve explored the common barriers and hindrances to realizing Freedom, and that they all boil down to having other “things” in the place of the One Thing, Christ.

We’ve detailed that the essence of Freedom is an abiding *in* and living *from* Freedom Himself, The Vine, on a continual basis. This is the walk along The Path. To receive the increase of The Vine, all else, including and especially Self, must decrease.

We’ve seen that all of the above is triggered by a faith, a trust, that it is true – Living and acting like it is, because it *is*.

Practically, day-to-day, minute-to-minute – this looks like turning to the Lord. Repentance doesn’t just imply “turning away” from sin; it embodies a turning away from *all other things*, to turn toward Christ.

“Call upon the (name of the) Lord.”

Go check out how many times this is done, or instructed to be done in Scripture, Old and New Testaments.

“I called upon the Lord in distress; the Lord answered me, and set me in a large place.”

“Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered.”

“Call unto Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things.”

“Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

Calling upon the Lord attunes our senses to the innate Divine Fellowship within:

“God is faithful, by whom you were called into the Fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

“Our Fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

Turning to the Lord, calling on His name, and receiving His Fellowship are windows toward beholding the Lord and His Glory.

*"But we all, with open (unveiled) face **beholding as in a mirror the Glory of the Lord**, are transformed into the same image from Glory to Glory, (even) as by the Spirit of the Lord."*

*"Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; **that they would behold My Glory**, which Thou hast given Me."*

*"For God, who commanded the Light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, the (give) the Light of the knowledge of the **Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**."*

*"And the Word was made 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."*

*"Now when they saw the boldness (Freedom) of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men (not Free), they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, **that they had been with Jesus**."*

*"**Looking unto Jesus**, the Author and Finisher of our faith..."*

When we "see" Him, our vision, outlook, perspective, belief, and actions change. They can't *not*. Again, Freedom is in "Seeing." He is who we must "see." Once we truly catch a glimpse of His Glory, everything else is exposed for the counterfeit it is. He is Light, and Light illuminates what is Real, and what is false. Freedom "Sees" the Real, and chooses It in Its Glory, to the exclusion of all else that is false.

Jesus has Authored our faith. It is in the "looking unto Him" where He does the Finishing.

Freedom is in the Finishing.

Finishing and Transforming are closely related. These happen in the mind. So much of anti-Freedom is wrapped up in the mind and mindsets – wrong beliefs. The Lord is after Transforming our mind, redirecting our Belief back unto Him.

*"Be not conformed to this world; but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**."*

*"**Be renewed in the spirit of your mind**."*

*"And you have put on the new man, **which is renewed in the knowledge after the image of God that created him**."*

*"Though the outward man may perish, **the inward man is renewed day by day**. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."*

Freedom is a Spiritual reality. Spiritual things are not "seen" with natural eyes. They are unseen in the temporal. But Spiritual things are "seen" eternally, with eyes of faith. Freedom is "seeing" things that are invisible; but that are, at the same time, *more real* than what your physical eyes do see. In His Light, the more we "see," the more we "see." How do we open these eyes to "See?" By the renewing of the mind.

A Renewed mind is a Free mind. A Free mind produces a Free Life.

REAL HUMANITY

Recognize that, in Christ, we see not only the Pre-eminence of Divinity, but we see Real, perfect humanity as well. When we look at Jesus Living by an Indwelling Life, we see the fulfillment of Eternal Order. Jesus laid down His Divinity and Lived by Divine Life. When we are renewed in our mind via abiding, we are perpetuating this Eternal Order.

To be fully human is to Live as Christ. This is the Garden restored.

We, in our new creation, receive Real Humanity. What we have died to, and left behind is perverted humanity – it is not as God intends. It is not Free. Freedom is realizing the Intention of Real Humanity in the Person and Life of Jesus.

Real Humanity is not directed by feelings or emotions. In our new creation, we understand that these are rooted in the soul. This is not to say they are *bad*, or to be ignored. We are simply not *led* by them. Your Freedom is not contingent upon your *feeling* Free. No, Freedom is captured in Real Humanity, which Lives by Life – and this Life has senses, awareness, sight, and consciousness. These are transcendent of feelings and emotions. Feelings and emotions can respond *from*, and manifest *out of* this Life – but they are not Life themselves.

The mind (un-renewed), will and emotions - collectively the soul - cannot be trusted. They are of the Self, will never fulfill the Eternal Purpose, and cannot yield Freedom. We put no confidence in the flesh, recognizing that all things apart from Christ are rubbish. The upward call is to run to Him, affixing our eyes upon Him, receiving and Living His Life, from a renewed mind, with His senses, sight and consciousness.

Real Humanity, Freedom, then, is simple – it is Jesus Christ and setting our minds on Him. He is constantly giving impressions from within. Freedom is in the looking, turning, beholding of Him and His impressions.

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty (Freedom).”

Where is the Lord? In you. Where is Freedom? In you. Turning to Him for Life is what it means to be fully, really human – and Free. It’s not a matter of getting something you don’t have. It is a matter of Living by Someone you *already* have.

SUMMING IT ALL UP

Freedom surpasses all comprehension. This is one reason it is so difficult to find, to remain in, to live from, and to grow in. We simply cannot do it on our own.

Paul describes Freedom in one of his final letters as *“the Peace of God.”* He says to *“Rejoice in the Lord always (be Free)...and be anxious (not Free) for nothing.”* Then, as if to say, “Summing it all up, here are the secrets to Living (Freedom) that I know of from the Lord...” he says,

“Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”

Jesus is True. Jesus is Honor. Jesus is Right. Jesus is Pure. Jesus is Love. Jesus is Good. Jesus is Excellence. Jesus is worthy of All Praise. Freedom is Jesus, and dwelling on (Living in) Him.

Just before this, Paul is writing about the goal of Life. He says that, *“All things are loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord.”* He expands, saying, *“Everything but gaining Christ is rubbish.”* Here is a man who saw Jesus face to face, underwent perhaps the most dramatic transformation into new creation ever documented, and then penned two-thirds of your New Testament. If anyone who ever lived knew Christ, it was Paul of Tarsus. And yet, near the end of his life, from a prison cell, he proclaims Freedom as Christ, and sums all of Life into one aim:

“That I may know Him, and the power of His Resurrection and the Fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”

To know your death with Him, and the power of your Resurrection with Him, and the Fellowship of His sufferings, being daily conformed through denying Self – is to know Christ, and know Freedom. It is to know the sharing of the Freedom of The Vine – as He was crucified, dead, buried, raised, ascended and seated – so too, are we the branches. **To be Free, you need only agree with and Live from the ascended place you are, with Christ. We are not trying to “get” Freedom. Instead, we have been made One with Freedom.** Having already received Freedom through the Cross, we no longer have to attain it in our own strength, we instead, *“lay hold of, by faith, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, we press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

I want all of what Freedom is, and has. For me, for my Bride, for my family, for my city, for the world, and for you. God does too. But I cannot, nor can any other, impart Freedom to you through wanting it for you. God Himself will not force Freedom upon you, because He will not force *Himself* upon anyone.

But He *is* calling, beckoning, waiting, inviting...

The Lord is searching the entire earth today, looking for one who will see His Purpose, His Life, His Freedom – and order themselves beneath that Call. His promises are to move Heaven and Earth on behalf of one who responds in faith to this. I pray this is you. I pray this is me. Seek *first* the Kingdom of God, and you will Overcome, Free.

You are being invited. This Call is for the whosoever will. The Gate, while narrow, is open. The Path, while difficult, is not closed. Freedom, while rarely Lived, is available to all who will taste and see. You are alive for a reason, a Purpose – that is to demonstrate the Freedom of the Lord into the earth. This is the “normal” Christian Life. Bondage is not your destiny. A “defeated Christian” is an oxymoron.

Jesus is freedom. His Life is Freedom. Your view and belief in Him; and your willingness to Live by Him - is directly tied to your realization of Freedom.

The world, the Church, and all of creation are desperate and are crying out to see Free Sons and Daughters of God revealed, and expressing their Freedom through Life. The *"Greater Things"* are there, waiting to be apprehended and demonstrated by such as these.

There is a Kingdom to declare. There is a Land to walk in and partake of.

How tired are you of being a slave? How done with Self are you? How Free do you want to be? Freedom is a Man, and He dwells within. He is the Prize. He is the Treasure. He is already buried in the field (you). Won't you go and sell *everything* (including your Self), to obtain the field where this Treasure is buried?

If you do, you will have found The Path, walked it, and been one of the few who do. You *will* realize Freedom there.

Find The Path. Walk It. Be one of the few.

"It was for Freedom that Christ set us Free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."

Be one of the few.



ENGAGE

Once you've read it...

If you've already read *The Path of Freedom*, let me say **thank you**. I'm honored and blessed that you took the time to read it. The process of writing it changed me. In a good way. I hope you can say the same. So... **what did you think?**

Go to the [home page](#) of The Path Of Freedom and share your thoughts and feedback in the comments below. If you liked it, you are welcome to share it with others. Here are a few ideas:

- [Tweet](#) about it.
- Share it on [Facebook](#).
- Email [this link](#) to a friend.
- Print it and give a copy to a family member, friend or coworker who you feel would be blessed by the message (just don't charge for it or change it).

And here are some other ways to get involved:

- Share your thoughts and takeaways on Twitter, using the hashtag **#ThePathOfFreedom**.
- Join the [Facebook community](#), where you can connect with other readers on The Path Of Freedom.

I'm praying that this eBook opens your eyes to more - More Freedom, More Life, More Jesus - and inspires you to [Live](#), really Live Free..

The world and the Church are hungry, starving, for the people of God to realize their Freedom - and to Live It.

Be one of the few.

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- Lightstock - Cover Image

The revelation of Christ comes from everywhere, all the time, for those who are seeking and looking. Scripture points to Christ, and “all things” do as well. I have seen, and received so much of Him from ministries of those who have gone, and are going before me. I stand on their shoulders, following them as they follow Him - giving credit to them, and thanks to our Lord.

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Much of my heart that you read here, are seeds of the Jesus in them, imparted to me. I am deeply grateful for their ministry unto the Lord, and His Body.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A dead man, Living by Jesus Christ. Madly in love with Marie. Smitten by McKinley and Delaney. Texas Rangers diehard - a ballplayer at heart. Crossfitter. Practicing golfer, hooper and guitarist. Fueled by meat, cappuccinos and chocolate. Writing about Life, Love and Church - and knowing Jesus as all of these.

Read more about Brandon [HERE](#).

Brandon blogs at [Zōē Perissos](#):

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