CANCER CAN'T KILL YOU
If You're Already Dead
FINDING VICTORY IN THE CRUCIFIED LIFE

DR. KEVIN CONNERS
CANCER CAN’T KILL YOU

If You’re Already Dead

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“If we understand that everything happening to us is to make us more Christ-like, it will solve a great deal of anxiety in our lives.”

- A.W. Tozer

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Cancer can’t kill you, if you’re already dead is a strange title for a book, especially one written to encourage those with a grave diagnosis. One might think, “what do you mean ‘already dead’, how is that giving me hope?” Others might criticize the initial portion crying, “cancer took my mother and my uncle and now it’s attacking my body, how can he say that cancer can’t kill when I witnessed it firsthand?”

Believe me, I’m not trying to be callous or super-spiritualize the matter of such serious concern. I understand, firsthand, the shock, disbelief, anger, grief, and acceptance that are often classified as the stages of the loss of control one experiences with a serious illness. That’s exactly what this book is about. How does one whom professes to belong to Jesus Christ, “not grieve as do the rest who have no hope,” (1 Thessalonians 4:13) and what does this even mean?

This book is about hope but it is about hope that is properly placed. We want to hope for healing, for desires, for peace and all things that make us happy. These are good and justified, yet they are self-
centered. Is it okay to want a new car and better job? Of course. Our heavenly Father wants us to ask Him for all that we need. We should ask for healing, pray for healthy marriages and Godly children. However, we must guard ourselves from expecting that we can manipulate God to provide what we think we need, even when that thing is life itself.

I believe the greatest error one can make is to settle for such little of God. We seek Him in times of trouble; we ask for miracles to overcome obstacles and believe this to be the ‘higher life’. Prayer has become a beggar’s cry as we fall well short of intimacy with our Creator. People profess to be Christians because they prayed a prayer, were dunked in water, and adhere to a belief yet are neither hungry nor thirsty after Truth.

We live in a culture of narcissism. People believe they have the right to jobs, education, healthcare, and the American dream. Our churches teach less about honoring our Creator than about success and happiness; preachers build large congregations through messages that elevate self and build esteem. Worship has been redefined as entertainment and the idea of having a relationship with the living God has been boiled down to 60 minutes a week of a self-glorified adrenaline rush.

There is a verse in the Old Testament book of Psalms that states, “Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart,” (Psalm 37:4) that has been used by preachers to teach that God desires to bless you with whatever your deepest desires may be. Do you want riches? God will give them to you. Do you want a new BMW, fancy home, or fully funded retirement account? Here’s the formula—delight yourself in God and they will soon be yours.

Though I am no theologian, most mature believers would disagree with such prosperity theology, yet, when faced with dire situations,
many of us may accept similar formulas that promise to solve our problems. When we shrink the omniscient, sovereign Creator down to a formula to fill our lusts, we are traversing dangerous territory.

While Psalm 37 may have something to do with God providing what we want, it has more to do with Him giving us a hunger for what we really need. “Delight yourself in the Lord,” stems from a Hebrew phrase that implies making an intimate habit of the enjoyment in a relationship. We are to have a delicate awe of our heavenly Father that will result in us sharing His heart, His dreams, and His desires. When we walk in intimacy with Jehovah, He will give us the desires of His heart that will become the desires of our heart. We will yearn for justice, cry for those hurting, work to serve others, and become a healing balm, not out of law, guilt, or shame but out of a God-placed drive uniquely chosen for us to glorify Him.

No one brings glory to God by gathering possessions; nor does one please Him through achieving goals and conquering foes. I know that He may call us to seasons of life that look different at various times but true victory of a life well-lived flows through surrender and death. Victory is found only at the cross.

May a holy hunger for Christ alone motivate and empower me. May I want nothing less and nothing more; may my obsession for Him shape my decisions and drive me in all I do and may I be found worthy to bring Him glory!

_He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose._ – Jim Elliott

_“When Jesus said, “take up your cross” to them, they thought of a cruel instrument of torture and death. They thought of dying in the most agonizing method known to man. They thought of poor, condemned criminals_
hanging on crosses by the roadside. Doubtless they had seen men executed in that fashion. They understood He was calling them to die for Him. They knew He was asking them to make the ultimate sacrifice, to surrender to Him as Lord in every sense.” – John MacArthur
CHAPTER 1

AND THE LIFE, WHICH I NOW LIVE

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

- Galatians 2:20

OH, TO BE CRUCIFIED

“People who are crucified with Christ have three distinct marks,” said A.W. Tozer, “1. They are facing only one direction, 2. They can never turn back, and 3. They no longer have plans of their own.”
The Apostle Paul used the prefect indicative passive tense of the verb ‘I am crucified’ to describe such an event in his letter to the Galatians. Therefore, our ‘crucifixion with Christ’ was completed in the past but has existing, present-time results that were received from an action of another.

What does it mean to be crucified with Christ but death itself? When one is confronted with the magnificence of the eternal God, the perfection of His law, and the undeniable fact that we cannot keep such perfection, death is our only option. Praise God it has been conquered.

“When a man finds and knows himself to be linked with Christ, his life is altogether a new life. Crucified, then dead. Crucified, then the old life is put away. Whatever life a crucified man has must be new life. Whatever you have of life was not given you till you came into union with Christ. It is a new thing—as new as though you had been actually dead and rotted in the tomb and then had started up at the sound of the trumpet to live again.”
– Charles Spurgeon

There is a distinct doctrinal difference between sanctification and salvation. When I initially was given the power to repent of my sins, through the grace of God alone, I received the promise of salvation, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This event happened at a distinct moment in time that changed my life forever. I was crucified with Christ, past tense. It was an event in time. It was not earned by my good works, won by my merits, nor achieved through my knowledge.

God Himself opened my eyes to reveal my sinful state through the revelation of the distance that stood between the law-breaker and the Lawgiver. This is what broke me, revealed my spiritual
depravity, the utter poverty and expected destiny I deserved. God brought me to that place; in a sense, He dragged me to that place, and seeing Him as He is, as well as myself as I was, I could do nothing less than throw myself at His feet and this is the only way, the only road to Christ. It is through the cross, as narrow as the beam is wide and though many may claim it, few truly find it.

“Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: ‘Ye were bought at a price’, and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.”
– Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship

Matthew records Jesus’ first teaching in chapter 5, verse 3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit…” I find it interesting that Matthew, writing his Gospel mainly to the Jews, and, more specifically, to the religious pretenders, places the first teaching of the Messiah to mankind as, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

It is well understood that Matthew’s Gospel was written to the Jewish hierarchy of the day. The Jews, at that time, even those believers in the church at his writing, had a sense of betterment about them. They saw themselves as God’s chosen people, the apple of His eye. In doing so, one might imply that those who are
not so fortunate to have selected the right parents are outside of God’s selected circle. This veil of pride defined by a sense of self-righteousness hasn’t changed much in the past 2000 years and was the first thing that John the Baptist attacked in Matthew Chapter 3, calling, “Make straight the paths, prepare the way of the Lord.”

John was a herald, an Old Testament prophet (he died before the New Covenant began with the death and resurrection of Christ) preaching the Law to convict his hearers and reveal their need for a savior. That is the purpose of the law, to ‘slay us’ as Paul wrote, to break us, to shine a mirror on us, a light in our heart as one would turn on the light switch of a dirty old basement to expose the cobwebs and years of filth. The Law makes us guilty and drives us to the New Covenant. The Law is the schoolmaster that points us to Christ.

As is now, John’s message of repentance fell on the ears of two groups of individuals. There were those who were sure about themselves and had religion all figured out. These were proud of their knowledge and believed themselves to be on the right track spiritually and in no need of repentance. One could say this group was not slain by the law. Today a life may reveal this heart in many ways, from complete defiance of God to a legalistic fundamentalism. Regardless of its outward appearance, self-righteousness has one core similarity: Christ is NOT the center of one’s life.

The second group of people that the message of repentance falls on is those whose eyes have been opened to understand their depravity. They know they are sinners; they know they could never keep the Law in themselves; they long for a savior; they realize that their only hope lies in the hands of a merciful God. Their attitude is one of: “If God doesn’t move, we’re doomed. We are transgressors and no matter how hard we try, we can’t be good. We need a savior.”
This is where we need to be (or I could say, this is where the Law leaves us): crushed under the weight of the Law that is impossible to keep; slain by the sword of God’s perfect demands that every thought transgresses; indelibly stained by the knowledge of good and evil from a pitiful sin of wanting to be ‘like God’ and de-throne Him from His rightful place as king in our life. We are guilty, deserving the punishment of our crime. There are no other pleas but gross, willful disobedience and we stand caught in the trap of our own sin. We are neither victims nor innocent bystanders; the devil did not ‘make us do it’ nor can we blame our parents or our past. We are guilty.

A soul in this state can hear the ‘good news’, for it is truly only ‘good news’ to the one who is fully aware of the ‘bad news’ of the hell that rightfully awaits the condemned. “Repent and be baptized?” Of course! So it is that Jesus preaches: Blessed are the broken; blessed are those hungry for a savior; blessed are those knowing they need a filling; blessed are those mourning over their disgusting sinful state. Why? For there has come a healer of broken hearts, a well of spiritual water, a comforter, a Savior and King.
Salvation, crucifixion with Christ, is a product of grace alone. There is a ‘work’ of repentance but true repentance is a spiritual gift that flows from the heart broken before God characterized by one physically, mentally, and emotionally turning from sinful ways in the present imperative tense. God’s command to live a repentive life implies a repeated, continuous action. Repentance is daily dumping out my vessel to be filled with God’s grace; it is constantly seeking and hungering for Him and pleading for a deeper, more pleasing walk. This, I believe, is at least part of what Peter spoke of when he commanded us to, “work out our salvation with fear and trembling.” Salvation may be an event in time, but sanctification is a process over a lifetime.

Salvation may be an event in time, 
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over a lifetime.

Sanctification is the message of the epistles. It is the purpose of the church: to make and keep a holy people, peculiar from the world, dependent on the Master, purified by an interdependence on one another keeping true to the Word.

Paul exhorts his young brother in II Timothy 3:10: “But thou hast known my doctrine (all that I believe and have taught you), manner of life (who I am in secret), purpose (‘prothesis’—my life on display before God), faith (built on an open, broken, dependent relationship with God), longsuffering (fortitude, depth of character), charity (agape love), patience (willful, cheerful obedience), persecutions (willingness to take a tough stand regardless of character assault), afflictions (enduring emotional pain and scars)...but out of all of them the Lord delivered me (rhuomai – rescued, energized).” The walk of sanctification may not
be easy for we are promised persecution and trials, but the fruit of such will bring redemption to many.

To this second group of individuals, few as they may seem, Jesus begins the most famous speech ever recorded: Blessed are the poor in spirit.

One cannot over emphasize (and we should be so thankful) what He didn’t say! He did not say, “Blessed are the educated,” nor, “blessed are the doctrinally correct.” He didn’t say, “Blessed are those who do good to others, go to church regularly, tithe, become pastors, go to the mission field, or even are martyred for Him.”

He briefly and clearly, using the vocabulary of the day, gave mankind the secret to eternal life—complete and utter dependence on God!

There’s an old song by Steve Green that states, “Everyone wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die,” that speaks of the open secret of the new life of the believer—death. Without the cross there is no resurrection; without death there is no life. If we believe that we are on our way to heaven when we pass this world and have not yet died TO this world, we are sadly mistaken. This is the secret—the cross.

This book prods that if there isn’t a life-changing, thought cleansing, priority rearranging, new-person creating – kind of movement going on from the inside-out of you that is a never-ending, sometimes painful, often difficult, and a usually uncomfortable road paved with joy unexplainable and birthed from an awful fear of your Creator now turned into a reverent amazement causing daily repentance and a subsequent filling of His holiness and desire for truth, then you better make sure that you are a child of Whom you say.
I couldn’t have written a longer run-on sentence than the one above packed with more truth. We’ve settled for too little of God. Ask Him for more; beg Him for more. We ask for houses and healings when He desires to pour out eternity. The Psalmist understood this well, “One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.” (Psalm 27:4)

May we not settle for too little of God this side of eternity; may we be given a thirst quenched only through Him. May we burn with desire to know Him, counting all else loss but for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.

It’s NOT about a ‘perfect walk’ or sinless life, for this is impossible. God’s definition of spiritual maturity is one who repents more immediately after they have sinned because they more clearly hear the Spirit’s corrective words. The less mature wallow longer in a disobedient state either ignoring or not recognizing the prodding’s of God’s Spirit to bring about repentance. But if I slip for days or weeks or months into a slumber of the enemy’s making I get dragged slowly, quietly, farther from my first love, more blinded from the truth and deaf to God’s pleadings. This is the slumber we are to awaken from.

This is a call to those professing to be a child of the Most High God to stimulate desire away from the shallow waters of superficiality. The only fingers to be pointed are back at oneself and these only to bring repentance and a beckoning for more of God. Judgment must first take place at home, not to condemn, but to lift one up from the pit, and this is done by God Himself when He gives one a spirit of repentance.

There is no other way to holiness but through the cross and no other way to life but through death. Lord, give me the ability to die
to self, surrender to You, and be renewed with a hunger that is filled in my relationship with You alone.

Thank God for His grace and mercy for in it is all I can depend. Thank God that He did NOT send us His Son to give us religion. Thank God that He does not measure my outward acts against me as I cast myself beneath the cross of Christ. Praise God for the saving blood that cleanses me daily as I see myself as I truly am and am more positively assured of my need for a Savior and a King.

“It is one thing to read about being filled with the Holy Spirit and quite another thing to experience the mighty infilling of the Holy Spirit that radically changes our life to a life of adoring wonder and amazement at the things of God. Reading and experiencing are two quite different things.”
– A.W. Tozer
“No matter how terrible they may be, the hardships and tragedies of human living that often befall Christians are not the crosses of which Jesus speaks. Such things as a cruel spouse, a rebellious child, a debilitating or terminal illness, the loss of a job, or destruction of a house by a tornado or flood, may strongly test a believer’s faith; but those are not crosses. The cross of a believer is not a mystical or spiritual identification with the cross of Christ or some “crucified life” idea. Such concepts are foreign to the context, and the cross of Christ was yet future when Jesus spoke here. The disciples would hear cross and think only of physical death. A cross is the willing sacrifice of everything one has, including life, for the sake of Christ. It is something that, like the Lord Himself, a believer must take on himself when it is thrust upon him by the unbelieving world because of his relationship to God.”
– John MacArthur
“The greatness of a man’s power is the measure of his surrender.”
- William Booth

SURRENDER IS THE ULTIMATE FORM OF POWER

“The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails,” said William Arthur Ward. How is a Christian expected to act towards change?

There are those that are more bent towards cynicism and become easily depressed at difficulty; they slip into a thick, gray fog that can choke out options and any view of sunlight. Maybe it stems from an apparent loss of control, maybe from a feeling of overwhelm. It is a spirit of passivity; a cessation of the active exercise of the will and surrender to the disease, the addiction, the sin or whatever
circumstance by which they believe is upon them. This passive pessimism is a counterfeit of ‘surrender to God’ and results in one giving over control to another person, profession, belief or principal in an attempt to avoid a responsibility.

In contrast, the believer is to be surrendered to Christ alone that always leaves one empowered for every good work He imparts. Surrendered believers are stronger, encouraged and on a mission to fulfill that which has been placed in their heart which is often to have victory over their current circumstance, though often this ‘victory’ is far different than what was expected. The believer surrendered to Christ is never passive.

The difference is often subtle, but deadly. I’ve experienced mature believers who have passively surrendered to their disease since, “God is sovereign and His will be done” yet they are fooled into a submissive stance towards their diagnosis disguised as surrender to God. Passivity is inactivity; it is idleness in both mind and spirit. The person is numb and overtaken, seemingly unable to act on their own behalf and falls short of ‘asking, seeking, and knocking’, action verbs commanded by Christ to those desiring truth. God IS sovereign and His victory for us may be physical death but we must be careful and purposeful in whom we place our trust.

Active surrender to our Creator involves cooperation with His Spirit and full use of our faculties. It is a present-tense verb to walk in a state surrendered to Christ, which requires a work, an active effort that is evident by a believer becoming empowered, renewed, and reborn. The powers of darkness aim at obtaining a passive slave, capturing their will. But God desires a regenerated man who is intellectually and actively choosing, praying, battling, and seeking to fulfill a God-ordained drive that has liberated him from slavery.
We are created after His own image (Ephesians 4:24) intelligent, mindful, powerful and unique. Wisdom is freely given to those who seek it (James 1) and all who seek Him will find Him. Never are we commanded to surrender to what man has said whether it be an authoritative figure, a doctor, a diagnosis or disease. Our surrender to God is an active choice, an effort that involves repentance and desire to please and glorify Him. Ask for a hunger for His word; stay up late to seek His face and wake early to hear His voice. Pray for revelation and make knowing your Creator the most important thing in your life evident by the amount of time you spend doing so and the energy it takes.

There is no mystical formula for an intimate relationship with the living God. Jesus said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” These three verbs may be better interpreted, ‘keep asking, over and over and over until you receive; seek as if your life depends on it as one earnestly looking for his lost soul; knock, no, pound, until your
fists are bare and bleeding and your brow drops beads of blood as sweat upon the ground. This effort, far from passive surrender, is evidence of one that desires God’s will and has laid all else down for Christ.

I urge you to make sure you do not err in this one thing and fall short of the glory of God in a false understanding of what surrendering to God means. We are to grow up and no longer allow ourselves to be enslaved to this world but through faith we are set free.

Listen to the Apostle Paul as he urges the Corinthians, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.” (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

Our ‘fight’ this side of eternity is not passive and our enemy is real. True surrender to Christ doesn’t leave us wimpy losers that wallow in our sad situation as victims. Nowhere in Scripture do I see believers helplessly grumbling about their lot in life except when grossly disobedient. Our weapons are real and forged in heaven, mighty for battle in active confrontation. They are divinely powerful for a distinctive purpose. By faith we are to rise up, filled with the Spirit of God to fulfill the purpose that He has placed in our soul.

What is our chief enemy? Paul explains God’s initial plan for us—the destruction of fortresses. Fortresses are strongholds, false beliefs about God, His love for us that is beyond our understanding, and the lies of the enemy that get us to doubt it. This is our daily battle. The enemy wants nothing more than to
have us doubt God's love, question His goodness, and submit to anything other than truth. This was the original sin, the root of all sin and the wedge of separation, “Did God really say? Did He really mean…?”

It takes a WORK of faith to ward off the subtle, quiet, whispering lies that coax us to drift slowly, silently further from this truth. We, like our forefathers are easily seduced by the serpent to doubt God's infinite love and desire for our good. We are tempted to trust in our own warped sense of good versus evil, defining our circumstance as 'bad' because it is undesirable and choosing to take action that is fleshly, instead of trusting God.

Nevertheless, we are called to pull down such imaginations; they are billows of smoke that blind our view. These lies to which we give power rise in our heart; we exercise them and make them stronger by dwelling on them, speaking to our heart and make them real. May it not be so! They are lies lifted up against the knowledge of God, and when we allow this to happen, our view of God gets smaller, more fuzzy, and clouded by sin. This is our fight! Bring every thought into captivity; actively choose that you will trust and surrender to no one but Christ.

Paul continues, “You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.” (Verse 7) What in the world are you thinking? If we are in Christ we are not to look at things according to the way they appear but through the eyes of Christ! This is perhaps our biggest obstacle. We are carnal; we are men surrendered to earthly logic and we claim to have intelligence but are made fools by the Gospel.

“But I have cancer,” you say, “I have only so long to live.” “My finances are in ruin,” you say, “there is no way out of this hole I am in.” “My marriage is a disaster.” “My daughter is dead.” “My life is
not what I expected.” Are we not carnal? We sometimes act as if our problem is a surprise to God. God knows our needs better than we do and foreknew them long before we were aware of them. Refuse to surrender to them. Refuse to give them power. Refuse to believe that God doesn’t care and that He isn’t already at work.

Listen; if I have truly surrendered to the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, I’m His. I’m no longer my own. I was purchased with the very blood of Christ and though I live, I live by faith in Him. I died. It’s over. Sin can’t stop me and this world can’t hurt me. The victory was won long ago and this sliver of time that I have been given this side of eternity is for a purpose that He has for me.

“But I have cancer,” you say. So what! I say as respectfully as possible, but so what if you have cancer! Have you sought His face as to what you are to be doing about it and with it? We all have one thing in common—we are all terminal. It is when we get lulled into believing that we have a right to experience someone’s definition of happiness on this earth that we are most deceived. Who said you were promised 90 years, a great job, a wonderful marriage, beautiful children and a 401k?

These are things that the world promises; they are lies of false fulfillment; they are wells with no water; they are junk food that leaves you fat and hungry for more. We seek these ‘good’ things—earthly contentment, security, health and happiness over a hunger for truth and a thirst unsatisfied in anything other than Christ. In Him is joy unspeakable that supersedes circumstance; in Him is peace that surpasses appearance.

The surrendered believer is not defined by circumstance and refuses to accept labels that the victim embraces. It just doesn’t matter anymore; Christ is my king. Paul could sit rotting in a Roman jail never once mentioning the rats that gnawed his legs at night nor the feces laden stench that choked his dictation of the
volumes of Scripture he created through the power of the Holy Spirit. Because, it – just – didn’t – matter!

What is visible is far less important than what is invisible.

I want more and more and more, my lust is never quenched.

Even when condemned to death, in sin my soul is drenched.

Why did He reach so low to scoop me from the molten clay?
Why did He choose to snatch me from the grip of Satan on that day?

It was nothing that He saw in me; nothing that I was

He chose because of who He is, will be, and who He was.

He loved me in my filth, picked me all deformed

And while I shook my fist at Him, it was my heart He warmed

With love that’s from another world, like never seen before

That changes, rearranges, cleanses deep and opens eyes,

He dragged me to His throne, cut me open, exposed my lies.

Then gently gathered up the pieces, broken, spilled out on the ground,

And like a puzzle, He placed together, every emptiness He found.

He made me new, and every day that I bow down, He makes me new again,

For in dependence on my Savior, is the beginning and the end.
“God is none other than the Savior of our wretchedness. So we can only know God well by knowing our iniquities. Those who have known God without knowing their wretchedness have not glorified Him, but have glorified themselves.”
– Blaise Pascal

“The God on whom we rely knows what suffering is all about, not merely in the way that God knows everything, but by experience. In the darkest night of the soul Christians have something to hold onto that Job never knew. We know Christ crucified. Christians have learned that when there seems to be no other evidence of God’s love, they cannot escape the cross. “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32) … When we suffer, there will sometimes be mystery. Will there also be faith? Yes, if our attention is focused more on the cross, and on the God of the cross, than on the suffering itself.”
– D. A. Carson
Chapter 3

Teach Me How To Mourn

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Matthew 5:4

Mourning Is The Ultimate Form Of Worship

Grief and mourning are natural; one isn’t human if one does not grieve. C.S. Lewis experienced such grief at the loss of his wife, “Getting over it so soon? But the words are ambiguous. To say the patient is getting over it after an operation for appendicitis is one thing; after he’s had his leg off is quite another. After that operation either the wounded stump heals or the man dies. If it heals, the fierce, continuous pain will stop. Presently he’ll get back his strength and be able to stump about on his wooden leg. He has ‘got over it.’ But he will probably have recurrent pains in the stump all his life, and perhaps pretty bad ones; and he will always be a
one-legged man. There will be hardly any moment when he forgets it. Bathing, dressing, sitting down and getting up again, even lying in bed, will all be different. His whole way of life will be changed. All sorts of pleasures and activities that he once took for granted will have to be simply written off. Duties too. At present I am learning to get about on crutches. Perhaps I shall presently be given a wooden leg. But I shall never be a biped again.”

Lewis spoke differently of grief prior to experiencing it. Mourning doesn't come naturally for anyone. It's a skill born from sorrow that youth cannot grasp. It's cultivated in the wounds of life when loss piles up like dirty laundry and questions of ‘why’ have no answers. Grief looks back; hope looks forwards, but mourning is a present experience of both, expressed.

Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are they that “penthas”. The Greek verb teaches us that, in order to truly receive comfort through difficult times, one must “penthas”, sorrow, to spill out, expel. As a physician I teach patients that, though it’s said, ‘you are what you eat’, it’s better said, ‘you are what you absorb’. However, proper understanding of physiology best states it as, ‘you are what you don’t detoxify’. From a spiritual/emotional perspective, Jesus said it 2000 years ago as, ‘you are what you don’t spill out, get out, deal with, eliminate, penthas’.

Grief looks back; hope looks forwards, but mourning is a present experience of both, expressed.

But I’m not good at this; I’m the strong one. I need to hold it together for everyone else; I have to be spiritual. But Jesus says, ‘blessed are those that get out what’s on the inside; blessed are they that don't allow the pain of life to poison their future; blessed are they that learn that in apparent weakness there is strength; blessed are they that allow God to be God; blessed are they that
can weep so the past has no hold on them; blessed are they that are surrendering daily to My Lordship, My strength, My control.’

We better understand His words if we step back a verse or two in Matthew. Jesus, in His first recorded sermon finds it important to begin with these essential words that must frame a believer’s life, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” This verse explains salvation and victory over every possible circumstance one could face. This verse answers the ‘how’ to all that follow; it’s the playbook for life, the directions to the puzzle.

Poor, “ptochas”, is a special Greek word that differs from other words the language used to describe a less-than-prosperous individual. Ptochas poor is a destitute poor. It’s a third world, desperate, no other hope, end-of-my-rope poverty that might be used to describe a blind, deaf, crippled beggar who, without the help of friends that might carry him to the street corner, set his
tin cup in front of him next to the cardboard sign, he would stave to death.

Jesus’ first lesson teaches us that, if we desire the Kingdom of Heaven, a relationship that allows us an eternity with God, it comes through a clear understanding of our complete, utter helplessness to earn such a standing. Blessed are those that know the depravity of their flesh and sit, as the blind, deaf, beggar to freely receive the grace that through Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, they are granted life. Blessed are they that know that they can’t be good; they need a Savior. Blessed are those that know that they can’t try harder to keep the law; they need a Savior. Blessed are those that know that their only hope is God Himself interrupting their life, intervening in ways supernatural on their behalf. Blessed are those that realize that if God doesn’t move, they’re done.

If we don’t walk daily in a deep realization of this truth we can’t expect Kingdom blessings. Do you want joy, and peace, and patience, and goodness, gentleness and self-control? It comes through brokenness! Do you long for comfort that surpasses all present circumstances? It comes only through a spirit, the depth of one’s soul, that tastes the putrid reality of sin and lies helpless in the hands of a loving Creator who picks us up and cuddles us in His arms and soothes us with words that heal every scar of abuse, every wound of rejection, every ache and sorrow that life can bring.

It is through brokenness that we experience Heaven; it is through dependence that we become free. “Repent” (turn around) from the way you are running, says the Baptist. Turn around from chasing religion; stop trying to please God. Turn around from being the strong one and realize that you aren’t and don’t need to be. The Kingdom of God is at hand in Jesus Christ. He is here. Yoke yourself to Him and He will carry the burden. There has come a ‘healer of broken hearts’, a ‘well of spiritual water that quenches all thirst’, a ‘comforter’, a ‘completer’.
Blessed are they that come to realize that their only hope is complete dependence on Christ. And, in an active state of utter dependence comes the fruit of the Kingdom. If I’m not experiencing love for those unlovable, it’s evidence that I’m not drawing water from the well. If my peace is dependent on desired experiences, I’m not drawing water from the well. I can fake it for a while and fool some for a time but I will die inside, rot, like a cancer in my soul that sucks the life out of me. I’m reminded, ‘surrender’, ‘repent’, ‘just turn around and come home’.

His Spirit beckons us like a gentle whisper. It’s a warm breeze that draws us to Him; He speaks in loving tones and calls us up on His lap. “I’m here,” He says, “I’m always here.” Blessed are those that keep that truth in the forefront of their heart; they will be blessed with the ability to mourn, given a love that knows no bounds, and bestowed with a peace that passes all understanding when life is falling apart.

Blessed are they that mourn, that get out what is on the inside. Blessed are they that come to an end of themselves and realize they are nothing without Christ. Blessed are they that like Mary in Luke 7:36-39, when she saw herself in the light of Christ, burst forth in tears, washing her Savior’s feet in the outpouring of her soul. Blessed are those who like the publican in Luke 18:9-17, beat his chest crying, ‘have mercy on me the sinner’ as if he was the very one that would drive the nails in Christ’s palm. Blessed are those that believe to the depth of the father in Mark 9 who wailed for the healing of his son admitting to Jesus that he, ‘believes, but heal my unbelief’.

Heal my unbelief Lord; heal my broken faith. Fill me with a desire to know You more; give me a hunger that is quenched by You alone. Make me sickened by this world, by contentment and ease. Teach me to mourn.
“I was delivered from the burden that had so heavily suppressed me. The spirit of mourning was taken from me, and I knew what it was to truly rejoice in God my Savior.”
– George Whitefield

“Occasionally, weep deeply over the life that you hoped would be. Grieve the losses. Feel the pain. Then wash your face, trust God, and embrace the life that he’s given you.

The reason for that counsel is 1 Thessalonians 4:13, where Paul says, “We do not want you to be uninformed . . . about those who are asleep” — about those who have died — “that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.” So, there’s real grieving, which he expects, and there’s hope. Grieving is real, losses are real, pain is real — really felt, really expressed — and hope is real that changes it profoundly.

I have in mind two kinds of losses: those who had something precious and lost it, and those who hoped for something precious and never had it. It works both ways. Sixty years go by, and forty years on you think, “I’ve come to terms with that,” and then one morning it breaks over you, and you weep about a 40-year old loss, or a 40-year “never have,” and my counsel is, yes, go ahead, embrace that moment. Weep.

But then, say to your weeping after a season, “No. You will not define me, sorrow, because my God has said, ‘No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly’” (Psalm 84:11). Therefore, even though it was good in one sense, and I miss it in one sense, I trust my God, and he has not withheld anything that is good for
“me.” Yes, let there be weeping in those seasons — feel the losses. Then wash your face, trust God, and embrace the life he’s given you.” – John Piper
CHAPTER 4

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD...

There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, ‘All right, then, have it your way.’

- C.S. Lewis

“THE LORD...”

If you’ve ever been to a funeral, you’ve probably read Psalm 23. I’m not quite sure why it’s become such a traditional funeral Psalm, but it now reminds most people of death when it’s such a passage of LIFE. I was taught a deeper meaning of the familiar text when my father passed away a few years ago. I pray that you experience a new sense of oneness with your Father as I did; meditate on His word and let Him speak to you individually and personally in your special need. Let’s start by reviewing the entire text:
“The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.
He restores my soul;
He guides me in the paths of righteousness
For His name’s sake.
Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the
presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.
Surely goodness and lovingkindness will
follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” – NASB

There’s a lot of talk today about a Universalist approach to salvation, i.e. that God is love and since God is love, He loves everyone and would never send anyone to hell. Most don’t even believe in a hell and if a heaven exists, the common thought is
that it is created by one’s own personal choice. Our once-Christian culture in America has adopted Hindu philosophies that, ‘there are many roads to the top of the same mountain’ and have embraced doctrinal differences to the point of melding their beliefs into an Eastern-Jewish-Christian mix that is far from Biblical Christianity. Where IS the Lord? Well, he is alive and well since the lord (small “l”) is one’s self as we have made ourselves our own idol!

It is difficult to argue against the belief that we are currently experiencing what was prophesized by Christ in Matthew 23, Paul in his letters to the churches and the rest of the New Testament writers as to what could be expected in the last days.

“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power.” – 2 Timothy 3:1-5 NIV

One might say that these particular practices have been seen throughout the ages, and that would be true. However, a closer look at the context of this passage reveals that Paul was not warning Timothy of what could be expected; he was foretelling the future to Timothy because of an incidence Timothy experienced in the church at Ephesus. Paul placed young Timothy in a pastoral position and Ephesus was a fast-growing church in a very commercial, godless city. Timothy ran into trouble with a few church members, professing believers named Hymenaeus and Philetus, who “have departed from the truth” (2 Timothy 2:18). Paul warned Timothy and other steadfast believers to stand firm
against false teachers and then in chapter 3 consoled Timothy with the prophetic truth of what the church was going to look like in the last days, as if to say, “You think it’s bad now, dealing with a couple of egotists? Well, let me tell you what it’s going to be like in the last days. The entire church is going to be corrupted by self-seeking false doctrines!”

In Paul’s first letter to Timothy he warned, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” (1 Timothy 4:1 KJV) This reveals the REAL problem—people depart from the faith, they leave the truth and believe the lie!

Paul expressed the same root cause of sin in his letter to the Romans(140,396),(877,522) saying that there will be those, “Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.” One might argue that here he is speaking of those in the world, not the church, but the previous two passages Paul was most assuredly speaking of the condition of professing believers.

The problem of sin, selfishness, moral corruption, pity, and the narcissistic culture now easily found not only in the world but nearly equally in the church has one cause at its core—self on the throne of one’s life! We have replaced God with self; we believe that WE have taken the king’s chair and are in full control of life. The fact that THE Lord of lords is no longer OUR lord has never been more evident. God creator, God sustainer, God redeemer, has been replaced with that which has been created. We are, as did the Israelites of old, doing that which is right in our own eyes.

Psalm 23, in its original Hebrew text never uses the article ‘the’. It actually reads, “Jehovah my shepherd I shall not want…” “The Lord,” as most interpretations write, seems appropriate, as the original author left no doubt as to whom possessed the only
qualifications of shepherding his heart. Jehovah was the special, sacred, and very significant name by which God revealed himself to the ancient Hebrews. In later times, the Jewish people believed that the name Jehovah was so sacred that it was never pronounced except by the high priest on the great Day of Atonement, when he entered into the most holy place. Jews used what we could say was God’s common name, Adonai, which is more synonymous with ‘Lord.’ There are several expanded definitions of God’s name throughout Scripture, as man has no other way to describe the magnificence of God but by the works observed:

**Jehovah-jireh**

Jehovah will see; i.e., will provide, the name given by Abraham to the scene of his offering up the ram, which was caught in the thicket on Mount Moriah. The expression used in Gen. 22:14, “in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen,” has been regarded as equivalent to the saying, “Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.”
Jehovah-nissi

Jehovah my banner, the title given by Moses to the altar that he erected on the hill on the top of which he stood with uplifted hands while Israel prevailed over their enemies the Amalekites (Ex. 17:15).

Jehovah-shalom

Jehovah send peace, the name that Gideon gave to the altar he erected on the spot at Ophrah where the angel appeared to him (Judg. 6:24).

Jehovah-shammah

Jehovah is there, is present, the symbolical title given by Ezekiel to Jerusalem, which was seen by him in vision (Ezek. 48:35). It was a type of the gospel Church.

Jehovah-tsidkenu

Jehovah our righteousness, rendered in the Authorized Version, “The LORD our righteousness,” a title given to the Messiah (Jer. 23:6, marg.), and also to Jerusalem (33:16, marg.). – (Credit Easton’s Bible Dictionary)

The point is that our English article ‘the’ expressively reiterates the fact that there is only ONE God, ONE Lord of our world and our life, and it is NOT us! God has NO intention of sharing His Godhead with man yet we have become a culture of idolaters. Scripture is explicit that there is but ONE God. “Hath not one God created us?” (Malachi 2:10) “For there is one God; and there is none other but he.” (Mark 12:32) “There is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.” (1 Corinthians 8:6) “One
God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Ephesians 4:6) “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 2:5)

The question we all must ask is this—who is really THE lord of my life?

My wife and I used to tell our kids, “If there is something, anything, in your life that, if taken away would destroy you, it is an idol!” We cherish possessions, collect, and even hoard yet rarely do we hear of idolatry.

Idolatry, by definition, is image-worship or divine honor paid to any created object. Paul describes the origin of idolatry in Romans 1:21-25: men forsook God, and sank into ignorance and moral corruption (1:28). In Scripture, idolatry is regarded as of heathen origin, and as being imported among the Hebrews through contact with heathen nations. The first allusion to idolatry is in the account of Rachel stealing her father’s teraphim (Genesis 31:19), which were the relics of the worship of other gods by Laban’s progenitors “on the other side of the river in old time” (Joshua 24:2). During their long residence in Egypt the Hebrews fell into idolatry, and it was long before they were delivered from it (Joshua 24:14; Ezekiel 20:7).

Today idolatry is disguised in hobbies, past-times, job responsibilities, corporate ladders, athletics and revealed by examining the amount of time and money spent on things other than that which would glorify God. Idolatry is the universal human tendency to value something or someone in a way that hinders the love and trust we owe to God. It is an act of theft from God whereby we use some part of creation in a way that steals from honor due the King alone.

No one grasped this better than Martin Luther, who ties the Old and New Testament together remarkably in his exposition of the
Ten Commandments. Luther saw how the Law against idols and the New Testament emphasis on justification by faith alone are essentially the same. He said that the Ten Commandments begin with two commandments against idolatry because the fundamental problem in law breaking is rooted in idolatry. In other words, we never break the other commandments without first breaking the law against idolatry; that is, all SIN has the root of SELF-exaltation above God! Luther understood that the first commandment is really all about justification by faith, and to fail to believe in justification by faith is idolatry, which is the root of all that displeases God.

All those not fully trusting God practice idolatry. Religion is idolatrous. Should one make every attempt to keep every commandment is, in itself, a sign of idolatrous living. Such was the root problem of the rich young ruler in Matthew Chapter 19. “How does one please God,” was essentially his question to Jesus who brilliantly allowed the young man to reveal the twisted thinking so commonly found in a self-righteous heart. “Obey the commandments,” he answered, to which Jesus essentially said, “Go do so then, if that’s what you think will get you to heaven.” I believe that Jesus already knew the man’s answers and was more teaching the crowd the lesson that keeping of the commandments was not God’s intention. The purpose of the commandments was (and is) to reveal to us that they are impossible to keep!

The religious man says, “Tell me the commandments that I may keep them.” The spiritual man says, “There is no possible way that I can keep up God’s standard. I look at my life and I am broken! All my attempts at righteousness leave me the puffed-up hypocrite I profess to hate. I deserve hell! Praise God for GRACE. If His mercies were not new every day, I would have NO hope!” THIS is the heart Jesus seeks and the heart that is produced in one crushed by the Law and broken under the weight of the commandments. Praise God they have done their work in you!
Luther writes, “(Those who do not) trust in His favor, grace and good-will, do not keep this [First] Commandment, practice real idolatry, even if they were to do the works of all the other Commandments, and in addition had all the prayers, obedience, patience, and chastity of all the saints combined. For the chief work is not present, without which all the others are nothing but mere sham, show and pretense, with nothing in back of them. If we doubt or do not believe that God is gracious to us and is pleased with us, or if we presumptuously expect to please Him only through and after our works, then it is all pure deception, outwardly honoring God, but inwardly setting up self as a false [savior]...” (Part X. XI Excerpts from Martin Luther, Treatise Concerning Good Works, 1520).

“Although the counterfeit cross takes on many forms, one of the most insidious errors that has crept into the church is that which allows for a confession of Christ as Savior, while submission to His governing authority as Lord is optional. It is a teaching that allows for one to enter the Kingdom of God while rejecting the rule and reign of the King. In other words, one can become a sheep of the flock of God, 1 Peter 5:2, while refusing to follow the Shepherd. It is a cross that can be embraced without the passions and desires of the flesh being crucified (Gal. 5:24), sin being abhorred (Rom. 12:9), without a life that lives contrary to the “course of this world” (Eph. 2:2).”
– James P. Shelly
CHAPTER 5

THE LORD...

Until the will and the affections are brought under the authority of Christ, we have not begun to understand, let alone to accept, His lordship.

- Elizabeth Elliott

WHO IS MINE?

Before I can claim one promise of Scripture, before I can expect one prayer to be heard, before one wish granted, this question must be answered: Who is my LORD? This is a serious question and I know of no proclaiming Christian that would answer anything other than what is expected, but most are lying to themselves. Whoa, that sounds like harsh words, but let’s stop pretending.

The truth is that most of us professing believers know how we are supposed to be living our lives, could point to many religious acts that ‘prove’ our salvation, and may even have all the right answers to theological questions. But, when the truth is told, most of us
spend the majority of our lives as the king of our self-centered universe. We declare Christ’s lordship, raise our hands on Sunday, and carry our Bible to small group but spend the preponderance of our time consumed in thoughts of our vacation, growing our career, collecting more stuff and fulfilling our goals.

This evening I drove my daughter back to her college dorm after spending a weekend at home. She commented that she thought it both funny and sad that humans spend most of their lives going to school to learn skills and then the rest of their lives trying to use those talents to make money so they can buy more things. We talked about this for a bit and I made some comment about how it is important to find a career that means more than just making money. I thought more about this on the way home and became more saddened by my response to her the more I pondered.

What IS our purpose in life? Where is there any true value? The richest man that ever lived finished life with deep regrets that all the ‘stuff’ he chased were just ‘vanities’ that led him away from his true purpose that he was created to achieve—to live under the Lordship of his Creator! There is neither greater glory nor greater joy; everything else is a futile, hollow, empty attempt to achieve significance by following a lie.

Do not believe that because you once prayed a prayer, got baptized, grew up in the church, received some spiritual gift, or any other past work of self or act of God that you now walk under His lordship. It is a daily struggle to surrender to the King. My flesh regularly rears its head, sin creeps at my door and the enemy waits to devour if I don’t purposely and deliberately cry out to Him daily. My walk is hindered often and life throws countless obstacles to keep me from seeing the victory already achieved. I will be eternally grateful that His mercies are new each day because I need them new each day!
My prayer is to bind myself to my Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ, that I may walk yoked to Him, keeping my need for Him at the forefront of my mind. Oh, if I could just remember how much he loves me. I was created to spend eternity with Him, ever enjoying His infinite love, learning of His wonder, and basking in His glory. This is our chief aim.

He not only knew my name, He planned me; drew out my vessels and sculpted my organs. Like a once barren woman, He longed for my time on earth, however, His waiting wasn’t passive; with His hands He formed my heart and tapped it to start its first beat; He stretched out my fingers and bent them to form their joints and etched each print into their tips. He smiled as He shaped my face and pulled on my ears, whispering secrets that my heart would only reveal years latter. He told me of walks we’d take, how we’d go fishing from an old log on the edge of a quiet pond, and how He made fireflies just to hear my laughter and watch me chase them.
around the yard. He said He’s painted sunsets just for me, created waterfalls and mountains, and green grass that tickle toes, and watermelon. I snuggled in his lap for nine months and listened to His stories of the world about both the beauty and the beasts that I would face. But then, I forgot, for a very long time.

Lord, let me remember that You are my Lord, my Father, my King. You desire that I come to You like a little child and crawl onto Your lap just to snuggle. Give me the ability to repent, lay everything down and count all I’ve done, earned, and strived for as rubbish compared to knowing You. Give me a hunger and thirst for You that can never be quenched.

Thank you Lord Jesus!

“Revelation is the first step to holiness, and consecration is the second. A day must come in our lives, as definite as the day of our conversion, when we give up all right to ourselves and submit to the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ.” – Watchman Nee

GOD IS MY FATHER
MATTHEW 6:9

Pray, then, in this way: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.” – NASB

Jesus taught us to pray in this way, to proclaim our Creator as our Daddy. He is a Father, a comforter, a teacher, a mentor, one who disciples the world is not just a haphazard set of circumstances; it has a planner with a blueprint. We are family, born-again into that which is eternal. We are created in the likeness of a God who loves us and cares for us and wants to be our Father. Behind everything
in this world is not just some inanimate force, some mysterious power, but an eternal, living being, and He is our Dad. He is in control; He creates and sustains all things. Everything is in the Father’s hand.

“Father, teach me to hallow You, adore You, worship You in a manner that is fitting for You and pleasing to You. I do believe that You love me but please heal my unbelief.”
CHAPTER 7

THE LORD IS...

All the grace contained in [the Bible] is owing to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior; and, unless we consent to Him as our Lord we cannot expect any benefit by Him as our Savior.

- Matthew Henry

MY EVER PRESENT SAVIOR

Religious people talk about God in the past tense. God did this and that at some particular time in the past as if the Bible stories were simply events on a historical timeline. It’s easy for us to get caught into the same mindset, seeing God separate from daily life, absent from present tense. I hear people pray as if God is distant, like He is unconcerned with our struggles and unattached to everyday needs.

Similarly, the Israelites had a religious view of God. They observed unbelievable miracles like the parting of the sea to allow their escape from Egypt, received fresh water from a rock in the desert,
and fresh food falling from the sky each morning. Yet, within a week, they faithlessly rejected the Promised Land because they had no vision that God could possibly provide a victory over the current tenants. What was the matter with those idiots? Well, we often act the same way!

The Israelites failed to display faith because it wasn’t *in* them. They saw God as a provider of their desires. He acted out of their need when they called on His name but He wasn’t a present person with whom they communed. God was ‘out there’, away from them, distant, and though they ‘believed’ in Him, their concept of who He was, was skewed. You see, to the religious person, things that God does are events in time, not displays of character. God parts the Red Sea and they think, “Great, wasn’t that nice.” Yet, they have no concept of purpose beyond the event; it was simply a kind benefit that quickly grew into an ungrateful expectation.

It's really a matter of personal presence—is God present with you, beside you, inside you personally? Religious people may know all *about* God, but don’t *know* Him; the Bible is a wonderful collection of stories to be learned, studied and memorized instead of observations of His personage, displays of His character, and a visual, tangible manifestation of His love.

*Was* God? Yes, he was. *Will* God? Yes, He will. Facts point out the former and prophecy the latter but the question we all must ask ourselves is this: *Is* God? *Is* He for me? *Is* He present now, engulfed in my thoughts, overseeing my desires, beside my actions, moment by moment? *Is* He real, alive, more than Sunday school pictographs, or is He something I just experience from time to time?

“I cannot imagine how religious persons can live satisfied without the practice of the presence of GOD. For my part
"I keep myself retired with Him in the depth of centre of my soul as much as I can; and while I am so with Him I fear nothing; but the least turning from Him is insupportable."
– Brother Lawrence

Years ago I had the wonderful opportunity of preaching a message at my sister’s wedding. She and her husband are believers and wanted the Gospel declared at their most special day, especially because so many of our relatives just might need to hear. I shared an abbreviated, yet pointed message that we prayed God would use for His glory. What I remember most about that day was something that my Aunt said to me. “Kevin,” she pulled me close, “that was wonderful, we need to hear that once in a while.” Maybe it was just I that found something strange in that comment, but I believe the Lord spoke to me after that saying, “This is the problem with religion—I become an event. I will NOT be an event.”

THE God of the universe sent His Son to establish a covenant with us that we might have an intimate, ever growing, one-to-one relationship with Him. Thinking that doctrinal knowledge, scattered experiences, and emotional occasions are what God intended is similar to believing that your Facebook friends are really relationships.

Never settle for religion; its lukewarm pretense of what He intended is an abomination to our Father. It’s time to get real with THE Lord who IS, and that He demands to be in present tense with those who hear His voice because they KNOW Him and are known by Him.

“The nature of Christ’s salvation is woefully misrepresented by the present-day evangelist. He announces a Saviour from Hell rather than a Saviour..."
from sin. And that is why so many are fatally deceived, for there are multitudes who wish to escape the Lake of fire who have no desire to be delivered from their carnality and worldliness.”
– A.W. Pink

OUR SOURCE OF JOY

PSALM 4:6–7

Many are asking, “Who can show us any good?” Let the light of your face shine upon us, O Lord. You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound. – NIV

This may be exactly what many are thinking, “Who can show us any good?” It may be nearly impossible to find something ‘good’ in your present situation. You may feel disillusioned; there’s pessimism in the air, a spirit of impending doom that just won’t lift. You’ve tried to remain positive and focus on Scripture but feel overwhelmed, like you are stuck in the bottom of a muddy well and all your attempts at scraping and crawling your way out result in you sliding right back down to the pit.

Who can show us any good? David, the psalmist, then goes on, “Let the light of Your face shine upon us, O Lord.” Real goodness has only one source. It comes from the Lord, and when He lifts up the light of His face upon us, that light dispels all darkness, our anxieties, our worries, and fears.

Happiness depends on our judgment of circumstance; joy is a gift from God regardless of current struggles. Ask for a fresh filling of His Spirit. “Give me joy, oh Lord; I need your joy! Restore to me the
JOY of my salvation!” (Psalm 51:12) “But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength; Yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning, For You have been my stronghold And a refuge in the day of my distress.” (Psalm 59:16)

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.”
– Isaiah 61:1-3
THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD...

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

- John 15:16

HE CHOSE ME

I love to just sit and contemplate the amazing truth that the Creator of the stars, the One with the infinite imagination, the maker of everything, and the sustainer of life, has chosen to call me ‘son’. I am His. He is mine. THE Lord of lords, THE King of kings, chased me, caught me, exchanged my heart, beckons me daily to walk with Him, and desires to be MY shepherd.
Would it be enough that God declares Himself as the shepherd of the world? He could be an indifferent leader whom, because His ways are so far above our ways, would be untouchable, unknowable. Like a CEO of a great business, the employees would know Him by His policies and demands. The weekly newsletter from the boss enlightens the workers with expectations and company earnings. This is reality for anyone working for a corporation and exactly how most Christians relate to God.

Praise God that He is NOT like man!

THE Lord of all is MY shepherd not just THE shepherd. Oh, I know that He is also your shepherd but that’s the point. He is our personal shepherd, desiring an intimate communion with His children. We must grow to expect to hear His voice, receive His discipline, enjoy His laughter, and grieve with His broken heart. Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” (John 10:27) There is only one true flock; I want to be under that one true Shepherd and want to know Him so well that I hear His voice and follow His commands!

Is He your shepherd or just ‘a’ shepherd? The world may say He was a ‘great teacher’, that is, He was ‘a’ shepherd. Many Christians profess that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world. They know the facts and recite the texts but remain outside the flock. He is more than ‘a’ shepherd, He is ‘the’ shepherd; we must do more than simply acknowledge Him as King. The demons do so, and they shudder at the fact. (James 2:19) Yet, they remain deaf to His voice and only observers of the truth. This is the group that Jesus spoke of who would even do wonderful things in God’s name yet they fail to enter Heaven because He was NOT their personal shepherd. (Matthew 7:21-23) He needs to be MORE than ‘a’ shepherd and even more than ‘the’ shepherd!
God did NOT send His Son to die on the cross to give you a good example; He did so to bring you back to the relationship lost in the Garden and promised through the ages. Jesus Christ is our one and only mediator between man and his Creator, the author of the new covenant, our personal, intimate shepherd.

If He is not currently YOUR shepherd, ask Him, using your words. Something like this: Oh God in Heaven, I know all about you but I don’t know you intimately. I’ve spent my life learning about you but living for me. Search me; change me. Give me the ability to know you like never before. Make my relationship real. I don’t want to be religious. Heal me from thinking I can know you any other way outside of complete surrender to you. Bind me to your heart, to your Son, to your word, truth, and light. Give me your Holy Spirit. Make me your son/daughter. I want YOU to be MY shepherd. Thank you Lord. Amen

“There are no ‘if’s’ in God’s world. And no places that are safer than other places. The center of His will is our only safety—let us pray that we may always know it!”
– Corrie ten Boom
RECEIVE FROM GOD
JOHN 3:27

John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing, unless it has been given him from heaven.” – NASB

There’s an old truth that states, ‘you can’t give what you don’t have.’ This perfectly describes life in Christ. Many spend the majority of their time and energy attempting to live a Godly life; this is religion, working hard at a holy persona. Religion follows rules to look holy; it changes behavior to meet expectations; it cleans the outside, looks good to the world, stays politically correct, and is friendly to be around. Let us not confuse this with Godliness.

“Lord, change me, re-make me, and fill me with You. Create in me a new heart that longs only for You and Your gifts to bring You glory. I can’t love my neighbor, overcome this disease, forgive my parents, or have victory over my narcissism without Your intervention. Change me Lord; give me Your Spirit, a new filling. Cleanse my heart of all selfishness. Teach me how to repent and receive Your Kingdom, I pray.”

The only thing that’s truly Godly in your life or in mine is that which we receive from Him. Just turn to God and say, “God, whatever You want me to have, that’s what I want. I’ll be satisfied. I will not seek after money or position, healing or happiness, unless, God, I can receive it from You.”
CHAPTER 9

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

It will be very interesting one day to follow the pattern of our life as it is spread out like a beautiful tapestry. As long as we live here we see only the reverse side of the weaving, and very often the pattern, with its threads running wildly, doesn’t seem to make sense. Some day, however, we shall understand. In looking back over the years we can discover how a red thread goes through the pattern of our life: the Will of God.

- Maria Augusta von Trapp
WHO DO I FOLLOW?

The Apostle John reminds us of Jesus’ explanation of a good shepherd in Chapter 10 of his Gospel: “I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice.

Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn’t understand what he meant, so he explained it to them: “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are
not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

17 “The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. 18 No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.” (John 10:1-18 NLT)

A shepherd guides, leads and commands direction. He protects, instructs, and shows the way. He knows His sheep and they Him; He gathers them, walks ahead of them, and they know His voice and hear Him. He is the way of salvation; He gives His flock a rich and satisfying life. He desires only their best and He promises a future. He sacrifices Himself freely for them because of His surpassing love for them.

But a shepherd implies there exists a flock. A flock must choose to follow its shepherd and this daily choice of the believer is the “fight of good fights” spoken of by the Apostle Paul. In Romans Chapter 6, he asks, “Shall we continue in a life of sin? Or are you ignorant that all who were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death…so we are to walk in the newness of life.”

We are dead to this world, its lusts and desires as well as its beauty and happiness. What is enjoyed here is a gift and glimpse of what is to come. We have been chosen out of this world and no longer belong to it. (John 15:19) We are transformed through moving our gaze from the temporal to the eternal; this intentional refocus settles our anxious spirit and calms our aching soul.

“But if we died with Christ,” says Paul in Romans 6:8, “we believe that also we shall live with Him.” This is our hope; this is our anchor. We count ourselves dead to sin and all in this world and
alive in Christ. We are set free to everlasting life, no longer bound to the lie that holds importance to this sliver of a life on the timeline of eternity. What fool would live their life planning for a minute in time to disregard the rest of their years? So it is when we live for this 70-80 years ignoring the forever and forever and ever.

Why do we try so hard to hang on to the present? We are blinded; we are fools. We are following the wrong shepherd. We believe the lie that happiness trumps joy; we are lulled into worshiping the world and the created thing over the Creator. When we were in the flesh, the passions of sin worked in our hearts, bearing fruit unto death. But let us die here. Let the truth of the law break our hearts and reveal the lie. When we do we can receive newness of life.

“For I calculate that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to compare to the coming glory to be revealed in us,” Paul continues in Romans 8:18. In every believer, there exists an inner groan, a gnaw, that longs for home. There is a knowing, that cannot be explained, that this is not where we belong. We are misfits. We are strangers.

The more I meld to this world, the more painful loss becomes. Is it because the pain of loss is proportional to the degree of possession? For we mourn yet not as one without a shepherd; we mourn not as one without hope. We know that a future awaits us more glorious than what is conceivable. For we have been washed through repentance, set apart for His work, and justified (given worth) in the name of Jesus Christ.

We are not our own; we a prized possession of our Shepherd. We have been bought with a price, purchased by the blood and cleansed by His love. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me,” Jesus promised. (John 10:27-29)
Oh, what a glorious promise! I have a shepherd and He is the true Shepherd and I belong to Him! What more could I possible long for?

“I claim no right to myself, no right to this understanding, this will, these affections that are in me. Neither do I have any right to this body or its members, no right to this tongue, to these hands, feet, ears or eyes. I have given myself clear away and not retained anything of my own.”
– Jonathan Edwards

**COMMIT YOUR WORKS TO THE LORD**

**PROVERBS 16:3**

Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established.
– NASB

Nicolas Herman was born into poverty in 1614 and joined the army as a young boy simply to survive with a meal and place to sleep. He later became a lay Bother in the Carmelite Priory in Paris, serving out his years as a dishwasher and servant. He left no worldly goods, never accomplished mighty things nor conquered any kingdoms, but Brother Lawrence, as he was to be known as, left behind a legacy of character. He kept a journal and wrote his prayers and thoughts and heart desires to his Father whom he intimately loved.

He knew well the meaning of Proverbs 16:3 as he believed in the sovereignty of God in every situation and that a true believer need practice God’s presence every mundane experience of life. He believed that if we could just see God in every situation, good or
bad, we would bring Him glory. “That we need only to recognize GOD intimately present with us,” he wrote, “to address ourselves to Him every moment, that we may beg His assistance for knowing His will in things doubtful, and for rightly performing those which we plainly see He requires of us, offering them to Him before we do them, and giving Him thanks when we have done.”

Too often we want to change our present experience rather than embrace it as a chance to allow it to change us. Brother Lawrence understood this, “God knoweth best what is needful for us, and all that He does is for our good. If we knew how much He loves us, we should always be ready to receive equally and with indifference from His Hand the sweet and the bitter: all would please that came from Him. The sorest afflictions never appear intolerable, except when we see them in the wrong light.”

We would do well to make his words our prayer, to strive at keeping Christ at the forefront of our life though we are drawn to wander
and work and whine. “When the mind,” he continues, “for want of being sufficiently reduced by recollection at our first engaging in devotion, has contracted certain bad habits of wandering and dissipation, they are difficult to overcome, and commonly draw us, even against our wills, to the things of the earth.

I believe one remedy for this is to confess our faults, and to humble ourselves before God. I do not advise you to use multiplicity of words in prayer: many words and long discourses being often the occasions of wandering. Hold yourself in prayer before God, like a dumb or paralytic beggar at a rich man’s gate. Let it be your business to keep your mind in the presence of the Lord. If it sometimes wanders and withdraws itself from Him, do not much disquiet yourself for that: trouble and disquiet serve rather to distract the mind than to re-collect it: the will must bring it back in tranquility. If you persevere in this manner, God will have pity on you.”
“Above all the grace and the gifts that Christ gives to his beloved is that of overcoming self.”

- Francis of Assisi

It’s like God spoke to me one day saying, “You are just a pot.” Think of a clay pot. I picture a giant earthen vessel about six feet tall that is round around the middle and slimmer at the top. It’s brown, made of unfinished clay and has the marks of the potter’s hands around the rim. “This is all you really are,” He continued. “As you come into this world, your pot is full of self. You cry when you’re hungry and whine when you don’t get your way. As you grow, your parents hopefully teach you that this kind of behavior is not acceptable and you learn to act in a more hospitable way
with manners and kindness towards others. This is good yet it is also dangerous. One may think, as they grow older that the way to please Me is to change outside behaviors by trying harder and being good. This is why I gave man the Law. It is perfect for bringing man to redemption because it reveals to them their utter depravity and drives them to repent at the foot of the cross of grace so I can lavish on them forgiveness and mercy and love. Repentance is like taking your pot and dumping out your flesh. Your pot is full of self, your goals and plans, your desires apart from me and this is SIN. You can not come to me without repenting, dumping out your vessel and allowing me to fill your pot.”

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”
2 Cor 4:7 – NIV

Salvation is possible only by the grace of God, through faith. I spent years knowing this fact intellectually yet in truth I simply used my knowledge of God’s word to shine the outside of my vessel. I used verses to spit-shine the north side and doctrine to polish the south. Works make the west adorable and kindness made the east spotless. But when people bumped into me, what spilled out was NOT love and peace and patience.

As you walk down the road of life, what’s spilling out of your vessel? Have you become an expert at polishing the outside of your jug, painting it with pretty pictures of holiness, decorating it with a ministry or two, adorning it with medals of righteousness? We do NOT need to learn how to love each other. We only have the capacity to express God’s love to the degree we are filled with it. YOU CAN’T LEARN LOVE; YOU HAVE TO RECEIVE IT.

We fail to reveal the agape love of God in our lives because of only one reason:
IT IS NOT IN US.

What is in us will spill out. Those that are daily walking in dependence and repentance, pouring out their vessel before a holy God, shall receive the promise of His Spirit and the fruit of it shall be evident by what then occupies the interior of the pot.

Times are hard and persecution prevails? What pours out? Times are good and blessings abound? What pours out? What spills out when my six year old acts like a selfish brat? Do I get angry and yell at her? Do I stop her and lovingly, yet sternly, discipline her? What pours out when my wife reacts to my foolish comments and mistakes it for ridicule? Is it defensively standing up for my opinion or is it apologizing for hurting her feelings and then lifting her up? What spills out when the doctor tells me I have a few weeks to live, when I lose my job, or when my wife gets a diagnosis of cancer?

I may be able to muster up millions of wonderful pretensions but sooner or later, what is flowing out of me shall be revealed to all. The problem is that we tend to surround ourselves with those who have similar garbage in their pot so we all kind of smell the same. If you live in the dump, you soon become oblivious to the stench.

Father, forgive me daily, wash me with the blood of your son Jesus and make me clean. Fill me Lord with your agape love that I may be a light in a dark place, fully assured of my salvation as a child and servant of Your will. Teach me that I am Yours and You are mine, the only possession worth striving for.

If the truth were told, most ‘Christians’ do NOT desire a deep walk with God. They, like the Israelites of old, prefer a ‘mediate’ relation in place of an ‘immediate’. Psalm 103:7 states: “God made His ways known to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel.” The Israelites chose a relationship with God that passed through Moses. Moses was the
mediator, not by his choosing, nor God's desire, but by the people's fear of responsibility that comes with keeping a relationship. It's as if Moses knew why God did what He did; the Israelites simply observed the acts as separate instances. Moses had a personal relationship; the people wanted simply to know what God said through Moses.

“God made His ways known to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel”. God made known, God revealed His purpose to Moses; God showed His plans to Moses. It’s like God took Moses up on a mountain and He laid out a map for him saying, “Listen, this was my original purpose for man when I created him. I created man to be the receiver of My agape love. I created man to be the taker of who I am, to be the container of My character so that he can then share that with every single person that he comes in contact with. That was My ultimate purpose. When man fell, he destroyed that plan and I’m going to bring them back into this covenant relationship because I have created them and I have sustained them and I am committed to fulfilling what I started.”

He made this known, His entire purpose, to Moses. The Israelites just said, “Hey, look, isn’t this neat, these things that God did.” It was as if everything that God did simply stood as an incident in itself. They didn’t know why He did it. They didn’t know where it was leading. They didn’t get the ‘rest of the story’. That’s why each miracle seemed to stand by itself, as a separate episode. Each miracle was a distinct surprise. God rained food down from heaven and a few days later, they were hungry and complaining as if God had forsaken them and they were going to die. That is, they saw food fall down from heaven as an act of God. They had no idea why, it was simply an act, a miracle, wonderful and amazing, but a slice of time where a blessing occurred with no understanding or desire to know why.
It’s one thing to experience God’s blessings and it’s an entirely different thing to know why they’re there. How many Christians go through their walk praying for some sign or wonder, begging for a revival, waiting for God to ‘show up’, bouncing from one spiritual experience to another as if life consists in events strung together with heavenly thread.

Life does undulate between hills and valleys, both of which are equally dangerous for the shallow man. Valleys leave many crying to God for salvation from their situation and have revealed the emptiness of many false converts. Mountain top experiences are similarly treacherous for they falsely educate the believer that their spiritual walk equals emotional bliss and the enemy is quick to teach them that these feelings equate with obedience to some external rule leaving many less mature believers spending far too much time rock climbing at Mount Sinai.

We need to mature to understand that our spiritual walk has nothing to do with happiness, happenstance, whatever peace or mud we find ourselves in, neither the wins nor the losses, the sickness nor health, the riches nor poverty—NO, God’s plan is far greater than any temporal experience, good or bad! Life undulates; God is steadfast. Life has happiness; God gives joy, independent of circumstance. Life has sorrows; God gives peace through them because His plan is eternal and often hidden past a veil. It is neither the highs nor lows that define the man but the fruit born, in season and out, from roots imbedded in Christ. Our relationship with Him needs to be ‘immediate’—through no one, not your pastor, your Bible teacher, your parents, your friends—your connection with Him must be direct and strengthened through cords of spiritual disciplines.

The Israelites of old wanted nothing to do with such grave responsibility, “Let Moses talk to Him and he can tell us what to
do,” they cried. Here lies the death sentence; here reveals the depth of conversion; here exposes the reality or pretensions of the ‘saved’.

Hell is NOT the only difference between the ‘saved’ and the ‘unsaved’, ‘believers’ and ‘pretenders’, ‘followers’ and ‘deceived’ and no matter what anyone says, this is of utmost importance! The ‘Great Commission’ was given to us as a sacred trust, a mission statement, and a purpose beyond our temporal life.

God’s plan is far greater than any temporal experience, good or bad! Life undulates; God is steadfast. Life has happiness; God gives joy, independent of circumstance. Life has sorrows; God gives peace through them because His plan is eternal and often hidden past a veil. It is neither the highs nor lows that define the man but the fruit born, in season and out, from roots imbedded in Christ.

“Therefore go (don’t just stay where you are at; seek and save the lost as our Master did; look diligently, strengthen your spiritual gifts and use them, do not be as the foolish man who buried his one
talent; get out of your comfort zone and go) and make disciples (not thousands who pray a prayer, walk an aisle, or profess a faith to get out of hell or seek asylum from a current ill-circumstance, but make disciples, true followers who hunger and thirst for a righteousness beyond their grasp; create, by teaching the true Gospel, believers who daily dump out their vessel in repentance and thirst for spiritual waters of agape so they can spill on others the peace and joy and love and hope and comfort that comes only from above) of all nations (because it is not about me or you anymore; because my life is no longer my own; because when my King and Lord calls me, I will go).

No, this Christian walk is so much bigger than now, things, happiness and healings; it is even bigger than heaven and hell. I know that I would serve my King even if there were nothing beyond this feeble, temporal walk. I would lay down my life for Him even if He chose to give me what I really deserve and cast me into eternal torment. I would call Him Lord, Jehovah, my God and my King in hunger or poverty, sickness and death, torment and pain because of WHO HE IS. Though you and I can make such claims, one can only carry them out through the power of God’s Holy Spirit inside. He is the power that enables me to love Him; He gives the ability to serve; He bestows the strength to carry the cross everyday, and without the complete, utter, dependence on Him—I am destined to fall just like Peter and deny Him to the first peasant girl that questions my faith.

One day every knee shall bow, I am just so thankful that He lets me do it now, everyday. There is no greater joy than to worship the King!

“And shall I pray Thee change Thy will, my Father, Until it be according unto mine?”
But, no, Lord, no, that never shall be, rather
I pray Thee blend my human will with Thine.

I pray Thee hush the hurrying, eager longing,
I pray Thee soothe the pangs of keen desire—
See in my quiet places, wishes thronging—
Forbid them, Lord, purge, though it be with fire.”
– Amy Carmichael
CHAPTER 11

THE VICTORY OVER DEATH

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, 
Death is swallowed up in victory. 
O death, where is thy sting? 
O grave, where is thy victory?

- 1 Corinthians 15:54-55

PERFECT PARADOX

There is more than one paradox the Spirit-filled Christian must face. Life is found through death; the Kingdom is experienced through brokenness; power is made manifest through surrender,
and strength is discovered when at our weakest—just to name a few. Each has its counterfeit, arranged by the enemy, that always leaves the believer weak.

God calls us to brokenness and leaves us victorious. The enemy breaks our will to leave us powerless; God keeps us empowered. The enemy wants us to wallow in our sin and suffer meaninglessly, stealing our joy. God calls us to share in the crucifixion of His Son to bring us life everlasting, beckons us to be filled with His Spirit and overflows us with love from another world, and peace that passes all understanding in the midst of all troubles.

The enemy drags us through the dirt as he reminds us of failings; he whispers ‘you can’t do it’ and ‘you’ll never win’. Christ kneels in the mud to come under us to raise us on His shoulders. We are broken but invaluable; we are worth the whole world and He calls us ‘friend’. His love is beyond our ability to comprehend yet as real as the morning sunrise that burns through a thick fog. Ask the believer to prove God’s existence and they smile gently, unable to construct a sentence of words that give adequate meaning to what is real in their heart. Their heart is changed, renewed. They are a different person with different desires and a fire in their belly to please their Father.

Paul called himself a bondservant—one who willfully places himself under another. This is the Christian life. God takes a man, slain by the Law and surrendered to Christ, then elevates him to a position of greatness. He never leaves us broken. He picks up the pieces of our shattered life and glorifies Himself through our circumstances.

When we are born of God we overcome our troubles, our pain, our diagnosis, and our disease. The maturing process of the believer moves from wanting his problems to disappear to desiring
nothing more than to see his problems bring glory to his King. The ‘overcoming’ of one’s problems may be defined as overcoming the need to rid oneself from one’s problems to experience joy. On the contrary, it is more common for the mature believer to experience true joy in the midst of the most difficult circumstances.

We glory in our sufferings for what they will produce. This isn’t some strange masochistic thought it is a real fruit of joy and peace and patience through pain that produces perseverance and strength and steadfastness. There’s no worldly explanation for one facing death in utter peace except for the hope that lies within them.

The mature believer considers his present sufferings something to bring him closer to Christ. Paul described this in Philippians 3:10, “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” We don’t seek out pain and problems nor do we passively allow evil
to rule over us, however, when life gives us issues unresolved by much prayer and seeking wisdom, there is peace in the suffering if it brings glory to our God.

Oh death where is thy victory? Physical death has no victory over the mature believer. He says as Paul did, “To live is Christ; to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21) Truly, Paul wanted to live but only to glorify his Savior through the work set before him. To die is greater gain for the one bonded to Jesus.

Eternity awaits and I so long to enter in. People talk about golden streets and seeing family gone before; they speak of castles grand and buffets with delights and beauty everywhere. I don’t know about any of these things and frankly they don’t excite me much. I long to see Him face-to-face, to be so engulfed in His presence that I drown in His joy. I long to never need to stop learning of the depths of who our Creator is, I won’t need a break to eat or sleep or go to the bathroom.

Death will be our graduation day. This splinter of temporal life on the timeline that stretches eternally will come to an end. We want to be counted as they that, “overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” (Revelation 12:11) “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” (Revelation 21:4)

The great preacher George Whitefield, when someone observed, “I should like to hear your dying testimony,” said, “No, I shall in all probability bear no dying testimony.” “Why not?” said the other. “Because I am bearing testimony every day while I live, and there will be the less need of it when I die.”
Yes, even though we shall all, “walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” we need not fear any evil, for we will not walk such a path alone. We are bound to the Savior; His strength and comfort surround us, His arms will hold us, for He preceded us. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives for we will dwell in the house of the Lord FOREVER!

“The Christian who is seeking better things and who has to his consternation found himself in a state of complete self-despair need not be discouraged. Despair with self, where it is accompanied by faith, is a good friend, for it destroys one of the heart’s most potent enemies and prepares the soul for the ministration of the Comforter. A sense of utter emptiness, of disappointment and darkness can (if we are alert and wise to what is going on) be the shadow in the valley of shadows that leads on to those fruitful fields that lie further in. If we misunderstand it and resist this visitation of God we may miss entirely every benefit a kind heavenly Father has in mind for us. If we cooperate with God He will take away the natural comforts that have served us as mother and nurse for so long and put us where we can receive no help except from the Comforter Himself. He will tear away that false thing the Chinese call “face” and show us how painfully small we really are. When He is finished with us we will know what our Lord meant when He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” – A.W. Tozer

Letting go of every single dream
I lay each one down at Your feet
Every moment of my wandering
Never changes what You see
CANCER CAN’T KILL YOU IF YOU’RE ALREADY DEAD

I’ve tried to win this war I confess
My hands are weary I need Your rest
Mighty Warrior, King of the fight
No matter what I face, You’re by my side

When You don’t move the mountains I’m needing You to move
When You don’t part the waters I wish I could walk through
When You don’t give the answers as I cry out to You
I will trust, I will trust, I will trust in You!

Truth is, You know what tomorrow brings
There’s not a day ahead You have not seen
So, in all things be my life and breath
I want what You want Lord and nothing less

When You don’t move the mountains I’m needing You to move
When You don’t part the waters I wish I could walk through
When You don’t give the answers as I cry out to You
I will trust, I will trust, I will trust in You!

You are my strength and comfort
You are my steady hand
You are my firm foundation; the rock on which I stand

Your ways are always higher
Your plans are always good
There’s not a place where I’ll go, You’ve not already stood

When You don’t move the mountains I’m needing You to move
When You don’t part the waters I wish I could walk through
When You don’t give the answers as I cry out to You
I will trust, I will trust, I will trust in You!
I will trust in You!
I will trust in You!
I will trust in You!

– Singer/Songwriter Lauren Daigle

Oh Lord, that I may someday hear the most glorious words to ever cross one’s tympanic membrane, “Well done, My good and faithful servant. Now come and enter into My JOY.”
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Kevin Conners has earned his Doctorate from Northwestern Chiropractic in 1986. He has also earned a Fellowship in Integrative Cancer Therapy, a Fellowship in Anti-Aging, Regenerative and Functional Medicine, and a Certification in Botanical Medicine and Cardiovascular through the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine. He currently practices in Minnesota caring for practice members with Cancer, Chronic Lyme, and other disorders.

He is the author of several published books including “Stop Fighting Cancer and Start Treating the Cause”, “The 3 Phases of Lyme,” and “Help, My Body is Killing Me”. He has published numerous educational articles, videos, and instructional series available on his website. Dr. Conners frequently lectures to doctors around the world at various seminars. Personally, Dr. Conners has been married to his high school sweetheart for over 35 years, has five children and thirteen grandchildren (and counting).

What he is most joyous of is that he can count it all as loss for the sake of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord.
This short devotional book was written to provoke the reader to a deeper life, to coax the believer out of the trap of superficiality. The world lulls us into believing a lie that we deserve everything our heart desires. Christ calls us to the cross and the cross does one thing—it kills.

There is more than one paradox the Spirit-filled Christian must face. Life is found through death; the Kingdom is experienced through brokenness; power is made manifest through surrender, and strength is discovered when at our weakest—just to name a few. Each has its counterfeit, arranged by the enemy, that always leaves the believer weak.

The enemy wants us to wallow in our sin and suffer meaninglessly, stealing our joy. God calls us to share in the crucifixion of His Son to bring us life everlasting, beckons us to be filled with His Spirit and overflows us with love from another world, and peace that passes all understanding in the midst of all troubles.

The surrendered believer is not defined by circumstance and refuses to accept labels that the victim embraces. It just doesn’t matter anymore; Christ is my king. Paul could sit rotting in a Roman jail never once mentioning the rats that gnawed his legs at night nor the feces laden stench that choked his dictation of the volumes of Scripture he created through the power of the Holy Spirit. Because, it – just – didn’t – matter!

What is visible is far less important than what is invisible.