



Hand of Mercy

A STORY OF GOD'S GRACE

Ann Greenleaf Wirtz

Hand of Mercy
Bible Study
Answers to the Questions in “A Deeper Reflection”
By
Ann Brubaker Greenleaf Wirtz

Thank You!

I’m so grateful for your interest in this Bible Study. It is designed to answer the questions found in “A Deeper Reflection,” located at the end of each chapter in *Hand of Mercy*. Perhaps you will be leading a study, or perhaps you are seeking answers for yourself. I’m thankful for your quest to discover what the Bible tells us concerning life and faith, including what it tells us about death. God reveals in His Word the mystery of life eternal in Christ Jesus:

Colossians 1:27 New King James Version (NKJV)

²⁷To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

The story of Joseph “Joe” Nowicki, once an atheist, unveils and demonstrates the power of God’s gift of faith on our lives. Joe was never the same once he encountered the Lord Jesus Christ and accepted Him as his Savior. Neither are we.

May this study enrich, enlighten, and encourage your life!

Blessings always,

Ann Wirtz

Recommended Group Study Schedule:

First Session: Come to the first meeting having read the first three chapters and having answered the questions to “A Deeper Reflection” at the end of each chapter.

Answers can be written in the book itself or in a notebook.

Chapter 1: Page 1: Grace and Hope

Chapter 2: Page 5: Eternity in a Day

Chapter 3: Page 8: A Father and His Son

Second Session:

Chapter 4: Page 14: Prayer

Chapter 5: Page 20: Grace Received

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Third Session:

Chapter 7: Page 30: A Granddaughter’s Illness

Chapter 8: Page 35: Power in the Storm

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Fourth Session:

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Fifth Session:

Chapter 13: Page 80: Precious in God’s Sight

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Sixth Session:

Chapter 16: Page 109: Dual Power: Faith and Prayer

Chapter 17: Page 112: Victory Over Death

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Bible Study
***Hand of Mercy* by Ann Greenleaf Wirtz**

A Deeper Reflection

Chapter One – Grace and Hope / Scripture to Consider

Read the story of The Rich Man and Lazarus from Luke 16:19-31.

²⁷ “Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father’s house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead’” (Luke 16:27-31 NKJV).

What word in Luke 16:28 means ‘to bear witness to; to affirm as fact or truth’? Testify

What was the testimony the Rich Man wanted his five brothers to hear from Lazarus?

The Rich Man was *tormented in this flame* [and separated from father Abraham]. Also, ²⁶ *And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here [Abraham’s bosom or heaven] to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.*

The Rich Man did not want his brothers suffering the same fate he did because of their lack of faith and understanding about how to avoid eternal separation from God (father Abraham), a separation that included punishment and torment in the flame. Once death occurred, there was

also no way available to change where a person spent eternity. He wanted his brothers to know the truth about the afterlife.

Read Luke 16:31 (see below) and compare this verse to Romans 10:17. *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (NKJV).* How are these verses alike?

Luke 16:31 (NKJV)

³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’”

These verses are alike because they both emphasize the importance that *hearing, and hearing the word of God* plays in coming to faith. If we never have the opportunity to *hear* the truth about Jesus from others, or if we never hear ourselves read the truth about God in the Bible, we will never have an understanding of who Jesus is and what it means to have a saving faith in Him.

We could use the word “Bible” as a substitute for the words “Moses and the prophets” in verses 29 and 31. If we did, what does Luke 16:29-31 tell us about belief?

Luke 16:29-31 (NKJV)

²⁹ Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets [the Bible]; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets [the Bible], neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’”

If a person *from the dead* comes back and tells what happens in the afterlife, it’s not going to matter what he says if the person they speak to rejects the truth of the Bible (Moses and the

prophets). We must hear with a heart seeking to understand, achieved by the mercy of God through the work of the Holy Spirit, before our ears can hear and our heart accept the truth.

Read Romans 10:9. *That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved* (NKJV). According to this verse, where does faith originate? What is the difference between “saying” and “believing”?

“Saying” originates in the mind or intellect and can be devoid of any emotional connection or understanding. “Believing,” or faith, originates in the heart. The Parable of the Sower helps us understand how true belief is sustained and becomes fruitful. We could understand the concept of “good ground” (verse 23, highlighted below) as nourished soil which combines the benefits of an understanding mind with the sensitivity, faith, and love found within the human heart.

The Parable of the Sower Explained Matthew 13:18-23 (NKJV)

¹⁸“Therefore hear the parable of the sower: ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. ²⁰But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ²²Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

²³But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

The Bible tells us in Mark 12:30 that ‘love’ is expressed through multiple venues: heart, soul, mind, strength. These unite through faith, or belief, that honors God.

Mark 12:30-31 (NKJV)

And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. ³¹ And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Define a Christian testimony as explained in Chapter One.

Page 17:

“Each revealing is a standing stone of God’s love and faithfulness.”

“Individual testimonies are highly valued, for they reveal a personal encounter with God.”

“A testimony is a marvelous, God-given witness that He is still at work drawing us to Him.”

Page 18:

“This telling is simply the story of grace and hope, as all Christian testimonies are, the rebirth of the human heart achieved through God’s infinite mercy.”

What do you anticipate learning through Joe’s story and the Scripture that accompanies this account?

I anticipate learning more deeply about the reality of God’s love us, for all mankind, and how He draws us to Him, even when we’re unaware of His hand upon our lives, even when we don’t believe He exists. This will be achieved through the story itself and through the Scripture that explains Biblically what is happening in the various situations and circumstances for Joe and his entire family.

A Deeper Reflection

Chapter Two – Eternity in a Day

Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth (Proverbs 27:1 NKJV).

What does this Proverb tell us about life?

This Proverb expresses the uncertainty of life, how we can never really know what is going to happen next to change, sometimes dramatically, the course of our life, forever. Examples of what can happen: a diagnosis, an illness, an accident, a disappointing decision, national and international occurrences, or natural disasters. The words *do not boast* indicate a challenging, even negative event.

Do you perceive a warning? If so, how would you live your life in response to this biblical message?

Our circumstances can change in an instant. I find it important to live my life in a prayerful, hopeful, trusting way, knowing God has every moment of my life, the good and the bad, in His hands. I want to be in a faithful, loving, close relationship with the Lord that grows stronger every day. Despite the absolute uncertainty of life, I don't want to live in fear, either, because:

2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV)

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Isaiah 41:13 (NKJV)

For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand,
Saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'

Read James 4:14:

Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away (NKJV).

What does this verse confirm about our daily life? What is the length of one's life span, regardless of how long one lives?

While days and years may stretch ahead as a seemingly long period of time, in reality, they pass rapidly by until days, weeks, months, and years are accomplished and done. At that point we look back in wonderment at how quickly time passed. One's life span, however long it may be in terms of years, is in the end, short.

Gretchen Ruben, author of The Happiness Project, wrote a sentence that captured the conundrum of time very well: "The days are long, but the years are short."

What did Joe believe about himself before the accident?

Page 29: "Joe was always a loner, a humanist who believed in his own intellect, strength, and survival skills. He simply didn't need anyone else..."

Joe was self-sufficient and determined to live life his way, by his own capabilities. He considered himself an atheist, alone and dependent only upon himself.

Have you ever felt that way? What made you change your mind?

Youth and early middle age are years that naturally foster a sense of independence and self-determination. While I considered myself a Christian, and even walked an aisle 'giving myself to God,' I didn't know much about having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Even though I prayed, I sought my own will and way. After living a life made up of poor decisions, mistakes, sins, and failure, I was finally broken and embraced the most important, lifesaving truth ever: Only Christ could redeem my life from the pit of my sins. He became my Savior!

Explain the following proverb from the Bible and why it is an accurate description of how man often perceives himself.

Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him (Proverbs 26:12 NKJV).

Sometimes we believe we ‘know better’ than God and are proud of our decisions and conclusions. If we leave the Lord out of our thinking, we get into trouble. We live in a world today where choices conflict with traditional, biblical standards. Since the world view is man-centered, and the biblical world view is Bible- or God-centered, it’s not surprising there is a divide. People will make and justify their decisions, but no one is exempt from the consequences, good or bad. Also, each will be accountable before God for their choices. Having a kind and compassionate heart toward others, knowing our own foolish ways, and lifting a prayer for God’s merciful intervention, even into our own lives, seems the wisest course when interacting with those who hold different views about life. The world is as it is, and my prayer to God is, ‘Thy will be done.’

The light and understanding we receive from the Bible is clearly stated in Psalm 119.

Psalm 119:130 (NKJV)

The entrance of Your words gives light;

It gives understanding to the simple.

Psalm 119:105 (KJV)

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

A Deeper Reflection

Chapter Three – A Father and His Son

Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward (Job 5:7 NKJV).

What does this verse mean to you?

Sparks flying upward is a natural, God-created phenomenon. Nothing can change how sparks naturally behave. That man experiences trouble falls into the same category. Troubles are inevitable because we live in a fallen world where sin and corruption rule for now, but not forever. Romans 5 explains how sin and death came through Adam and how righteousness and life eternal were established through the obedience of Jesus Christ. He bore our sins on the Cross of Calvary and died for us, freeing us from the penalty of sin, which is death. By accepting His free gift of salvation, we are made righteous before God.

Romans 5:12 (NASB)

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.

Romans 5:19 (NASB)

¹⁹For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

How do troubles affect relationships?

Troubles can isolate and turn us away from a parent, a sibling, a friend, a teacher, simply from people in general, even from church. As Gene's family disintegrated, he sought a life for himself beyond the normal, youthful desire for independence. His relationship with his father suffered even more since Joe was living apart from the family. Over time, there was no interaction to nourish and keep the father/son relationship intact. There was little to no parental guidance for Gene.

Ephesians 4 offers a life principle that will impact and improve our relationships with others. It also explains how to handle and survive the inevitable interpersonal disappointments and problems we encounter:

Ephesians 4:29-32 (NKJV)

²⁹Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. ³²And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Jesus makes a bold statement in John 16:33.

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world (NKJV).”

What is Jesus telling us about life and about Himself? How did He overcome the world? How does faith affect how we handle our troubles, even allowing us to *be of good cheer*?

Life will be difficult, disappointing, hard, fearful, uncertain, discouraging, unfair, traumatic, and heartbreaking, BUT, if we call upon Him in trusting faith, no matter what we’re facing, then He will be with us through every tribulation. His victory over the grave defeated the final enemy, death, and proves His power to implement Romans 8:28 in our lives, and for that reason, we can *be of good cheer* and filled with thanksgiving:

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

²⁸And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Faith allows us to have victory over our trials because of God's promises to us:

Deuteronomy 31:8 (NKJV)

⁸And the LORD, He *is* the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed."

Psalms 46:1 (NKJV)

God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

The enemies we face are most often internal, all the emotional struggles we experience when life is especially difficult for us. God fights these enemies with His peace and tells us in Philippians 4 how the victory over our emotions is found through prayer and thanksgiving:

Philippians 4:2-7 (NKJV)

⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

The fullness of life is found only in Jesus as we abide in Him. This gives us the opportunity to actually to *be of good cheer*, because apart from Him we'll never experience the reality of His abiding Spirit.

John 15:5 (NKJV)

"I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NASB)

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

John 15:11 (NKJV)

"These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.

Prayer is defined as *spiritual communion with God... as in supplication, thanksgiving, adoration, or confession* (dictionary.com). How does prayer impact the truth of John 16:33?

John 16:33 (NKJV)

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Without prayer, without the decision to turn to our Heavenly Father through His Son Jesus Christ, we can never experience the depth of God's peace. As it is, problems are difficult enough to handle for those who truly love our Dear Lord, so the thought of going through life without the hope, joy, comfort and assurance we have in Jesus seems overwhelmingly impossible! Without Him, we simply could never have *peace* and *good cheer* in the midst of our trials! Left to ourselves, our human nature could not manufacture the confident trust we need to face and handle our daily challenges.

John 15:7 (NKJV)

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

Romans 8:26-27 (NKJV)

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷ Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

From *Jesus Today* by Sarah Young, page 162:

“No matter how dark and difficult your day may seem, the Light of My Presence will shine through the darkness as you worship Me. This glorifies Me and enables you to live above your circumstances – victoriously!”

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand (Isaiah 41:10 NKJV).

What wonderful attributes do you learn about God in Isaiah 41:10?

God is always with us:

Psalm 46:1-3 (NKJV)

God is our refuge and strength,

A very present help in trouble.

²Therefore we will not fear,

Even though the earth be removed,

And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

³Though its waters roar and be troubled,

Though the mountains shake with its swelling.

God is our God:

Psalm 48:14 (NKJV)

For this is God,

Our God forever and ever;

He will be our guide

Even to death.

God helps and upholds me:

Isaiah 41:13 (NKJV)

For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand,

Saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'

God is righteous:

Psalm 71:19 (NASB)

For Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens,

You who have done great things;

O God, who is like You?

God is our righteousness:

Philippians 3:8-9 (NKJV)

That I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness,

which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.

A Deeper Reflection

Chapter Four – Prayer

Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness!

You have relieved me in my distress;

Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer (Psalm 4:1 NKJV).

Why is it important to cultivate a prayer life?

Without a prayer life, we have little to no relief in our distress. Sometimes people turn to other outlets to find relief: alcohol, drugs, promiscuity. These can keep us from seeking the Lord and in the end bring us destruction and greater emotional pain. There is no permanent release in the world's ways, only temporary escape. Prayer is a call to God to bestow His mercy on a situation, and this gives us hope as we leave our concerns and problems in His hands. Sometimes we have no control, power, or very little influence over what is happening, so calling on God in our distress connects us to the only One who can solve the problems and issues we face. Prayer needs to be our first response, but if we forget, we can have confidence He is there waiting for us. And while it may take time before we see an answer, and while we may never see or understand the answer we receive, our determination to trust Him, no matter what, is an essential part of our faith walk. Job 13:15 is a verse I've used as a rallying cry to my heart when I see no viable solution. I make a conscious and deliberate decision to trust God, regardless of the circumstances, and find great peace in this determined stand of faith, knowing God hears me and will answer in His will, way, and time.

Job 13:15 (NKJV)

Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.

James 5:16 (NKJV)

The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

The most hopeful prayer we can ever pray is, “Thy will be done.” This signifies our release of a problem and our total trust in Him. God listens to a heart relinquished to His loving sovereignty.

Psalm 73:25-26 (NKJV)

²⁵ Whom have I in heaven *but You?*

And *there is* none upon earth *that* I desire besides You.

²⁶ My flesh and my heart fail;

But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Psalm 51:10 (NKJV)

Create in me a clean heart, O God,

And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

In the “Parable of the Persistent widow,” Jesus begins with a clear message:
He then told them a parable on the need for them to pray always and not become discouraged (Luke 18:1 HCSB). How does this message challenge you?

It seems impossible to pray always and to not become discouraged by what happens in life.
Jesus challenges us to cling and to abide in Him as we deal with the myriad, daily issues that can overwhelm and hurt us emotionally and physically. Jesus tells us to *pray always* because He knows firsthand how hard life is, and He wants us turning to Him to redirect our focus from discouragement to hope in Him. For every situation, our hope can only be found in the Lord.
There is nowhere else to turn. Our peace is in Christ alone, as we release our burdens to Him:

Psalm 39:7 (NKJV)

“And now, Lord, what do I wait for?”

My hope *is* in You.

John 14:27 (NKJV)

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

What can cause a person to *become discouraged*?

Everything can discourage us. However, our discouragement often comes from disappointment in relationships, in decisions that bring harm, in hurtful or neglectful actions by others. We can *become discouraged* when our prayers seem unanswered. Sometimes we allow others to dictate our happiness and contentment, and there's NO joy or peace in that. Sometimes we're discouraged because we make mistakes and do not live up to our own standards and ideals, especially if, as a believer, we feel we've disappointed our Dear Lord.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, we're given a startling command: *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you* (NKJV). Is this humanly possible? Why not?

This command seems impossible because of the trials, sorrows, and disappointments we experience in life, and the tendency of our human nature to react with fear, dread, even anger. God's commands are positive and designed to protect us from negativity, despair, mistakes and regret.

Proverbs 6:23 (HCSB)

For a command is a lamp, teaching is a light, and corrective discipline is the way to life.

Psalms 103:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we *are* dust.

The “how” to even attempt this command is found in John 14:16 when Jesus explains: *I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever* (NASB). Jesus defines the Helper in John 14:26. *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you* (NASB). How does having the Holy Spirit of God residing in you (which occurs at the moment of salvation) affect your attitude, your hope, your prayer, your life?

John 14:26 Amplified Bible (AMP)

But the Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor—Counselor, Strengtheners, Standby), the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name [in My place, to represent Me and act on My behalf], He will teach you all things. And He will help you remember everything that I have told you.

My attitude stems from my hope in God, that He will keep me and those I love regardless of challenging circumstances, which may be financial or work related, or a result of interactions and relationships with family, friends and even the world. It helps to know my groanings are meaningful through the Holy Spirit’s intercession on my behalf before the throne of Grace and Mercy, according to His will, which is all that matters – this truth so eloquently stated in Romans 8:26-27 (see below). Abide, believe, relinquish, and trust are four words the Lord gave me several years ago when I was struggling with disappointment. God reminds me every time I feel anxious, that life is a journey, and I’m to trust Him for my family’s journey, and my own: F.R.O.G. = Fully Rely On God!

Have you felt helpless in your prayer life, wondering if your prayers are heard? Why do we feel this way?

Yes, we can feel helpless when we don’t see a change in our circumstances. Our fears and concerns can be so overwhelming at times, that we miss what God is doing in our heart, in our life, and in the lives of others. We need to shift our focus onto the Lord with a determination to

abide, believe, relinquish, and trust, regardless of what's happening. The late Catherine Marshall, beloved Christian author, has written about her third grandchild being born with a terminal, genetic birth defect in her book *Meeting God at Every Turn*. Despite intense and multitudinous prayers lifted for Amy Catherine, she died within six weeks. Catherine became very bitter and angry toward God, and wrote she experienced "rebellion against God because I felt He had betrayed me." Finally, she allowed Him to speak to her, "The baby died, but Amy is with Me. And while she lived, she ministered to everyone who prayed for her." God revealed all the answered prayer that occurred through the prayers for Amy Catherine. We may never understand, but we can never give up our faith and hope in Christ, no matter what.

Have you ever struggled to pray, not knowing what to say?

Yes, especially the night of August 1, 2003. That afternoon my late first husband, Arie, and I learned that Arie had cancer, which turned out to be terminal. Many others have had a similar, devastating experience. No matter who we are, at some point in life we will struggle with something that leaves us speechless and fearful.

What does the truth of Romans 8:26 mean for the believer?

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words (NASB).

When we are unable to pray because we are emotionally distraught and disabled, if you will, the Holy Spirit will pray for us. We are NEVER left alone in our helplessness!! PTL!!

Romans 8:26-27 (NASB)

²⁶ In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; ²⁷ and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the^[a] saints according to the will of God.

Colossians 1:11 in The Message translation is excellent and inspiring with its common, everyday language:

Colossians 1:11-12 The Message (MSG)

We pray that you'll have the strength to stick it out over the long haul—not the grim strength of gritting your teeth but the glory-strength God gives. It is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy.

Proverbs 3:5-7 offers a guide for our prayer life: ⁵ *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct* your paths. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil (NKJV).*

(make your paths straight in the NASB).***

Rewrite this proverb, using your own words to reinforce the power of its message.

Never let your heart stop trusting the Lord,

Even when you don't understand what is happening in your life or in the lives of those you love;

Just acknowledge the power, majesty, love, mercy and grace of God,

And God Himself will guide your way.

Don't think you know everything, or anything, for that matter;

The Lord is to be feared with awe and reverence,

And that allows us to stay clear of the destructive path.

Chapter 5 – Grace Received

A Deeper Reflection

The Bible identifies Jesus as both God’s Son: *Then a voice came from heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11 NKJV), and God Himself: *For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9 NKJV).**

The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14 HCSB).

For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word [Jesus], and the Holy Spirit; these three are one (John 5:7 NKJV).

This is the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the great Three in One. With this in mind, what does the verse 1 John 5:12 mean: *He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life (NKJV)?*

Eternal life (even a life of joy on earth) is in the Son, Jesus Christ, who is God Himself come to earth as the Word made flesh. Without a saving faith and relationship with Jesus, our eternity will be spent apart from Him, and our daily life will reflect the empty void of a life lived without Christ.

1 John 5:13 (NKJV)

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

John 17:1-5 (NKJV) “Jesus Prays for Himself”

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ²as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. ⁴I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Jesus makes a profound and dramatic statement in John 3:3. *Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (NKJV).* Being born again is the birth of the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, within us when our hearts accept Jesus as our personal Savior. This is accompanied by repentance of sin coupled with faith in the redeeming work of Christ on the cross. Jesus explained to Nicodemus, “*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit*” (John 3:6 NKJV).

We are given assurance of our salvation: *By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit* (1 John 4:13 NKJV). Explain what it means to be *born again*.

When we accept Jesus as our Savior, the Holy Spirit, who is the third aspect of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) comes and permanently resides within us – the Holy Spirit gives birth to a new spirit within us, and we become a new creation in Christ. This new birth is what it means to be *born again*. The Holy Spirit abiding within assures us of our salvation. You don’t have to do anything to be lost, but you must accept Jesus Christ as Savior to be saved or *born again*.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

1 Peter 1:3-5 (NASB)

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The verse 2 Corinthians 6:2 is a powerful statement about God's desire and call on your life: *Today is the day of salvation* (NLT). How do you respond to this call?

I'm uncertain my high school desire to give my life to God, which I did several times, even walking an aisle to express my sincere faith, led to an actual moment of redemption. Perhaps it did, because I know I loved Jesus. However, all the sinful choices and mistakes I made later on led to great despair, even to the point of feeling my spirit's pending death. I was convicted and repented and embraced the Lord with all my heart. I definitely experienced my salvation that day, everything changed. My marriage and family were saved, and I thank our Dear Lord for His convicting Spirit that brought about my salvation and the assurance of His eternal love for me. Our days are numbered and soon over – we must choose Christ before it's too late:

Psalms 90:10 (NKJV)

The days of our lives *are* seventy years;
And if by reason of strength *they are* eighty years,
Yet their boast *is* only labor and sorrow;
For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

What does salvation mean for your daily life and for your eternity?

Daily life: Salvation means abundant life through the Fruit of the Spirit (see below). Without the work of the Holy Spirit within us, we could never humanly experience the fullness and vibrancy of life represented by each aspect. Because of saving faith, our lives are taken to a higher level of happiness, satisfaction, and fulfillment, regardless of our circumstances. We also have the choice to live sacrificially for Christ in our daily decisions, and the choice to renew our minds daily by reading His Word, the Holy Bible. These are the choices, and benefits of faith.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NASB)

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

Romans 12:1-2 (NKJV)

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is your* reasonable service. ²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Eternal LIFE and JOY are found in Jesus Christ:

Salvation means we can KNOW our Heavenly Father and our Savior Jesus Christ personally, TODAY and throughout ALL ETERNITY – and that is an awesome thought!!!

John 17:3 (NKJV)

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

If you say “Yes!” to salvation, would you want your loved ones to be saved, as well? Why?

Yes, I want my loved ones to be saved, because the thought of them not being in heaven with me, and especially with the Lord, is simply heartbreaking! I don't want them to be separated from God, and from me, because they've not accepted Christ as their Savior. I don't want them experiencing the hell that was created for Satan and his demons. This is a motivation to keep sharing the truth with family and friends – and with everyone we can!

Matthew 25:41 (HCSB)

Then He will also say to those on the left, 'Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels!

Chapter Six – Miracle Upon Miracle

A Deeper Reflection

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30-31 NKJV).

What is the greatest miracle a person could experience?

Salvation of the human heart is the greatest miracle a person could experience. It's not a salvation of the mind but of the heart. There is a common saying: "You can miss Heaven by 18 inches," about the distance between your head and your heart. Faith is a gift from God that plants itself in the heart of man. Faith helps to overcome the wickedness of the human heart:

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV)

⁹"The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?

Matthew 15:19-20 (NIV)

¹⁹For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. ²⁰These are what defile a person.

What other occurrences in your life fall into the miraculous category, according to your understanding of miracles?

All of life is a miracle from God, going back to the beginning of time as recorded in Genesis through today. Love, family, faith, friendship, health – all miracles in their own way, mainly because we are so unworthy of these blessings. Sustaining faith is a miracle.

After my first husband died at 5:50 a.m. on July 14, 2004, at The Elizabeth House in Flat Rock, NC, I called my son, Arie Todd, to tell him his dad had just died five minutes ago. My son and his wife were living in Greenville, SC, then, a good 45 minutes away. He told me he had gotten up to fix the air conditioner, sat by the side of the bed and drank some water, looked at the clock, which was 5:50, lay down and wondered how his dad was, if he had died yet. All of a sudden he heard his father's voice speak to him saying, "Oh, Todd, it's so glorious, more glorious than you can ever imagine." He wondered at hearing his father's voice, but he knew this is what his dad would say if he could. Then I called. We were overcome with joy at this miracle which God allowed at Arie's death.

How do personal and intercessory prayers (praying for others) contribute to a miracle?

Everyone needs prayer, because everyone needs the Lord. When we pray for others, we are asking God to touch their lives, their circumstances, their needs, desires and fears. We call on His mercy. For unbelievers, our prayer is for the Holy Spirit to quicken their heart and spirit to respond to Him. That is the greatest miracle. God wants us to pray for others; it is a privilege and an honor. Praying for others – a waitress, a friend, our loved ones, our leaders, even strangers – brings us joy and closer to our Lord.

Ephesians 6:18 (HCSB)

¹⁸ Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

1 Thessalonians 5:25 (NKJV)

²⁵ Brethren, pray for us.

For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (Luke 11:10 NKJV).

And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it (John 14:13-14 NKJV),

Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10 NKJV).

What do these verses tell us about answered prayer? Do you perceive answered prayer as a miracle? Why?

I view all answered prayer as a miracle because it represents God's divine intervention into our lives when we call upon Him. When we pray, "Thy will be done," we relinquish the outcome into the Hands of the Only One who knows what is best to accomplish His sovereign will:

Isaiah 46:10 (NIV)

¹⁰I make known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times, what is still to come.
I say, 'My purpose will stand,
and I will do all that I please.'

He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay, and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and will trust in the Lord (Psalm 40:2-3 NASB).

After reading these verses, describe how God changes the heart of an individual who has accepted Jesus as their personal Savior. Why would you consider salvation a miracle?

I remember well the day God's merciful, loving grace and kindness rescued me from the *pit of destruction*. The sins in my life had taken me to the brink of despair where I felt my spiritual death. I felt keenly the darkness that is separation from God – it was invading my soul, and I knew if I didn't repent, turn from my sins and follow Christ with every decision, I was dead. I experienced my own death – the barrier that sin placed between me and God, not just on this earth but an eternal death, and I was terrified. I wept until every tear was wrung from me. Several months later, God spoke to my redeemed heart and said, "Everything is going to be all right." I called my husband into our bedroom and told him what I heard in my spirit, and we both knew our marriage and our eternal souls were saved forever by God's grace and mercy upon both of us. My salvation experience occurred in December, 1986, and the Lord's affirmation to my heart occurred in early March, 1987, at the start of the Lenten season. We had been at church that morning, where I felt the new birth of joy and hope well up within me.

Once I began faithfully reading the Bible, I discovered Psalm 40:2-3, and it became my life verse. God indeed *set my feet upon the Rock* that is Christ Jesus and made my *footsteps firm* in Him alone. People have said they observe me when I sing in the choir, aware of my smile, probably even of my tears, aware of how I worship the Lord. Well, I simply owe God everything. I was on the brink of losing **every single thing** of meaning and value, even my mortal soul. So when I sing, the lyrics of the song mean **life** to me because: ***He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God*** in my heart.

Is salvation a miracle? Absolutely, because left to myself, I am dead in my trespasses and sins!!

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-10 NASB).

A miracle comes from God. How does this verse express the miracle of faith in Christ?

This verse expresses God's mercy upon us through His redeeming gift of grace through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. The miracle is that God does this supernaturally through the Holy Spirit, there is nothing within us that can generate eternal salvation. This verse takes away the fear of trying to earn salvation through human will, action, or strength - all impossible.

Titus 3:4-7 (NKJV)

⁴ But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Chapter Seven – A Granddaughter’s Illness

A Deeper Reflection

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7 NKJV).

When a tragedy or devastating illness occurs, what is the usual response?

The usual response to a tragedy or a devastating diagnosis/illness is a combination of various emotions: fear, horror, panic, grief. When faced with a crisis, we feel an immediate loss of control over our life. We feel set adrift from the secure and familiar moorings of our routine, our home, our relationships, our faith. At once, the future becomes frightfully unknown.

What are we told to do to achieve *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding*, and how should we try to respond to problems, as explained in Philippians 4:6-7?

We are told to pray and ask God for His help, our prayer to be undergirded and laced with thanksgiving for God’s merciful response to our plea. Praise and thanksgiving release us from the bondage of fear, and we receive God’s remarkable peace that guards our hearts and minds through our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every trial becomes a standing stone of faith. The Bible tells us to remember God’s faithfulness, how He has answered our prayers and kept us in His peace. These are the keys to how to deal with life and the difficulties we inevitably experience.

The NIV Study Bible commentary tells us, “Jeremiah, so often characterized by anguish of spirit, has justly been called the ‘weeping prophet.’” He is the author of the book Jeremiah and is considered the probable author of the book Lamentations. About this latter book, thought to have been written between 586 and 575 B.C., the commentary states, “Lamentations poignantly

shares the overwhelming sense of loss that accompanied the destruction of the city [Jerusalem], temple and ritual as well as the exile of Judah's inhabitants." We treasure Lamentations 3:21-24 because these verses speak eloquently about God's mercy. It is helpful to put them into context, however, in order to grasp the profound horror of Jeremiah's loss. Verses 19 and 20 indicate the depth his soul plunged as he uses two particular words: 'wormwood and gall' which are 'metaphors for extreme bitterness' (Bible Doctrine News). Yet, while struggling with the memories of his losses, Jeremiah also remembered God's mercy and his heart was filled with hope. At our lowest point, this is something to embrace:

Lamentations 3:19-24 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Remember my affliction and roaming,

The wormwood and the gall.

²⁰ My soul still remembers

And sinks within me.

²¹ This I recall to my mind,

Therefore I have hope.

²² *Through* the LORD's mercies we are not consumed,

Because His compassions fail not.

²³ *They are* new every morning;

Great *is* Your faithfulness.

²⁴ "The LORD *is* my portion," says my soul,

"Therefore I hope in Him!"

What two words follow *by prayer and supplication*, and why are they surprising?

The two words that follow are *with thanksgiving*. These words are surprising, because our normal, human reaction to anything that causes anxiety is to reject, even hate, what has happened. We don't normally respond positively to something we perceive as negative.

Why is thanksgiving an important and vital component of prayer?

God wants us to be thankful in our prayers, especially when our requests concern troubles, because our thanksgiving is a recognition that He is sovereign and that *all things work together for the good*, no matter what the problems are or how disappointing or devastating they may seem:

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

²⁸And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

Thanksgiving changes our perspective because it causes us to focus on God. It also changes us:

Romans 5:3-5 (NKJV)

³And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Is it humanly possible to be anxious for nothing?

No, by virtue of living in this fallen world, we will experience anxiety: personally, relationally, situationally, nationally, and especially globally today with ISIS.

How does a saving faith in Jesus Christ make this possible?

The Holy Spirit living within reminds, convicts, and helps us give our cares to God where we can then rest in His assurance of divine peace:

1 Peter 5:6-7 (NKJV)

⁶Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Psalm 55:22 (NKJV)

²²Cast your burden on the LORD,

And He shall sustain you;

He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

What can we do to temper our anxieties?

We can temper our anxieties by clinging to our Dear Lord, knowing we cannot conquer our fears without Him. Seek God in humility and receive His amazing grace.

James 4:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

James 4:6 (NKJV)

⁶But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:

"God resists the proud,

But gives grace to the humble."

The book of Psalms offers a gold mine of inspiration for the hurting and fearful heart. Read the following verses and explain what they mean to you.

What word occurs in each verse?

The word 'hope' occurs in each selection.

Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all you who hope in the Lord (Psalm 31:24 NKJV).

When our hope is placed in the Lord, He will strengthen our heart and give us courage to face whatever trial is before us.

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God (Psalm 42:11 NKJV).

Sometimes our discouragement puzzles us, because as believers we know we can trust God with everything, yet we don't always act like it. At times like this, I need to remind myself where my hope is found, praise Him for it, and the peace of God will then become evident in my demeanor and expression.

My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I shall not be shaken. On God my salvation and my glory rest; the rock of my strength, my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times, O people, pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us (Psalm 62:5-8 NASB).

Absolutely powerful statement of faith: God is a refuge for those who pour out their heart before Him and wait patiently in hope; God is our rock, our strength, the author of our salvation, His glory evident to those who believe. Never stop trusting Him!

Chapter Eight – Power in the Storm

A Deeper Reflection

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you (Isaiah 43:2 NKJV).

Gene experienced terrible visions of what could happen to his family and his church because of Gena's illness. In his great despair, where did he turn first? Where would you turn first? Why?

Gene cried out to God first, "Lord! I'm in *agony*... my mind is under attack, and I can't control the fear! Lord! I see an end to everything dear to me... *please help me!*"

I pray I would turn to the Lord first, since He knows everything that is happening, He has allowed it to happen, and He is the only One who can interject His divine solution and intervention into the problem. In the end, whatever we face requires total relinquishment and trust, no matter what the conclusion turns out to be. God's plan for our lives is personal, particular, and is designed to bring us closer to Him in knowledge and truth as we share in His suffering. He transforms and renews our minds with hope, when we keep our thoughts on Him.

Psalm 46:1 (NKJV)

God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.

Romans 12:2 (NKJV)

²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Romans 8:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

Sarah Young wrote about this topic on page 80 in *Jesus Today*, “When life gets tough, don’t waste those hard circumstances. Instead, ask Me to use them to transform you more and more into My likeness – helping you become your true self.”

What solution did God give Gene for handling these devastating thoughts?

Why did it work?

God gave Gene a powerful vision of *a plane of white light with bleeding feet on the right... held together by a nail that pierced them, with blood dripping from the nail. They were the feet of Jesus, when He was crucified on the cross.* The Lord told Gene to *hold all thoughts captive that didn’t come from Him and to place them into the Light* and then to *place them on Calvary*, represented by the vision of Christ’s pierced feet. This vision and directive worked to get Gene’s thoughts from Satan under control, because they combined the visual with an action that brought Gene’s focus onto Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross.

Isaiah 26:3 (NKJV)

³You will keep *him* in perfect peace,
Whose mind is stayed on You,
Because he trusts in You.

James 4:7 New King James Version (NKJV)

⁷Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

What is Isaiah 43:2 telling us about life on earth?

This amazing verse depicts the power and the sometimes destructive nature of the natural world when it's out of control – water, rivers, fire, and flame – to tell us that we will experience hardships, fears, and sometimes catastrophe in our lives. This verse begins each sentence with the word “When.” It does not say “If you pass through” or “If you walk through.” These are declarative sentences that simply state facts. We are going to experience problems simply because we are alive and live in a fallen world. We experience the consequences of other people's sins, of our sins, and the bondage to sin of the natural world itself.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 (NASB)

²⁰Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who *continually* does good and who never sins.

Romans 8:21-22 (NKJV)

²¹because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

What does Isaiah 43:2 tell us about God's presence in our lives when we are dealing with the overwhelming challenges and storms of life?

God emphatically states some fascinating principles. Even through it's not easy to walk through water because of the resistance our legs feel as we push forward, that reality descriptive of the resistance we feel when we push through a problem; and even though we sometimes feel we're actually drowning in our problems or sorrows; and while what we face may seem as deadly as walking through fire itself – God tells us three things: He'll *be with* us to help us push through our problems, He'll keep us from drowning, and He'll keep the intense flames of the fire from

scorching us. This is a remarkable, instructive verse that promises God's presence, power, and participation in our lives. The verse does not say, however, that everything turns out rosy, as we perceive a rosy ending to a problem.



Annie suffered from severe arthritis, and before she turned 30 she was unable to walk. She wrote this poem in 1919. She also wrote the song, *He Giveth More Grace*. Her life and words became a remarkable testimony of faith that lives on, even to this day.

1866 - 1932

Annie Johnson Flint's Testimony

WHAT GOD HATH PROMISED

God hath not promised skies always blue,
Flower strewn pathways all our lives through,
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.

God hath not promised we shall not know
Toil and temptation, trouble and woe;
He hath not told us we shall not bear
Many a burden, many a care

God hath not promised smooth roads and wide,
Swift, easy travel, needing no guide;
Never a mountain rocky and steep,
Never a river turbid and deep.

PASSING THROUGH

(See Isaiah 43:1-2)

"When Thou passest through the waters,"
Deep the waves may be and cold,
But JEHOVAH is our Refuge
And His promise is our hold:
For the LORD Himself hath said it,
He the faithful God and true:
"When thou comest to the waters,
Thou shalt not go down, but through

Seas of sorrow, seas of trial,
Bitterest anguish, fiercest pain,
Rolling surges of temptation,
Sweeping over heart and brain,
They shall never overflow us,
For we know His word is true:
All His waves and all His billows
He will lead us safely through

Threatening breakers of destruction,
Doubt's insidious underflow,
Shall not sink us, shall not drag us
Out to ocean depths of woe:
For His promise shall sustain us,
Praise the LORD, Whose word is true!
We shall not go down or under,
He hath said, "Thou passest through."

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold (Psalm 18:2 NKJV).

Why should we turn to God when troubles arise, as stated in Psalm 18:2?

We should turn to God when troubles arise because there is simply no other person, force, or entity that has the power, authority, or identity to deliver us from eternal punishment to eternal glory through faith in God's Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. We have the ultimate protection and redemption in Him, so life on earth can be lived in the hope and promise of God's eternal deliverance, making whatever happens here pale in comparison. We need to have an eternal perspective, praying for ourselves and for others, as we cling to God as our *rock* and *fortress* in the storms of life.

2 Corinthians 4:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory.

Ephesians 6:14-18 (NKJV)

¹⁴Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; ¹⁸praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You (Psalm 56:3 NKJV). Why?

I will trust in God whenever I'm afraid, because He promises to never leave nor forsake me.

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NKJV)

“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”

Psalm 27:1 (NKJV)

The LORD is my light and my salvation;

Whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the strength of my life;

Of whom shall I be afraid?

Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me (Psalm 23:4).

What truths do we learn from God in this revered and well-known verse?

We needn't fear death, because He is with us until the end, those who love Jesus, sustaining and comforting us with His merciful presence, and then He receives us into glory!

Psalm 73:24-26 (NKJV)

²⁴You will guide me with Your counsel,

And afterward receive me to glory.

²⁵Whom have I in heaven but You?

And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.

²⁶My flesh and my heart fail;

But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Chapter Nine – Struck With Astonishment

A Deeper Reflection

He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen (Deuteronomy 10:21 NKJV).

List the everyday occurrences, the things around you or the special events, happenings, or people that you would consider great and awesome in your sight.

Great and awesome people to me: my husband, son, daughter-in-law, granddaughter and grandson – in short, my family and friends! Also, I admire authors, missionaries, people of faith.

Special events: marriage, giving birth, visiting my family, becoming a grandmother

Happenings: graduation, writing books and articles, being cancer free, music we sing

Nature: the beauty of birds, companionship of special cats and dogs I've had over the years, the white squirrels, the deer that pass through, the sunrise and sunset, the mountains, lakes, rivers, and flowers, the animal world

I believe all the beauty and blessings around me, from family and friends to the natural world, from the comfort and joy of my home to the worship and spiritual life and fellowship of our church – well all of this is great and awesome in my sight, and I praise God for the blessings that each represent!

One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts (Psalm 145:4 NKJV).

Why is it important to share what God does and has done in our lives, especially with the younger generation?

The young are not going to know anything about how God has worked in our lives unless we tell them. They observe how we live our lives, so it's important we live a life of faith in Christ and share that with them through our actions, as well as our words. They learn about God from us, how to trust Him and come to Him in prayer, how He answers our prayers, how He loves and cares for us, and how He loves and cares especially for them. The world has a strong message that pulls people from Christ, and telling others, young and old, the Good News of the Bible is an over-arching cornerstone and principle of our faith:

Romans 10:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NKJV)

⁶"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

Titus 2:3-4New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, ⁴so that they may ^[a]encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,

Proverbs 22:6 (NKJV)

⁶Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 22:6 tells us to *train up a child in the way he should go*, which is another principle at work in Psalm 145:4, where the older generation is told to *praise and declare God's works and mighty acts to another*, or younger generation. The conclusion to Proverbs 22:6, *and when he is old he will not depart from it* is very instructive. The verse doesn't say that once the young understand and accept the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, they will then be mistake free or won't make decisions we wouldn't want them to make. Our children grow up and make their choices – good or bad from our perspective – and they will be accountable to God for those choices, just as we are.

We are wise to pray for our children and our grandchildren, both ours and others, and place our concerns for them into God's hands for Him to handle over the long journey of life. The encouraging aspect of this verse in Proverbs is that it recognizes life is a faith journey from childhood to old age. And don't we ourselves know how long it's taken for us to get to this point in our own understanding of faith and our own relationship with Jesus! Although life is a vapor in the end (James 4:14), life for most of us takes time. The beginning verses in the book of Job offer insight into a parent's faithfulness to pray for his children. Job loved and feared God with all his heart and lived a blameless life, still, he felt compelled to pray diligently for his sons and daughters, knowing each was capable of sin. He is an example for all of us.

Job 1:1-6 (HCSB)

1 There was a man in the country of Uz named Job. He was a man of perfect integrity, who feared God and turned away from evil. **2** He had seven sons and three daughters. **3** His estate included 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, and a very large number of servants. Job was the greatest man among all the people of the east.

4 His sons used to take turns having banquets at their homes. They would send an invitation to their three sisters to eat and drink with them. **5** Whenever a round of banqueting was over, Job would send for his children and purify them, rising early in the morning to offer burnt offerings

for^[a] all of them. For Job thought: Perhaps my children have sinned, having cursed God in their hearts. This was Job's regular practice.

And in the language of the NKJV, so timeless:

Job 1:1-6 (NKJV)

1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. **2** And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. **3** Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.

4 And his sons would go and feast *in their* houses, each on his *appointed* day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. **5** So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings *according to* the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed^[a] God in their hearts." Thus Job did regularly.

The most important issue for a believing parent or grandparent is the issue of salvation.

Whatever mistakes or decisions the young make, we want them in heaven with the Lord – and with us! How they come down politically or socially on an issue pales in comparison to the issue of eternal salvation through faith in our Dear Jesus. The unpardonable sin is rejecting Christ as one's Savior. I hold onto that truth.

Matthew 12:31-32 (NKJV)

The Unpardonable Sin

³¹“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. ³²Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary by John Walvoord and Roy Zuck explains, “A divine Person living among men would naturally not be appreciated fully. That was why allowances for such actions were made... But while the person of Jesus was not fully comprehended, the power evidence through Him should never have been misunderstood, especially by religious leaders... They were about to attribute incorrectly to Satan the power of the Holy Spirit exercised through Jesus and thus to commit the blasphemy against the spirit.”

Reasons for Hope site by Liberty University clarifies this even more:

“This blasphemy by the Pharisees and scribes led Jesus to expound more clearly on a sin that was, and always will be unpardonable – the blaspheming of the Holy Spirit. Since the work of the Holy Spirit is to testify of Jesus, when someone blasphemes the Holy Spirit they are rejecting the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christian Research Institute, Clay Jones from Biola University wrote:

“The difference between blaspheming the Son of Man and blaspheming the Spirit is that blasphemy of the Son of Man is an instant rejection, while blasphemy of the Spirit is a permanent rejection....Once the Spirit’s testimony about God’s work through Jesus is permanently refused, then nothing can be forgiven, since God’s plan has been rejected.”

Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness (Psalm 29:2 NKJV).

Why should we give God glory, and what does it mean to worship God in holiness?

We should give God *the glory due His name* because He is: Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, Defender, Comforter, Provider, Protector, Healer, Shepherd, Rock, Shield, Teacher, King of Kings, and our Eternal Father, to name a few descriptive titles!

The definition of ‘holy’ is *to be set apart for the service of God*. When we *worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness*, we worship Him in the beautiful purity of our born again spirit, through our personal relationship with Jesus Christ, which sets us apart from the world and from our own sin nature. We worship the Lord, who is the only True Savior, Redeemer and Son of God. Any other worship directed toward any other god apart from God the Father, in the Name of His Son Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit is false. Sometimes we pray to Jesus, as in “Dear Jesus, help me!” Sometimes we pray “Dear Heavenly Father, help us, in the name of Jesus!” Sometimes we simply pray “Dear God, Thy will be done! Amen.”

John 4:24 (NKJV)

²⁴God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

John 14:6 (NKJV)

⁶Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

How does giving God *the glory due to His name* affect us?

We are changed when we pray, and when we praise the Lord, because our focus becomes directed toward God and His merciful love. We are not so consumed with ourselves when we praise God and contemplate all His marvelous ways. In return, we receive marvelous inner gifts to sustain and bless us: peace, hope, joy, strength, wisdom. Our position in Christ is the most awesome gift we could ever receive, and thanking God for the gift of salvation causes a rejoicing that will never end! Our faith and salvation come from a dramatic change of heart – how we thank our Dear Lord!

1 Peter 2:9-12 (NKJV)

⁹But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

What happens to the heart that neglects to thank God?

A heart that neglects to thank God is in peril of losing sight of God's blessings. The neglectful heart can become hopeless, depressed, inward-focused, hurting, callous, insensitive, loveless, shriveled, selfish, self-centered, conceited, backslidden, and broken. God has given us the command to *give thanks* because He knows the benefits we receive from thanking Him. He blesses us when we have a thankful heart!

Proverbs 14:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways,
But a good man *will be satisfied* from above.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Ephesians 5:20 (NKJV)

²⁰giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Psalms 69:30 (NKJV)

³⁰I will praise the name of God with a song,
And will magnify Him with thanksgiving.

“Our job is faithfulness. God’s job is fruitfulness.” Pastor Steve Scoggins

Chapter Ten – Darkness And Fire

A Deeper Reflection

[In The Parable of the Talents,

Jesus describes hell: “And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:30 NKJV).

In The Son of Man will Judge the Nations,

Jesus describes the final judgment: “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels’” (Matthew 25:41 NKJV).]

But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them... “this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall be in the last days,’ God says, ‘that I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams’” (Acts 2:14-17 NASB).

Describe Joe’s two dreams and his emotions during them. Who did he encounter both times?

In Joe’s first dream he experienced the pitch blackness of the outer darkness, or hell. People were around him, screaming and crying, like they were in torture. He was terrified! In the second dream he experienced the lake of fire. He was in a wheelbarrow-like cauldron and was being pushed down a hill. Hideous creatures poked at him and tried to bite him. He peered over the top and saw the lake filled with fire and knew they were going to throw him into it. When they did he screamed, but the next thing he knew he was on a bed in a cool room. He was again terrified and confused. He encountered Christ both times.

Question: "What is the outer darkness in Matthew 22:13?"

<http://www.gotquestions.org/outer-darkness.html>

"Got Questions Ministries seeks to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ by providing biblical, applicable, and timely answers to spiritually related questions through an internet presence."

GotQuestions.org is a volunteer ministry of dedicated and trained servants who have a desire to assist others in their understanding of God, Scripture, salvation, and other spiritual topics. We are Christian, Protestant, conservative, evangelical, fundamental, and non-denominational. We view ourselves as a para-church ministry, coming alongside the church to help people find answers to their spiritually related questions.

S. Michael Houdmann

President, GotQuestions.org

Answer from gotquestions.org: In the Parable of the Wedding Feast, Jesus tells of a “wedding crasher” of sorts: a man in the wedding hall was discovered to have entered the feast without authorization. Jesus says that the king, the master of the feast, issued a dire command concerning the interloper: “Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness” (ESV).

Jesus uses the term “outer darkness” in the parable to describe a condition of great sorrow, loss and woe. It stands in vivid contrast to the brightly lit and joyous celebration attended by those who accepted the king’s invitation. Interpreting the wedding feast as heaven, the “outer darkness” must be the place of eternal punishment. **Most Bible scholars agree that the phrase “outer darkness” refers to hell** or, more properly, the lake of fire (Matthew 8:12; 13:42; 13:50; and 25:23).

The outer darkness of Jesus’ parable is called “blackest darkness” in Jude 1:13. Again, a place of judgment is the obvious meaning, since it is reserved for “godless men” (verse 4).

Perhaps the place of judgment is pictured as “dark” because of the absence of God’s cheering

presence. “When you hide your face, they are terrified” (Psalm 104:29). God is called “light” in 1 John 1:5, and if He withdraws His blessing, only darkness is left. Throughout the Scriptures light symbolizes God’s purity, holiness, and glory. Darkness is used as a symbol of moral depravity (Psalm 82:5; Proverbs 2:13; Romans 3:12). Darkness can also refer to trouble and affliction (Job 5:12; Proverbs 20:20; Isaiah 9:2) and to death and nothingness (1 Samuel 2:9; Ecclesiastes 11:8; Job 3:4-6).

The outer darkness of judgment is accompanied by “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The “weeping” describes an inner pain of the heart, mind, and soul. The word in the original denotes a bemoaning or lamentation by beating the breast in an expression of immense sorrow. The “gnashing of teeth” describes an outward pain of the body. Taken together, the weeping and gnashing of teeth says hell is a place of indescribable spiritual agony and unending physical pain (see Luke 16:23-28). The outer darkness is a place of anguish, heartache, grief, and unspeakable suffering. Such will be the lot of all who reject Christ (John 3:18, 36).

Christ is the Light of the World (John 8:12). When one rejects the Light, he will be cast into eternal darkness. Just like the man in the parable, the one who rejects Christ will lose his chance for joy, blessing and fellowship and will be left with nothing but darkness and eternal regret.

Recommended Resources: Four Views on Hell edited by John Walvoord and Logos Bible Software.

Question: "What is the difference between Sheol, Hades, Hell, the lake of fire, Paradise, and Abraham's bosom?"

<http://www.gotquestions.org/sheol-hades-hell.html>

Answer from gotquestion.org: The different terms used in the Bible for heaven and hell—sheol, hades, gehenna, the lake of fire, paradise, and Abraham's bosom—are the subject of much debate and can be confusing.

The word “paradise” is used as a synonym for heaven (2 Corinthians 12:3; Revelation 2:7). When Jesus was dying on the cross and one of the thieves being crucified with Him asked Him for mercy, Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Jesus knew that His death was imminent and that He would soon be in heaven with His Father. Therefore, Jesus used paradise as a synonym for heaven, and the word has come to be associated with any place of ideal loveliness and delight.

Abraham's bosom is referred to only once in the Bible—in the story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31). It was used in the Talmud as a synonym for heaven. The image in the story is of Lazarus reclining at a table leaning on Abraham's breast—as John leaned on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper—at the heavenly banquet. There are differences of opinion about what exactly Abraham's bosom represents. Those who believe the setting of the story is a period after the Messiah's death and resurrection see Abraham's bosom as synonymous with heaven. Those who believe the setting to be prior to the crucifixion see Abraham's bosom as another term for paradise. The setting is really irrelevant to the point of the story, which is that wicked men will see the righteous in happiness, and themselves in torment, and that a “great gulf” exists between them (Luke 16:26) which will never be spanned.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word used to describe the realm of the dead is *sheol*. It simply means “the place of the dead” or “the place of departed souls/spirits.” The New Testament Greek equivalent to *sheol* is *hades*, which is also a general reference to “the place of the dead.” The Greek word *gehenna* is used in the New Testament for “hell” and is derived from the Hebrew word *hinnom*. Other Scriptures in the New Testament indicated

that sheol/hades is a temporary place where souls are kept as they await the final resurrection. The souls of the righteous, at death, go directly into the presence of God—the part of sheol called “heaven,” “paradise,” or “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23).

The lake of fire, mentioned only in Revelation 19:20 and 20:10, 14-15, is the final hell, the place of eternal punishment for all unrepentant rebels, both angelic and human (Matthew 25:41). It is described as a place of burning sulfur, and those in it experience eternal, unspeakable agony of an unrelenting nature (Luke 16:24; Mark 9:45-46). Those who have rejected Christ and are in the temporary abode of the dead in hades/sheol have the lake of fire as their final destination.

But those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life should have no fear of this terrible fate. By faith in Christ and His blood shed on the cross for our sins, we are destined to live eternally in the presence of God.

Recommended Resources: Heaven by Randy Alcorn and Logos Bible Software.

Describe what Jesus did for Joe in each dream.

The simple answer is Jesus rescued Joe. When Joe dreamed about the outer darkness and was experiencing the terror of utter blackness, punctuated by the horrifying screams of torture, he looked up and saw a pinhole of light. Out of that light came the hand of the Lord to save him, and he saw Jesus.

Joe dreamed about the Lake of Fire, and hideous creatures poking and pushing him down a hill toward the lake, and then the terror of being thrown into the fire. He screamed as he was about to land, only to find himself on a bed in a cool, seemingly air-conditioned place where the Lord placed him, and he saw Jesus.

Isaiah 59:1(NKJV)

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened,

That it cannot save;

Nor His ear heavy,

That it cannot hear.

Psalms 4:8 (NKJV)

⁸I will both lie down in peace, and sleep;

For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Describe Joe's physical reaction each time he said to Gene, "Then (there) I saw..."

"His countenance froze, and his uncovered brow drew back, like someone was pulling on the back of his hair. He wouldn't – or couldn't – talk... He was literally catatonic."

Zechariah 2:13 (NKJV)

¹³Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for He is aroused from His holy habitation!"

What was Joe's response and what happened to his appearance when Gene asked him if he saw Jesus? Why would he respond this way?

"When I said the word "Jesus," his entire brow and countenance drew forward, and he started bawling, tears pouring from his one good eye. He was crying so hard, his chest was heaving."

Joe had been in the presence of God who mercifully rescued Joe twice from eternal destruction. What he experienced in his dreams was so vividly and terrifyingly real and permanent, and God's love was so overwhelmingly true and compassionate, that Joe could do nothing else but sob and weep tears of gratitude, humility, and joy at being rescued by the Lord.

Luke 7:37-38 (NKJV)

³⁷And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, ³⁸and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

Psalm 51:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit,

A broken and a contrite heart—

These, O God, You will not despise.

At the name of Jesus every knee will bow – of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth – and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11 HCSB).

How do you think you'll respond when you see Jesus? How do you respond to Him now?

I have thought about what I would do in the presence of Christ. I believe I would drop to my knees on the way to the floor, where I would want to lie prostrate before God in humility and gratitude so profound and deep, that words would be inadequate and impossible to utter. My thankful heart would groan and sob at God's mercy upon me, a wretched sinner saved by grace. That's about how I respond even now at the thought of what Christ has done for me!

I love Ruth, and her response to her Kinsman Redeemer, Boaz:

Ruth 2:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰So she fell on her face, bowed down to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I *am* a foreigner?"

Her response is my response to our Lord, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that You should take notice of me, since I am a sinner?"

Thank you, Dear Lord, for Your merciful grace!

Question: "What is a kinsman redeemer?"

<http://www.gotquestions.org/kinsman-redeemer.html>

Answer from gotquestions.org: The kinsman-redeemer is a male relative who, according to various laws of the Pentateuch, had the privilege or responsibility to act on behalf of a relative who was in trouble, danger, or need. The Hebrew term (*go el*) for kinsman-redeemer designates one who delivers or rescues (Genesis 48:16; Exodus 6:6) or redeems property or person (Leviticus 27:9–25, 25:47–55). The kinsman who redeems or vindicates a relative is illustrated most clearly in the book of Ruth, where the kinsman-redeemer is Boaz.

The story of Ruth and Boaz begins when Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, return to Bethlehem from Moab where they had been living. Naomi's husband and both sons, one the husband of Ruth, had died, leaving the women penniless and without a male protector. Upon arriving in Bethlehem, Naomi sends Ruth to glean in the fields of Boaz, a wealthy relative of Naomi to whom they, through a series of divinely appointed circumstances, appeal as their *go el*. Boaz acquiesces, willingly takes Ruth as his wife, and together they bear a son named Obed who became the grandfather of David, the forefather of Jesus.

Yahweh is Israel's Redeemer, the one who promises to defend and vindicate them. He is both Father and Deliverer (Exodus 20:2). There are numerous Old Testament appeals to God as rescuer of the weak and needy (Psalm 82:4; Daniel 6:27; Jeremiah 20:13) and preserver of the sheep of Israel (Ezekiel 34:10–12, 22).

In the New Testament, Christ is often regarded as an example of a kinsman-redeemer because, as our brother (Hebrews 2:11), He also redeems us because of our great need, one that only He can satisfy. In Ruth 3:9, we see a beautiful and poignant picture of the needy supplicant, unable to rescue herself, requesting of the kinsman-redeemer that he cover her with his protection, redeem her, and make her his wife. In the same way, the Lord Jesus Christ bought us for Himself, out of the curse, out of our destitution; made us His own beloved bride; and blessed us for all generations. **He is the true kinsman-redeemer of all who call on Him in faith.**

Recommended Resources: Judges & Ruth: NIV Application Commentary by K. Lawson Younger Jr. and Logos Bible Software.

Hebrews 2:11 (NKJV)

“For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,

Chapter Eleven – Revelation

A Deeper Reflection

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:13 - 14 NASB).

What does Ephesians 1:13-14 tell a new believer?

The new believer, who heard the gospel message of salvation, believed it was true, and accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior is sealed in Christ with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit living within us is the solemn promise, or pledge, the Lord made to His disciples before He died. We are heirs of grace, redeemed by faith in the finished work of Christ on Calvary, possessed by God Himself for all eternity, all to His glory!

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 (NKJV)

15 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ²by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

³For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

John 14:15-17 (NKJV)

¹⁵ "If you love Me, keep^[a] My commandments. ¹⁶ And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 (NASB)

²¹ Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God,²² who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a ^[a]pledge.

Romans 8:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:12-14 ESV).

When do we receive the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God?

We receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at our conversion, at the moment our heart believes and accepts Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

John 7:37-39 (HCSB)

³⁷ On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, he should come to Me^[a] and drink! ³⁸ The one who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said,^[b] will have streams of living water flow from deep within him." ³⁹ He said this about the Spirit. Those who believed in Jesus were going to receive the Spirit, for the Spirit^[c] had not yet been received^{[d][e]} because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

1 Corinthians 3:16 (HCSB)

¹⁶ Don't you yourselves know that you are God's sanctuary and that the Spirit of God lives in you?

Galatians 4:6 (NKJV)

⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

Where does our spiritual understanding come from?

Our spiritual understanding, or discernment, comes from God through the Holy Spirit.

John 14:26 (NKJV)

²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

2 Corinthians 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

Can the person without salvation in Jesus Christ, the natural person, understand spiritual truths (spiritual discernment)? Why not?

The person without Christ as his Savior cannot understand spiritual truths, because it is the Holy Spirit within that imparts truth. The world seeks its own wisdom and understanding in order to accomplish its desires.

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

John 16:13 (NKJV)

¹³ However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

1 Corinthians 3:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their own craftiness”;

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he can become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness;” and again, “The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless” (1 Corinthians 3:18-29 NASB).

Why would the wisdom of this world be foolishness before God?

There are motives and reasons behind man’s ‘wisdom.’ They are rooted in arrogance, pride and desire, often used to justify actions, decisions and beliefs.

1 John 2:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶For all that *is* in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

Psalms 103:8-10 (NKJV)

⁸The LORD *is* merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.

Sometimes we have to come to the end of ourselves before we can recognize our foolish ways, and what amazing grace and mercy await us when this happens – hallelujah!

Psalm 51:1-2 (NKJV)

A Prayer of Repentance

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

51 Have mercy upon me, O God,

According to Your lovingkindness;

According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,

Blot out my transgressions.

²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,

And cleanse me from my sin.

For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:31 NASB).

Is Jesus the foundation of your life? Why should you choose Him? If He is your Savior, what does this mean for you both on earth and eternally?

Praise God, yes, Jesus is the foundation of my life! I should choose Jesus because God sent Him to be the Redeemer of the World, and there is no other way to have eternal life with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ except through Christ. As my Savior, I have the joy of eternal life with Him and loved ones who've also chosen Him as their Savior. While on earth, I have the blessed Holy Spirit within me as a Helper to comfort, guide, teach, convict, lead, and point me to Jesus every single day.

John 14:6 (NKJV)

⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 14:26 (NKJV)

²⁶But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

If I don't have the Holy Spirit abiding within me, I have no one but myself to handle life – a grim thought! It would be a life of despair, futility and hopelessness.

John 14:16-18 (NKJV)

¹⁶And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— ¹⁷the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

John 6:63 (NKJV)

⁶³It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life.

Chapter Twelve – Forgiven

A Deeper Reflection

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle (Psalm 103:1-5 NASB).

As declared in Psalm 103:1-5, what acts of mercy do believers receive from the Lord? When does total, physical healing take place?

We receive an abundance of mercies from the Lord when we come to Him in saving faith: pardon for our sins, healing of emotional diseases and total physical healing when we die and are in heaven, redemption from the pit of our sins, the joy of His lovingkindness and compassion, rebirth and renewal of our spirit that rejuvenates us in Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward *man* is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

What was Joe's response to the minister who spoke of his own need for a Savior? Why?

Joe was speechless to think a minister would be so honest about his need for a Savior. He had not had a favorable experience with ministers or priests, usually finding them arrogant and demanding. This experience opened his eyes to the truth that all people need salvation, even those in authority who preach about the Bible. Joe raised his hand in agreement when the pastor asked if there were others wanting Jesus to save them. His response is much like my own when I repeat a prayer offered for salvation during a church service. I enjoy reaffirming my faith in Christ. Joe's dislike of anyone wearing a collar changed that afternoon.

Romans 3:23 (NKJV)

²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Joe wept at God's mercy on his life. Gene and Dee wept with him. What is your response to receiving the *benefits* that are the result of your salvation in Christ Jesus?

I weep, as well. I'm humbled by God's mercy, overwhelmed by His love for me, a sinner, stunned He would die for me. I have asked "Why?" Knowing my heart full well, I know my unworthiness to receive His love and His gift of salvation, my unworthiness to experience the Holy Spirit drawing me to Jesus and giving me the gift of faith. I Truly Stand Amazed. In response to His great mercy, I want to love Him back with everything in me: my *heart, soul, strength, and mind*. First the miracle of faith, then comes our response:

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast.

In The Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus identifies the totality of our love response to Him:

Luke 10:25-28 (NKJV)

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁵ And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"

²⁷ So he answered and said, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,'^[h] and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"^[i]

²⁸ And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."

Matthew 22:37-40 (NKJV)

³⁷ Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'^[a] ³⁸ This is *the* first and great commandment. ³⁹ And *the* second *is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'^[b] ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

What was the doctors' prognosis for Joe's life?

It was doubtful Joe would ever be able to walk again, that he would ever be able to live on his own, and that he would have to move into an assisted living home.

What was Joe's response to the prognosis?

He started his own regimen of physical therapy to supplement what the nursing home provided. He was determined to overcome his injuries and walk again.

What did the X-rays reveal about Joe's legs? What did the doctor say?

To their utter amazement, Joe's pelvic belt region, which had been severely fractured, didn't have a single line in it. And the bones which were shattered below both his knees, especially in his right leg, now had a mass of bone growth, all the way down to his ankles.

The doctor said, "In all my twenty years in medicine, I have never seen anything like this. Joe, I don't know how to respond except to say... it's a true miracle."

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He will also hear their cry and save them (Psalm 145:18-19 NKJV).

How do we call upon Him in truth and how does the Lord respond to us?

We call upon the Lord in truth through our personal relationship with Him, a relationship based on our acceptance of His gift of salvation. Jesus is truth, and our prayers and worship have access to God because of our faith in Jesus Christ, expressed through the Holy Spirit that lives within us. Our awe and our reverence for the Lord are channels to receive God's blessings. Contemplate the wonder of God, the Creator of the Universe. He draws near to us, He hears our cries, and He saves us. He redeems our souls and uses His power, will and way to affect the situations we're facing and praying about. There is nothing more astounding and joyful than our Heavenly Father; our Dear Jesus, His Son; and the awesome Holy Spirit living in our hearts – a reality I often struggle to grasp! Don't we all say, "Thank You," together!

John 14:6 (NKJV)

⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 4:24 (NKJV)

²⁴God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

James 4:8 (NKJV)

⁸Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

Romans 5:8 (NKJV)

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

Why do we cry? What do our tears mean to God?

I am the most emotional and well-up with tears when I'm singing about the Lord and His love for us. Because He has forgiven and saved me from *so much*, the depth of my formerly lost soul fills with enormous joy and humility as I savor the lyrics that express my heart. Sometimes I cry over my family and their challenges and choices; sometimes over the loss of my parents, my parents-in-law, my first husband, friends. Stories of God's faithfulness in the face of overwhelming needs, odds and impossibilities always cause tears to form. I believe tears are precious to God, so much so, He *puts our tears in a bottle*. When our eyes can no longer make tears, God sees the tears and sensitivity and humility of our hearts. The shortest verse *in English* in the Bible is only 9 letters long and is found in John 11:35: *Jesus wept*. He truly understands and sympathizes with the emotions and realities that cause our tears.

Psalm 39:12 (NKJV)

¹²“Hear my prayer, O LORD,
And give ear to my cry;
Do not be silent at my tears;

In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* by John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, their explanation of
Psalm 56:8-13 says the Psalmist David “was confident because God knew him intimately, even
recording his *tears*... that God did not forget his suffering.” We, too, can be confident that God
knows us intimately and is *for us*.

Psalm 56:8-13 (NASB)

⁸You have taken account of my wanderings;
Put my tears in Your bottle.
Are *they* not in Your book?
⁹Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call;
This I know, ^[a]that God is for me.
¹⁰In God, *whose* word I praise,
In the LORD, *whose* word I praise,
¹¹In God I have put my ^[b]trust, I shall not be afraid.
What can man do to me?
¹²Your vows are *binding* upon me, O God;
I will render thank offerings to You.
¹³For You have delivered my soul from death,
^[c]Indeed my feet from stumbling,
So that I may walk before God
In the light of the ^[d]living.

Of course, when we are in heaven at last, this sin-sick and lost and dying world will be put behind us. The sorrow, grief, regret that plague our earthly existence will be no more, and the living, visible reality of God's love for us will wipe our tears away.

Revelation 21:4 (NKJV)

“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

Question: "Will there be tears in heaven?"

<http://www.gotquestions.org/tears-in-heaven.html>

Answer from gotquestions.org: The Bible never specifically mentions tears in heaven. Jesus speaks of the rejoicing that takes place in heaven when one sinner repents (Luke 15:7, 10). The Bible says that, even now, those who believe in Jesus Christ “are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8)—if our earthly lives are so characterized by joy, what must heaven be like? Surely, heaven will be a much more joyful place. By contrast, Jesus described hell as a place of weeping and “gnashing of teeth” (Luke 13:28). So, after a cursory look at Scripture, it seems that tears will be a part of hell’s domain, and heaven will be tear-free.

The promise of God has always been to take away the sorrow of His people and replace it with joy. “Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Psalms 30:5). And “those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy” (Psalms 126:5). As in all else, Jesus is our model in this. Our Lord is “the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). Jesus’ weeping gave way to awaiting joy.

There is coming a time when God will remove all tears from His redeemed ones. “He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 25:8). The apostle John quotes Isaiah’s prophecy as he records his vision of heaven in Revelation 7:17. At the very end of time, God fulfills His promise: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 21:4). What’s interesting is the timing of this event: it happens after the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11–15) and after the creation of the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21:1).

Consider this: if God wipes away every tear *after* the new creation, that means that tears could still be possible up to that point. It is conceivable, though by no means sure, that there are tears in heaven leading up to the new creation. Tears in heaven would seem out of place, but here are a few times in which we could speculate that tears might fall, even in heaven:

1) *At the Judgment Seat of Christ*. Believers will face a time when “the quality of each person’s work” will be tested (1 Corinthians 3:13). He whose works are found to be “wood, hay, or straw . . . will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames” (verses 12 and 15). Suffering the loss of a reward will certainly be a sad time—could it be a time of tears in heaven, as we realize how much more we could have honored the Lord? Perhaps.

2) *During the tribulation*. After the fifth seal is broken, the persecution of believers during the tribulation intensifies. Many are slain by the beast or Antichrist. These martyrs are pictured in Revelation 6 as being under the altar in heaven, waiting for the Lord to enact vengeance: “They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’” (verse 10). These souls are in heaven, but they still remember the occasion of their death, and they seek justice. Could these individuals be shedding tears as they keep vigil? Perhaps.

3) *At the eternal doom of loved ones*. Assuming that people in heaven have some knowledge of what happens on earth, it might be possible that we will know when a loved one rejects Christ and passes into a godless eternity. This would be a distressing knowledge, naturally. During the Great White Throne Judgment, will those in heaven be able to see the proceedings, and, if so, will they shed tears over those who are damned? Perhaps.

Again, we have been speculating. There is no biblical mention of tears in heaven. Heaven will be a place of comfort, rest, fellowship, glory, praise, and joy. If there are tears, for the reasons listed above, they will all be wiped away in the eternal state.

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God” (Isaiah 40:1). And “he who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’” (Revelation 21:5).

Recommended Resources: Heaven by Randy Alcorn and Logos Bible Software.

Question: "What are the New Heavens and the New Earth?"

<http://www.gotquestions.org/new-heavens-earth.html>

Answer from gotquestions.org: Many people have a misconception of what heaven is truly like. Revelation chapters 21-22 gives us a detailed picture of the new heavens and the new earth. After the events of the end times, the current heavens and earth will be done away with and replaced by the new heavens and new earth. The eternal dwelling place of believers will be the new earth. The new earth is the “heaven” on which we will spend eternity. It is the new earth where the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city, will be located. It is on the new earth that the pearly gates and streets of gold will be.

Heaven—the new earth—is a physical place where we will dwell with glorified physical bodies (1 Corinthians 15:35-58). The concept that heaven is “in the clouds” is unbiblical. The concept that we will be “spirits floating around in heaven” is also unbiblical. The heaven that believers will experience will be a new and perfect planet on which we will dwell. The new earth will be free from sin, evil, sickness, suffering, and death. It will likely be similar to our current earth, or perhaps even a re-creation of our current earth, but without the curse of sin.

What about the new heavens? It is important to remember that in the ancient mind, “heavens” referred to the skies and outer space, as well as the realm in which God dwells. So, when Revelation 21:1 refers to the new heavens, it is likely indicating that the entire universe will be created—a new earth, new skies, a new outer space. It seems as if God's heaven will be recreated as well, to give everything in the universe a “fresh start,” whether physical or spiritual. Will we have access to the new heavens in eternity?

Possibly, but we will have to wait to find out. May we all allow God's Word to shape our understanding of heaven.

Recommended Resources: Heaven by Randy Alcorn and Logos Bible Software.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – these O God, You will not despise (Psalm 51:17 NKJV).

What does this verse tell us about God? Does this truth give you hope? Why?

When we are broken with the knowledge of our sins and failures before a Holy God, our spirit and heart cry out to God for His merciful forgiveness. Once we understand and accept the true depravity of who we are, there is hope. Jesus died on the cross of Calvary for our sins; He rose from the dead and conquered death so we could live eternally with Him. When we ask Him to be our Lord and Savior, we become a new creation in Christ Jesus, and we are changed forever. What joy this brings all of heaven! Now that I am saved, what joy and hope fill my heart!

Jeremiah 17:9 (NKJV)

⁹"The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?

Mark 7:20-23(NKJV)

²⁰And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. ²¹For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, ²²thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. ²³All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

Luke 15:7 (NKJV)

⁷I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Chapter Thirteen – Precious in God’s Sight

A Deeper Reflection

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints (Psalm 116:15 NKJV).

After leaving the nursing home, how did Joe’s life change?

Joe went to live with Gene and Dee and experienced the greatest happiness he’d ever known. During the four months he was there, he was on an exercise regimen in their swimming pool which helped him gain his strength back. More important than even his physical strength, though, was his emotional healing. The whole family entered into a time of blessing that healed all wounds and memories, into a time of especially sweet fellowship, and into a time of spiritual growth and renewal – each a miracle unto itself. He got involved in some of the ministries Gene and Dee were active in and met many of their friends. He grew in his understanding of faith through prayer, devotion, and Christian fellowship.

Where was he finally able to live?

Joe was finally able to go back to his duplex on Palmetto Avenue in Daytona Beach to live on his own, something the medical community had said he would never be able to do.

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you (Ephesians 4:32 NKJV).

What caused the healing between father and son?

Relationships rarely experience a “do-over.” When Joe accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior, his life changed forever, and so did his relationship with his son, because Faith... gave Joe and Gene the chance to mend their hearts and change the final chapter of their family’s story.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV).

How does faith in Jesus Christ change our attitudes, our relationship, and our lives?

As a new creation in Christ, the Holy Spirit lives within us and gives us a new perspective on life and relationships. Our perspective becomes eternal, which helps us handle the tragedies we experience and see around us. Our interactions with others take on a new dimension, too, that is best described in the two greatest commandments:

Mark 12:30-31 (NKJV)

³⁰And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'^[a] This is the first commandment.^[b] ³¹And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'^[c] There is no other commandment greater than these."

John 13:34 (NKJV)

³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

Ephesians 4:32 (NKJV)

³²And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:1-2 NKJV).

What does Paul call the believers in Ephesus?

Paul calls the faithful who live in Ephesus *saints*.

What makes you a saint in God's eyes?

You become a *saint* in God's eyes when Jesus Christ becomes your Lord and Savior. Becoming a saint is not a matter of vote or purity or attributed miracles. A person is a saint because of their position in Christ by virtue of faith. Faith is evidence of a redeemed and repentant heart that believes Jesus bore our sins on the cross of Calvary, that He died and rose to conquer death, and that He alone provides the way to God the Father for all eternity.

John 14:6 (NKJV)

⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

1 Corinthians 1:2-3 (HCSB)

²To God's church at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called as saints, with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—both their Lord and ours.

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 4:19-23 (HCSB)

¹⁹And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

²¹Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. Those brothers who are with me greet you. ²²All the saints greet you, but especially those from Caesar's household. ²³The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

What does God mean in Psalm 116:15 when He says: *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints?*

God loves everyone, but He especially treasures those who love Him and have come to Him in saving faith. God calls us His children, so when we die, His saints, He is welcoming His own children to their eternal home. What an amazing moment that will be, when we see Jesus face to face, our Redeemer who made salvation and eternal life possible!! How glorious that will be!!

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

1 John 3:1 (NKJV)

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!

Romans 8:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

1 Corinthians 2:9 (NKJV)

⁹But as it is written:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,

Nor have entered into the heart of man

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known (1 Corinthians 13:12 NKJV).

According to this verse, can we understand all the mysteries of God while we live on this earth? Why not? When will we have a greater understanding?

We are not humanly capable of understanding all that happens on earth. God's ways are above ours. We will have a greater understanding when we are in heaven.

Isaiah 55:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸"For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts,

Nor *are* your ways My ways," says the LORD.

⁹"For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth,

So are My ways higher than your ways,

And My thoughts than your thoughts.

Job 26:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴Indeed these *are* the mere edges of His ways,

And how small a whisper we hear of Him!

But the thunder of His power who can understand?"

Chapter Fourteen – Final Blessings

A Deeper Reflection

You are the God who works wonders; You have made known Your strength among the peoples (Psalm 77:14 NASB).

What “coincidences” and happenings occurred when the family met to scatter Joe’s ashes?

When Gene received the box containing Joe’s ashes, he was shocked to discover they felt like the substance he touched in his dream the night before Joe died. It was an emotional moment he shared with Dee, one filled with thanksgiving that God had given him the dream so they would drive the two hours to visit Joe, their final visit. Later, when Gene and Dee met his sisters at the Marriott to scatter Joe’s ashes, they heard the Polka music and later danced to it carrying the bag containing the urn. It was a final dance for Joe, in honor of his homeland, Poland. The man let them on the pier, even though it was closed, and when they opened the doors, the colony of white seagulls lifted and flew over them, as if in homage to their mission.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 (NKJV)

⁷Then the dust will return to the earth as it was,
And the spirit will return to God who gave it.

Genesis 3:19 (NASB)

¹⁹By the sweat of your face
You will eat bread,
Till you return to the ground,
Because from it you were taken;
For you are dust,
And to dust you shall return.”

In the end, what did Gene feel was the most important thing he did for his father? What was the result?

Gene felt the most important thing he did for his father, Joe, was to pray for him: *for salvation, for forgiveness, for loved ones, for others in need, for God's hand of mercy on [their] lives.* The result was God's hand of mercy did, indeed, reach out to Joe and he accepted it, all to God's glory and Joe's eternal salvation! We can never stop praying. No one can ever take prayer away from us. Our prayers are a demonstration of our deep neediness and trust in the Living God to hear and answer, however long it takes. THIS is God's will for us!!

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NKJV)

¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

James 5:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶Confess *your* trespasses^[a] to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous
(Proverbs 15:29 NASB).

God hears the prayers of the righteous.

He made the One [Jesus] who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21 HCSB).

And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed (1 Peter 2:24 NASB).

How do we become righteous before God?

God gives us the righteousness of Christ when we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.
When He looks upon us, our sins are covered by the blood Christ shed on Calvary for our behalf,
and He sees only the purity of His Son. Our righteousness comes from our saving faith in Christ alone.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)

²¹For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Isaiah 1:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸"Come now, and let us reason together,"

Says the LORD,

"Though your sins are like scarlet,

They shall be as white as snow;

Though they are red like crimson,

They shall be as wool.

Romans 5:8 (NKJV)

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

Question: "How does God see me in Christ?"

<http://www.gotquestions.org/how-does-God-see-me.html>

Answer from gotquestions.org: Several places in Scripture refer to believers being "in Christ" (1 Peter 5:14; Philippians 1:1; Romans 8:1). Colossians 3:3 gives a little more insight: "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." When we come to Christ as broken sinners, He exchanges our sin nature for His righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). We cannot remain as we were and enter into the presence of a holy God. We must "die" to self and be "hidden" in the righteousness of Christ. Galatians 3:27 says, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Here the purity of Christ is presented as a garment we wear when we repent and accept God's offer of salvation.

Imagine this scenario: A powerful king sits on his throne, judging the people. Guards attend him, and commoners wait in long lines for an audience. Suddenly, the doors of the throne room burst open. Heads turn, and everyone gasps. There stand two little boys. One is clean, but one is covered in mud and crying. With brazen boldness the unsullied boy tugs the other down the red carpet toward the throne. The guards pull their swords, waiting for a nod from the king to get rid of the intrusion. But the king holds up a hand, and his face softens into a smile.

The first little boy stops at the king's knee and pulls his buddy into the circle of his arm. "Dad, this is my friend. He's scared and hurt. I told him you could help." The king opens his arms to envelop both boys, not caring that mud is smeared on his royal robe. He looks into the frightened eyes of the muddy waif and says, "Any friend of my son's is welcome here. How can I help you?"

We cannot come to God on our own merit. We must be escorted by His Son. No amount of self-cleansing can make us pure enough to warrant the attention of Perfection. The Bible says that in our natural, sinful state we are enemies of God (Romans 5:10). But, escorted by the Son, we are welcomed into His presence. Through

repentance and acceptance of Jesus' death on our behalf, we are even called His children (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26). God no longer sees our imperfections; He sees the righteousness of His own Son instead (Ephesians 2:13; Hebrews 8:12). Because we are in Christ, God sees Christ's righteousness covering us. Only "in Christ" is our sin debt cancelled, our relationship with God restored, and our eternity secured (John 3:16-18; 20:31).

Recommended Resources: Who am I?: Identity in Christ by Jerry Bridges and Logos Bible Software.

Question: "Does God hear / answer the prayers of a sinner / unbeliever?"

<http://www.gotquestions.org/unbeliever-prayer.html>

Answer from gotquestions.org: John 9:31 declares, "We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will." It has also been said that "the only prayer that God hears from a sinner is the prayer for salvation." As a result, some believe that God does not hear and/or will never answer the prayers of an unbeliever. In context, though, John 9:31 is saying that God does not perform miracles through an unbeliever. First John 5:14-15 tells us that God answers prayers based on whether they are asked according to His will. This principle, perhaps, applies to unbelievers. If an unbeliever asks a prayer of God that is according to His will, nothing prevents God from answering such a prayer—according to His will.

Some Scriptures describe God hearing and answering the prayers of unbelievers. In most of these cases, prayer was involved. In one or two, God responded to the cry of the heart (it is not stated whether that cry was directed toward God). In some of these cases, the prayer seems to be combined with repentance. But in other cases, the prayer was simply for an earthly need or blessing, and God responded either out of compassion or in response to the genuine seeking or the faith of the person. Here are some passages dealing with prayer by an unbeliever:

The people of Nineveh prayed that Nineveh might be spared (Jonah 3:5-10). God answered this prayer and did not destroy the city of Nineveh as He had threatened.

Hagar asked God to protect her son Ishmael (Genesis 21:14-19). God not only protected Ishmael, God blessed him exceedingly.

In 1 Kings 21:17-29, especially verses 27-29, Ahab fasts and mourns over Elijah's prophecy concerning his posterity. God responds by not bringing about the calamity in Ahab's time.

The Gentile woman from the Tyre and Sidon area prayed that Jesus would deliver her daughter from a demon ([Mark 7:24-30](#)). Jesus cast the demon out of the woman's daughter.

[Cornelius](#), the Roman centurion in [Acts 10](#), had the apostle Peter sent to him in response to Cornelius being a righteous man. [Acts 10:2](#) tells us that Cornelius "prayed to God regularly."

God does make promises that are applicable to all (saved and unsaved alike) such as [Jeremiah 29:13](#): "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." This was the case for Cornelius in [Acts 10:1-6](#). But there are many promises that, according to the context of the passages, are for Christians alone. Because Christians have received Jesus as the Savior, they are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace to find help in time of need ([Hebrews 4:14-16](#)). We are told that when we ask for anything according to God's will, He hears and gives us what we ask for ([1 John 5:14-15](#)). There are many other promises for Christians concerning prayer ([Matthew 21:22](#); [John 14:13](#), [15:7](#)). So, yes, there are instances in which God does not answer the prayers of an unbeliever. At the same time, in His grace and mercy, God can intervene in the lives of unbelievers in response to their prayers.

Recommended Resources: [Prayer, The Great Adventure by David Jeremiah](#) and [Logos Bible Software](#).

Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints (Ephesians 6:18 HCSB).

What is the most important prayer we can pray for an unbeliever and why?

The most important prayer we can pray for an unbeliever is for their salvation, because without a saving faith in Jesus Christ, they will not spend their eternity in heaven with Christ and the believers who've gone on before. If they're not in heaven with the Lord, they'll be separated from Him to spend eternity in what the Bible describes as the Lake of Fire, or hell. It is the final judgment, the *second death*, and it will be tragic beyond description.

Revelation 20:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Revelation 2:11 (NKJV)

¹¹"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."

Revelation 20:6 (NKJV)

⁶Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Question: "What is the second death?"

<http://www.gotquestions.org/second-death.html>

Answer from gotquestions.org: The second death is mentioned on multiple occasions in the book of Revelation and is synonymous with the lake of fire. It is a “death” in that it is a separation from God, the Giver of life. It is called the “second” one because it follows physical death.

Revelation 21:8 explains the second death in the most detail: “The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

Three other places in Revelation also mention the second death. The first is Revelation 2:11: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.” In this verse, Jesus promises that believers (“overcomers”; see 1 John 5:4) will not experience the lake of fire. The second death is exclusively for those who have rejected Christ. It is not a place believers in Christ should fear.

Revelation 20:6 speaks of the second death in relation to a future period called the Millennium: “Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.” This verse notes three important facts. First, those who die for their faith in Jesus during the Tribulation will later be resurrected to enter the Millennium and live with Him. Second, these martyrs will escape the lake of fire or second death. Third, they will reign with Christ.

The second death is also mentioned in Revelation 20:14-15: “Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” At the end

of time, even death and the grave (Hades) will be thrown into the lake of fire. In addition, every person not included in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire. This condition will be final; the destination is permanent.

In summary, the second death is a reference to the lake of fire where those who are separated from God by their sin will dwell for eternity. This judgment was recorded in Scripture as a warning to unbelievers to seek the salvation that Jesus Christ provides. The coming judgment should also challenge believers to share their faith. There is a vast difference between the final destination of those who know Christ and those who do not.

Recommended Resources: Heaven by Randy Alcorn and Logos Bible Software.

What other things do we pray about for non-believers, for believers, for ourselves?

We pray for strength and healing in body and spirit; for wisdom and guidance in handling our daily life; and we pray for God's *will be done on earth as it is in heaven*. Another prayer, as well, is for perseverance in our prayer life: May we seek to be faithful to pray an anointing of God's encouragement, presence and blessing upon our families, friends, even upon ourselves; may our love for others make us bold in sharing the gospel message of faith in Jesus Christ. When we pray "Abba, Father!" we can rejoice that this *very heart cry* comes from the Holy Spirit Himself within us, as stated in Galatians 4:6. We need to embrace this awesome and endearing truth, for Jesus cried out "Abba, Father!" in the Garden of Gethsemane!

Mark 14:35-36 (NKJV)

³⁵He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. ³⁶And He said, "Abba, Father, all things *are* possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You *will*."

Romans 8:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

Galatians 4:6 (NKJV)

⁶And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

Ephesians 6:18-20 (HCSB)

¹⁸Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.¹⁹Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.²⁰For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough in Him to speak as I should.

Chapter Fifteen – Belief

A Deeper Reflection

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1 NKJV).

Are we ever too old to come to a saving faith in Christ?

No, we are never too old to come to a saving faith in Christ, as Joe's story showed us. Here is another wonderful story demonstrating this truth, taken from a Christmas newsletter, 2015, and shared with us by my friend, Carol:

And now... Elizabeth's Final Days

After spending 3 long difficult days in [the] hospital with Mom Burnett [in her 90s] expecting each day to be her last, the dear Dr. told us he wanted to make her as comfortable [as possible] and return her to her care home. Knowing we desired to have a time to talk with her, he put her on oxygen, hoping her mind would be clear enough to converse.

In the meantime, we all continued to talk to her, sing hymns, show her love, read the Bible, etc. One day Scott had just come in to visit her and she woke up and said to him, "I had a dream about heaven."

He was stunned. She was awake and all her life Mom B. said, "When you die, you just die." She never believed in heaven.

Scott asked her, "Do you want to go there?"

To which she replied emphatically, "Yes!"

He then shared with her again (for the umpteenth time) how she could know she could go to heaven and live with JESUS.

When he asked her if she wanted to ask Jesus to forgive her of her sins and open the door to heaven, she said with no hesitation, "Yes."

What an incredible privilege for him to pray with her as she asked Christ to give her a new life. He called the family and some of us were able to rush right down. She was a changed woman. She shared words of love with us and just beamed. By afternoon, she had slipped back into her semi-coma. But we had witnessed a miracle!

Scott had prayed for 50 years for his mom! As one man told him recently, "You can never pray too much or too long for anyone."

For sure!

The morning mom passed away, one of her care aides entering the room, sensed her time was near. Brittney lay down beside [her] so she would not be alone. We were moved to tears at the show of love Mom received from Good Samaritan. She received loving care 24/7. Mom had some rough years in her life, but we were so grateful for such a wonderful home. Her final resting place is a beautiful little private cemetery in Blaine beside an inlet from the ocean. Very fitting we thought for this Alaskan pioneer. We are all forever changed having been deeply touched by the miracle God gave us all that beautiful September day.

What keeps us from accepting Jesus as our personal Savior?

Pride, or arrogance, keeps us from accepting Jesus as our personal Savior.

Pride in our own beliefs - we want to believe what we want to believe, regardless of anything the Bible tells us about Jesus. We reject His claims that He is the only way to God the Father in heaven, mainly because it doesn't seem fair to other religions or beliefs.

Pride in our own sins – we have sinned too much or too horribly for God to forgive us, ever. Christ's sacrifice on the cross of Calvary wasn't enough for a sinners such as we are.

Satan and the world system interfere with our understanding of who Jesus is as they both try to rob, subvert, and destroy the Good News of the Bible.

Matthew 13:18-23 (NKJV)

The Parable of the Sower Explained

¹⁸“Therefore hear the parable of the sower: ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. ²⁰But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ²²Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. ²³But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands *it*, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

What caused my first husband, Arie, to reject God?

Arie rejected God when his wife, Sandy Green, died from cancer. They were college sweethearts at Illinois State University when she was diagnosed – I believe it was acute leukemia – in the spring of his junior year in college. He asked her to marry him because he loved her and wanted her to experience the excitement of planning and experiencing a wedding, and then the satisfaction of marriage itself. They also thought she would be healed through prayer. After he came to the Lord with a saving faith, he told me Sandy had a true faith in the Lord, but belief was an intellectual “mind game” for him and not rooted in his heart. They married in September, 1962, and she died three months later in December, right before Christmas. He drove away from the cemetery in Rockford, Illinois, shaking his fist at God because of her death. He couldn’t understand how God could be loving and still allow this beautiful person – inside and out – to suffer and die in such a terrible way and at such a young age.

Romans 10:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Arie did not personally experience the inner joy and peace described so eloquently in Ephesians 3:14-19 until 1980, when broken emotionally he finally turned to God:

Ephesians 3:14-19 (NKJV)

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,^[a] ¹⁵from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

What were the consequences of Arie turning his back on the Lord?

Arie experienced many consequences because he rejected God. The most devastating consequence was *he lived in total soul darkness and misery without the Lord all those years* [almost 20 years] *until he could go no further*, and then suicide seemed the only way out of his anguish. We married in 1967, five years after Sandy died. While I knew about Sandy, I was only 18 (he was 28) and knew nothing about the long-term emotional consequences of her death, nor the depth of his anger toward God because she had died. Our marriage, of course, suffered and we were never in church. Growing up, I lived three-doors-down from the Methodist Church and was there all the time: for church, Sunday school, choir practice, MYF (the Methodist Youth Fellowship), for prayer meetings, dinners – you name it. I loved my church and I loved God. So when I married Arie, three months after I met him and got engaged on our first date – a story for another time - I spent the next 20 years away from church. As a result of this plus other decisions, we both experienced a slow spiral downward that in the end escalated into a soul death as real as physical death. It was terrifying!

Proverbs 8:36 (NKJV)

³⁶But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul;
All those who hate me love death.”

Romans 6:23 (NKJV)

²³For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What caused Arie to turn to God? What two things did he specifically do after relinquishing his life to Him, even when he was uncertain God was there?

Arie was in great despair and about to end his life. Desperate to find meaning – his wife and son unable to give him enough purpose to live – that plus he thought we’d probably be happier without him - he sought to find meaning in the literature the world writes – grand, flowing and lovely. He took a stack of my books to work - but when all is said and done, poetry and prose are without power and are un-redemptive without Christ in the heart of the reader. He also picked up my rather unused Bible, as well – thankfully it was next to my bedside and not hidden on a shelf. When the stack of books proved fruitless, he picked up my Bible last, held it, and turned to the only hope left, the Author of that Holy Book, God. He didn’t know if God was there, or if He’d pay attention to him if He was, but he was desperate enough to give Him a try.

Arie’s heart cried out, “Oh, God, I don’t know if You’re there or not, but I’ve made a mess of my life! If You want it, You can have it.”

In the final analysis, it was the promise and truth of God’s love that Arie had heard about all his growing up years that caused him to seek the Lord as his last hope.

The two things he immediately started doing, whether God was there or not - but hoping so - were to pray and to read the Bible.

Psalm 34:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart,
And saves such as have a contrite spirit.

Proverbs 8:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷I love those who love me,
And those who seek me diligently will find me.

Jeremiah 29:13 (NKJV)

¹³ And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

What changes occurred in Arie's life because he accepted Jesus as his personal Savior?

He had a desire to live and to grow in his new-found faith. He was hopeful for the future, but there was still much to be healed inside. It took a year before he told me a little about what happened. I remember one day he started talking about attending a church, by himself. That was the first indication something had changed. But there was much to be confronted, confessed, redeemed, dealt with, and healed in me, too, so it took a while before both our lives were truly healed and repaired, both of us finally saved. In the end, our marriage survived, and we were blessed with over 17 more years together, this time under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Praise our Dear Lord for His mercy on both of us! Along the way, Arie fashioned a wooden cross, explaining that Sandy had asked him to make one for the foot of her bed when she was dying. He couldn't bring himself to make one for her at the time, no relationship with the Lord to help him come to terms with her pending death. Years after he was saved, he finally did make that cross for her, and it's a focal point of my prayer corner.

Arie's faith and his love for the Lord carried him up to the end, through the end, and into glory with Jesus. Before he died from cancer in July, 2004, he prayed for my happiness and believed I would marry again. I couldn't imagine it. God answered those prayers, however, through my precious second husband, Patrick, a blessed marriage of ten years in April, 2016. Praise the Lord, indeed!!

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

What do you hope for, both on earth and after death?

Hebrews 11:1 (NASB)

Now faith is the ^[a]assurance of *things* ^[b]hoped for, the ^[c]conviction of things not seen.

I hope for salvation especially for my loved ones and friends who haven't accepted Jesus as their Savior. My faith and the Word assure me of the truth of Christ and eternity. The Old Testament saints didn't have the completed Bible, but they experienced God in a vibrant and real way that assured them of His reality and the hope of eternity with Him because of their faith alone. Verse after verse in Hebrews 11 begins with these two words: *By faith...* Then verses 13 and 14 speak of their belief and hope in their eternal homeland, heaven, with God.

Hebrews 11:13-14 (NKJV)

¹³These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, ^[a]embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland.

Romans 1:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, ^[a]for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

How does faith give evidence of God, the unseen?

God proves our faith is real through our diligent pursuit of Him and through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who makes Jesus known to the believer. He answers our prayers, changes our circumstances, meets our needs, comforts us, gives us hope, and helps us when we turn to Him.

John 14:15-21 (NKJV)

¹⁵ “If you love Me, keep^[d] My commandments. ¹⁶ And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. ²⁰ At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

²¹ He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints (Ephesians 6:18 HCSB).

Why are we told to pray at all times in the Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is our conduit to God through our faith in Jesus Christ. He prays according to God’s will. God listens to the voice of the Holy Spirit, even when the sounds uttered are groans and unintelligible to the human ear.

Romans 8:26-27 (NKJV)

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us^[a] with groanings which cannot be uttered. ²⁷ Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

Romans 8:26-27 (NASB)

²⁶ In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for *us* with groanings too deep for words; ²⁷ and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the^[a] saints according to *the will of God*.

How do our prayers for others, *intercession for all the saints*, make a difference in their lives and in our own lives?

When we pray for others, we unleash God's power and mercy upon them. Sometimes we'll know the results of our prayers, sometimes not. Sometimes we'll be in heaven before we know anything about how God has worked in someone's life. Praying for family, friends, strangers, government leaders, the world draws us closer to God and blesses us with the anointing act of prayer. Does prayer bring us closer to God? Yes, it's a time of worship, a holy time of fellowship, and we are the better for our obedience, because God commands we pray, even without ceasing.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

How do you respond to answered prayer?

Hallelujah!! Praise the Lord!! Thank You, Dear Jesus!!

Psalm 28:7 (NKJV)

⁷The LORD *is* my strength and my shield;

My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped;

Therefore my heart greatly rejoices,

And with my song I will praise Him.

Chapter Sixteen – Dual Power: Faith and Prayer

A Deeper Reflection

Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation

(2 Corinthians 6:2 NKJV).

Does your heart want to respond to the call of the Savior? _____

If so, pray this Sinner's Prayer.

There are no specific questions to this chapter, just the challenge of accepting Jesus as one's Savior.

But there is an opportunity for a group discussion.

Read and discuss the Four Bible Truths:

Read the sentence and have someone else read the accompanying Scripture:

God hears the prayers of those who love Him.

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him (1 John 5:14-15 NASB).

Trust God with everything, including prayer that seems unanswered.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5 NKJV).

God's sovereign will, way, and timing are beyond our human understanding.

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9 NASB).

God loves us, and a personal, heart relationship through faith in Jesus Christ saves us eternally.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9 NKJV).

There are two spiritual components, if you will, that bring pleasure to God and underlie the choices we make every day. What are they?

Faith and Obedience please God and underlie everything we think and do.

Hebrews 11:6 (NKJV)

⁶But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

John 14:23 (NIV)

²³Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

What spiritual disciplines are the result of our born-again faith, are for our benefit, and indicate we're striving to be obedient to God?

Spiritual disciplines include: prayer, reading the Bible, fellowshiping with other believers through discipleship opportunities and pleasure, serving others, meeting needs, tithing, sharing the truth of our faith in Jesus Christ with nonbelievers.

What hope do you gain from Joe's story? From Gene and Dee's story?

God's mercy on Joe, Gene and Dee, and their daughter Gena, for each had a story to share in *Hand of Mercy*, gives me great hope, that God would mercifully rescue and save those I love and pray for. We can never pray too long or too much for anyone, and I will live by that truth forever. Never give up on prayer!

Ephesians 6:18 Contemporary English Version (CEV)

¹⁸Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people.

Chapter Seventeen – Victory Over Death

***Before you begin A Deeper Reflection, read and discuss the Scripture on pages 150 and 151:**

With salvation in Christ, we need not fear death:

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24 NKJV).

This is a magnificent and succinct verse assuring us of eternal salvation through our faith in Jesus Christ alone. In Him, death is no longer our enemy, and judgment is removed because we are justified by faith in Christ the Son before a holy God the Father.

How we praise Jesus for the amazing gift of His eternal grace!

With salvation in Christ, we need not fear life:

When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. In God, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid, What can man do to me? (Psalm 56:3-4 NASB)

There are several powerful truths in this Scripture. The first truth is found in the opening four words, “When I am afraid.” This acknowledges that, indeed, we are sometimes fearful.

Sometimes we’re actually afraid **a lot**, not necessarily for ourselves but for our spouses, our children, our grandchildren, for our friends, for our circumstances, the doctor’s diagnosis, the horror of evil touching our lives, the world crises that seem to escalate year by year. We are easily afraid because of the sin and evil in our world. However, the Bible says, “Fear Not!” or a

variation of that numerous times. God knows the human heart and how fear is often our first response to things that happen, or to things that need to happen.

The other powerful truth in this Scripture is that God has an answer for our fears: trust and praise. “I will” is a choice, a decision, a recognition of our need, dependence, and desire for God to help us and those we love, to rescue us from the situations we struggle with, even to rescue us from ourselves. As we choose to put every fear and concern in His hands and pray, “Abba, Father!” over our loved ones, our friends, our own issues, adding the praise of thanksgiving for His merciful Hand upon our lives, we make it possible to experience His peace. Since our tendency is to want an immediate answer and solution to our problems, right now, our fears can find hope through the wait.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 is a favorite of many who are waiting on God’s plan to unfold for themselves and others:

Jeremiah 29:11-13 (NIV)

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Isaiah 41:10 offers a comforting assurance: God’s strength and help are like a stream of Living Water anointing our heads, hearts, and souls with His righteous mercy.

How we praise Him for the gift of His merciful presence!

Isaiah 41:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰Fear not, for I *am* with you;

Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God.

I will strengthen you,

Yes, I will help you,

I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

Proverbs 21:1 offers an encouraging reality: God has sovereign control, and we can rest our fears in that truth, always praying, "Thy will be done."

Proverbs 21:1 (NKJV)

The king's heart *is* in the hand of the LORD,

Like the rivers of water;

He turns it wherever He wishes.

Chapter Seventeen – Victory Over Death

A Deeper Reflection

The powerful truth of 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 (NKJV):

So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“O Death, where is your sting?

O Hades, where is your victory?”

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Two verses help us understand:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

(1 Corinthians 15:22 NKJV).

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23 NKJV).

With Jesus as your personal Savior, how do you now view death?

With Jesus as my Savior, I have no fear of death. I look forward to being with our Lord, worshipping Him, and rejoicing with my loved ones who’ve gone before. It’s a remarkable joy and truth that we’ll be together again, even meeting others for the first time. Being with the Old and New Testament Saints is an awesome, even incomprehensible, thought!

Revelation 14:13 (NKJV)

¹³Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me,^[a] "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'"

"Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 (HCSB)

⁹For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.

How did you view death before your salvation?

Prior to my salvation and understanding of the truth of the Bible, I tended toward a more universal approach to death. I thought we all made it to heaven, one way or another. I was wrong. I didn't understand I would be separated from Christ, and I didn't fully grasp the magnitude of what that meant. Some people believe there is no existence after death, or there is reincarnation. Some consider hell as a possibility, or even a real place, but there's little comprehension about what it means to be there.

Romans 6:23 (NKJV)

²³For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 (NASB)

⁷and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, ⁸dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹**These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,** ¹⁰when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep [those who have died with a redeeming faith in Christ], so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13 NASB).

When a born-again follower of Christ dies, why do believers grieve differently than others?

A believer and follower of Jesus has the hope and promise of eternal life with Christ. They know their eternity is the promise of joy and glory in the presence of their Savior. This promise is true for every born-again follower of the Lord, so when our loved ones or people we know who love Jesus die, they, too, will be with us in heaven. In our sorrow, we know we'll truly see and be with them again – and that causes joy in the midst of grief – a certainty beyond any doubt which the world cannot claim.

1 Corinthians 2:7-9 (NKJV)

⁷But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory, ⁸which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

⁹But as it is written:

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.

2 Corinthians 5:1-8 (NKJV)

For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a
building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the
heavens. ²For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our
habitation which is from heaven, ³if indeed, having been clothed, we shall
not be found naked. ⁴For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not
because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be
swallowed up by life. ⁵Now He who has prepared us for this very
thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

⁶So we *are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body
we are absent from the Lord. ⁷For we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸We are
confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be
present with the Lord.

According to Scripture, Who conquered death and gives us eternal life through faith in Him?

Only One Person in the whole of history conquered death and gives us eternal life through faith
in Him:

Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, our Lord, our Savior and Friend!

Romans 1:1-6 (HCSB)

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle and singled out for God's good news— ² which He promised long ago through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures— ³ concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was a descendant of David according to the flesh ⁴ and who has been declared to be the powerful Son of God by the resurrection from the dead according to the Spirit of holiness. ⁵ We have received grace and apostleship through Him to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations, on behalf of His name, ⁶ including yourselves who also belong to Jesus Christ by calling:

⁷ To all who are in Rome, loved by God, called as saints.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

TESTIMONIALS

Gena Andrews Young – “My Testimony”

Gena writes an intriguing and true thought that can apply to each of us: *I will never fully know how my sickness and God’s miraculous healing touched him [Joe] and the others around us at the time.*

What does her statement tell us about life: both what happens to us and the choices we make in response?

Our impact on others is more profound than we can ever fully realize. We’re touched by circumstances that surprise, overwhelm or challenge us. Gena didn’t have a choice with her illness, but her parents’ response was their choice to make, and their response touched others in an ever widening circle of influence and awe. Gena’s illness was diagnosed on June 13, 1986, thirty years ago this June, 2016. Gene and Dee could never have contemplated their daughter’s leukemia, Joe’s accident in 1991, and all that transpired in relation to each event. Today we’re completing our study on their family’s story, and how wonderful our Lord knew that one day this would be shared with others, a miracle in every way.

Mark 5:18-20 (NKJV)

¹⁸And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. ¹⁹However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.” ²⁰And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.

Why does Gena feel her story is about hope?

Gena shared how God worked in her life by healing her from acute leukemia. Since that was true for her, there is hope that God would be merciful in our lives, as well. Simply learning how God has worked in people's lives, in the midst of physical illnesses, distressing challenges, to the ultimate healing which is faith and salvation in Jesus Christ, encourages us and gives us hope that God is still at work today in the affairs of mankind. Whether there is an actual physical healing as Gena experienced is not important, it is the knowledge that God is there with us through every trial, sustaining and working out His sovereign will, all to His glory and our good.

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

Lamentations 3:22-23 (NASB)

²² The LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease,

For His compassions never fail.

²³ *They* are new every morning;

Great is Your faithfulness.

2 Corinthians 1:2-4 New King James Version (NKJV)

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Dr. John Graham-Pole – “A Trial by Fire: Gena’s Ordeal”

At the end of his testimony, Dr. Graham-Pole quotes a line from a famous hymn. Read his final thoughts, the hymn’s first verse, and discuss what they mean.

So, this story has a blessedly happy ending. From the vantage point of 2014, Dee and Gene can look back on the long ordeal that began in 1986 and see it as an ultimate test of their faith. It was a profound education of a deep truth: God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform.

“God Moves in Mysterious Ways”

By William Cowper

God moves in a mysterious way

His wonders to perform;

He plants His footsteps in the sea

And rides upon the storm.

God accomplishes His sovereign will in ways that are mysterious, yet we do see His wondrous and merciful reality in the changed lives and circumstances of people. We believe and embrace the glory and wonder of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we can barely comprehend what our Savior did while on earth: His walk across the Sea of Galilee; His voice calming the storm; His healing miracles; His powerful teachings; His difficult journey to the Cross of Calvary; His death, burial and resurrection, all for the sins of mankind that separate us from a Holy God. Accepting the loving sacrifice Jesus made for us makes us righteous before God. We can now stand before Him, unafraid. So, we lift our hands; we stand in awe; we bend our knees; we lay flat before Him, all to acknowledge the majesty and mystery of God the Father, Jesus His Son, and the power of the Holy Spirit who now dwells within each believer.

Mark 4:37-41 (NKJV)

³⁷And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. ³⁸But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?"

³⁹Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. ⁴⁰But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How *is it* that you have no faith?" ⁴¹And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

Rev. Mark and Sandy Remington – “Pop and the Princess”

What were the results of Mark’s obedience to journal, for a time, the thoughts and directions he had from the Lord, combined with the faithfulness later of Gene and Dee to respond to the dream Gene had about Mark and Sandy?

Mark wrote what he heard from the Lord, “A brother will put you on wheels and you will go city by city.”

Six months later Gene shared, “Suddenly a bus appeared around the corner of this facility with you, Mark, and your wife Sandy inside, waving at me... Now I understand the vision. If we sell our business, I’m to see you get that bus!”

Gene and Dee sold Ambassador Medical, and they helped Mark and Sandy purchase a 34-foot motor home with only 8,000 miles on it.

Mark explained, “We lived in it while I was in school preparing for the ministry, and then we began seven years of living and traveling in that ‘box on wheels.’

In the end Mark and Sandy covered over 200,000 miles in 15 states in the eastern half of our nation.

Remarkably, Mark wrote, “Gene’s vision launched us into 28 years of fulltime service to over 2,750 churches and thousands who have met the Lord through our ministry of drama.”

We can all say together, “Hallelujah, Praise our Dear Lord!”

Deuteronomy 2:7 (HCSB)

‘For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this immense wilderness. The LORD your God has been with you this past 40 years, and you have lacked nothing.’

Gene Andrews – “Teresa ‘Tess’ Kalinowski Nowicki – Her Final Years”

Tess went on to live a long life, dying on April 18, 2006. She was 86 years old.

What are the two defining characteristics of Tess? Would you want someone, especially your child, to say the same about you?

Despite the difficulties in her life, Tess never lost faith.

She loved God with all her heart.

I certainly pray that my son and daughter-in-law, as well as my husband and those who know me, would be able to say I was a woman of faith who loved God with all my heart.

Romans 15:13 (NKJV)

¹³Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

James 1:12 (NASB)

¹²Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

Ann Brubaker Greenleaf Wirtz – “The Writing”

These are the final questions accompanying *Hand of Mercy*.

What important message does the author wish to share?

The final paragraph sums up the hope I wish to impart:

After my late first husband turned to the Lord in desperation, I, too, had to seek God and find forgiveness at the Cross. In our misery, we found Jesus and our marriage was saved. In order to put our past mistakes and sins into perspective, and to allow us to go forward in the joy of faith, God gave us these wonderful words of truth: Everyone has a story to tell. This is yours, but it's just another story of life without Christ. Rejoice in your salvation, the ultimate desire of God's heart for every person. Go forward and live your life for the Lord, sharing His love and truth.

God bless you, dear reader, in your journey to the foot of the Cross, where you, too, can find forgiveness and eternal redemption.

How was this book accomplished?

“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord of hosts (Zechariah 4:6b NKJV).

What has *Hand of Mercy* meant to you?