

UNDEPRESSED – How God’s Word Can Heal Your Heart

By
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ALSO BY FREDA FARMER

Unjealous Heart
Carols for Consecration

Booklets

The Remedy for Desperation
Diligent Bible Study
Diligent Meditation

Available at www.wordsofhopeandhealing.com

A LOVING WORD OF CAUTION

If you are depressed or have severe anxiety, please seek help – from a counselor, preferably a Christian one, as well as from friends and family.

DO NOT TRY TO STRUGGLE THROUGH ON YOUR OWN.

Left untreated, depression usually deepens each time you re-experience it because root causes have not been healed.

I PLEAD WITH YOU--GET HELP!

DISCLAIMER

This work depicts actual events in the life of the author as truthfully as recollection permits, with some poetic license. While all persons within are actual individuals, names and identifying characteristics have been changed to respect their privacy.

The information provided in this book is not intended as a substitute for seeking professional guidance. Please seek professional advice if you have any inkling you may benefit from it.

The author shall not be held liable or responsible for any negative situation or circumstance allegedly arising from suggestions or information contained in this book.

DEDICATION

God longs to help you. This book is dedicated to you, dear reader. I want you to know and experience for yourself the truth of Isaiah 30:18:

“The LORD longs to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for Him! (NIV)

God sent His Word and healed my heart and my life, and He earnestly longs to do the same for you, no matter what problem you face. God clearly tells us in Jeremiah 32:27 that nothing is too hard for Him. *“I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?”* I had a problem that looked impossible, but God used that problem for my good, as He promises in Romans 8:28.

Unsolvable problems. Is there something with which you, too, have wrestled in many ways, for many days, without success? Could it be that God is saying lean on Him and not your own understanding, as He tells us in Proverbs 3:5-6? Is He saying to you that He has – that He IS – the solution to that problem of yours that seems hopeless?

I am not offering you a quick and easy read or 3-step solution for superficial problems. This is the story of how God worked step by slow step to change deeply entrenched habits of heart and hand that were destroying my life. The solution is not easy, but it is guaranteed to work (Joshua 1:5 and Hebrews 13:5, AMPC). God will do His part, if you will do your part. And He will give you His strength to do it. You will never be alone.

This story shows how leaning on God’s Word first, rather than worldly methods, healed deep depression and anxiety that had lasted two years and had recurred throughout my life. God’s Word works for all problems. I earnestly pray that seeing the faithful love of God in my story will encourage and strengthen you, however you need it, in the places only you and God see.

Applying God’s Word as He tells us to will heal your heart and your life. God’s Word will enable you to live an abundant life, no matter the external circumstances (John 10:10).

My prayer for you, dear reader

Father, I pray that Your truth in this book will lead readers to the healing and the lessons for living that You sent me through constantly meditating and pondering on Your Word, which is what You promised in Psalm 1. Whatever they face, I know Your Word will heal and deliver them. Your promises in Proverbs 4:20-23 and Deuteronomy 11 are true and faithful.

If they are now in a dark valley, shine the light of Your face on their heart, cover them with Your presence, and lead them into their own promised land, the life

abounding in good things that You have prepared for them before they were born, before the foundation of the world. Train them to use Your Word to conquer any giants that prevent Your promises being manifested for them. Let them know it is You Who works in them, Who lives in them, and Who fights for them (Philippians 2:13, Deuteronomy 3:22). Please blot out all mistakes in the writing and let only Your truth take root. Amen!

Let us pray together

“Oh LORD! We give thanks to You, for You are good! Your faithful love endures forever. You have redeemed us, and we say so! We tell others that you have rescued us from our enemies. Oh LORD! We praise You for Your great love and for the wonderful things You have done for us. You satisfy the thirsty and fill the hungry with good things. You have snatched us from the door of death. We offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and sing joyfully about Your glorious acts. We exalt you publicly. You have turned our dessert into pools of water and our dry land into springs of water. Oh, how You bless us! We take all this to heart! We think about it. Through what You have done for us we see Your very great and very faithful love.” (Taken from verses in Psalm 107, NIV)

With all our heart, Father, we say: *“You are worthy, O LORD, to receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things. And by Your will they exist and were created.” Revelations 4:11 (KJV)*

Thank You, Father, that Your mercies for us are new every morning, that Your grace is more than enough for each of us, and that You are always with us, even to the end of the age, and that You promise to guide us as we lean on You and not our own understanding. (Lamentations 3:23, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Matthew 28:20, Proverbs 3:5-6)

SPECIAL NOTE

If you do not know God, please see the free booklet titled ‘The Remedy for Desperation’ on the “Basics of Believing” tab at www.wordsofhopeandhealing.com.

If you do not know how to find verses in the Bible (those notations like “John 10:10” or “Proverbs 3:5-6”), please see Appendix A.

If you do not have a Bible, you can find one at any bookstore or online at www.biblegateway.com or www.blueletterbible.org and many other websites and apps. If you are new to Bible study, I recommend an easy-to-understand translation, like the New American Standard, the New Living, or the New International Version for an initial understanding. Then, as you study deeper, use the Amplified Classic Bible.

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INTRODUCTION

TOPICS

- ✓ What can heal your heart?
- ✓ This book can help you heal from depression and anxiety
- ✓ This book can draw you closer to God
- ✓ This book can help you understand those who are depressed
- ✓ The purposes of this book
- ✓ If you are depressed or anxious now
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- ✓ If you do not know God
- ✓ What can heal your heart?

What can heal your heart? This book shows how applying God's Word as the medicine He says it is will heal your heart. Giving God's Word its rightful place leads to abundant life. God says to each of us:

*Proverbs 4:20-23 (AMPC) - My son, attend to my words; consent and submit to my sayings. Let them not depart from your sight; keep them in the center of your heart. For they are life to those who find them, **healing and health to all their flesh**. Keep and guard your heart with all diligence and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life.*

*Proverbs 4:20-23 (NLT) My child, pay attention to what I say. Listen carefully to my words. Don't lose sight of them. Let them penetrate deep into your heart, "for they bring life to those who find them, and healing to their whole body". Guard your heart above all else, **for it determines the course of your life.** (emphasis added)*

This book can help you heal from depression and anxiety. Heart deep healing of depression and fear for me came only through applying the Word of God where I needed it. I struggled repeatedly with depression and anxiety my entire life but it became unbearable during 2017 and 2018.

This true story begins when I was in counseling and also using some of the many helpful methods psychology has discovered that alleviate depression and anxiety. Those helped greatly, as well as medicine, but *complete healing came only when I treated the Word like the medicine it is.* I diligently studied Scriptures in my areas of personal need, diligently meditated on those passages and spoke them out loud and silently - *constantly.*

In my case, I believe God allowed depression to become a severe affliction because the intense emotional pain motivated me to put Him and His Word in its proper place -- first. I needed His loving correction because, in seeking relief from

the pain of depression and fear, I had unknowingly made psychology and other things into idols.

This book can draw you closer to God. How? By unveiling one of the enemy's most effective snares. Keeping God first requires diligent guarding against depending on or loving anything or anyone more than God. Anything we love, depend on or pursue more than God is an idol. We are blessed and highly favored when God gives us "the bread of affliction and the waters of adversity" (Isaiah 30:20, NIV) so that we will cease idol worship and worship Him only.

What we depend on controls our life. The enemy of our souls seeks to "steal, kill and destroy" God's beloved human beings and to steal the abundant life Jesus died for us to have (John 10:10). So, he sets traps to get us to love and depend on things of the world or other people rather than God. We unknowingly step into his snares which are disguised. He knows it is "useless to spread a net where every bird can see it!" (Proverbs 1:17, NIV).

If I spend all the substance of my life—my hours and days, physical energy, and thoughts—to obtain material things or relationships or if I love and depend on those things more than God, I am engaging in idol worship. I am breaking God's commandments in Exodus 20:3-6. It is for our good that He orders us to have no gods before Him or in addition to Him. God says:

³ You shall have no other gods before or besides Me. ⁴ You shall not make yourself any graven image [to worship it] or any likeness of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; ⁵ You shall not bow down yourself to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, ⁶ But showing mercy *and* steadfast love to a thousand generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Praise God that He lovingly corrects us, as the perfect parent He is, even though correction is painful at the time (Hebrews 12). God will help us escape from the snare of the enemy of our souls (Psalm 124).

This book can help you understand those who are depressed. If you have never been depressed or controlled by anxiety, you may wonder why depressed people just don't "Get over it." This book can help you understand so that you can help or at least avoid adding extra stress. "Singing cheerful songs to a person with a heavy heart is like taking someone's coat in cold weather or pouring vinegar in a wound." (Proverbs 25:20, NLT). Think about that, and God will make it clear.

The purposes of this book. I pray this book helps you learn to:

1. Meditate on God's Word day and night (Psalm 1) and to seek and require Him as your "indispensable necessity" (I Chronicles 22:19 and Psalm 105:3-4)
2. Identify anything higher than God in your heart,
3. Overcome depression and fear and walk in the victorious, abundant life Jesus died for you to experience (John 10:10).

If you are now depressed or anxious, I suggest you read Chapters 5 and 6 first. And please continue with counseling and whatever resources you have been using as God leads you. Regardless of what helps in your battle against depression and anxiety, I believe the Word must be your primary weapon. *This book aims to help you use the invincible weapon of God's Word as He intends it to be used. Only spiritual weapons can overcome spiritual problems. Although depression has roots in the body, the mind and the emotions, it is a spiritual attack from the enemy of our souls and we must use spiritual weapons. (Romans 8:31).*

The message of this book is simple: taking God's Word like medicine can heal depression and anxiety. Why is this book so long then if the message is short? One reason is that people in depression need companions, especially ones who understand depression. They need someone to spend time with them, to talk about their problems, and to carry light into their darkness. Obviously, I cannot talk with you but hearing and seeing how Biblical principles worked in my life will give some relief while you start taking the medicine of God's Word.

This book aims to help you use the invincible weapon of God's Word as He intends it to be used. Only spiritual weapons can overcome spiritual problems. Although depression has roots in the body, the mind and the emotions, it is a spiritual attack from the enemy of our souls and we must use spiritual weapons (Romans 8:31).

The benefits of affliction. The working title for this book was "Affliction, God's Loving Chastening." When God afflicts us, it is for our good and it is a blessing. C. H. Spurgeon wrote:

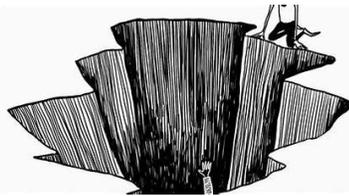
"I find that life and health often come to the saints through briny tears or through the bruising of the flesh. I bear willing witness that sickness has brought me health, and that loss has conferred gain. . . and . . . our brightest joys are given birth by our bitterest griefs." (*Beside Still Waters*, edited by Roy H. Clarke, p. 62, Copyright 1999, Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville Tennessee).

I gratefully say amen.

Through numerous stories God *shows* us the benefits of affliction. Consider Joseph and David. Psalm 119 contains one of many passages where God *tells* us affliction is for our good. *"I used to wander off until you disciplined me; but now I closely follow Your*

word.” (v. 67) and” *My suffering was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to your decrees (v. 71).*” In verse 72, *after* being trained by affliction, the psalmist exulted “*Your instructions are more valuable to me than millions in gold and silver*” (NLT.) Again, I gratefully say amen!

One of the blessed truths of Psalm 18 is that if we make God our refuge, obeying and leaning hard on Him, He gives us agile, graceful, nimble feet like those of a deer so that we can stand firm and make progress “upon the dangerous heights of testing and trouble” (Psalm 18:32-33). We can have victory and reach a better place with God **because and while** we go through seasons of affliction.



If you are right now in the pit of depression and fear, you might find these statements harsh. Isaiah 30, the Biblical bedrock for this book, teaches how God uses affliction for the benefit of those “who love Him and have been called according to His purposes” (Romans 8:28) and to train those who seek Him (Hebrews 12).

God lovingly used the affliction of severe depression to *teach me to rely on His Word, so I could walk in the promises of Psalm 1 and Deuteronomy 11. God let me get desperate, then He taught me the vital necessity and unfathomable blessing of keeping the Word first in daily life.* That is what this book is about.

If you do not know God. If all this talk about God and His Word sounds strange to you, please see the free booklet titled ‘The Remedy for Desperation’ on the “Basics of Believing” tab at www.wordsofhopeandhealing.com. It will all make sense then.

Now, for the background of this story.

PROLOGUE

A trailer stood in Tampa. In 1977, on an especially cold February afternoon, especially cold that is for central Florida, a trailer stood in the Four Seasons trailer park in Tampa, on the north side of town near Interstate 75 and Nebraska. Nebraska Avenue meandered along the spine of the city, parallel to the newish interstate. Even back then, the mention of Nebraska Avenue stirred images of abandoned storefronts and warehouses, garbage-lined curbs, and drunks weaving at noon across pot-holed parking lots of cheap hotels and shabby convenience stores.

Most trailers in Four Seasons Trailer Park were fairly new, with bright paint and no orange rust streaks on their corrugated aluminum sides. Glaring white skirting reached from most trailer bottoms to sparse grass, attempting to give the flimsy structures the heartening solidity of home. Not so her trailer.

No, her trailer had no skirting. Like a grotesque hunk of mustard-colored cotton candy hanging from the exposed bottom, a jagged strand of insulation twisted slowly in the February wind, blowing against the trailer's underbelly, charred from a fire that had been quickly extinguished but not before leaving a faint smell to the air and a thin layer of black soot on the floor. The discarded carpet remnants she had spread across the floor on the inside of that end of the trailer constantly slipped, no matter how much duct tape she used, and the knees of her daughter's crawlers were stained black as soon as they moved in, with the same black now staining the white plastic footies of her three-year-old darling's winter sleepers.

Strengthening the trailer park's desperate grab for the respectability of a normal neighborhood, newly planted saplings stood every fifty yards beside the eight-foot-wide strip of asphalt driveway running from Four Seasons Boulevard up to each tiny lot. Lots on the outer edge of the circular boulevard grudgingly accommodated single-wides while lots on the inner edge of the circle easily allowed glaringly new double-wides, as well as upscale amenities like covered porches and garden areas. Trailers on the inner part of the circle almost looked like houses. Not so her trailer.

No, the father-in-law had purchased the ten-year old burned out single-wide for eventual parking beside the river running through his twenty acres of wooded land in North Florida. For all except the two actually cold months of Florida winters, she and her beloved daughter lived all day, every day in the un--air-conditioned trailer, enduring frequent prickling, itchy heat rashes. The husband/father avoided the swelter by coming home long after dark, departing early and staying gone on weekends.

She had not given up hope, however, of a better life. Iron resolve had entered her heart that gray dawn when she first held her baby girl. The depth of that love had helped her endure that terrible year when the husband slid from heavy social drinking into money guzzling constant drunkenness and then that first year of sobriety. That first

year she had, following advice from Al-Anon meetings, earnestly tried to make the marriage work. But she knew they had to go that day when she was dusting, her toddler trailing behind, and she heard Holly echoing her words “Hope he dies hope he dies”. There had been no effort on his part to save the marriage. Eventually, anger and resentment had mushroomed into hate.

So now, now she was getting ready to leave. She had learned during the active drinking years when paychecks often went for vodka and pornography, to take five dollars here, two dollars there, from grocery money, to build a nest egg for food, electricity and lot rent in case the husband disappeared for a while. Telling him she planned to go back to work, which she did, she had attended classes in medical records transcribing, a job using her above-average language and typing skills. It would pay better than the secretarial work she had done when single.

She had done well with the first half of the five-month certificate program. She got 100s on vocabulary tests and discovered a knack for transcribing. She quickly acquired the skill of simultaneously listening to and typing the rapidly-spoken, mumbled multisyllable words of hurried doctors. Good transcribers had a rare combination of proficiencies: typing, grammar, knowledge of medical vocabulary, and an indefinable and nearly untrainable ability to hold a phrase, or several, in the mind while typing the start of those phrases and simultaneously listening to the next group of phrases, all the while coordinating the forward movement of the tape and the speed of the typing. The recognition from the teacher and the handful of other students for her innate skill and diligent study watered her soul.

She relished each day of that third year of her daughter’s life even more than ever, knowing the stay-at-home mommy season was ending. Each night, she rocked Holly to sleep, holding her snug against her chest a long while after the little body went limp with sleep, tenderly patting the small back and caressing the soft blonde hair. After tucking Holly into bed, she sat in the six-foot wide, two-foot-deep washer/dryer nook in the hallway, writing and re-writing that week’s vocabulary on a wobbly desk made of two by fours stretched across cardboard boxes filled with books, clothes and oddments that overflowed the trailer’s scant closet space. She covered the surface of her ersatz desk with a bright yellow towel, to avoid splinters in her hands and to make the tiny nook where she spent four or five hours studying each night in some way attractive. The husband never returned before ten, having “worked” late at the family car lot, and then drinking or, this past year, attending AA meetings. Two nights a week he came home in time for her to attend class.

Sometimes in late afternoons, like today when the gusts of an approaching cold front twirled that tattered piece of insulation under the trailer, while Holly happily played with pots and pans, spoons and bowls in her cardboard box kitchen, having been the sole focus of attention all day thus far, she brought her textbook to the rocker next to Holly. But those were just supplemental study times. She never missed an evening. She knew that the better her skills, the better she could provide for Holly.

So, she studied diligently those last months in the burned-out trailer and kept building their nest egg until she had a deposit and first and last month's rent. Then she called her father who brought a pickup truck, her two brothers, a card table and chairs, a chest of drawers and a single bed that, along with the crib, rocker, and one end table furnished their small apartment. She had done her utmost with how her life had developed. It was time, time to file for divorce and time to start life on their own, just Holly and her. They would be their own little family.

The seeds of depression. That burned-out, desperately sad trailer was emblematic of what that five-year marriage had done to a heart already shattered by childhood neglect, emotional abuse and unmet needs. But I would gladly grope my way through those five years again to gain the one good thing I brought out of that marriage—my daughter. Pouring my love into Holly watered my love-parched heart and gave purpose and structure to my life. I was twenty-five that summer. Holly had just turned three. I would remain single for the next forty-six years.

Unaware, I also brought out of that marriage something I had carried into it—seeds of life-long, life-controlling depression and fear, seeds planted at birth but hidden for more than three decades.

Bathing Betty Sue. The day I watched my mother bathe Betty Sue, her third grandchild, came the first spark of understanding about the root causes of that depression and fear. My mother's mouth was clamped into that same grim, lipless line, her eyes squinted in that same scowl I saw as a child when she scrubbed floors, windows, stovetops, countertops and anything else she deemed filthy. For decades, that word on anyone's lips stirred tangible embers of burning shame by virtue of its having been repeatedly applied to me and things I tried, unsuccessfully, to clean to her standards.

That day as my mother bathed Betty Sue, her left hand was clamped around the back of my infant cousin's fleshy neck, and she swiped the dripping washcloth back and forth, back and forth across the tiny face, apparently unaware that the bottom two-thirds of the cloth covered the little face with each swipe, probably inducing a feeling of near suffocation. Then she swiped around each eye, over and under the nose, around and across the mouth, three times under the chin, all while Betty Sue sputtered and flailed legs and arms in the classic infant startle response.

In that moment, somewhere in my late thirties, came my first accurate glimpse of the seeds of depression and why I had so eagerly left home at sixteen, why I felt bitterly ambivalent toward my mother and why hearing her voice, much less being in her presence, caused agitation so profound that I had eliminated most contact with her. At age twenty-nine, making Jesus my Lord and Savior had brought healing, yet the briefest of phone calls tumbled me into emotional rollercoaster rides lasting weeks. I saw her as little as possible, and only then so she could see her granddaughter, specifically because I was trying, the best I could, to obey God's command to honor my parents.

That day, in that moment, watching her bathe my little niece, as Betty Sue flung her chubby arms and legs wide and stiffened her entire body in wide-eyed, gasping startlement, I remember thinking “So that’s how she handled me when I was an infant. That’s one of the things she did.” But I only stored that memory in my mind. It was deeply upsetting. I felt like saying something like “Can’t you be gentler?” but watching my mother ignited an internal inferno that consumed and silenced me. I felt like a child again, too. It would take decades to heal the wounds and set me free of that controlling fear and anger and, yes, hate that surged up in her presence, hate and anger so deep that it scrambled thoughts, silenced speech, froze action, slammed all inner doors and raised an all-encompassing high and safe wall around me.

More than three decades later, during attachment therapy, a preverbal memory surfaced, a distinct feeling of being grabbed up harshly and handled roughly then being plunked down and left, totally alone in a room and left alone for a very, very long time. I knew my earliest years had left deep scars. I did not know it at the time, but that was the reason why, during the frequent arguments we had in my young adult years, my mother often said, “There was something wrong with you when you were born.” Well, there was something different all right, but not wrong, just different.

I was different in the sense of being especially sensitive and high strung. Besides that, any infant, in the hands of a mother terrified her two-year old son might die of asthma if the house were not kept immaculate, as doctors had told her, any such infant would be handled hurriedly and thus react, no doubt, with startled, jerky movements, and lots of crying and squirming, but especially if that infant was high-strung. And, if that infant seldom cried, being quiet by nature and also having learned that crying brought the big swooping presence and harsh, hurtful touch, that infant would be left alone, for long stretches of time in the crib while the mother cared for the two-year old and battled asthma, all while daily facing the endless tasks of keeping a spotless house in the early 1950s.

My mother’s burdens. So, what was my mother like and what was her situation? What had caused a loving mother to act that way? First, her situation. My parents were at that time in the lower rungs of the blue-collar working class and squeezing nickels, having lived for a time with my maternal grandparents until Daddy found a job operating heavy machinery. My mother, like most women in that pre-feminist era, stayed home and kept house. Little was known about asthma in the early fifties, and I often heard the regular refrain that the emergency room doctors would send my parents and older brother home when they brought him there because there was nothing to be done. My mother often said she “spent many a night rocking him in her arms” not knowing if he would live. I cannot conceive what that must have been like and the panic she must have lived with.

Being told dust caused asthma, on top of being perfectionistic and house-proud, again, like many women of that era, meant she scoured, bleached, swept, mopped, dusted, and cleaned with desperate vengeance. Keeping a dust-free home in the fifties

and sixties must have left no time to go slow and be gentle with the new baby who was vigorously healthy.

I know I was often alone in the crib. One of my aunts often recollected that when she visited, "There was Freda Sue, scrubbed within an inch of her life, all alone in that crib." My aunt's older sister status must have intimidated my mother, who for years said nothing until one family reunion when I was in my twenties. By then, I had heard the comment numerous times and thought nothing of it until my mother exploded at my aunt, saying she did not want to hear that again. Without denying it, she just said she did not want to hear it again. In more recent years, the same thing was confirmed by another aunt. I learned that when my older brother and I were babies, we all lived with my maternal grandparents and that my mother usually had my older brother in her arms and I was usually alone in a playpen. But my grandfather often took me in his arms and played with me, my aunt said.

Hidden scars. Besides being handled roughly by a harried, worried, hard-pressed mother and being left alone for long periods, it was the subsequent hurts, a deeply sensitive nature, and an introverted personality that worked together to form extreme shyness early in childhood. I keenly remember sitting by myself on the second-grade playground, propped against a pine tree, ten yards from the picnic table where the teacher sat with children who had brought their lunch. I spilled my thermos of scalding hot soup on my arm as I tried to hold it between my drawn--up knees. Something was obviously awry that I was sitting alone, isolated from the teacher and my peers. Why didn't the teacher reach out and draw me in? Had she tried and I refused? And why did quiet, compliant me refuse to go to school one morning that same year. Was it because I was afraid of the harsh, overly strict teacher?

Sometime in adulthood, I pieced together that my mother had probably been aware my degree of shyness was excessive. She told me she placed my older brother in first grade when he was five so she could "have some time with me" because my younger brother was en route and she knew life would get busier. Did she do that because I obviously needed help with shyness? With something deeper?

Regardless, whatever was amiss grew, tumor-like, until in fifth grade it became conspicuous. In class one day, unable to stop crying, I kept repeating 'I am not worth anything, I am not worth anything.' I remember hushed adult whispers as I lay on the cot in the small room behind the principal's office. Later, at home, came more hushed voices as well as arguments about whether I needed "help." That was when Mother took me to a lady who "did healing of the memories". That lady placed her hands on my head, prayed and asked what I saw. I said I saw a little baby, all alone in a big white room with white drapes. Jesus was smiling at the window, but He could not get in. Mother burst into tears and her friend who had come with us wrapped her arms around Mother.

And that is all I knew, for many, many years. The enemy's foundations of rejection, fear and loneliness had grown steadily since those earliest, preverbal years. Like weeds bursting out of the ground, pain and self-hate had finally erupted in the words "I am not worth anything!" And, like many with trauma in early years, depression surfaced every few years for most of the rest of my life. Absorbing the message that "something was wrong with me" destroyed all hope and enshrouded life with heavy, pulsing sorrow.

"Something was wrong with you." In my adult years, my mother and I argued often, with her trump card being "Something was wrong with you when you were born." I believe she wanted to lay blame anywhere but on herself. I think I understand that now, after all these years. What a burden she must have carried! Now that I have two grandsons who sometimes need me at the same time, I understand a bit of the conflict she lived with for years. And, of course, it was about as bad as it could get because my brother's life was in danger and she had the strenuous work of caring for a newborn, in the fifties before wrinkle-free fabrics, dish washers, microwaves, prepared foods and fast-food franchises made caring for a family easier

Not till many years later would I understand that, indeed, something was different about me when I was an infant, not wrong, just different. While researching shyness, the topic of my dissertation, I learned that about twenty-five percent of children and animals have an inborn sensitive temperament that makes them react more intensely than the other seventy-five percent to sound, touch and all forms of stimulation. Such an infant, being cared for by a mother who was rushed and in near terror would indeed react with startling and crying. That would have intensified any mother's frustration and created a vicious cycle.

My mother's burdens. The question is not what was wrong with me but "What was the enemy of our souls doing to a woman who loved her children and husband and who tried with all her heart to be a good wife and mother?" I will never know this side of heaven but I do know some facts:

- She was depressed and anxious and on multiple prescription drugs much of her adult life, drugs she did not intend to get addicted to.
- She was perfectionist by nature as well as critical and demanding, likely because she kept a spotless house and raised three children in the fifties and sixties, which meant long days of hard, physical work, as well as the work of being a wife.
- Once I was old enough to do chores, when she yelled from wherever she was I had to run to her immediately and do her bidding. She never yelled after Daddy came home, a fact my mind unearthed only during attachment therapy in my early 60s.
- She was sometimes physically abusive. The "spankings" she gave left bruises that lasted days.

- I never remember one single compliment, not on housework, school grades or my appearance. However, I distinctly remember frequent angry criticism. “Freda Sue! You never do anything right. Look at this filthy mess you left. Do it again!”

Such was my home environment, until Daddy came home. My father was a man’s man in every way, but he was also gentle, kind and loving. I felt safe as soon as Daddy was home, and I adored him. Quiet and soft-spoken he was. His own childhood, I learned later, had been difficult. So alike in temperament we were, we two. Just thinking about him coming home at night even now floods me with fondness and peace.

Overmedication caused part of my mother’s emotional distress and also numbed her awareness of everything, I surmised later. In those days, doctors dispensed mood-altering drugs so often that they were called “Mother’s little helper”. Most women of that era stayed home raising children, most physicians were male, and doctors over-prescribed those kinds of drugs for women. For as early as I remember, Mother had a cabinet full of pill bottles and she took pills throughout the day. She was also groggy and took naps often. She must have often been in either a mental fog from excessive amounts of drugs or coping with a mental and emotional rollercoaster of symptoms until the next sense-dulling round of pills, all while caring for three typical rambunctious kids, two all-boys and one thoroughly determined tomboy. That would have made anyone blind to their behavior and the needs of those around them. Those were the facts of my childhood and adolescence.

The effect of those early years. For all my adult life, even after finding Jesus in 1981, I struggled desperately with depression, anxiety, and emotional upsets, needing every five years or so, counseling to cope with overwhelming feelings and thoughts. That spurred me to journal more than most people, I think. I also expressed my despair through writing. I had sporadically written since adolescence but I began writing purposefully, for Jesus, in 1985. For thirty-five minutes morning and night while the bus swayed and rocked its way from midtown to downtown Tampa and back, I wrote. I wrote at night and in the early morning, while Holly slept.

Throughout those years, even after my mother passed away, I thought I would never write about the abuse and neglect of my childhood. I did not want to hurt or dishonor her or upset family members.

As my daughter moved through young adulthood, hindsight revealed my own failings as a parent. As age brought more of life’s hardships beyond my control, as I kept trying to forgive, and as repeated counseling removed more layers of the onion, I understood that my Mother had loved me and had done her best, but that her own problems and things far beyond her control had affected her behavior. By God’s grace I did genuinely forgive from the heart and we had many good years before she had multiple strokes and dementia set in.

I was in my early sixties when attachment therapy with a Christian counselor helped heal some of the root causes of depression and anxiety. After that came the

season of affliction and healing, the years this book covers. Those years parallel the story of Isaiah 30. The depth of emotional pain motivated me, finally, to take God's Word like the medicine it truly is. And God healed my heart. I have been off antidepressants and free of depression ever since.

Those next fifty-four years. So, what happened between fifth-grade in 1963, when those undeniable emotional problems erupted, and 2017, when God began root-deep healing of those problems? Well, from fifth grade through high school, shyness steadily worsened. With the emotional stress I experienced at home, few friends, no dates and the limited opportunities of small-town life, I escaped into reading and dreams of becoming a world-famous writer. A lonely, isolated teen, I transferred from high school early in my senior year to a Christian junior college from which quiet, rule-abiding me was dismissed for cutting chapel. Then I entered a business college where I obtained an associate's degree in secretarial science. I worked in Tampa for a year, married the first man who asked me out and showed me attention, struggled through five years in a toxically entwined extended family, then divorced when my beloved Holly was three and the husband/father had maintained sobriety for a year.

After that came four tender but financially desperate years as I devotedly cared for Holly. I gave my life to Jesus in 1981, when Holly was seven. God brought peace and two all-consuming desires: to grow as a Christian and take good care of Holly. God also began the process of emotional healing. I remained a devoted single parent, focusing all possible time and energy on Holly, writing late at night and very early in the mornings while she slept and, when she began part-time jobs, on weekends.

After high school graduation we remained close for ten wonderful years as I continued making her a priority through her young adult years and her first marriage. For the first five of those ten years I focused on writing when I was not at my day job or with Holly in the evenings. Eventually, I sold a few articles then returned to school for my bachelor's degree, having read that a degree would "make readers respect my work." I wanted people to believe the wonderful things God had done for me and Holly and to discover the wonders of the Bible.

Then came Holly's divorce and, after she met her second husband, we became less close. Her closeness with Andrew thrilled me and, although the new emotional distance stung, I filled each non-working hour with school and writing. After completing a master's then a doctoral program in educational measurement and research, I held a full-time professional position in my new field, struggling mightily with the imposter syndrome. After twenty-plus years as a secretary, I felt far inferior to my new peers. That and the pain of Holly and Andrew relocating to Austin in 2006 brought on depression and anxiety so intense I resorted to antidepressants and tranquilizers, though I had vowed never to take antidepressants and tranquilizers after what they did to my mother. I struggled desperately with depression and anxiety the next six years in Tampa while working full time and finishing my dissertation in after-work hours.

In the fall of 2011, my first darling grandson was born. I began praying, even more earnestly than before, for God to get me to Austin. In August of 2012, in the mugginess of a Florida summer afternoon, Andrew and I finished loading a U-haul and started the first of the one thousand miles to Austin.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

- The structure of this book
 - God said rewrite
 - Show, don't tell!
- Biblical bedrock
 - Historical background of the book of Isaiah
 - Outline of the book of Isaiah
 - Isaiah 30, the basis of this book
 - Overview of the message of Isaiah 30
- Parallel timelines

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

God said rewrite! In November 2020, when I was close to putting this book on the website (www.wordsofhopeandhealing.com), God showed me I was telling you about my story rather than sharing it with you. Originally, Isaiah 30 formed the outline and into that outline I put sections of “telling” my two-year struggle as God healed deep-rooted depression and fear.

Show don't tell. Showing is essential to certain forms of writing. Editors tell writers “Show don't tell”. I can tell you “I am sentimental”. But when I write: “I leaned against the washer, pouring laundry powder into the faded pink and white Tommy Tippy cup Holly had used as a toddler, cradling its rounded bottom in the palm of my hand a moment before gently returning it to the shelf. A smile cut through the fatigue.” In the longer showing version, we share feelings, and some of your own memories might be stirred.

So, this book includes sections that *show* what was happening (the “My Story” sections) as well as application sections (“Applying the Word”) *telling* how Isaiah 30 applied to my life. These two sections are separated in Chapters 1 through 3 and merged in Chapters 4 through 10. If you get lost in the story or cannot see how it relates to Isaiah 30, review the outline on the first page of the chapter and/or the headings in that chapter. They are there specifically to help you apply the message of Isaiah 30 to your own life.

BIBLICAL BEDROCK

I pray that God enlightens the eyes of your heart through seeing how my story paralleled Isaiah 30. These next few pages provide a basic understanding of Isaiah 30. This is a lot of reading before you get to the story, but *please indulge me!* Building a foundation in Isaiah 30 will help you apply the Word to your life.

Historical Background of the Book of Isaiah: The name Isaiah means “Jehovah is salvation” or “Jehovah saves.” While Isaiah prophesied in Judah, the Southern Kingdom, Assyrians had already destroyed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. As Halley's Bible commentary explains, prophets are “*the spiritual conscience of the nation.*”

They are appointed to remind kings, priests, and the people of their obligations to God and people.” (p. 363).

Isaiah warned kings and the people that God’s wrath would bring condemnation and tribulation. He urged repentance from sin and returning to God. As Mary Fairchild explained in her post about the book of Isaiah, Isaiah also described beforehand events that would happen soon, like consequences of depending on Egypt for help, events that would take place in the distant future, such as the first coming of Jesus Christ, and finally events that still have not occurred, like Christ’s return to earth. “In summary, the message of Isaiah is that salvation comes from God—not man. God alone is Savior, Ruler, and King.” [https://www.learnreligions.com/book-of-isaiah-701145\)](https://www.learnreligions.com/book-of-isaiah-701145)”

The Assyrian threat. For Isaiah’s entire life, the Assyrians threatened Judah’s existence. Isaiah witnessed the destruction the Assyrians inflicted on God’s people, including the captivity and exile of the entire Northern Kingdom, the taking by Sennacherib of 200,000 people of Judah, and the near capture of Jerusalem. Isaiah saw his entire nation ruined by Assyria. Throughout his life, during the reign of four kings (Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah), Isaiah warned over and over that Jerusalem and Judah would be destroyed because of their wickedness. But he also gave words of comfort as he spoke of the coming Messiah.

Outline of the book of Isaiah: The 1984 NIV published by Zondervan outlines Isaiah as follows in Table A below.

Table A: Outline of the Book of Isaiah

| Summary of Content | Chapters in Isaiah |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| “Judgement and hope of restoration | 1-6 |
| Hope in Assyria or God | 7-12 |
| Prophecies about nations | 13-23 |
| Israel’s judgement and deliverance | 24-27 |
| Warnings and Zion restored | 28-35 |
| King Hezekiah withstands Assyria | 36-39 |
| Promises of divine deliverance | 40-56 |
| The final kingdom established | 57-66” |

The 1984 NIV Bible (Zondervan) states:

“Isaiah repeatedly warned the people that Jerusalem and Judah would be judged because of their wickedness. In chapter 39 he predicted the Babylonian exile. But he also held to the hope that the kingdom would be restored again.

Beginning in Isaiah 40 Isaiah offered comfort with these promises from God: 1) the Babylonian exiles would be allowed to return to Jerusalem; 2) a righteous,

suffering servant would bring salvation; 3) God would set up a new, righteous kingdom.” (page 593)

Isaiah Chapter 30, the basis of this book: The portion of Isaiah on which this book is based is Isaiah 30, which is one of the “Sermons of woes upon the unbelievers in Israel.” (Open Bible, New American Standard, p. 626). Chapter 30 is labelled “Confidence in Egypt versus confidence in God.” Chapter 30 occurred in the reign of the very wicked king Ahaz. Unlike the other three kings who reigned over Judah during Isaiah’s lifetime, Ahaz was a wicked king, encouraging idolatry and even sacrificing his own child to the idol Moloch. Tragically, this same sin is practiced by many in our world today, when people murder babies in the womb. They make it sound less gruesome by calling it abortion but it is the same thing.

When surrounded by his enemies, instead of turning to God for help, this horribly evil King Ahaz took the treasures out of God’s Temple and sent them to Egypt, to purchase help.

The blessing and safety of obedience to and reliance upon God and His Word first—not self, not others, not things of the world nor ways of the world--is the central message of “Undepressed”.

Overview of the message of Isaiah 30. Table B on the following page summarizes my understanding of Isaiah 30. The verses of Isaiah 30 are grouped in ten sections that correspond with book chapters. Isaiah 30 teaches us:

We rebel against God when we rely on or love anything more than Him.

Eventually, the very thing we lean on starts destroying us.

BUT

God will answer us when we return to Him,

AND

He will give us joy as we fight together to destroy our enemies.

Table B: Overview of the Message of Isaiah 30

Verses 1-18: We rebel against God when we love or rely on anything more than Him. Eventually, the very thing we lean on starts destroying us.

- **[Chapter 1] Verses 1-9:** Anything less than dependence on God for strength and protection eventually leads to great sorrow, shame, humiliation, and confusion.
- **[Chapter 2] Verses 10-12:** Dependence on the world and worldly ways--rather than God-- for strength and protection, shows we are rebelling against God.
- **[Chapter 3] Verses 13-17:** This rebellion removes part of the protection around our heart and, eventually, "at some distant day" the enemy attacks through this open door with sudden, total destruction. That happens because we refused God's warnings to return to depending on Him, quieting ourselves and letting our trust in God give us strength. And because we said no to God and went our own way, thinking we could outsmart, or outrun our enemies, our enemies will totally terrorize us
- **[Chapter 4] Verse 18:** God earnestly waits, longing to be gracious, to have mercy and compassion on us. Because God is faithful and just, we are blessed if we wait and hope for Him with expectation. He will be gracious and faithful to our waiting and trusting if we ask for help.

Verses 19-33: God will answer us when we return to Him, AND He will give us joy as we fight together to destroy our enemies.

- **[Chapter 5] Verse 19-22.** God hears His people when they cry out to Him, and He answers by letting us constantly hear His clear instruction, even though He hid Himself and gave us adversity and affliction when we turned from Him. After that, we will totally turn away from putting anything before God because we will understand how disgusting that is to God.
- **[Chapter 6] Verse 19-22 continued. Meditation**—keeping God in your daily life.
- **[Chapter 7] Verse 23-26:** While God is healing the wound He inflicted because of our sin, He will: abundantly bless our work and our life; give refreshing water everywhere; and give seven times our usual light.
- **[Chapter 8] Verse 27-29:** God will burn with anger, with indescribable consuming fire and power, when He comes to fight for us.
- **[Chapter 9] Verse 30-32.** We will have the highest possible joy when God lets Assyria, our bitterest enemy, see Him coming and we will all celebrate together every step of the way as God annihilates them.
- **[Chapter 10] Verse 33.** God completes the destruction He has prepared for our enemies.

PARALLEL TIMELINES

God deals with us as individuals, just as He dealt with Israel. My mistakes are a modern-day illustration of Isaiah 30. Table C on the following page presents two parallel timelines: the path the Israelites followed in Isaiah 30 and the path I followed as God used the affliction of depression to heal and restore. God gave Israel the just and fair consequences for their dependence on idols. When they returned to Him, He restored them. God graciously did the same with me.

In Table C, read down the left column for a summary of Isaiah 30. Read down the right column for a summary of my story. Referring to this timeline as you read will help clarify how Isaiah 30 looks in an individual life. I pray that my mistakes help you understand and escape the vicious trap of depression and fear.

My story in a nutshell: God took me from affliction to victory as He lovingly taught me the meaning of Isaiah 30. Though I thought I was depending on God, I was relying on worldly methods first. So, God let the affliction of depression worsen. When I began relying on God and His Word first, He did what two years of desperately seeking healing in other ways could not. Through this process, He also healed my heart of other hidden idolatries, and trained me to maintain victory over depression and fear. Oh, what a priceless gift! Oh, how loving our Father is!

Table C: Parallel Timelines: Israel's Affliction. . . My Affliction

| <i>Israel's Affliction</i> | <i>My Affliction</i> |
|--|--|
| Ch 1. Undone World-dependence leads to shame, humiliation, and confusion. (Isaiah 30:1-9) | Early 2017. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I <i>thought</i> I was depending on God • Depression and anxiety grew worse – again. |
| Ch. 2. Unknowing World-dependence is rebellion against God. (10-12) | Mid 2017. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God whispered to get much more Word in my life. • By obeying half-heartedly, I made self-effort an idol. |
| Ch. 3. Unprotected Rebellion removes God's protection. (13-17) | Fall 2017. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The wall fell, the enemy surged through. • The enemy roared, and I cowered in fear and torment. |
| Ch. 4. Terrorized In our rebellion, God intensely longs to help but must wait (18) | Jan – Dec 2018. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terror and torment. • God sent a part-time job in the fall of 2018 • Medicine and group therapy • <i>God intensely longs to help but must wait</i> |
| Ch. 5. God's Word God leads us with His Word (19-22) | Jan-Mar 2019. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REAL HEALING BEGAN as I took God's Word like the medicine it is. Good fruit steadily grew and I began writing again. |
| Ch. 6 God's Way <i>Even clearer answers (19-22)</i> | Jan – Mar 2019 continued <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Meditation – keeping God in your daily life.</i> |
| Ch. 7. God's light Unbelievable light while God heals and guides. (23-26) | Mar -Dec 2019 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I kept faithfully storing up the Word and growing. • When the part-time job stopped, I wrote more. • I heard God clearer than ever and became more aware of His presence during daily life. |
| Ch. 8. God's power and glory Unimaginable anger as He fights for us (27-29) | Jan-Dec 2020. Just before the covid plandemic: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I felt closer to God than ever • Unrecognized guilt and shame about being depressed. • Songs in the night and gladness of heart. |
| Ch. 9. God's Joy & Ours <i>Unspeakable joy while God annihilates our bitterest enemy (30-32)</i> | Jan to Dec 2021 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing had to continue. . . • . . . through many more trials • Learning to maintain peace and balance |
| Ch. 10 – God's Path (33) <i>God perfects things that concern us</i> | Jan 2022 to June 2023. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carving out a level path ahead • Remembering, with gratitude • Stepping into the future |

***The loving message of Isaiah 30:
Light for the Afflicted and Confused***

Anything less than dependence on God first for strength and protection eventually leads to great sorrow, shame, humiliation, and confusion.

However, *God lovingly waits on us and longs to help us WHEN we return to Him. THEN He will help us utterly destroy our enemies and give us abundant life with Him WHILE He restores us.*

CHAPTER 1

UNDONE

Isaiah 30:1-9. Depending on the world leads to shame, humiliation, and confusion. In Isaiah 30:1-9, God warned Israel that great sorrow would come because they refused to believe His Word and instead purchased help from Egypt. God told Isaiah to record what happened as a witness forever that stubborn Israel had refused to heed His instructions. God thus ensured that you and I would hear this message.

Early 2017:

- I thought I was depending on God.
- Depression and anxiety grew worse – again.

ISAIAH 30:1-9 IN MY STORY

- August 2021 – U-hauling to Texas
- Depressed – again???
- What God was doing
- Tormented by fear
- The wondrous reciprocity of loving
- Two little toddlers and their stay-at-home Nana
- Lord, can we really write?
- Hidden wounds, hidden poisons
- Surface level healing, surface level change

APPLYING THE WORD

Life paralleled Isaiah 30:1-9:

- Who me? Rebel against God? Never!
- I thought I was depending on God
- God will do what is needed to protect us from what He knows is deadly.
- The help of the world is of no eternal purpose.
- Rebellion disguises itself, like a hidden snare.
- Rebellion is like witchcraft.

Isaiah 30:1-9 In My Story

- August 2021 – U-hauling to Texas
- Depressed – again???
- What God was doing
- Tormented by fear
- The wondrous reciprocity of loving
- Two little toddlers and their stay-at-home Nana
- Lord, can we really write?
- Hidden wounds, hidden poisons
- Surface level healing, surface level change

August 2012 - U-hauling to Texas. I gazed out the window of our orange and white U-Haul truck at the miles of white board fences. Thoroughbred horse farms were a major industry in the Ocala, Florida, region.

“Thank you again, Andrew, for coming early to help pack. It was too much at the end.” Andrew took his eyes off the interstate long enough to smile at me and pat my hand.

“It was no trouble, Nana. Remember how hard it was for Holly and me six years ago? We are thrilled you will be in Austin with us. It's going to be great having you there.”

“I agree!” I said fervently, glad to end the last seven years as a school district evaluator. The stress of that job and other pressures had, again, opened the door to depression. God used a counselor skilled in cognitive behavioral therapy to help me learn to replace habitual negative thoughts with more positive, realistic ones. That, along with medication, had suppressed depression the last two years.

I say suppressed because, in less than six months, it would explode. That late evening in August though as dusk descended on Florida's panhandle, I foresaw only good times. With my first grandson Ben eleven months old, living with Andrew and Holly a while meant rocking, snuggling, and just loving Ben every day. Memories of baby powder, diapers, first steps, first words, wobbly little chubby legs, sweet naps together, giggles over falling blocks and splashing bathwater, and the feel of Holly on my shoulder as I rocked her to sleep—all those memories and many more lifted my heart. God was gifting me with countless days plunged into all-consuming love once again.

To say I was grateful falls far short of what I felt and tried to express to God in my heart as Andrew and I talked our way across those one thousand miles from Tampa to Austin.

Depressed – again! Five months later, I sat in Rose's office, staring blankly at

the emerald green ivy leaves sprawling atop old oak bookcases. I inhaled the distinctive scent of the old building, answered questions about the past, then asked Rose “Why have depression and anxiety returned again when I am living my dream?”

Rose answered with the gentle smile I would see regularly.

“Change is stressful, even when it is good change. And everything about your life changed overnight in August. You quit working, became a full-time grandmother, relocated, lost contact with your friends as well as co-workers and members of the church you had attended for twenty years. The biggest change, though, was from living alone for fifteen years to one bedroom in a home with two other adults and an infant. Also, as an introvert, solitude recharges you and you have very little alone time now.”

I blew my nose yet again, a weak assenting “um-huh” all I could manage. She continued.

“Based on what you’ve said, I believe attachment therapy could help with what’s causing repeated depression and anxiety. Briefly, we will work to understand how the past, especially childhood issues, might be controlling current behaviors and feelings. My job is to support you in that process and not let you get bogged down or more depressed while we talk about difficult things in your past. We will work to help you find better ways to handle life and get back to where you were before.

We will move quickly as we review your past, with reading and homework from this book.” Rose held up “Attachments: Why You Love, Feel, and Act the Way You Do” by Drs. Tim Clinton and Gary Sibcy. We will consider the past only long enough to understand how it affects you now and then move on to learning new ways of living that are not affected by the past.”

Again, I managed only a few “um-huhs” as I wiped tears and blew my nose, raw from days of crying I could not stop. The crying, along with Holly and Andrew’s concern, had finally led to the appointment.

“And,” Rose concluded, “You need to go back on the anti-depressant and tranquilizer. . .

She stopped as I shook my head.

“I understand that you do not want to take them but, like your counselor in Tampa said, medicine is necessary sometimes to calm your emotions and mind enough to get our work done. And you are not your mother. You do not have an addictive personality. Okay?” she prodded gently.

“Okay,” I said, only because the pit darkened every day.

By God’s great grace, I clung to hope as we began weekly sessions. Soon, the medicine kicked in and Rose and I began unearthing some of root causes of depression and anxiety. We talked about them only long enough to see them clearly. Then we moved on, week by week. I began seeing how past events, like buried toxic waste, had affected me all my life.

What God was doing. Through counseling with Rose, God was preparing me for the season covered in this book, a season of hope and healing during which He gave me the gift of an undepressed heart. Loving the family kept me afloat emotionally during the deep work of attachment therapy with Rose while God was exposing the cracked foundations of my emotions.

Satan had used the insecurity, rejection, and shame of childhood trauma to create strongholds. After the divorce, which required putting Holly in daycare at age three, Satan had fortified the stronghold of fear with obsessive worry that I could not take good enough care of Holly by myself. As a working single mom, that fear became constant and expanded into every area of life. How well I remembered.

Tormented by fear. Putting Holly in daycare had been like the ripping apart of one flesh, to which I heard divorced likened. Divorce was easy compared to separation from Holly for most of each weekday. I desperately determined to use every non-working hour to simulate still being a stay-at-home mom for her.

Each moment from 5:30 p.m. when I picked her up at day care to 7:30 the next morning, I actively focused on her and her needs. When the gravel of Cannington's Day Care driveway crunched under my tires at 5:30 p.m., my spirits soared. On the way home, I *actively* listened to and commented on her sweet chatter ("Mommy! Harold and Roger put little green lizards on their ears and chased the girls!" "Did they chase you?") and "Mommy! We got chocolate cupcakes for snack today and mine had sprinkles on top!" "Did you eat the whole thing?"). Right after our lunchboxes plunked on the kitchen counter, came at least twenty minutes snuggling on the saggy blue plaid love seat, chortling together over Dr. Seuss.

Every apartment we lived in was small, putting Holly close by at the rickety dinette table while I cooked dinner and we listened to the news. Using the news, I explained current events, human nature, and whatever other topic came to mind, as I strove to fill the role of both parents. After her bath came another reading session, a game of Sorry, Battleship, or Uno, or a television show, if a wholesome one was on. Our chatter stopped only when I tucked her into bed and we prayed. Profound gratitude to God flooded my heart each night as I looked into smiling eyes framed by strawberry blonde hair fanning over a faded pillowcase. She was truly happy.

Rising at five all those years had allowed me time for devotions, and a bit of writing if I had gotten necessities like bills done the night before after tucking Holly in. Rising at five also gave me time to dress so I could give Holly focused attention as she got ready. (Yes, baby, I think the red socks go well with that red plaid skirt. Here, let me help even up the socks." "Sure, you can take your new coloring book today. I'll get it for you.") Then it was time, once again, for a tender hug as I signed her in at daycare, a gentle caress of the silken hair, and more swallowed-back tears as she walked away.

A friend from Al-Anon had advised years ago to "get down on her level and play" and to "be involved in whatever she was involved in." I did. Together, we built ramps for Matchbox cars out of yardsticks and books. Together, we made blanket-and-chair forts on rainy days, and had grilled cheese sandwiches and cookies under the fabric roof. Together, we found space for her Pretty Pony stable. And I joined in, at appropriate times, when she had playmates over.

I was profoundly grateful to God for helping me take good care of Holly. Yet, even after becoming a believer in 1981, the enemy tormented me with fear that Holly would grow up *feeling* insecure, poor, lonely and unloved. God was, through me, giving her the opposite of those things, but it would be years—the season of healing on which this

book is based--before I could silence those vicious lies.

So, throughout Holly's childhood and adolescence, I desperately focused on ensuring she felt secure, that she had someone to share her thoughts and feelings with, and that she developed an unjealous heart to protect her from feeling poor, even though we were. You can read that story, *Unjealous Heart*, on the Books and More page at www.wordsofhopeandhealing.com.

The wondrous reciprocity of loving. In giving me Holly to nurture, even into her young adulthood, God provided nurturing *for me*. Giving genuine, unselfish love always blesses the one giving the loving. During all those years of loving Holly, every five or so years, God had untangled one root cause of depression after another whenever turbulent feelings forced me into counseling. And each season of counseling had removed one more layer of hurt. Holly and Andrew's move to Austin had been painful, leaving no chance for in-person nurturing the last six years. But now? Now, I could love on not only Holly and Andrew but also Ben, as well as Ansel, who followed a year and a half later.

Giving that love sustained me during the hard work of attachment therapy, while God unearthed the strongholds Satan had built. It was simultaneously a very hard yet a very wonderful time.

Two little toddlers and their stay-at-home Nana. Our little family's routine in those early years with the boys was beyond delightful. Andrew left for school early, and Holly, who worked three nights a week, was home all day with her two boys and me. Together most of the day, we split into twos for groceries, the gym, the library and other errands. Evenings, Andrew lent a helping hand and showered his own father kind of love on the boys. I made friends at church, joined the prayer team, attended Tuesday morning Bible study, worked out at the gym three times a week, and kept praying for Holly to return to Jesus and for Andrew to accept Him. By getting up early, I maintained my devotional time, although that gradually focused more on Christian books about handling feelings than Bible study.

Those first few months in Austin I tried, unsuccessfully, to find part-time consulting work as an evaluator. Although it meant a pinched budget, I delighted in being a stay-at-home Nana for Ben and Ansel's pre-school years. Not finding consultant work was a cherished gift from my loving Heavenly Father because it gave me all the preschool years with the boys.

Ahh, those first three years in Austin! Loving and helping care for Ben and Ansel nurtured my own heart, as it had in Holly's earlier years. Counseling with Rose uncovered fear, insecurity, rejection, self-criticism and many other poisons and I relearned cognitive behavioral techniques that had been successful in Tampa. I relearned to question the accuracy of my automatic thoughts and replace them with truth and a more compassionate view of myself.

In a blink, the boys were older. It was time to find my own place and time also to begin writing. I had written diligently—though on a back-burner basis—since 1985 when God sent the dream to write and help hurting hearts find the same comfort in Him that I had. Now I was at an age and situation where I had to take the dream seriously.

Lord, can we really write? A thin wedge of pleasant, non-glaring late afternoon sun angled onto the six-foot beleaguered butcher block table I used as a desk, luminating the seal-colored fur along Barny's back. I straightened the stack of loose-leaf papers then reached over to scratch his velvety ears. My beloved Barny—the five-year-old gentle soul I had gotten from the Texas Tonkinese Rescue Society when I moved into my tiny apartment—squeezed his eyes, flopping to one side so I could, obligingly as per our custom, give a good tummy scratch.

Barny (short for Barnabus, which means friend) was aptly named by whoever his former owner was. He stayed on his blue folded-up towel, occupying a full third of my work surface, for however long I wrote, whether 30 minutes grabbed before supper after a day with the boys or, like today, three hours on Saturday.

“Do you think we can do it, Barn?” I asked. “You know, Holly and Andrew and Rose were very encouraging about starting a blog. After reading that book, I think it might work to blog one chapter at a time of “Unjealous Heart.” But how will we find the time? With the job Tuesday and Thursday mornings, and the boys and Holly the other days. . . hmmm.”

With three short steps into the alcove kitchen, I started a stir-fry, sauteing onion and garlic then adding kale, water and orange slices, covering it with the lid to the larger of two sauce-pans, part of the home-warming gifts from my Sunday School class. The lid did not quite cover it all but close enough. Six months earlier, when I learned I had some heart issues, I had worked hard to lose the twenty pounds the depression medicine had added. I was determined to keep the weight off for heart health as well as vanity.

“Like most everything in this 375 square foot place” she thought, “ this frying pan lid is make-do.” A double thickness of sheets hung over a flimsy cafe rod covered one window. Oversize thrift store pillow shams concealed the fact that the end tables were actually stacked boxes of books. The ersatz but perfectly functional hutch on the back of my table/desk had been fashioned by covering eight diaper boxes with pillow cases in varying shades of brown, yellow and gold, stacking them to form two columns, and inserting an unfinished plywood plank between each layer of boxes.

I smiled as I moved papers aside and sat at my desk/dining table with my plate, relishing the harmony of luxe autumn-hued pillowcases in the hutch, grateful for each corner of the two rooms God had provided. I was weaning off the antidepressant, sitting at that same table each night, counting out individual grains from the capsules, avoiding the frightening side-effects of too rapid tapering I had experienced before. So far, everything was going well.

So, on those afternoons and evenings, with Barny's companionship and with much, much prayer, great grace, and God's truly miraculous help, I built a website, painstakingly following instructions in a book. Then I used late afternoon and evening non-Nana time to study blogging and start putting my Unjealous Heart manuscript into blog posts.

When I think about that first season of blogging, I see my beloved Barny, napping in the sun on my writing table and myself turning to gaze through the full-length patio doors that formed one wall. The view across the apartment driveway then across the

street bordering the property and on to the old oaks in the yard next door opened up the tiny front room. Three trees stood silhouetted against late afternoon sky. Slanting bands of sunlight formed geometric patterns across townhome roofs next door. Barny and I shared many cups of instant coffee and cream cheese and chive crackers at that table/desk while I learned blogging. I often paused and looked out that window as I searched for the right word or phrase. Though I had only two or three readers, I was grateful for that small beginning. Before each writing session, I dedicated the work to God and asked that He grow it as *He* desired it to grow.

Once every three weeks or so during 2016, I had a tune-up appointment with Rose. The thrill of writing and the satisfaction of being with family had an emotionally buoying effect for several months after coming off the anti-depressant. Gradually, however, old negative thoughts and feelings returned, and Rose urged me to get back on the medicine before depression symptoms worsened. Then, due to health issues, she began closing her counseling practice. By our last appointment, when she helped me locate two other Christian counselors, she practically badgered me to take the medicine.

“Freda, the antidepressant literature emphasizes that after you have two recurrences--and you have had more than two—you have to stay on an antidepressant for life. You need. . . .”

I had taken pills in 2008 and again in 2012 only out of painful desperation. With the heart issues, and simple vanity, I did not want the 20 pounds that had piled on before nor the severe gastrointestinal upset, nor the unpleasant side effects of withdrawal I had experienced even with a slow taper. There was also the fear of becoming addicted like my mother, despite multiple reassurances that I did “not have an addictive personality.”

Rose stopped talking when I began shaking my head. With nothing left to say, our last session ended awkwardly, twenty minutes early. I did not know it, but the season of freedom from depression God had graciously granted was ending, and I was entering, once again, the dark valley of depression.

Hidden wounds, hidden poisons. That attachment therapy the first two years in Austin was foundational for the root-deep healing to come. I believe God cushioned the stress of that initial unearthing childhood trauma with Rose by tucking me into the bosom of my family.

During that unearthing process, as God exposed root causes of depression, I was convinced He was healing them permanently, and He did---in partial measure. I saw the hurt my mother had unintentionally done in spite of her deep love for all her children. I saw how my father’s gentle, accepting love built a potential for love and a measure of security that enabled me to trust God as my Heavenly Father at the age of twenty-nine. And Rose articulated how insecurities and fears had controlled my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Counseling did increase self-awareness and the ability to handle emotional ups and downs. However, the enemy's strongholds, those root causes--the wrong beliefs about myself, God and the world—had to be demolished. I had not learned to take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). And my *mind was not yet fully renewed with God's Word despite decades of faithful Bible study.*

Surface-level healing brings only surface-level change

Surface level healing, surface level change. Beloved, you can learn to change and control thoughts, feelings and behaviors, for a while, through experience, through the mental training and knowledge that good Christian counseling can provide, and/or through the help of chemicals, prescribed or otherwise. All that, however, happens at the surface level

Until God has replaced, at the bottommost level of your soul, Satan's lies with the truths of His Word, your spirit may have been cleansed but you are still dealing with your soul—your mind, will and emotions. Until your mind, will and emotions have been made new by God's Word, you are vulnerable to the enemy, teetering on the edge of whatever emotional or behavioral pit he wants to shove you into.

That is what I have experienced. That is why I am writing this book. That last day I was in her office, Rose accurately warned I was heading into disaster. God would soon backhoe each root of childhood trauma as well as toxic waste from decades of living, albeit unaware, under the influence of the world, my flesh and the devil. The next season of healing would be bone deep.

APPLYING THE WORD

LIFE PARALLELED ISAIAH 30:1-9:

- *Who me? Rebel against God? Never!*
- *I thought I was depending on God*
- *God will do what is needed to protect us from what HE knows is deadly.*
- *The help of the world is of no eternal purpose.*
- *Rebellion disguises itself, like a hidden snare.*
- *Rebellion is like witchcraft.*

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ISAIAH 30:1-3. (1) *Woe to the rebellious children, says the Lord, who take counsel and carry out a plan, but not Mine, and who make a league and pour out a drink offering, but not of My Spirit, thus adding sin to sin; (2) ² Who set out to go down into Egypt, and have not asked Me—to flee to the stronghold of Pharaoh and to strengthen themselves in his strength and to trust in the shadow of*

Egypt! (3) Therefore shall the strength and protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame, and the refuge in the shadow of Egypt be to your humiliation and confusion.”

Comment: Relying on the world is rebellion against God. Israel rebelled against God when they relied on Egypt, which symbolizes the world, instead of God for guidance and strength.

ISAIAH 30:1-3. WHO ME? REBEL AGAINST GOD? NEVER! God warned Israel that great sorrow would come to them because they refused to respect and accept His Word and instead tried to purchase help from Egypt. God told Isaiah to record what happened so it would stand as a witness forever that stubborn Israel had refused to pay attention to the Lord’s instructions. I was doing the same—although unintentionally. Instead of dwelling in the shadow of the Almighty (Psalm 91) I was seeking refuge in “the shadow of Egypt.”

Rebellion does not *feel like* rebellion and disobedience does not *feel like* disobedience. Why? Satan disguises it with fleshly weaknesses like pride, shame, and fear. Sin never looks like sin if your eyes have turned away from the light that comes from following God. Until living the experiences that make up this book, I never considered myself one of the rebellious children in Isaiah 30:1-9, those who refused to hear the law and instruction of God, choosing, instead, to depend on the world. Why? Since giving my heart to Jesus in 1981, I had zealously followed Proverbs 3:5-6. I thought I was doing well regarding depending on God. I see the ugly pride now, but not then.

Soon after, depression resurfaced, the deepest depression and fear of my life would teach me about “the hidden person of the heart” (1 Peter 3:24). Although I tried to heed God’s warning “*If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall*” (1 Corinthians 10:10, NLT), God’s loving affliction would teach, that indeed “*The human heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who knows how really bad it is?*” Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV). On a certain path to humiliation and confusion, like Israel, I thought I was doing well. But God alone knows the heart.

“And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve Him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought.. If you seek Him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.” (1 Chronicles 28:9, NIV, emphasis added.)

ISAIAH 30:4-6 ⁴ For though [Pharaoh’s] officials are at Zoan and his ambassadors arrive at Hanes [in Egypt], ⁵ Yet will all be ashamed because of a people [the Egyptians] who cannot profit them, who are not a help or benefit, but a shame and disgrace. ⁶ A mournful, inspired prediction (a burden to be lifted up) concerning the beasts of the South (the Negeb): Oh, the heavy burden, the load

of treasures going to Egypt! Through a land of trouble and anguish, in which are lioness and lion, viper and fiery flying serpent, they carry their riches upon the shoulders of young donkeys, and their treasures upon the humps of camels, to a people that will not *and* cannot profit them.

Comment: Refusing to respect and accept God's Word is rebellion. *Anything less than complete dependence on God for strength and protection leads to great sorrow, shame, humiliation, and confusion from the very thing you depended upon.*

ISAIAH 30:4-6. I THOUGHT I WAS DEPENDING ON GOD. Yes, I thought I was depending on God, but for some time before the worst depression of my life began, I had begun depending first on the ways of the world, that is, the techniques of psychology, to fight depression and anxiety. These techniques had helped greatly before, and I am not speaking against counseling and self-help materials.

However, in hindsight I see that I had begun relying on counseling techniques more than on God. Like ancient Israel, I set my heart on worldly things for help. Soon, "sorrow, shame, humiliation and confusion" would arise from the very things I was spending the substance of my life, my treasure, upon. I was, like Israel, spending much effort to acquire help from the world. Leaning on the world "will not and cannot" profit you. It draws you away from God.

GOD LONGS TO PROTECT US FROM WHAT HE KNOWS IS DEADLY.

Although Proverbs 3:5-6 was my life verse, I spent much effort serving three major idols. I coped with emotional stress through the peace I felt in loving Holly, the numbing effect of obsessive hard work and through psychological methods. I tried hard to depend on God since my spiritual birth, but I kept those same old idols, too. I was blind to my stubbornness and rebellion, God was going to destroy the idols. God understood the enemy had made good things into idols. God knew the enemy was seeking to destroy me. And He knew I was not deliberately putting those things before Him. He understood my self-deception.

God instructed that Israel's rebellious behavior be recorded, so it would be a witness "forevermore." Why? So you and I would hear this message. God longs to protect us from what He knows is deadly. "God knows rebellion is deadly. *Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.*" (1 Samuel 15:23, KJV) We humans, weakened by pride, cannot see our rebellion as the grievous sin it is. Our enemy *disguises* it.

We fail to see that not doing what God says is actually acting in rebellion against Him. Ever heard the piercing truth stated by Dietrich Boenhoffer “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”? When I know to do something and do not do it, that is sin. “If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them.” James 4:17, NIV). I was being faith-less in that I did not put my faith in God first. Instead, I was relying on psychological techniques and the comfort of being with family more than on God.

Modern day rebellion is less obvious than when Israel caravanned to Egypt, camels laden with all their treasures to purchase Egypt’s help, but it is the same.

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ISAIAH 30:7. For Egypt’s help is worthless and toward no purpose. Therefore, I have called her Rahab Who Sits Still.

Comment: You can spend all your treasures on worldly help but it will be useless.

ISAIAH 30:7. The help of the world and worldly methods is of no value and no (eternal) purpose. In the previous section, Isaiah 30:4-6 showed us that worldly kingdoms not only will not and cannot help believers who depend on them but that the things of worldly kingdoms become a shame and disgrace. God says that even if His children take all their treasures—spend all the best of their life resources—and make a long, arduous effort “through a desert land of trouble and anguish”, the help of the world will be “worthless and toward no purpose.” In verse 7 we see why.

Verse 7 says that *the help of the world has no eternal value and fulfills no eternal goal*. Psychological and self-help methods may help depression, fear and other emotional problems temporarily but they help the human spirit, *only indirectly* by temporarily helping the soul. And they cannot heal the soul. The help they give is “toward no purpose”, that is, toward no eternal purpose. What God was going to do – after I returned to Him—was of indescribable, immeasurable eternal value and would fulfill His good purposes. God was going to give me a different spirit, and He was going to heal my soul as only He can.

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ISAIAH 30: 8-9. “Now, go, write it before them on a table and inscribe it in a book, that it may be as a witness for the time to come forevermore. 9. For this is a rebellious people, faithless and lying sons, children who will not hear the law and instruction of the Lord.”

Comment: Rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft. God wants us to always remember that when His children do not take His instruction to heart and obey—when we fail to “hear the law and instruction of the Lord”—it is rebellion,

faithlessness and deceit. We are rebelling, and showing faithlessness. We are deceiving and being deceived.

ISAIAH 30:8-9. Rebellion is a hidden snare. See how verses one through nine illustrate what God means by rebellion, as He first mentioned in verse one? As Israel turned to Egypt for help so I turned to worldly methods. I was as rebellious as Israel. How?

For years, God had been telling me through Bible teachers to dig deeper into, to meditate on and to speak His Word all day long, to the point of what many call extremism. For years, teachers and preachers who had overcome great personal problems stirred my spirit. I felt God's anointing for me on their teaching. And they all stressed depending on God's Word FIRST. They talked little if any about psychology.

I remember thinking that was God's path for me, too, but I also remember thinking that speaking and thinking about the Word all day might interfere with daily life. I already thought about God more than most, I pridefully thought, and I followed good spiritual disciplines. So, I only half-heartedly tried to obey. Meanwhile, each time depression resurfaced, including now, I felt that with enough teaching and Christian self-help books I could get a grip. Oh, wretched and deceitful human heart! Modern day rebellion is less obvious than when Israel caravanned to Egypt, camels laden with all their treasures to pay for help, but it is the same. Oh, foolish me! Oh, praise God that He is ever-loving and forgiving and compassionate and abundant in mercy and loving kindness!

REBELLION IS LIKE WITCHCRAFT. Unfortunately, like Saul in 1 Samuel 15:22 and Cain in Genesis 4:1-6, I was offering a sacrifice *of my own choosing* rather than obeying God. In continuing to live the best Christian life I could but depending on the methods of psychology FIRST rather than God's Word, I disobeyed and rebelled against God. Gradually, I spent less time and energy on the Word. (How it grieves my heart to say that!) Soon, the thing I was depending on led to disaster. I was, like Israel, sending for help to Egypt, even using "the treasures of the temple," using the essence of my life, my heart, to pursue worldly help.

I am a living tabernacle for God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and the treasure of my tabernacle is my heart. God is a jealous God who allows no other gods before Him. (Exodus 20:5) Like Israel, I lacked enough faith to do what He was telling me—although I knew that "*Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.*" (Romans 10:17, NKJV). I was practicing deceit in that I deceived myself, subconsciously thinking, "God will accept what I am doing even though it is not exactly what He showed me. I do not have

Stubbornness is as iniquity, which means not being fair, or a condition of "in-equity". We do not deal rightly or fairly with God if we do not follow His guiding. He made us, He owns us, and after He redeems us, we have made a covenant with Him. Idolatry includes putting self above God.

to speak the Word and think about the Bible all day long. I am doing okay in my life with God.”

Oh, how stubborn! And the Word clearly says, In I Samuel 15:23 that “stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.” (KJV). Stubbornness is as iniquity, which means not being fair, or a condition of “in-equity”. We do not deal rightly or fairly with God if we do not follow His guiding. He made us, He owns us, and when He redeems us, we make a covenant with Him to obey Him whole-heartedly.

In pondering the meaning of iniquity, I referred to www.learnthebible.org. I read that sin and iniquity are synonyms used together in the Bible about 70 times.

Sin is “The most general term for those “actions which are wrong” or miss the mark. Those include wrongs that we do and good that we fail to do (sins of commission and sins of omission). So “whereas sin deals with the action or lack of action that is wrong,” iniquity deals more with the character or nature of the act. The word, iniquity, comes from in-equity and it refers to that which is unequal, unfair, or unjust.”

We treat God unfairly—we practice iniquity against Him—when we do not whole-heartedly obey Him, because that is what He deserves! Like Israel, I failed to obey whole-heartedly. I did not treat God as He deserves to be treated. I practiced iniquity against Him.

Through all this time, God was *whispering, telling me to depend on Him and His Word first, not all the other things. And He was also telling me I was slipping away from closeness with Him.* But my ears were not hearing ears. I was busy walking through “a land of trouble and anguish” (Isaiah 30:6), trying to find help from worldly things.

CONTINUING GROWTH REQUIRES CONTINUING DISCIPLINE. He alone knows how and when to remold, purify, and prune so that we may come forth as gold, for His glory and our ultimate good. He knows when to give His rebellious children “the bread of adversity and the water of affliction” and when to hide Himself. (Isaiah 30:20) He knew what I needed in order to grow up more into His image. And so, I believe that is why the depression returned, deeper than ever. It lasted two years.

If we want to continue maturing throughout our life, God must continue dealing with our heart. We are subject to the flesh so long as we inhabit earthly bodies. Continuing growth requires continuing discipline, which seems “painful at the time but later on produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” (Hebrews 12:11, NIV)

CHAPTER 2

UNKNOWING

Isaiah 30:10-12. Depending on the world is rebellion against God. Isaiah 30:10-12 teaches that dependence on the world and worldly ways--rather than God--for strength and protection, shows we are rebelling against God.

Mid 2017.

- God whispered to get much more Word in my life.
- By obeying half-heartedly, I made self-effort an idol.

Isaiah 30:10-12 In My Story

My story continues:

- Off the meds. . . or not?
- Those little, but big, things
- Afraid to be alone – me?
- Cherishing the hours, dreading the future
- One last precious pre-school year
- A memory so tender
- Spurning God by relying on the world

Applying the Word

Life paralleled Isaiah 30:10-12.

- Not listening to is the same as despising God's prophets and teachers.
- Relying on the world is rejecting God's ways.
- I was rebelling against God by not conforming to His ways.

Isaiah 30:10-12 In My Story

My story continues:

- Off the meds. . . or not?
- Those little, but big, things
- Afraid to be alone – me?
- Cherishing the hours, dreading the future
- One last precious pre-school year
- A memory so tender
- Spurning God by relying on the world

Off the medicine. . . or not? I squinted into white, piercing glare slanting off windshields and fenders. I was later than usual so interstate traffic was slower. The boys had begged “One more book, Nana!” and then Holly had begun describing built-in bookcases she was planning to build for the front room.

As usual when I pulled into the parking lot, I looked away from the curb next to the sagging fence. As usual, a man slouched on the curb, legs thrust out, hand clutching a bottle-shaped brown bag, lips moving, a regular patron of the convenience store bordering this end of the worn-out apartment complex.

I hurried inside, put my bags down, hugged Barny, made a cup of coffee, then sat at the computer. If I hurried, I could finish the blog post from yesterday and get a good start on the next one. Writing steadily for the next two hours, pausing only to rub noses with Barny, I did just that. Then, after cooking and eating dinner, I sat sideways at the desk, kneading Barny’s tummy fur, alternating between proofreading and pondering how three trees silhouetted against bands of pink and crimson, situated as they were fifty yards across the parking lot and a side street, could so calm my soul.

Those little, but big, things. The wall above my desk was covered with crayon pictures, as well as framed mottos from offices I shared during grad school then the seven years I worked as an evaluator at the school district. One framed plaque, purchased after I had stood for fifteen minutes, letting the boys spend two whole dollars each at the Dollar Store, read “Enjoy the little things in life, for one day you will look back and see that they were the big things.” The privilege of raising Holly forty years earlier had shown me that the little things of a child’s early years are indeed big. My heart was set to relish this phase with Ben and Ansel, each library trip with, play dough session, bug find, cardboard box car, cookie baking, and hour on park benches as well as the deep pleasure of watching Holly and Andrew’s loving parenting.

For a while, all went so well being a stay-at-home Nana, writing, and being involved at church. However, depression symptoms were worsening, as Rose had warned. Then, suddenly, I was afraid to be alone.

Afraid to be alone – me? As an introvert and loner, raising Holly had brought more love and human connection than I had ever known, daily, for eighteen years. For the first five years after she graduated from high school and needed me less, I used the quiet night and weekend hours for writing. Then, came eight years of full-time work and part-time school, with studying taking every spare moment. I had always enjoyed solitude and solitary pursuits, like reading and writing and studying. Now, though, it was torment.

Cherishing the hours, dreading the future. Gradually, as summer days ran out, kindergarten for Ben loomed like a semi headed for a squirrel. Depression symptoms intensified--constant negative thoughts, difficulty concentrating, trouble sleeping, and that noxious fear of being alone. Ansel would follow Ben into kindergarten the next year. Then what would I do all day?

Satan used a most excellent thing—my love for family—to deceive me into making them an idol. Unaware, I depended far too much on the joys of loving and being with them. Those who give their heart's first allegiance to anything other than God begin believing that the something or someone is what is helping them. Those who worship idols become, like an idol, blind and deaf.

So, I was unaware when I first began dreading, then fearing, leaving the family and returning alone to my tiny apartment. As fear worsened, I desperately focused on the only thing that eased the fear-- those fleeting golden days of that last summer when both boys were pre-school and then that last full-time year with Ansel. Ignoring the screaming danger signals and the echo of Rose's desperate advice, I focused on loving the boys, Ansel full-time and Ben after school and weekends.

One last precious, precious pre-school year. “Nana! Nana!” As I opened the car door, Ansel leaped out the front door, having seen my car from his perch by the window. I switched my purse and odds and ends bag to my right shoulder, leaned over and pulled him onto my left hip, grateful I could still do so, albeit with a grunt.

Once inside, “Look, Nana! I made you a cart!” I felt the healthy moistness of his small palm as he tugged me over to the table where Holly sat, surrounded by tape, scissors, and snippets of construction paper.

“Oh! I love it darling! Tell me how you made it.” And he did, in high gear, while Holly and I exchanged smiles over the top of his head.

“Nana! Are we going to your house or the gym?”

“The gym and then my house.”

After settling and buckling him into the padded, bucketed curve of the car seat, I opened our traditional package of cream cheese and chive crackers, leaned into the back seat, and stacked the six crackers on the child-size orange plastic plate I kept in the car. That joy and whole-hearted trust on his face, the innocent helplessness of his small hands gripping the edges of the plate as he waited, that little boy full-faced eagerness for such a simple thing, all that and so much more are engraved, deeply, on my heart.

I can still feel the weight of his little body as he sat in my lap after my gym workout, as we looked at cartoons and shared snacks before heading to the playground; I can still see the cracked sidewalk where he marched as the leader showing me to the mailboxes at the apartment; I can still smell the sweet scent of the canned biscuits he ate as he leaned back against me in my desk chair, watching cartoons on the computer that served as my television; I can yet smell his hair; I can still feel the hefty stack of picture story books we picked out together at the library at least once a week.

How grateful I am to God for showing me how to bolster his confidence—needful in most little brothers--by encouraging him in little things (“Yes, I see you remembered where our almond milk is in this store. You have a good memory”, “Yes, that’s a great idea. You have a good mind, Ansel.” “You were a good friend to that little boy who was crying in the park. It made him feel better to play with you. You are fun to be with. I like being with you, too!” Weekdays, Ansel and I picked up Ben after kindergarten. I cherished the last remaining long days with Ansel even while I ached for the gone forever preschool days I had had with Ben.

A memory so tender. Letting go emotionally when Ben started kindergarten was almost as hard as putting Holly in daycare at age three and a half. I still saw Ben weekday afternoons and weekends but I sorely missed his long preschool days. God soothed that ache with treasured moments, like the day Ben first grasped how to sound out words.

One autumn Thursday afternoon, both boys sat on either side of me on the big, comfy couch, pressing in close as I read to them. Those first couple of months of school, Ben had resisted learning to read, still preferring being read to. He had spurned the child--size, beginner readers sent home in his backpack. That afternoon, as Holly and Andrew shared a cup of coffee at the table, the boys and I shared “The Foot Book” by Dr. Seuss. I prayed silently, then asked Ben to read the next sentence. I prayed because he previously had refused gentle nudges from Holly and from Andrew and from me.

“Okay, Nana,” came his resigned sigh as he pressed his cheek into the coolness of my upper arm. “Wuh- et. Wet! “ Then “Fuh....fuh.....fffff”

I covered the t and said, “oooo. Now put the sounds together.”

Ben said, “fuh – ooooooo” Then came “tuh.”

“That’s right,” I said as I uncovered the t.

Next came three progressively shorter iterations of “fuh-oooooooootuh”. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Holly and Andrew staring intently.

Finally, “Foot! Nana, it says wet foot!”

For some reason, Ben’s success that afternoon opened floodgates. He was soon reading far beyond grade level. Sharing that moment with Ben was one of many sparkling treasures of God’s grace during that last full-time Nana year as deep blackness closed in.

While I treasured up each day of Ben’s kindergartner year and Ansel’s last preschool year, fear of being alone sharpened as did other symptoms of depression, symptoms like insomnia and unrelenting, vicious self-critical thoughts. My rebellion was unintentional, but it was still rebellion. I was simply experiencing some of “God’s decisions against ...particular lines of thought and conduct.” (Psalm 119:7, AMPC).

Applying the Word

LIFE PARALLELED ISAIAH 30:10-12.

- *Not listening to is the same as despising God’s prophets and teachers.*
- *Relying on the world is rejecting God’s ways.*
- *I was rebelling against God by not conforming to His ways.*

Isaiah 30:10. Who [virtually] say to the seers [by their conduct], See not! and to the prophets, Prophecy not to us what is right! Speak to us smooth things, prophecy deceitful illusions.

Comment: By my conduct—what I did and what I did not do—I was telling God, “I do not want to hear that I have to do the hard work You are saying to do. I want to get help the way I have been getting help, the easier way.”

ISAIAH 30:10. NOT LISTENING TO IS THE SAME AS DESPISING GOD’S PROPHETS AND TEACHERS. Although I thought I was depending on God, I failed to depend on Him *first*. That was rebellion. I depended on psychological methods to handle negative feelings. I also sought security from taking care of and being around those I loved rather than directly from Him. For most of my life, “If Holly is okay, then I am okay” had thrummed in my heart, sustaining me through the arduous years when my slim paycheck was all we had. Giving my heart to Jesus had brought true peace that deepened as my spirit grew, but taking care of and being around Holly was a true need.

In loving kindness, God had let us stay close, and that profound love had expanded to include Andrew, then Ben and Ansel. Now, however, now it was time to face the fact that I had made family an idol. I was not putting God first. God warned Israel to “*regard Him as holy and honor His holy name [by regarding Him as your only hope of safety], and let Him be your fear and let Him be your dread [lest you offend Him by your fear of man and distrust of Him.]*” (Isaiah 8:13, AMPC).

I was also despising, or slighting, God’s teachers. Like Israel seeking help from Egypt, I sought help from psychological methods. It was like asking a beloved friend who is an excellent gardener the best soil for roses, then planting my rose bushes in sand. Far, far worse it was.

Even in that rebellion, though, as I sought help from the new counselor, I kept desperately seeking God’s help, reading teachings by Derek Prince, Joyce Meyer, and others about using God’s Word like the medicine it is to heal and renew your heart. Each weekday at sunrise, Barny and I watched Joyce Meyer’s show. I devoured several books on emotional healing. But my depressed mind could not comprehend, much less, implement one main thrust of her teachings: study the Word for yourself, proclaim the Word out loud and meditate on it---all day.

As when we hear the wise advice of a friend, but go our own way, so it is that when we hear God and do not do what He says, we rebel against, despise, slight, think less of, and reject God. Selah, oh my soul. and be ever attentive to Him!

I did study the Bible more and began speaking God’s Word out loud, but inconsistently. I also failed to study for myself, instead using lists of Scriptures compiled by others. I read the lists but then immediately succumbed to negative thoughts. *By not studying diligently and not meditating on His Word, I was slighting, or despising, God’s teachers by not doing what they said.*

ISAIAH 30:11. ¹¹ Get out of the true way, turn aside out of the path, cease holding up before us the Holy One of Israel.

Comment: If you had asked, I would have said I was following God with my whole heart. But I still kept refusing to do what I knew God was telling me to do—to seriously study the Word. Why? I was living my life in service of idols and, like idols, I was blind and deaf.

ISAIAH 30:11. RELYING ON THE WORLD IS REJECTING GOD’S WAYS. I kept trying to use the cognitive behavioral therapy that had helped ten years earlier in Tampa. The clump of pages constituting the last third of my copy of the “Feeling Good Handbook” by David Burns, M.D., had separated from the binding. More pages than not were heavily marked with underlines, brackets, arrows and comments in pencil, red ink, and blue and yellow marker. I thoroughly understood the content of that book. Now,

though I tried to write out negative thoughts and replace those “cognitive distortions” with truth, though I lugged that thick book to the coffee shop, the library, and the counselor’s office, I could not actually sit down and write out the thoughts. Apparently, God had used cognitive behavioral therapy before, but He now required trust and reliance on Him FIRST. Instead, like Israel in Isaiah 30, *I was depending on other things first, taking my treasures to Egypt*

Friend and fellow pilgrim, do you see what I see? Though you love and put God first the best you can, you can still be living in rebellion and disobedience.

How else might idol worship look today? Some of the more obvious forms are:

- If I spend my entire paycheck on bills instead of paying my tithes and offerings first, I am trusting money. I am rebelling against God by refusing to obey Him and trust Him to take care of me.
- If I fill each hour of every day with noise or other people and avoid time alone with God, so that I can give Him my total attention, I am not trusting God to be my friend and companion.
- If I use anything--drugs, prescribed or not, alcohol, other people or activities—to handle feelings, I am putting those things before God.
- If I say there is not enough time for daily devotions, I am failing to trust that God is sovereign over time. I am trusting in myself and I am, by my actions, saying that whatever I did that day is more important to me than God.
- If I say I just cannot understand when I study the Bible for myself so I’ll listen to others teach and preach, I am disobeying God’s command to study His Word. I am failing to trust that God Himself can teach me. I am also accusing Him of being unfair because my actions say I believe He has told me to do something that is beyond my abilities

Although I was unknowingly rebelling against God, I did, however, continue listening to sound preaching and teaching, and I continued assembling together with other believers, serving, and sharing life with other believers. And God spoke through

When we trust in anything or anyone but God we make that thing or person an idol. Then we become, like idols, unable to speak, see, hear, smell, feel, walk or even “utter a sound with their throats.” In Psalm 115:4-8 and Psalm 135:15-18, God repeats the same teaching in nearly the same words. ***THIS IS IMPORTANT. It is a loving warning. God says putting things above Him—which is sin—destroys my very life and my spiritual senses. My spirit will become as lifeless as a block of wood or chunk of gold. I will not be able to:***

- ***express my thoughts,***
- ***see what God is doing and where He is leading me,***
- ***hear what God and His Word say,***
- ***sense His presence,***
- ***feel his touch, or***
- ***walk forward,***
- ***or even moan.***

each of these avenues. Eventually, He used another believer to initiate true healing. But that was much later.

ISAIAH 30:12. Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel: Because you despise *and* spurn this [My] word and trust in cunning *and* oppression, in crookedness *and* perverseness, and rely on them,

Comment: God was very patient, and merciful, but because I persisted in rejecting His Word and I kept relying on worldly things to handle depression, He would soon remove His protection. That wall in which I trusted was about to collapse.

ISAIAH 30:12. I WAS REBELLING AGAINST GOD BY NOT CONFORMING TO HIS WAYS. In retrospect, I see that as time in devotions, prayer, and Bible study shrank, the fear and negative thoughts and feelings expanded. I heard “What you focus on grows,” but could not see that I was struggling in quicksand. I could not stop thinking about “The depression”. In the middle of it all, I tried to write, thinking the 1985 dream God had given me, that dream of writing to help others, was finally happening. However, the slippery slide to the bottom of self—where desperation births true obedience—would take two more two years of torment.

CHAPTER 3

UNPROTECTED

Isaiah 30:13-17 - Rebellion removes God's protection: In Isaiah 30:13-17, God says our rebellion of depending on the world rather than Him removes part of the protection around our heart. "At some distant day" through this open door comes sudden destruction. That happens because we refused God's warnings to depend on Him, to quiet ourselves and let our trust in Him give us strength. Because we said no to God, going our own way, thinking we could outrun our enemies, our enemies will terrorize us.

Fall 2017

- The wall fell, the enemy surged through.
- The enemy roared.
- I cowered in fear and torment.

Isaiah 30: 13-17 In My Story

My story continues:

- Boxes, boxes, and more boxes
- Torment from inside
- Deteriorating health
- Desperate measures
- Total terror
- Respite before the abyss. . . and a life-line
- One person to give hope
- Teetering toward the chasm

Applying the Word

Life paralleled Isaiah 30:13-17

- The door to destruction was opened
- Only God can renew the mind and truly heal the heart.
- Our only place of safety and rest
- Sudden destruction
- Terror, torment, and how the enemy works
- Understanding our enemy

Isaiah 30:13-17 In My Story

My story continues:

- Boxes, boxes, and more boxes
- Torment from inside
- Deteriorating health
- Desperate measures
- Total terror
- Respite before the abyss. . . and a life-line
- One person to give hope
- Teetering toward the chasm

Boxes, boxes, and more boxes. I sighed, put “The Essays of E.B. White” face down on the top-most brown cardboard box and rocked, a little child frantically seeking comfort. Stacks of sagging boxes covered all but a narrow slice of the 200-square-foot front room/kitchen of the condo. The rocker, the only furniture besides my desk/table, was firmly wedged between stacks, and could not be turned to face the window. As usual, upon returning mid-afternoon after seeing Holly and the boys, the stacks closed in. I shook my head, sipped decaf and selected another animal cracker from the faded orange smiley face snack bowl, finding solace in the familiar crunch, the scent of hazelnut coffee creamer and simply eating – anything for a crumb of comfort.

I remember thinking, “Is this the panicked paralysis claustrophobics feel? I can’t clean this up. . . don’t know where to start. . . no space to work in . . . I can’t . . .” I knew that if I did not get that book in front of my eyes again, the panic would escalate as it had for weeks now. Each time I tried to unpack, I interrupted myself and opened another box only to interrupt myself again, collapsing into tears because my efforts only complexified the chaos.

For weeks after relocating, I came home, numbed my mind by reading until dinner time then went to bed, listening to an audiobook until falling asleep. Every few days, when a bit of clarity pierced the fog, I unpacked a box or two before plunging into a book, trying to silence vicious, self-critical thoughts.

Torment from inside. That silent voice in the mind, the self-talk we all hear throughout our day, had become a brutal torment, as had riotous fear. The ruthless negative self-talk and terror came from the accuser of our souls, and from the lowermost level of my heart. Being alone at home gave it free rein. Whenever I was alone, the enemy hissed: “You are so dumb and stupid. You are such a failure. Your family dreads seeing you. You are such a pathetic grandmother, taking your grandsons to McDonald’s and the Dollar Store. That is all you can afford. How sad that they have

such a pitiful grandmother! Your house is such a mess. You look so old now. You are pathetic. You will never write again” and on and on and on.

Notice that in all these things the enemy whispered vicious, blatant lies and twisted truth. Sound unfortunately familiar to you? The enemy especially attacks what we cherish. His aim is always to steal, kill and destroy. (John 10:10) The vicious thoughts he put into my mind were the exact opposite of truth. My family adored me, I was a wonderful grandmother to my grandsons, my life was a success in the Lord, and not writing was impossible for me. Yet, the lies and distortions of the enemy raced around, unhindered by truth, in my head. Being alone terrified me. Just cooking a meal and taking out the garbage required herculean effort. And as mind and body weakened under the attack, so did the body.

Deteriorating health. In retrospect, I believe God allowed a series of physical ailments to make me desperate enough to take the spiritual medicine of His Word. The health of our soul and spirit is of greatest importance to God.

From early 2017 when depression crept back in and through most of 2018, the roaring lies and fear escalated, stress accumulated and health declined sharply. In 2016, I had learned about some minor heart conditions that, along with family history, mandated vigilance. I had adjusted to occasional angina and paroxysmal atrial tachycardia. But now fear about blood pressure and heart rate and every twinge of chest discomfort consumed me. Then, for six months, I subsisted on three hours of sleep until learning that asthma medicine was causing insomnia. Then, came stomach ulceration, alleviated only by a diet of sweet potatoes, banana and honey for six weeks.

Every day for months, I crumbled a bit more, emotionally as well as physically. The broken section of the wall had indeed fallen suddenly and the enemy struck with full force. And all this came, to my despair, while I desperately tried to enjoy the last full-time year with Ansel and the first kindergartner year for Ben. By God’s grace, I did enjoy my hours with the boys and Holly and Andrew, and I did focus on them when I was with them. Yet, torment filled every other hour as I tried other desperate measures--- everything but fully trusting God and the power of His Word.

Desperate measures. My church had a ministry of special healing prayer for the spirit and soul on Sunday nights. You sat with two others in a private room, explained your struggle, they prayed with you, and God gave words of knowledge and comfort and spiritual insight. For example, one lady said she kept seeing a humming bird in her mind and urged me to look up hummingbirds when I went home. Unknown to this lady, earlier that week I had received a plaque of a hummingbird facing a crimson flower, inscribed with “Oh, Lord! May my life reflect the joy You have given that I may glorify you.”

That night after the healing prayer, an internet search revealed that hummingbirds must drink nectar up to eight times per hour to sustain life. I knew God was saying that I must feed on the nectar of the Word that often, too. I really tried. But it would be months before I succeeded.

In devotional times, I prayed for healing, and, taking the advice of one person, read five psalms out loud each morning. I listened to worship music, and did everything I could to find help and healing for my tormented mind and emotions. Besides prayer at my church, I went to a prayer ministry in town that focused on praying for deliverance. And I obeyed instantly when God revealed I had somehow forgotten to repay a loan from a friend the last year of grad school. I called her, apologized profusely and began monthly payments at once. Oh, the shame! That, of course, enlarged the emotional burden.

I reached out for friendship, but having been in this new church just a few months, the old painful shyness returned full force. I was embarrassed by the heaviness that slumped my shoulders, drooped my mouth, and kept me visibly about to cry. Although people did reach out and pray with me at church services, each Sunday at noon I faced that solitary walk back to the car, then isolation at home. The fatigue that accompanies depression deepened each week. Some weeks I attended a home group meeting or a Friday morning Bible study with Pentecostal women from several local churches. I had coffee fairly regularly with two different compassionate, caring women. Just being with other believers and in the presence of God helped.

I sensed that a very brief chat each evening would help with feelings and the long afternoon and evening hours alone at home. However, among the few women I knew, no one was available. Oh, how self-pity wailed over that! However, I see now that God's sovereign and loving hand was arranging even that circumstance for my good.

Total terror. I did get to know one person whom I called a couple of times a week but then she said "When I talk to you, I get depressed. I do not want to talk to you any more." After more stinging words, she hung up. I knelt by the couch and cried and prayed and cried then went outside and walked around the building in the dark, afraid to go back inside, just calling out quietly "Oh, God! Oh, God! Help me!", more afraid than ever of the thoughts that blanketed my mind as soon as I entered my front door.

I survived the many months that followed solely by God's grace. I sat in that rocker by the window and read Psalms, cried and read and cried and read some more. And so, the emotional spiral continued throughout that summer of 2018, even after I had a part-time volunteer job.

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Respite before the chasm. "What do you think, Barny cat?" I looked in the half-length mirror over the sink.

"This is the best I can do". I scrutinized the brown earrings, brown top and black capris, wishing my tummy were less obvious, then turned around and looked over my shoulder, a habit from earlier years when the body was attractively shaped and I had diligently made sure my rear view was modest. Now though, I checked that the bottom of the blouse covered the pudgy rump.

It felt peculiar dressing up on a weekday and driving in 8:30 traffic as I had done so many years. My volunteer job at church was still unsettling, too, though I had been helping two mornings a week for a month. How had I gotten that job? I believe God was honoring my efforts, weak as they seemed, to obey Him the very best I could, in spite of relentless self-criticism about my failures as a believer. Despite the tormenting depression all those many months, I had sought to serve my local church by joining pre-service prayer each Sunday morning and calling the church office about volunteer jobs. I also knew volunteering would help fill the long, lonely days when this summer ended and not only Ben but also Ansel would be at school all day.

So, I struggled through the summer of 2018, intentionally enjoying each day with the boys and trying to not look too stressed out on workdays. The helping tasks I did at church were menial but I frantically did my best with each little thing, struggling all day to look normal and not cry. Sometimes, though, I had to rush to the bathroom to cry. Each afternoon at two o'clock, getting into my old Corolla to drive home brought a slight release of tension, but shoulders hiked up again as fear and dread of going home alone roared once again.

In late August, I gratefully accepted the offer to make the volunteer work a real job. The paychecks would reduce piled up medical expenses and, eventually, pay for a few things from the Salvation Army, like bookshelves, throw rugs and pictures that would make things cozier, and a couch so the boys and I could sit together. The job also meant the comfort of the company of others, even though the enemy blasted away with thought arrows like "Everyone just feels sorry for you. That is why they gave you this job. They think you are pathetic and weird."

Just one person can give hope. After Rose closed her practice, God had provided a new counselor, Rachel, who was also a strong Christian. I had been seeing her about a year when I started the job. Rachel was a life-line, the one person with whom I could be completely honest about how bad I was feeling. Several books about depression (see Appendix C: Recommended Resources) share the theme that just one person who truly understands and accepts you, without condemnation or criticism, and who consistently gives encouragement and hope, can keep a depressed person afloat. God knew I needed Rachel to be that life-line.

Each week I drove across town and sat and cried and talked and cried. She recommended, but did not badger me about, taking an antidepressant and worked with me, seeking to help me overcome the worsening symptoms of depression and what had now become terror of being alone. Soon, however, I could barely force myself to go to work and stay there. Tears popped up throughout the day, insomnia worsened, the house remained unsettled, clutter accumulated, and emotional pain became tangible weight on my chest.

Teetering toward the chasm. Finally, one day the pain was so bad at work I went into a vacant room and called the home group leader to ask for prayer, too

embarrassed to ask the people with whom I was working. She gently recommended, as before, to try medicine which had made such a dramatic difference for her husband. I sincerely thanked her, hung up the phone, and somehow got through the rest of the workday. That Sunday, as I walked into church, visibly holding back tears but determined to attend the service, a couple I knew came over and both of them hugged me, prayed with me right then and invited me to sit with them and their kids, which I did. After the service, another member, who regularly looked me up each week to check on me, pulled me over to two chairs in the corner of the lobby.

“Freda,” she said gently. “You have been struggling with this so long. I am sure your body is totally depleted of serotonin . . .” I listened closely, having learned that insufficient serotonin is one of many chemical imbalances in the brain causing depression. I really listened because the anti-depressant that had worked well previously in Tampa had helped with serotonin levels. This precious saint then told how, after prolonged illness had weakened and depleted her body, mind and emotions, taking medicine had balanced her brain chemistry and been instrumental in her own healing of depression and anxiety.

I looked at her, with that hollow, dry-eyed feeling you get after prolonged crying. Finally--after two years of resisting that advice from two counselors and many friends and acquaintances—I said I would think seriously about it. Two days later, I woke up so weighed down I barely made it from bed to rocker.

APPLYING THE WORD

Life paralleled Isaiah 30:13-17

- The door to destruction was opened.
- Still such an immature believer.
- Only God can renew the mind and truly heal the heart.
- Our only place of safety and rest
- Sudden destruction
- Terror, torment, and how the enemy works
- Satan is real
- **BUT GOD IS SOVERIGN AND HIS SOVEREIGNTY INCLUDES SOVEREIGNTY OVER SATAN**

ISAIAH 30:13. Therefore this iniquity and guilt will be to you like a broken section of a high wall, bulging out and ready [at some distant day] to fall, whose crash will [then] come suddenly and swiftly, in an instant.

Comment: God says Israel's rebellion-- which God says is "iniquity and guilt"--this rebellion of which we are all guilty at some point, this rebellion of less than whole-hearted obedience, this rebellion of refusing to obey God's instruction to cherish His Word and depend on Him rather than the world--this rebellion removes part of God's protection. Eventually, "at some distant day", the enemy attacks through the open door of our rebellion with sudden, total destruction.

ISAIAH 30:13. THE DOOR TO DESTRUCTION WAS OPENED. All this time, while descending toward the bottom of the chasm, I continued trying to help myself through counseling and psychological self-help methods as well as those times of special prayer from others. Even after years of good counseling, even after the recent excellent work Rose had done regarding attachment issues, the biggest source of those poisonous, tormenting thoughts and feelings remained submerged at the bottommost level of the wellspring of my heart. *Much of what I subconsciously believed about God, myself and the world was lies.*

Much of what I subconsciously believed about God, myself and the world was lies.

Satan had used the unhealed damage and unmet needs from the past to create those lies. He had put conscious and subconscious thoughts into my mind and feelings all day long, for decade after decade. Those had become a hardened, genuine belief, a stronghold. So, the real cause of depression and fear was lies I was believing and how those lies affected my thoughts, feelings, and actions. The only cure for that was the truth of God's Word to replace each of those lies. However, more time was to pass before that miracle happened.

All that summer and early fall of 2018, while treasuring Ansel's last preschool summer, and Ben's last summer before first grade, those areas of unhealed emotional abuse and neglect had continued to poison my life, keeping me feeling insecure, unloved, and afraid. No wonder I was so easily bogged down by problems!

In spite of making Christian growth and taking care of Holly my goals since finding Jesus in 1981, I was still so immature in my faith, still understanding a mere fraction of God's love and mercy, and still so self-focused. That root-level insecurity kept me focused on feelings and controlled by fear of disapproval and rejection. The self-critical voice from the childhood years of constant criticism clouded perception of God's love and acceptance. Root-deep hopelessness, formed in childhood when I failed to do things perfectly, proved fertile soil for discouragement and despair. The broken sections of the high walls I had built around my heart were bulging out, ready, "at some distant day" to fall, And the crash would "come suddenly *and* swiftly, in an instant." (Isaiah 30:14)

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ISAIAH 30:14. And he shall break it as a potter's vessel is broken, breaking it in pieces without sparing so that there cannot be found among its pieces one large enough to carry coals of fire from the hearth or to dip water out of the cistern.

Comment: The "it" in this verse is the wall we build—the thing we are depending on to save us from the enemy. Out of love, God shatters that thing completely so that it becomes useless, lest we later try to turn back to it. God must make self-effort useless *in our own eyes*.

ISAIAH 30:14. ONLY GOD CAN RENEW THE MIND AND TRULY HEAL THE HEART. Guilt makes us susceptible to sudden and devastating attack. Through the years of counseling, I had learned some of the reasons for the painful thoughts and feelings. I had learned techniques to replace the negative thoughts with more positive and realistic ones. Counseling had also provided desperately needed emotional support.

Counseling, however, did not replace lies that had become the enemy's hidden strongholds in my heart. Counselors and good friends can help you change the thoughts in your mind and, to some extent, your beliefs. *However, only God and the truth of His Word can change the heart. We wage a spiritual battle. Only spiritual weapons are effective against the enemy and his damage to hearts. Only God's spiritual medicine can heal spiritual wounds.*

Only God and the truth of His Word can change the heart. We wage a spiritual battle. Only spiritual weapons are effective against the enemy and his damage to hearts. Only God's spiritual medicine can heal spiritual wounds

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ISAIAH 30:15. For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning [to Me] and resting [in Me] you shall be saved; in quietness and in [trusting] confidence shall be your strength. But you would not.

Comment: God says clearly that He has shattered the thing we were depending on (Isaiah 30:14) *because* only in returning and resting in Him will we be saved from our enemies. Only in Him will we find strength for living.

Isaiah 30:15. Our only place of safety and rest. I had refused God's warning to trust in and rely on Him and have faith. The last two years of depression had further weakened a body and mind already weakened by repeated seasons of depression and fear. I needed to return to God, to put Him first in all things, and to rest in Him. *"For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: in returning [to Me] and resting [in Me] you*

shall be saved; in quietness and trusting confidence shall be your strength. But you would not.”

Even more dangerous than a weakened body was a greatly weakened spirit, the most important element of human life and that which sustains us through trial. “The strong spirit of a man sustains him in bodily pain or trouble, but a weak and broken spirit who can raise up or bear?” (Proverbs 18:14, AMPC)

I was in grave danger. God knew that, though I did not. I needed the help of medicine to restore balance to my brain chemistry. The imbalance had affected body, soul and spirit.

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ISAIAH 16-17. ¹⁶ And you said, No! We will speed [our own course] on horses! Therefore you will speed [in flight from your enemies]! You said, We will ride upon swift steeds [doing our own way]! Therefore will they who pursue you be swift, [so swift that]

¹⁷ One thousand of you will flee at the threat of one of them; at the threat of five you will flee till you are left like a beacon *or* a flagpole on the top of a mountain, and like a signal on a hill.

Comment: God is just and fair. “He is the rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are law and justice. A God of faithfulness without breach or deviation, just and right is He (Deuteronomy 32:4). We get what our actions deserve. Colossians 3:25 tells us “But if you do what is wrong, you will be paid back for the wrong you have done. For God has no favorites.” (NLT). When we rebel against God’s ways, when we fail to obey what He says, we do evil. And “God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:14, KJV)

Sudden destruction. The enemy attacked swiftly and I began being terrified at the least little thing. Constantly fleeing the enemy, with weakened body, mind, soul, and spirit, my defenses were not only down but destroyed. The broken section of the high wall I had created suddenly crashed and the enemy swarmed through that gap with unrelenting onslaughts of fear and negative self-talk. For years, I had rebelled, subconsciously, by not giving God’s Word its rightful place in my mind and in the hours of daily life. I failed to see that fact, however, because the enemy uses the world and our flesh to blind us. Depending on worldly methods and other people first had made them an idol and my eyes and ears as blind and deaf as an idol.

God knew how much pain it would take to move me to give His Word appropriate time and effort. Out of fathomless compassion, He gave the bread of affliction – until I hit the bottom of self. Every shred of proud strength and independence, of courage to

pursue dreams, of passion for the hard work required to pursue those dreams—all of it vanished into the chasm of helplessness.

Terror, torment and how the enemy works. Beloved, I will simply say that that time was truly awful. It was exactly like Isaiah 30:16 says, a period of intensified attack, and inability to fight back. I was terrorized by the least little thought arrow from the enemy and panicked with the tiniest challenging circumstance, like an unexpected bill. I will stop here with details because dwelling on the negative can open a door to the enemy. Recalling trauma, your own or others, can cause fresh damage.

When the enemy roars. Look at the chain of verses in I Peter 5:5-10 for another perspective on what was happening. I had not yielded to God's hand of correction and I was now unable to cast my cares on God and be balanced. Our enemy, the devil, was roaming ". . . around like a lion roaring [in fierce hunger] seeking someone to seize upon and devour." (I Peter 5:8, AMPC). I was terrified by and unable to resist his attack and be firm in my faith at all, much less at the onset.

Without my shield of faith lifted up, the lie arrows he shot at my mind hit their mark. My thoughts were often "I am the only one who struggles this badly with depression and fear. There is something wrong with me that either God could not or did not choose to fix. It is going to get worse. Maybe I am going crazy." The enemy did indeed *roar* in my mind. It felt like a real lion five feet away. I had studied the fight or flight response as part of graduate school work on a statistics anxiety project and research on shyness. I knew that the body reacts to perceived, as well as real, danger and threat by flooding the bloodstream with high-powered chemicals like adrenaline and cortisone. This steeping of the brain in stress chemicals had happened daily for many months.

God had the answer of course but my physical brain was so out of balance chemically that I could not think clearly. God had to put people in my path to help me feel safe enough about medicine to actually take it. And He did that. Soon after, He would start true healing of heart and mind, through the medicine of His Word.

If the enemy cannot get us to believe he does not exist and cannot get us to forget about him, then he will use his favorite weapon of fear and seek to convince us he is more powerful than God. Ha! **God laughs! The enemy is defeated already!** (Revelations 1:18, and 12:11, Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14, Romans 16:20 and James 4:7).

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UNDERSTANDING OUR ENEMY. Is the devil real? Some believers in God do not believe the devil is real. Others are afraid to talk about him or simply seldom think about him. In the famous "Screwtape Letters" C.S. Lewis shows us that Satan's best tactic is to convince us he does not exist. I believe that, failing that, the enemy seeks to make believers forget about him.

But I knew for certain that he was real. I never saw him or any demons, as many have, but I felt what I believe was the presence of the demonic, especially after that terrifying comment that night.

Please write this truth on your heart: GOD IS SOVERIGN AND HIS SOVEREIGNTY INCLUDES SOVEREIGNTY OVER SATAN. We do not need to fear Satan because Jesus defeated him at the cross and has given us authority over all the power of the enemy. (Luke 10:19) Below is a concise explanation of the believer's authority over Satan from www.gotquestions.org. Read it and take heart!

The believer's authority over Satan and victory over the spiritual forces of evil depend on the power of God, the relative power of Satan, and God's power within the believer.

First, God's power is perfect and unlimited. He created the heavens and the earth ([Genesis 1:1](#)) and holds power over life and death. God clearly has power over Satan and in the end will cast Satan into eternal punishment in the lake of fire ([Revelation 20:7-10](#)).

Second, Satan's power, while no match for God's, is yet strong. Satan can tempt humans, as he did with Eve in the Garden of Eden ([Genesis 3](#)). He is sometimes given permission from God to inflict pain on people as in the case of Job ([Job 1-2](#)). He was able to tempt Jesus but was unable to cause Him to stumble or sin ([Matthew 4:1-11](#)). God warns us that Satan hunts for human victims in the way that a roaring lion prowls for his prey ([1 Peter 5:8](#)). Satan's power is not only limited in effectiveness today, but it is also limited in time. Evil faces an ultimate defeat in the future (see [Revelation 12:12](#) and [20:10](#)).

This brings us to our power in relation to Satan. Believers in Jesus Christ ([John 3:16](#); [Ephesians 2:8-9](#)) have God's Spirit living within them. [Galatians 2:20](#) says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." The same power that created the universe resides within us. As a result, Satan has no true power over believers in Christ. He cannot force us to sin, he cannot possess us, and he knows that we will ultimately have the victory over him.

At the same time, Satan continues to cause problems for believers living in this fallen world. [Ephesians 6:10-18](#) reminds us of the [spiritual battle](#) we face and the importance of walking in [spiritual armor](#). In addition, [James 4:7](#) tells us of our

responsibility to resist Satan: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

We have no authority over Satan in ourselves. God has all authority, and He fights on our behalf. Our response to Satan's attacks should include submitting our lives to God, living in a holy manner, praying for God's protection, and resisting sin. When we place ourselves under God's protection, Satan has no authority over us. He will flee. In addition, we can respond to the devil's temptations as Jesus did. All three times Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, the Lord responded by quoting God's Word ([Matthew 4:1–11](#)). If Jesus defeated temptation through Scripture, we should certainly rely on the Bible to overcome Satan's temptation in our lives. It's not called the "[sword of the Spirit](#)" for nothing ([Ephesians 6:17](#)).

The apostle Paul reminds us that Satan's power will not last long. [Romans 16:20](#) promises, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." Stand firm in the Lord, and you can live in victory over Satan's schemes.

Gotquestions.org/authority-over-Satan.html

What are we to do? We are always to strive to keep our minds focused on God, but when the enemy attacks we are to deal with him, then return to our walk with and work for God. If the enemy cannot get us to believe he does not exist and cannot get us to forget about him, then he will use his favorite weapon of fear and seek to convince us he is more powerful than God. *Ha! God laughs! The enemy is defeated already!* (Revelations 1:18, and 12:11, Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14, Romans 16:20 and James 4:7). But that fact, although I had learned it early in my walk, now slipped out of conscious awareness. I cowered in fear of the fear I felt being alone and of the depression worsening.

Beloved, the devil is real and active on earth, but remember he is our totally defeated enemy. God is infinitely more powerful, in every way, than the enemy of our souls. The devil can put thoughts into our minds, but he cannot read our minds. Only God can. Jeremiah 17:10 tells us "*I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve*" (AMPC).

How the devil tries to use fear. I had heard teaching that it is vital to resist the devil when we first feel negative feelings and thoughts. I had been trying, but feebly. Now, I found myself becoming afraid of being afraid. Though I do not think I said it out loud or acknowledged it to myself at the time, I had become afraid of the devil, a dangerous position for a believer in that fear is the chief weapon of the enemy. I have heard that fear is mentioned in the Bible more than 300 times. God knows that handling

fear correctly is vital to His children. So He shows us and tells us over and over how to do that.

The spirit of depression. Isaiah 61:3 shows us that depression is a spiritual issue. When we are depressed, we have “a heavy, burdened, and failing spirit.” Negative thoughts and feelings weigh us down as does inability to maintain our usual habits. We fall behind in everything. Change seems hopeless. Our attitude and our spirit become dangerously unhealthy. Sometimes, depression is caused or worsened by demonic attack, which is another reason to be in fellowship with strong believers who can pray with you and for you. In my case, deliverance prayer helped, but there was much more to be done. My soul needed to be healed, my mind had to be renewed, and foolish foolish me, I still was not using the Word as the God-given sword and the medicine it is.

CHAPTER 4

TERRORIZED

Isaiah 30:18. In our rebellion, God intensely longs to help but must wait. In Isaiah 30:18, God says that while we rebel against Him seeking help from the world, He earnestly waits. He longs to be gracious to us, to have mercy and compassion on us. God is faithful and just, therefore, we are blessed if we wait and hope for Him with expectation. He will be faithful to us. He will treat us more than fairly.

Psalm 34:18 says, “*The Lord is close to those who are of a broken heart and saves such as are crushed with sorrow for sin and are humbly and thoroughly penitent.*” Well, I was indeed broken-hearted and humbly and thoroughly penitent. God was indeed looking at me, longing to be gracious to me. If you eagerly expect, look and long for someone you love to return home, you notice the tiniest movement on the horizon. Like the father of the prodigal son in Luke 15, God was looking for me. And He ran.

January to December 2018

- *Terror and torment*
- *God sent a part-time job in the fall of 2018*
- *Medicine and group therapy*

APPLYING THE WORD

Verse 18a. God earnestly waits

- It is not an emergency. . . oh yeah?
- You’re so stupid!
- Those stupid tears

Verse 18b. God lifts Himself up

- The rhythm of His redemption
- Rebuilding life
- Early days of healing
- The curriculum of the program
- Hidden roots of shame
- God knows the seasons
- Light and truth always cast out darkness and lies
- The lies shame screams at you
- Our God of unbounded love, endless mercy, and fathomless compassion

Verse 18c and d. God is just. Blessed are those who wait for Him

- Hope! Oh, blessed, blessed hope!
- One fathomless blessing of loving God

Please note: In this and following chapters, the sections “My Story” and “Applying the Word” are merged. I tried to be consistent with the earlier format – repeatedly – but to no avail. So, I leave it to the Lord to keep the story straight as you read. Any good in the story is Him! The flaws are all mine!

APPLYING THE WORD

ISAIAH 30:18A. *And therefore the Lord [earnestly] waits [expecting, looking, and longing] to be gracious to you;”*

Comment: How I wish I had known then as clearly as I know now how passionately God loves His children and how desperately, eagerly He longs to be gracious to them. Consider all of Isaiah 30:18.

¹⁸ And therefore the Lord [**earnestly] waits [expecting, looking, and longing] to be gracious to you;** and therefore He lifts Himself up, that He may have mercy on you *and* show loving-kindness to you. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed (happy, fortunate, to be envied) are all those who [earnestly] wait for Him, who expect *and* look *and* long for Him [for His victory, His favor, His love, His peace, His joy, and His matchless, unbroken companionship]! (AMPC) (emphasis added)

Websters 1828 online dictionary says gracious means “favorable, kind, benevolent, disposed to forgive offenses and impart unmerited blessings.” The root of the word grace connotes ready, quick, prompt, willing.” And then it says “from advancing.” To me, that means from a position of advancing, of reaching. It suggests the father of the prodigal, the loving and merciful father who was eagerly looking down that road and ran to embrace his beloved son.

Oh, hear God’s heart! That is how He loves us – every hour of every day. All we have to do is reach out in obedience and faith. He is already there, with more than we need laid out and prepared. And His father heart longs to embrace us!

ISAIAH 30:18A. GOD EARNESTLY WAITS.

It is not an emergency. . . oh yeah? “If it’s an emergency, you can go to Psychiatric Emergency Services.”

The flat voice of the middle-aged woman seated behind the sliding glass matched her flat, expressionless face. Eyebrows arched upward, quizzically, waiting on the response so she could slam the glass partition closed again. The tall woman in the

faded blue hoodie shifted the bulging tote bag tucked under her left arm as her own eyebrows arranged themselves in a puzzled zigzag.

“But it’s not an emergency. I just want to be sure I can see someone today.”

Once more the County Mental Health Clinic receptionist repeated: the only thing you can do at this clinic is to sit and wait and hope someone cancels today. Otherwise, you’ll have to wait until the appointment you’ve been given.”

“But I came yesterday afternoon at 3:00 and they told me they were not doing any more intakes and I would have to come back in the morning and someone could see me, so I came back today...” The tall woman stopped as she saw the receptionist’s darkly penciled eyebrows reach a new height that, along with an obvious narrowing of the eyes, meant patience was gone.

The dark panicked feeling filled her mind. She was a small, helpless child again, hurting, unable to stop the hurting, and all alone. She sputtered.

“But, but I don’t know what to do!”

Five rings, three bracelets and a tattoo whirred by ten inches below her face as the receptionist slammed the glass window closed. The tall woman walked to the closest plastic covered bench seat. The address she had scribbled on the back of a crumpled grocery list was at least 30 minutes north on I-35, through the worst traffic in the city. She had never been in that part of the city. Could she find it? Was she so nervous that it was dangerous to drive? No, she finally decided as she looked up the address on her cell phone.

Twenty-five minutes later, she exited the interstate, drove four meandering, fretful miles on Airport Boulevard, and pulled into a corner spot of the County Emergency Psychiatric Facility. Gray mold advanced from the sides of the building, giving the chipped beige bricks a mottled look. The boxy, bland government building rested next to one of those sheer embankments so common in Austin, but still so foreign to someone who had, until relocating, lived in Florida, a state nearly bereft of hills of any kind and where the few hills present rolled gently.

Immediately inside the entry door stood a glass-enclosed cubicle, in front of which two policemen waited to be buzzed through the secure door. She stepped to the window.

“I need to see someone today, please. They told me at the County clinic that I could probably see a psychiatrist today who could prescribe some medicine for me.” Tears blurred her vision.

“**You’re so stupid!**” “You’re so stupid!” the inner thoughts scolded. “Do you really think it makes any difference that you don’t tell him you need an antidepressant? He can tell just looking at you that you are a real mess. You look like you are ready for

the loony farm. Your face has set into a permanent sad droop that will be with you the rest of your life.”

“Okay,” the man with a black beard and kind brown eyes said. “You can go up those stairs to the left and check in there.”

She tried to smile but knew it resembled a grimace, as she looked to the stairs then the office area on the right, where the policemen had disappeared.

“Maybe that is where they take you if you are Baker Acted,” she thought.

“At least I’m here under my own steam, Lord” she thought. “Please let me get in to see someone today. I can’t handle it anymore. I give up. I will take the stupid medicine and I’ll stay on it as long as it is necessary. Thank You for helping me drive here safely.” Upstairs, after a brief conversation with a person behind another glassed-in reception area, during which choked back tears so constricted her throat that each word sounded like the struggle it was, she sat. The muffled hum of traffic rose from the street to the second floor. Her eyes roved over dents, faded paint and duct-taped windows of cars in the parking lot.

“Just like my car,” she mused, “with its strip of tape across the windshield when that pickup crawled up the median barrier and almost hit me last fall.” As she looked around the waiting room, she kept her head below eye level, aware of feeling more ashamed than at any time in her life. Absently, she noted the lime, beige and rust pinwheel pattern of the chipped formica floor. And the run-down tennis shoes, frayed pantlegs and beyond worn-out backpacks flung beside chairs.

“I’m not judging, Lord, or being critical. Oh, Lord! Help me not be critical. I know that could be me just as easily. Oh, help them, Lord! They have far fewer resources than I do.”

On the long bench in the corner, lay a man whose shoulder blades jutted out from beneath his soiled t-shirt, hip bones giving an angular shape to oil-stained jeans. One grimy hand grasped a knitted watch cap as his forearm shielded his eyes from the fluorescent glare. In the chair next to him sat a young girl, of similar leanness and dress. Periodically, she leaned over and said something inaudible, which only elicited a shake or nod of a head covered with long, matted black hair. By the window sat a man about her age, who kept leaning forward, then back, crossing and uncrossing his legs, getting up and then sitting back down. Two seats down, a young girl was arguing, louder and louder, with an older man who looked enough like her to be a much older brother or her father.

“Are some of these people going to be admitted, Lord? I know I won’t but am I that close? Oh, Lord, help me get in to see someone today. I know I need to take medicine and I just don’t feel I can keep on without some help. It all hurts too much.”

Those stupid tears. She dug in the pocket of her hoodie for the folded-up bathroom tissue, wiped at her eyes, blew her nose and, winced as she wiped the raw tip of her nose. The tears had begun at seven, sitting in the rocker by the window, reading her devotional. The tears had flowed fairly constantly, through the drive to the County clinic, while driving across town, and now, while waiting.

“These stupid tears are what made me go on medicine the last time,” she reflected, “that and the painful sadness. Just like now. It just won’t stop.”

The tears became a steady stream as she told her story to the intake nurse, counselor, social worker – whatever this person was who recorded the gritty details of the “patient’s presenting problem” before “the patient” saw the psychiatrist. But this woman was a world apart from that receptionist who had almost stopped her effort to get help. This woman, with attentive, sympathetic eyes, cared. Speaking softly, she explained:

“Because of some of the things you said, and the fact that this has been a problem more than once, I’m suggesting that, in addition to your regular counseling, you take part in what we call IOPT – intensive outpatient therapy. They do take Medicare. The program is basically for those with depression, anxiety, substance abuse issues, and recurrent emotional problems, not resolved by counseling. It helps you learn to lessen intense emotions.

“The program lasts five weeks, and you go for three hours, four nights a week. You do group therapy first then there is teaching about things like distress tolerance, emotional regulation . . . “

And my loving Heavenly Father used that program to begin healing those heart-deep wounds, that all too fertile soil for anxiety and depression that had returned, in seasonal rhythm, my entire life. Years of Bible study, good counseling, my own prayers, the prayers of many others, including prayer for deliverance, speaking God’s truth over myself, speaking positive affirmations . . . none of it had removed the root causes. But, with God’s guiding hand, the program shed rays of light that prepared the way so that I could, finally, take God’s Word like the medicine it really is.

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ISAIAH 30:18B. GOD LIFTS HIMSELF UP

ISAIAH 30:18B *and therefore He lifts Himself up, that He may have mercy on you and show loving-kindness to you.*

Comment: This picture of God lifting Himself up speaks, to me, again of the father of the prodigal son standing up and running toward his returning son, eager to have mercy and show loving-kindness to him.

Maclaren's Commentary (www.biblehub.com) gives a deeper meaning. Maclaren says that God is not merely passively waiting for us until we are in the right condition but that God is working mightily, that God is 'lifted up in the manifestation of His might' while He prepares us to receive His gifts. "He who prepares a place for us is preparing us for the place." emphasis added.)

Isaiah 30:18b. The rhythm of His redemption. While waiting six weeks for the anti-depressant's full effect and for group therapy to start, though, raw feelings raged on – through the weekly thirty minutes with the County clinic psychiatrist while I waited a month (the earliest available) to see a private psychiatrist, through the tearful talks with Holly and Andrew, who had given all the love and support possible but who, of course, could not fix me. And raw feelings raged on through many moments crying in the bathroom at work. Yet through it all, I saw faint glimmers of Him as He provided strength for each day and hope that the program would make a big difference.

It did. *God had been waiting, looking, and longing to be gracious* to me. He had prepared precisely what I needed and He had precisely prepared me—through letting me get truly desperate---to receive it.

Rebuilding my life. Like a mother's rocking, swaying motion, the rhythm of those early days of His redemption soothed my frail soul. That the seven weeks of the program happened during Christmas holidays lengthened the time when I had the support of a group who were walking the same path I was. Also, attending a three-hour meeting four evenings a week for seven weeks provided structure and a sense of purpose. Although seeing the family and working had prevented continuous days of sitting at home during the holiday, I struggled mightily to feel a sense of purpose after the boys were both in school. I recall often thinking "How do I create a life for myself?" Now, though, most waking hours were mapped out.

Mercifully, the job took up three mornings and early afternoons. I filled the other two weekdays with the gym, errands and just resting due to genuine, not depression-induced, tiredness. Sunday was church and on Saturdays, I just hung out with the family. Every weeknight meant three hours with people who gave mutual emotional support while we all learned how to manage feelings better. Weekday afternoons at four, I began getting ready to drive to North Austin, for an hour of stop-and-go-mainly-stop traffic. Gratefully.

The early days of healing. 4:15 p.m. Tuesday. I walked downstairs and across the sidewalk to the parking lot, slowly, keeping the warm go-mug of creamered coffee level in spite of book bag, lunch bag and purse banging against my shoulder. Traffic on Stassney and Manchaca was not yet heavy and the Mopac Expressway had no bottlenecks for a full two miles.

"Not bad," I told myself as I leaned sideways to accommodate keeping one foot on the brake for the next forty-five minutes of stop-and-sit, traffic. I took a sip from the go-mug, tapped the brake, and sighed as an SUV slid sideways, crab-like, into the gap I

left between the vehicle in front of me. I would be at the Northeast Clinic a full hour early—unless I stopped to buy non-perishable groceries as I often did—but leaving the house any later could mean missing part of the session due to even heavier rush hour traffic. Today, I did stop at the grocery, treating myself to a deli turkey-on-rye and a small bag of yogurt-covered pretzels.

I pulled into my usual parking slot to the far left of the front doors, reclined the seat a bit and opened the sandwich, relishing the taste of something not prepared by me. Decades of frugal living had imbued such little things with deep pleasure. I gazed through the wild rose bushes planted in front of the clinic into fast-fading bands of rose and cornflower blue sunset. The green of tall trees in the quaint neighborhood behind the clinic became lacey black silhouettes as I snuggled into my hoodie. How I relished the cool of Texas winters!

Soon, I was walking through the doors and down the hall, past six other meeting rooms just starting to fill with people. On reaching the room in the corner, I grabbed a slate board. Sitting in one of fifteen chairs lining the walls, I completed the daily self-check, and then, like two other early arrivers, avoided conversation. They perused their cell phones. I reviewed my notes.

The meeting was carefully structured. The therapist referred to our daily self-checks as we each took turns reporting how the previous day had gone for us and receiving feedback from group members and the counselor. After that hour and a half, came a ten-minute break and then an hour of instruction. Each day of the seven-week curriculum was sequenced to cover the designated topics and then the seven weeks began again, which allowed clients to start and end at any point. That also meant that you saw the same people for a while but then different ones as people ahead of you graduated.

Some people had just completed a stay at the County hospital or a private mental health hospital. Others, like me, had been referred into the program as outpatients. People in other meeting rooms were addressing issues like substance abuse, but everyone in my room needed help with depression. That in itself brought comfort and a measure of self-acceptance.

The curriculum of the program. The program used dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), which “focuses on teaching people strategies to help them live their best and most productive life. DBT is often used to help people with depression, anxiety, borderline personality disorders, addictions, eating disorders and post-traumatic stress syndrome.” (<https://dialieticalbehaviortherapy.com>)

DBT aims to help develop four skills that help with problem solving. (1) The core skill—mindfulness—is being able to non-judgmentally observe yourself and your surroundings, and . . . to become more aware of physical and mental triggers that cause runaway emotions.” (2) Distress tolerance – the ability to deal with painful situations. (3) Emotion Regulation – recognizing when emotions are unproductive and how to change

them to more productive ones. And (4) Interpersonal Skills – to get more out of relationships.

Each person's counselor identifies their client's main problem and specific goals to be achieved during the 12-weeks while learning those four core skills. My problem was stated as: struggling with negative and self-critical thoughts and isolation. My goals were: To feel positive and confident, to feel happy again, and to get my life back. To do that, I needed to increase self-compassion, learn healthy coping skills and identify opportunities to be productive and self-disciplined.

I did not know it but God led me to just what I needed. Each technique I learned was actually rooted in Bible principles. Portions of the remainder of this book illustrate how taking the medicine of God's Word developed each of these skills and habits. At first, though, I relied heavily on notes from class sessions for the step-by-step application in real life of what I learned. Below is a summary of the skills.

- "Mindfulness and early identification of negative emotions and unstable, wildly fluctuating moods (labiality).
- Distress tolerance skills, including ability to tolerate painful emotions and urges without acting on them and/or making the situation worse.
- Radical acceptance to decrease emotional suffering.
- Relaxation and self-soothing techniques.
- Interpersonal effectiveness.
- Positive coping skills.
- Increased awareness of early warning signs of intense emotions and ability to manage behavior.
- Emotional regulation techniques to decrease vulnerability to negative emotions and mood labiality and increase positive events and emotions."

The hidden roots of shame. Group therapy format provided a ready-made group of "friends", however temporary, who gave the support and companionship for which I was starved. They also provided the listening ears I needed to do some of the healing work. The first major healing work was exposing shame, shame concealed at the very core of my being.

I was ashamed of who I was, at the most fundamental level. This had been Satan's hot poker. With all that shame, I could not experience God's love in its fullness. I was a living illustration of the verse "He who fears is not made perfect in love, because love has to do with torment." (1 John 4:18).

Evening by evening, comfort with the group increased and I was able to voice my shame and embarrassment about being so depressed so long. As others described their own struggles, shame began shrinking, though it was a long process. God began by peeling back the layers. The first layer that came off was realizing and then, with

choking tears, telling the group I did not like myself and that I was deeply ashamed about even that.

A day later, again with choking pain, “I do not like who I have become, this passive, negative, fearful, self-focused person with no friends, a cluttered house and who is not doing the writing God called her to do. That’s not the real me.”

In a good support group, such as the one I was in, members give feedback after one member has shared thoughts and feelings. Members get to know each other and, hopefully, say the same things a kind friend would say, good and truthful things that counteract the lies that Satan and the mental upheaval hiss into your mind. Fairly quickly, because I was honest, group members knew the basic facts of my history. So, they could remind me when I said, for example, that I felt like a failure, that I was a successful and loving single parent who had done some courageous things and who was devoted to God and helping others.

Gradually, as group members reminded me of the truths about myself that they had heard through those long three-hour evenings, feelings about myself began changing. One night, when sharing some negative self-thoughts, I said, “But I do like who I really am, the single parent who did a great job raising her daughter entirely alone, who went back to school and got an excellent job, who loves God and serves others and is a devoted writer and researcher, and who gives so much of herself to her family.”

God knows the seasons. God’s timing is perfect. On the night the counselor taught about “Core beliefs” that can lead to negative emotions, one phrase she diagrammed on the white board was: “I am bad/I am not worth anything.” Those words riveted my eyes back to the whiteboard as truth stirred deep inside, way deep. I kept staring and frowning and taking notes for the remaining 30 minutes of teaching that Tuesday night. I knew I must share with the group what I was understanding but that it would have to wait until tomorrow.

Through the twenty-minute drive home that night over the night-dark expressway and through the next day, I kept hearing “When you have a core feeling of shame, the antidote is to talk about it, although that is the last thing you feel like doing.” How I wanted to get free! I sensed then what I would learn later – that shame is extremely hard to detect and eradicate because it hides and it thrives in secrecy. Shame is one of Satan’s most effective weapons.

So, the next night, I was the first person to speak during check-in, that initial hour of the evening when we talked about our day and received feedback. I kept my eyes fixed on the floor, stopping often to blow my nose.

“After all those years of good counseling, I have realized I have a problem with shame,” I gritted out, “and it hurts to admit that. I am ashamed of feeling ashamed. I know where it all started . . . “

I felt the familiar tightening between my eyebrows that always accompanied talking about my earliest years. I kept going, forcing the painful words out, because I had read—and knew with all my heart—that the way to break the power of shame was to expose and talk about it.

“Because of how my mother talked to me, how she yelled and criticized and nothing was ever good enough no matter how hard I tried . . . “ I paused, pushing against the tightness in my chest as the feelings of those earliest years constricted my throat.

“She always called anything that was messy or dirty ‘filthy’ and if I got dirty she would say ‘Look at your hands! You are filthy!’ I can still hear the anger in her voice and see the rage on her face.

“I think that became how I thought of myself. I think the source of the feeling that whatever I do, it is never good enough or clean enough, like how I keep house and . . . “ another long struggling for breath pause again “. . . how I do my whole life.”

“I guess that is why I don’t like myself and I guess I am . . . ashamed of who I am . . . “ Tears gushed down my cheeks “. . . and why I feel inferior to everyone and why I don’t think anyone really, truly likes me for who I really am. That’s probably why my daughter is the only person I have ever been truly comfortable with.”

I lifted anguished eyes to the counselor.

“I don’t understand why it hurts so much to talk about it,” I squeezed out.

“Shame thrives in secrecy,” she said. Later, I would understand that that is why God tells us, commands us, to confess our sins, one to another as well as to Him.

I looked back down at the worn turquoise and black carpet where it met the pale blue walls, at the five pairs of feet belonging to my group-mates, we who—by virtue of having been transparent and vulnerable with one another these weeks as we sat in this windowless room illuminated by pole lamps in each corner that never quite eliminated the darkness as overhead lights do—we who now knew some of one another’s most deeply held pains, fears and, yes, shame.

I looked back at the counselor. “Whatever it takes, I’m going to do it to get rid of this feeling. I am so tired of it and . . . “ Long, patient, compassionate silence ensued as I struggled to force words through my clenched throat and kept swallowing over and over.

Finally, “I am ashamed that I have lived all my life with this feeling and I could not stop it. I am embarrassed by that.”

A long silence as I kept staring at the feet of the five people in my group: the brown boots of the attorney, the sock feet of the college student whose fiancée had broken up with him, the tennis shoes of the teacher whose depression had required a leave of absence, the lime green flip flops on the twenty-something who struggled with anorexia, and the ballerina flats of the grandmother who had just been discharged from a mental hospital. In fact, three of the five had recently been an in-patient in a mental hospital.

“I have not been in a mental hospital,” I thought, “But I know these people understand depression and anxiety. They have all described feelings and problems just like mine. And I know they accept me, just like I am, in the middle of all these feelings.”

I could not lift my head to meet their eyes, but I did manage to continue, catching the threads of what I had said before..

“I think it came from my Mother, from her criticism and her yelling at me so much. I think that’s where I began thinking bad about myself and not liking myself. I always

remember her yelling at me because I did not dust or wash dishes or do anything good enough. She'd say,

'Freda Sue, that is filthy! You never get anything clean. Do it again!' Filthy was her word for anything that was disgusting and dirty, like garbage or unwashed hands."

My hands shook as I listened to the truthful, encouraging feedback and statements of fact from the group and the counselor. I learned more about shame over the next few weeks but I had to approach it slowly, reading a few minutes at a time. The pain of exposing those deep wounds to light was intense.

Light and truth always cast out darkness and lies. One evening, after a church service, as I sat and wrote out my feelings with God, I saw how shame had operated in my life – and why it "hid itself" as soon as any bit of it was exposed. I understood that the Word of God, truth itself, the light that comes from God's love and acceptance destroys shame.

That night, I sat and wrote with God a long time. He gave deep understanding of how shame had operated in my life. And I saw that shame was the cause when I felt anxious, and had that floaty, all too familiar feeling of fear that something was going to go wrong. Shame and fear made me keep checking my feelings and made me fret about the hour, the day, the week, the month ahead. Because it was deep inside, at the very core of my being, shame was sending out its painful lies, those tormenting lies I had heard my entire life.

I paused and stared into the darkness of the window by the rocker.

The lies shame screams at you. "Yes," I reflected, "Shame has been putting lies in my mind all my life, lies like: *"You're not loved. No one sees you. You are not acceptable. You are all alone and unwanted and always will be, so you must think about everything in this day ahead and everything in your entire life. You must work hard to be perfect and to get what you need because no one else will give you what you need. And no one will take care of your feelings so you must work hard and do everything right so you will feel good about yourself. That is your only hope. You must keep yourself safe at all costs and that includes never saying how you really feel or think. You can never trust anyone because they don't really love you and they don't really want you."*

With each sentence, I saw clearly that the lies had come from Satan. No wonder I had become depressed over and over! The heavy burden of poison had been a constant, stressful burden that had destroyed hope. The lies Satan imprinted had created feelings of insecurity, self-hate and inferiority. The only cure was God's truth, love, forgiveness, and overwhelming, unconditional acceptance. Oh, the depths of the riches of God's mercy and lovingkindness!

Our God of unbounded love, endless mercy, and fathomless compassion.

God had given me the consequences of my rebellious refusal to trust Him first, but our great God is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and loving kindness.” (Psalm 103:8, AMPC) He knew what had to happen, which was pulling out the roots of shame, pride, and rebellion. The plowing up and exposing those roots had been wrenching. However, God controlled each moment, and nothing happened that brought long-lasting *harm*. Even while in deepest pain, He supplied what was needed with medicine and then group therapy. When those two things brought a measure of stability, He kept me functioning better, day by day, teaching me life skills I needed at that time and would need for the rest of my life. And He gave me hope, hope that I had lost during the long night of emotional upheaval.

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ISAIAH 30:18c and d. GOD IS JUST. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO WAIT FOR HIM.

ISAIAH 30:18C AND D. For the Lord is a god of justice. Blessed are those who wait on Him. Blessed (happy, fortunate, to be envied) are all those who [earnestly] wait for Him, who expect and look and long for Him [for His victory, His favor, His love, His peace, His joy, and His matchless, unbroken companionship]!

Comment: I believe the word “therefore” is implied after the phrase “For the Lord is a god of justice”. He will give us Himself, an unbelievable blessing, if we seek Him earnestly. He will do that because HE is fair. If we earnestly wait for Him, if we expect and look and long for Him - for His victory, His favor, His love, His peace, his joy, and His matchless, unbroken companionship – He will give it! How blessed we are when we wait for and expect His presence and His help. God IS just! He rewards us when we seek Him as He says to. Consider Hebrews 11:6:

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” NIV

In these and numerous other Bible passages, God encourages us to seek Him. Why? Seeking God whole-heartedly keeps us safe and, just as important--God longs for our love and companionship. Selah, oh my soul!

Isaiah 30:18 c and d. Hope! Oh, blessed, blessed hope! One morning, sitting in my rocker re-reading notes from the previous night’s group therapy, God shone blazing hope into the despair still lurking in my soul. *Subconsciously, I still did not think He would completely heal the depression.* But that morning, God highlighted the paragraph explaining that the habit of reacting with negative feelings could be replaced

with normal, healthy reactions. I read and re-read that passage every day for weeks. Faith grew every time I read those words.

I also shared it with a friend back in Florida with whom I had re-established a relationship. One assignment from therapy had been to re-establish communication with friends. Rhonda had responded with compassion, suggesting that we talk for an hour Sunday afternoons. Week by week, as I kept putting into practice what I learned, our conversations became more positive. Often, we talked while I was at the park with the boys, walking slowly along the sidewalk bordering the playscape, as the expanse of grass on the soccer field and the trees at the horizon soothed my eyes and I watched the January wind twist branches and bend the grass, snuggling my hoodie tighter.

Just knowing there was hope for healing, just that one spark, burned steadily brighter each week as I talked with Rhonda and each day as I texted with and talked with two other friends. I needed someone to talk with about the nuts and bolts of life and someone to suggest practical things, like “Just try to do three things a day” and “Tidy up one area each day, then maintain that while you do another area the next day.” God supplied the human companionship I needed.

God is indeed just and fair and His heart overflows--exceedingly--with compassion and tender mercies for those who follow Him whole-hearted and who whole-heartedly obey Him. God demonstrated that mercy in letting the depression deepen enough to make me desperate, in helping me get my life back in order, and then in giving me hope for true healing.

Three things a day was all I could manage for a while and tidying up was off and on. But as I did my best to apply what I had learned in therapy, to keep in touch with friends, and to study the Word the best I could at that time, life became more balanced. Finally, I began thinking more clearly. Then I was finally able to apply God’s Word, like the medicine it truly is, to areas that needed healing.

One fathomless blessing of loving God. Love for God had never wavered since first giving Him my heart in 1981. I never stopped wanting to be close to Him and to please Him. The way I had related to Him all those years before had been, although woefully immature, nevertheless whole-hearted. God is indeed just and fair. We are indeed blessed if we long for Him and His presence as our “first and vital necessity” because He will give us more of Himself. I had failures and seasons of doubt but I persevered in loving God the best I could.

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|---|
| We are indeed blessed if we long for Him and His presence as our “first and vital necessity” because He will give us more of Himself. |
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God now led along a new path, where the light of His Word and the light of His love would provide healing and greater awareness of His presence. We had, together, made progress upon “the dangerous heights of testing and trouble” and He was now bringing me into a spacious place.

God was girding me with strength and starting to perfect my way.

³⁰ As for God, His way is perfect! The word of the Lord is tested *and* tried; He is a shield to all those who take refuge *and* put their trust in Him.

³¹ For who is God except the Lord? Or who is the Rock save our God,

³² The God who girds me with strength and makes my way perfect?

³³ He makes my feet like hinds' feet [able to stand firmly or make progress on the dangerous heights of testing and trouble]; He sets me securely upon my high places.

³⁴ He teaches my hands to war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze (Psalm 118:30-34, AMPC)

I was learning to say with the psalmist,

I will be glad and rejoice in Your mercy *and* steadfast love, because You have seen my affliction, You have taken note of my life's distresses, And You have not given me into the hand of the enemy; You have set my feet in a broad place. (Psalm 31:7-8, AMPC)

At that time, I had no idea how deep and complete the healing would be. I also had no idea that He was working to fulfil the dream I had surrendered to Him, that decades-old dream of writing with and for Him. I did not know in those early winter months of 2019, that God's Word would soon start healing my heart to the root level. I did not know it but God was going to "teach my hands to war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze." (Psalm 118:34, AMPC)

Dear friend, God longs to do the same for you, no matter how often you have failed and or doubted, no matter how many mistakes you have made, no matter what sin you have committed. Why? Just a few of many reasons. . .

- God adores you (this fact is all over the Bible).
- God has no favorites (Romans 2:11).
- God always forgives if we confess our sin. (1 John 1:9),
- and nothing is impossible with God – nothing!!! (Matthew 19:26).

5

GOD'S WORD

ISAIAH 30:19-22. GOD ANSWERS WITH HIS WORD. Isaiah 30:19-22 declares that God answers His people when they cry out to Him by letting them constantly hear His clear instruction. God hides Himself and sends adversity and affliction when we reject Him and depend on the world. But when we cry out and learn from Him, our former idol worship becomes disgusting to us.

Two tormented years of depression had moved me to search my heart, confess and repent of sins I had hidden from myself. Until God made me desperate, my ears and eyes were those of an idol—unhearing and unseeing—because I was depending on the idol of self-effort and worldly ways, rather than God. *“They have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.” (Psalm 135:17-8, NIV)*

Once I could see and hear God, the truth of His Word began demolishing hidden strongholds of life-long lies. His Word planted in my heart began bearing the fruit of the light (Ephesians 5:9)

JANUARY TO MARCH 2019.

- Real healing began as I took God's Word like the medicine it is.
- Good fruit began steadily growing.
- I began writing again.

APPLYING THE WORD

VERSE 19. YOU WILL WEEP NO MORE

- Weeping ceased
- God's medicine bottle . . .
- . . . exactly where you need it
- More than going through a list
- The turning point - *focusing on needs, not fears*

VERSE 20. YOUR EYES WILL SEE YOUR TEACHER

- My eyes began seeing Him when. . .
- The Amplified Bible.
- Peter Marshall's style of note-taking

- Diagrams from God.
- It all came together with Isaiah 26:3-4

VERSE 21. YOUR EARS WILL HEAR HIM.

- My ears began hearing Him.
- God’s vocabulary--accurate definitions
- God’s laws--causes and effects
- Capturing context
 - A pause to reflect

VERSE 22. YOU WILL CAST AWAY ALL IDOLS

- Casting away idols
- Building on solid ground
- The blessing of desperation and persistence
- Dreams being restored
- Trusting in God

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ISAIAH 30:19 YOU WILL WEEP NO MORE

Isaiah 30:19 *O people who dwell in Zion at Jerusalem, you will weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.*

Comment: Consider Isaiah 30, verse 19 again. Hear the fervent voice of Isaiah in Isaiah 30:19. Can you hear him wail the words “O people” and “surely.” Isaiah writes, “*O people who dwell in Zion at Jerusalem, you will weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.*” The NIV says it this way: “As soon as He hears, He will answer you.” Isaiah is reassuring the people that God will surely hear them if they cry out to Him for His help.

As God’s mouthpiece, His vessel through whom Holy Spirit is moving to write down God’s Words for us (2 Timothy 3:16), Isaiah is feeling and expressing the intense longing of God to take care of His children.

ISAIAH 30:19 WEEPING CEASED. Little by little, starting during those two months of group therapy, came steadily increasing times of happiness as I struggled to get my life back, using tools learned in group therapy. Those tools—like taking time to comfort yourself when needed, stopping negative thoughts before they spin into toxic emotions, being kind to yourself when you fail--were healthy responses to daily life, responses we make when the truth of God’s Word is the controlling force in our heart.

Believers in the right frame of mind take time to rest and take care of themselves because they know God's yoke is easy. They stop negative thoughts because God's Word says think on good things. They are not harsh with themselves in failure, rather they are mindful God is just and fair but also an extremely tender, compassionate Father.

Though not there yet early in 2019, for months I had cried out to God for help, doing my utmost to obey Him. *He heard and graciously* used the anti-depressant medicine and support group like triage. The emotional undergirding and practical lessons from group counseling were a crutch while He retrained day to day habits. The medicine restored chemical balance in my brain, and the mental fog lifted. My ears were opened to hear God's teaching about the medicine of His Word. Perhaps because of consistent persistence—I do not presume to know—God *answered my cry for healing. He showed me how to take His Word like the medicine through* two Bible teachers and a particular method of diligent Bible study.

That is when heart-deep healing began.

“GODS’ MEDICINE BOTTLE” . . . I discovered Derek Prince's teaching because of another act of obedience. Earlier, I had joined two intercessory prayer calls, groups of believers who prayed together via teleconferencing, for our nation and our world. One prayer group leader also took personal prayer requests. After months of silent listening, I gathered courage to speak up though I was embarrassed for others to hear. (See how the enemy uses everything he can to keep us from blessings God has prepared?) The leader prayed for healing of depression, talked about taking God's Word like medicine, and suggested I read “God's Medicine Bottle” and other teachings by Derek Prince.

In “God's Medicine Bottle”, Derek explained that after man's medicine had failed, God's Word had healed his year-long excruciatingly painful skin disease. Then a new believer, he knew little about healing but in his desperate searching of the Word, he found Proverbs 4:20-22.

“My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. “(KJV)

Derek knew “health to all their flesh” meant the entire body and a margin note stated the alternative translation for health was “medicine.” He saw that “life and health are in the words and sayings of God”. When Derek decided to take God's Word as medicine, God said clearly, though not audibly, “This is My medicine I'm giving you. The directions are on the bottle. You better study them.” Derek saw four specific instructions in those verses: [1] Attend to My words. [2] Incline thine ear unto My sayings (or orient your entire being to hearing God's Words, lean close and listen intently), [3] Let them not depart from thine eyes. [4] Keep them in the midst of thine heart.

Derek began diligent Bible study three times a day, since that was how people take medicine. In a few months he was healed. In his priceless booklet, "God's Medicine Bottle," Derek devotes a chapter to each of these four instructions on how to study the Bible for healing: (1) Pay close attention; (2) Bend your ear; (3) Don't let God's Words out of your sight; and (4) Keep them in your heart. In other words, take time to study, really study, and to meditate and memorize. Incline *your entire being* to understanding God's Word, look closely and study intently.

As I began trying to diligently study, God led to another essential element of healing through the Word --- study in your areas of personal need.

. . . EXACTLY WHERE YOU NEED IT. The Bible teachings of Joyce Meyer had helped greatly throughout the season of deep depression and for years before that, but her repeated emphasis on studying the Bible in one's area of need helped most. She compared our need for precise application of the Word to the need for precise application of medical care. A physician does not perform surgery on the stomach for a diseased gallbladder nor does he prescribe blood pressure medicine for diabetes.

So, with a post-it note marking verses about fear in the concordance of Joyce Meyer's AMPC study Bible, I read each Scripture, one after another, and any study notes or commentary on those verses. Then I read them again. Initially, I did not feel much, but day by day as I persisted, going through the list of verses for discouragement, anxiety, emotions, etc. light began piercing the thick darkness cloaking my mind.

MORE THAN GOING THROUGH A LIST. I typed those verses and tried, but failed, to memorize them. I desperately needed them during the minutes and hours of each day, those minutes when the enemy, self or the world stirred up negative thoughts and feelings. However, I kept studying each morning and, following Derek's pattern, I read my list three times a day. I still struggled greatly with feelings, even though I now studied diligently (I thought!), and even though I used tools for daily living from group therapy, and even though the antidepressant had taken full effect.

I also tried, and failed, to remember lists of proclamations. I had long heard teaching on speaking the Word out loud and had tried, sporadically, to include this in daily life. One such time had been months earlier. Each morning I had listened to a podcast of healing Scriptures worded as proclamations. I typed those verses and now read that list as well as the excellent ones by Steve and Wendy Backlund (www.ignitinghope.com). But painful thoughts and feelings continued dominating my mind most of the day, and I could not remember verses or proclamations when feelings surged.

Through all this, God encouraged me with little improvements. So, I kept trying – still reading through lists of verses, trying to study them, following up cross references, taking notes. I went from list to list in the concordance, lists about fear, discouragement,

worry, anxiety. I read the list of verses that seemed strongest for me, three times a day and tried, vainly, to remember them when I needed them.

THE TURNING POINT – FOCUSING ON NEEDS, NOT FEARS. God began even deep healing when He motivated me into *truly* diligent Bible study. One day while looking up more verses about fear, Holy Spirit gave the idea to search for what I needed, which was peace, rather than how to avoid fear.

Before that, I must have subconsciously avoided thinking about fear. Studying about peace, though, was soothing. I wanted to dig deeper. As I studied about peace, I slowed down, trying to understand how to get peace and what it really was. I was finally giving proper attention to God’s Word, inclining my ear, giving my full attention to hearing Him, not merely reading a verse, then the study Bible notes, then the next verse on the list. Notes in study Bibles are a good start, but 2 Timothy 2:15 says God wants us individually to dig meaning out of the Word, not merely eat spiritual food others had labored to find. This is the diligent study—God’s medicine—God describes in Proverbs 4:20-22.

I was finally giving proper attention to God’s Word, inclining my ear, giving my full attention to hearing Him, not merely reading a verse, then the study Bible notes, then the next verse on the list.

God had the healing ready. God knew that only the medicine of His Word would demolish the strongholds of lies and fear that had caused depression and stolen much of the abundant life He had prepared. He was surely gracious when I cried out earnestly. *He longs to do the same for you.*

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ISAIAH 30:20 YOUR EYES WILL SEE YOUR TEACHER

ISAIAH 30:20. And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide Himself any more, but your eyes will constantly behold your Teacher. (emphasis added)

Comment: Lamentations 3:32-33 tells us “*But though He causes grief, yet will He be moved to compassion according to the multitude of His loving-kindness and tender mercy. For He does not willingly and from His heart afflict or grieve the children of men.*” (AMPC) Because God loves us, He disciplines us, as He carefully explains in Hebrews 12:4-12. No parent enjoys disciplining a child and when that child tries to change the wrong behavior, the parent is right there, encouraging and guiding every step.

ISAIAH 30:20 MY EYES BEGAN SEEING HIM WHEN. . . When I began truly diligent Bible study in the way God had planned for me, I heard Him speak through the Word, every morning. No more did it seem God was hiding Himself. No more did I wonder why Bible study had not healed me as it had for others. The particular way God led me to included three things: (1) studying as if I were in school, (2) constant meditation, and (3) using the Amplified Classic Bible.

From the very first morning I began searching my Bible—for myself—in my areas of personal need, God began renewing my mind

To diligently study the Bible, for me, is to study as you study a textbook for school. In class, the teacher has your full attention and you take notes. In diligent Bible study, you take notes on what God your Teacher says in His Word by either copying the

verses or writing them in your own words. You ask your classroom teacher questions, so you ask Holy Spirit questions. Then you reread and study your notes, to ensure you understand and are ready to use that knowledge on the test. The test for believers regarding our Bible study is how well we remember and can apply the Word we have studied during the hours and moments of daily living.

Besides paying close attention and taking notes, diligent study requires accurately understanding the words used as well as understanding cause and effect. For me, the Amplified translation of the Bible is self-teaching textbook that does both. Initially, the Amplified may seem difficult and time-consuming. I deeply regret that this was my excuse for many years. Because I did read a lot of the Word and studied superficially, pride blinded me to truth that I was rushing through Bible reading and study.

The test for believers regarding our Bible study is how well we remember and can apply the Word we have studied during the hours and moments of daily living.

THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE. So, what is the Amplified Bible? It is a Bible that “breaks the language barrier.” It is a word-for-word translation using the New American Standard Bible that also explains, or amplifies, the text and helps readers understand what the Bible really says. The Lockman foundation (which publishes the NASB and Amplified translations) describes the Amplified Bible like this:

Without sacrificing accuracy, the Amplified Bible uses synonyms and definitions to explain and expand the meaning of words in the text by placing amplification in parentheses, brackets, and after keywords. As a result, English readers can clearly and completely grasp the meaning as it was understood by the readers of the original languages. (emphasis added). Additionally, amplifications may provide further theological, historical, and other details for a better understanding of the text.”

(www.lockmanfoundation.org)

Just reading the Amplified slowly and thoughtfully is in itself good, deep study and exposes you to the true meaning of terms that the writer of the “Textbook”—God Himself—intended and which speakers of the original language would have automatically understood. I highly recommend using the Amplified Classic version.

When I approached Bible study using the Amplified version, studying deeply and writing the verses by hand, in a particular note-taking style (what I call the Peter Marshall style) and then studying those notes as if for a test – I began seeing my Teacher.

PETER MARSHALL'S STYLE OF NOTE-TAKING. This special style of note-taking simplifies studying in the Amplified and reveals deep truths. Re-writing the Amplified in Peter Marshall note-taking style lets you hear God, your Teacher, pause and remind you of what a word means. You also hear Him identify and teach causes and effects, how and why His laws work, and how to obey them.

Peter Marshall, Chaplain of the United States Senate and a beloved pastor, graduated to heaven at the age of 46. His widow, Catherine Marshall-LeSourd, published a volume of his sermons then went on to write more than 30 other books, which have sold more than 16 million copies. I read many of those books while God drew me toward salvation. Catherine Marshall explained how her husband often wrote sermon notes. It went something like this.

Start each sentence on a new line, at the left margin. When a sentence contains more than one clause, and you want to emphasize that clause, drop down one line and indent. If that sentence contains a third clause, drop down another line and indent even further.

This affects how your mind processes the thoughts. It slows you down, deepens understanding and helps your mind make connections. It draws a picture of the thoughts, thus activating visual learning. Paragraphs thus written convey more to me than ones written in standard left-to-right, one-line-at-a-time style. Having used this style for years when taking notes in school and during Bible study of other translations, it was second nature as I began studying out of the AMPC.

You can find an Amplified Classic Bible in bookstores and you can also find it on websites like www.biblegateway.com.

LIKE DIAGRAMS FROM GOD. So, that first morning, when I copied down Isaiah 26:3-4 in Peter Marshall style, *my eyes beheld my teacher*. It was like God standing in front of me, diagramming the meaning of trust, and *how* to trust, on a whiteboard. As I looked at what I had written, understanding was a near palpable touch inside my mind. I blinked, and with trembling hand, took another sip of coffee and looked at the verse again as I had diagrammed it. I had written my notes like those you see below.

You will guard him and keep him in
perfect and constant peace
whose mind

[both its inclination and its character]
is stayed on You,

because

He commits himself to You,
leans on You, and
hopes confidently in You.

So

Trust in the Lord

(Commit yourself to him,
lean on Him, and
hope confidently in Him) forever,

for

the Lord is an everlasting Rock
(the Rock of ages).

IT ALL CAME TOGETHER WITH ISAIAH 26:3-4. That blessed morning, my eyes ran repeatedly up and down, back and forth over the diagram, underlining, circling, drawing arrows. I could hardly sit still. Such clear teachings! Going slowly, phrase by phrase, word by word, I saw deep truths. First, God said trust meant to commit myself to him, to lean on Him, and to hope confidently in Him. No wonder I still struggled so with fear! I was trying whole-heartedly to commit myself to Him *but I was not leaning on Him*. I was not relying on Him and giving Him the chance to calm my fears of being alone, for example, by sitting home with my Bible. Instead, I ran over to see family or going to a coffee shop to calm my emotions. In those situations I was relying on family or the atmosphere of the coffee shop. I certainly was not choosing to be confident in Him. God was saying He would guard my mind, and that His peace could be complete and constant IF I did my part. Wow!

Seeing my Teacher. I sat, stunned, for a long, long time that morning, while birds chirped outside the window and minutes ticked by. I knew God was saying something vital. I knew God was going to let me see and hear Him more clearly than ever before. I got another cup of coffee and a pack of crackers and settled down to take each phrase apart.

Guarding and keeping. “You will guard and keep. . . “ How reassuring that God would not only keep me in peace but would *guard* me as well. To guard is to protect or shield from harm by keeping potential danger **away**. That meant God would not allow anything to damage my peace when my mind was focused on Him.

“Complete and constant peace”. In the next phrase, God said His peace could be complete and constant. Complete peace would mean freedom from worry about any aspect of life, precisely what I needed. Peace includes freedom from struggle and fighting. Phrases similar to “He was given peace from his enemies round about” appear often in the Bible. I heard God promising freedom from attacks of worry, or fear or any

irritation about life, including health, family, friends, finances, and the world. That would be complete peace. And, I reflected, constant means sixty minutes each hour, twenty-four hours each day.

“. . . *whose mind [both its inclination and its character]*” Hmm, I pondered. “Inclination of mind” means focusing one’s thoughts toward something. I reasoned that, as the earth’s tilt, or inclination, toward the sun causes day and night and seasons that produce fruit so our thoughts constantly tilted toward God and His truth, produce fruit. Such an inclination of mind leads to light and life and all good things whereas inclining the mind toward problems and, thus, away from God, darkens the mind and destroys life.

The character of the mind. Most people credit Ralph Waldo Emerson with this truism: “Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.” As character is shaped by what we repeatedly do and think, so is the character or quality of our mind shaped. God was promising that if I could learn to fix my mind on God and His goodness, rather than the negative things I had dwelled on so very long, He would change the character of my mind.

“Fixed on Him.” That would mean consciously, deliberately thinking about God whenever my mind was not occupied with something else, just as you think about someone with whom you are in love – constantly. You still carry on with the business of living, but your heart is fixed on your beloved. When your mind is unengaged, it naturally turns to God as compass needles turn north, flowers turn toward sun, and ears turn toward noise.

. . . *because he commits himself to You, leans on You, and hopes confidently in You.* Since trying to speak and meditate on the Word, I had been quoting only the first part “You will keep in perfect peace whose mind is fixed on You” (NIV) and forgotten the second part of the sentence. Now, studying diligently, not just isolated verses, I saw that peace requires a trusting heart as well as a mind fixed on God. It was a clear statement of cause and effect. The because in that verse demonstrated one of God’s laws or ways of operating.

I had hope now. I was seeing that if I did what God required as the condition, He would fulfill His promise. If I did x, God would do y! If I did my part of a promise, then God would do His part of the promise!

It was so clear that my actions affected what happened– that is, that if I kept my mind on Him, He would keep me in complete and constant peace. The power of that truth, and similar ones, changed me from victim to more than conqueror. In and through God, I had control over my feelings. No longer enslaved to them, I was finally free to live the abundant life.

So, trust in the Lord – commit yourself to Him, lean upon Him, and hope confidently in Him -- forever. The word “so” is another connecting word, meaning “therefore” or “for this reason”. That “So” after verse 3 means that “because of verse 3, do verse 4.” God was saying that trust is essential in this process of having peace.

“. . . because the Lord God is an everlasting Rock – the Rock of Ages.” That other connecting word—because—showed I should trust God *because* He is a refuge that will last forever. Later, I learned rock also symbolizes strength, but that first day, God led my mind to think what I needed most, which was refuge.

And these very same thoughts God gave that morning bring the same degree of near-palpable comfort this very day. Every time.

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ISAIAH 30:21 YOUR EARS WILL HEAR HIM.

ISAIAH 30:21. And your ears will hear a word behind you, saying, This is the way; walk in it, when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left.

Comment: I anchored my hope in Proverbs 3:5-6 early in my walk with God and had always kept trying to “hear” God better. Now, by His grace I heard *specific* guidance – through His Word.

ISAIAH 30:21. MY EARS BEGAN HEARING HIM. After I began truly diligent Bible study, I began hearing God teach me deep truths in His Word. God knows the heart. (1 Chronicles 28:9) *He knew exactly where to shine the light of Truth and stir up faith that would enable me to start believing He could really heal me.* Faith is “the leaning of the entire personality on Him in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness” (Colossians 1:4a, AMPC). God was helping me start truly leaning on Him and giving new and renewed confidence in Him as I diligently studied and He began teaching how to meditate.

All day long now I heard his Word in my mind and I sensed His guidance on how to live, I heard Him say do this, do that, don’t do this, this is better. Daily, I was hearing His comfort and hope as I learned more about what was truly diligent Bible study for me, things like for example, learning how God defined terms I had heard all my life. Simply pondering definitions given in the Word gave guidance on what to do. Holy Spirit “spoke” all day as I pondered definitions, causes and effects.

GOD’S VOCABULARY - ACCURATE DEFINITIONS. When studying, we (hopefully!) look up words we do not know; however, we often assume we know the definition when we do not. Through the AMPC, God shows me constantly how simplistic my definitions of His sacred vocabulary are. How God defines a word is clearly seen in the amplifications following a word. The Amplified is a like an annotated textbook or an in-person tutor reminding you, for example, of the definition of verbs and adverbs as you

complete a worksheet on the parts of speech. For example, see how God defines righteousness in Deuteronomy 6:25.

And it will be accounted as righteousness (conformity to God's will in word, thought, and action) for us if we are watchful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us."

God is saying that righteousness means "conformity to God's will in word, thought and action." Now, when I see the word "righteousness" this clear definition comes to mind. I am slowly learning God's vocabulary. Diligent study also reveals causes and effect, that is, God's laws.

GOD'S LAWS - CAUSES AND EFFECTS. As I diligently studied, day by day, I learned to pay special attention to causes and effects, those if/then statements indicated by connecting words like for, because, so, therefore, etc. Taking extra time to make notes in the Peter Marshal style also revealed cause and effect. It showed me what "because", "so" and "for" were connecting in Isaiah 26:3-4. Wow, oh wow!

Another example is Psalm 91. The "for [then]" in verse 3 and the {Then} in verse 4 tell me that all the promises of Psalm 91 are dependent upon fulfilling the conditions of the first two verses, which are "*dwelling in the secret place*" and "*saying the Lord is my Refuge, and my Fortress, my God; on Him I lean and rely, and in Him I [confidently]trust.*"

¹ He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall remain stable *and* fixed under the shadow of the Almighty [Whose power no foe can withstand].² I will say of the Lord, He is my Refuge and my Fortress, my God; on Him I lean *and* rely, *and* in Him I [confidently] trust!

And do you see the "For then" and the "Then" in verses 3 and 4?

³ For [then] He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.⁴ [Then] He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings shall you trust *and* find refuge; His truth *and* His faithfulness are a shield and a buckler.

In these verses, He told me where His correct "way" or path was, where He wanted me to put my thoughts through the day. He was saying to *abide*, or keep my mind on Him. I was *to say*, to remind myself as I lived daily life "He is my Refuge, my Fortress. He will keep me safe from danger and that includes those dangerous thoughts."

I was learning to study God’s laws, His ways of working, His “decisions for and judgements against particular lines of thought and conduct” (Psalm 119:7, AMPC) I was learning how to apply the Word, how to do my part of a “promise”. God led me right away to several verses that promised peace if I did my part, verses like Isaiah 26:3-4 and Psalm 91. Through clinging desperately to these verses like the medicine they indeed are, God’s Word continued renewing my mind and creating positive feelings.

Causes and effects became clear while diligently studying chapters and long passages.

Causes and effects became clear while diligently studying chapters and long passages. In the case of Psalm 91, I read and re-read and took notes on the entire chapter before I saw the truth that all the promises depend on obeying the first two verses. God clearly led me into what was diligent study for me. Part of that was always thinking about context. Capturing context became a regular habit.

CAPTURING THE CONTEXT. A cane pole might catch a single fish but a cast net gets all the fish in an area. A cast net has weights on the side that help it sink so as to catch whatever creature is in the netted area. Furthermore, you catch no fish if you do not know how to cast the net so that it opens and covers the area. Your net will hit the water in a wadded-up, fish-less tangle. God began training me how to make the net unfurl and cover the targeted area.

God wants all to be successful fishers for His truths. That requires casting a net wide enough to pull the context of a verse into your thoughts. Reading just one verse is like overhearing one single sentence of a ten-minute conversation. God wants you to correctly understand His conversations, or discussions, in the Bible. I learned to, at bare minimum, read verses before and after the one I was studying. Usually, I glanced over the entire chapter and an outline of the book of the Bible containing the verse.

Websters 1828 online dictionary says context is the general sense or structure of a discussion, specifically the parts of a discussion coming before or after the sentence quoted, or “the passages of Scripture which are near the text, either before it or after it.” If we still read the Bible on scrolls, we would have to at least skim the context to find what we were looking for. That thought was enlightening, and a warning, for me.

By the way, Webster’s 1828 is the best dictionary to use because it is from 1828, before so much of God was taken out of our culture and, thus, our dictionaries. Check it out. You will see that the 1828 version often uses Bible verses as examples.

Webster’s 1828 is the best dictionary to use because it is from 1828, before so much of God was taken out of our culture and, thus, our dictionaries.

Back to the topic of context, regrettably, our modern convenience of grouping verses into sections and assigning chapter and verse makes it easier to take God’s Words out of context and misuse them. God’s Word—and simple common sense—tell us that studying the Word correctly

involves more than plucking a sentence here or there. Would you approach a college chemistry textbook that way, or a recipe for lasagna, or the instruction manual for assembling playground equipment? Why then do we approach God's Word like that?

No more did I take one single verse listed in a concordance and then the next, which was often in another book entirely. For example, suppose I found a list of verses about safety, starting with Deuteronomy 28:6: "*You will be blessed when you go in and blessed when you go out.*" (NIV). That would bring comfort on my next long drive, but wait. Do I know to whom God made that promise? This promise, and those following, apply to those who fulfill the conditions of the first two verses of Chapter 28. Hear verses 1 and 2:

IF you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. ² All these blessings will come on you and accompany you IF you obey the LORD your God:" (emphasis added)

If I am not truly interested in what God thinks about this subject, if I only want to get something from Him, I will grab a cane pole rather than taking time to use my cast net and capture context. I will grab (to be accurate, I will only think I have grabbed) that one little blessing and then go on to the next verse on the list. Until I fully obey Him, I cannot "claim" those blessings.

I am a child, *sitting in a parked car in a garage, spinning the wheel and saying "Vroom! Vroom!" Like a child engaging in fantasy, I deceive myself into thinking I am going somewhere but I never activated the engine.* I simply cannot read part of an operator's manual for a complex machine and expect to operate the machine correctly. Humans, and life, are complex. I cannot read a sentence here and there in the Bible and think I know how to operate my life! And I dare not rely solely on someone else's interpretation of the owner's manual, either. Their insights are a help, but I must know the details myself.

Connecting words and phrases show how wide to cast your net. In paying attention to connecting words, such as because, for, therefore, whereas, accordingly, etc. *my ears were hearing Him* guiding my study. He showed me that words like these link statements or ideas together where the second statement or idea depends on the first. Connecting words reveal the if/then nature of God's laws and promises. They show what we must do to have the uncountable blessings He has prepared. Just as I cannot correctly understand what I read without understanding the context, I also cannot understand how God's laws and promises work if I only grasp the end of a chain of thought. I miss hearing God carefully, lovingly telling me what obeying and disobeying do and what will be the effect of my actions.

Verses 1 through 6 of Psalm 119 explain how to live an upright life, a life that pleases God. Verse 7 says I will be able to praise God with an upright heart "***when I shall have learned [by sanctified experiences] Your righteous judgements [Your***

decisions for and against particular lines of thought and conduct’]. (AMPC)

We learn when we experience consequences for our actions, when we experience God’s judgements for what we think and do, when we see the results or effects of breaking or keeping His laws. As we search the Word, seeking to understand how God’s laws work, we see our action was the cause that led to the effect, or result, we experienced. After becoming more aware of context, I developed the habit of going backward and forward from a verse, seeking to see where the condition for a promise was stated. I kept reading bigger and bigger segments of Scripture. What insights God gave!

God’s Word NEVER fails, although it APPEARS to fail when WE FAIL to handle the Word correctly.

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A pause to reflect. You might think, “This is getting complicated and will take a lot of time!” As for the former, with persistence these things became automatic, like looking before you backup a car. And yes, following these suggestions takes time and steady, focused effort. God showed me what diligent Bible study meant for me. And He will show you what diligent Bible study means for you. That might be much like mine or very different. Regardless, obtaining the healing, “medicinal” benefits of God’s Word requires diligent study. Proverbs 4:20-23 is just one of many passages where God tells us to study His Word carefully and to keep it before our eyes constantly.

Dear fellow pilgrim, I dare not presume to explain exactly how God works. I can, though, reverently state these Bible truths:

- God rewards obedience (Psalm 19:11, Deuteronomy 28) and He loves those who approach Him with sincere, pure motives (Matthew 5:8). I believe He rewards any sincere effort at Bible reading and study.
- However, God also says—many times—that we get what we deserve. *“I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”* (Jeremiah 17:10, NIV).

God does give us many, many things, but He requires labor for some things. Would it be fair if I rarely opened my Bible yet received the same deep understanding and blessings as one who regularly studies diligently? God blesses obedience (Leviticus 26:3-10).

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ISAIAH 30:22 YOU WILL CAST AWAY ALL IDOLS

ISAIAH 30:22 Then you will defile your carved images overlaid with silver and your molten images plated with gold; you will cast them away as a filthy bloodstained cloth, and you will say to them, Be gone!

Comment: Because of God's gracious teaching, I "heard" Him saying go left, go right", telling me clearly how to live, hour by hour. And I totally turned away from my idol of depending first on myself and my ability to use a worldly technique or to be in the presence of others to stay at peace and avoid fear. I now depended on God and His Word first. He was the Rock I turned to, my Refuge and my Strength and my Song.

ISAIAH 30:22 CASTING AWAY IDOLS. In Isaiah 44:6-23, God warns Israel about the detestable and foolish practice of making and worshipping idols. God reminds Israel that He is the only God: "*This is what the Lord says—Israel's King and Redeemer—the Lord Almighty; I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.*" (Isaiah 44:6, NIV). Then God says "*All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame.*" (v. 9) When we depend on idols, rather than God, we are blinded by the enemy and we are ignorant. ("Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them." Psalm 115:8.) When we give the substance of our life in the service of an idol—as when I depended on worldly methods to heal depression and fear--we will eventually be humiliated or brought to shame.

Isaiah 44:12-20 describe a blacksmith who makes an idol yet remains hungry and a carpenter who uses a piece of wood for fuel and the other half for an idol, bowing down to it and saying "Save me! You are my god!" (v. 17) God says that such people who make idols "*know nothing, they understand nothing (v 18).*" "*Such a person feeds on ashes; a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, 'Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?'*"

God then tells his people to "*remember these things.*" Why? Because we are His servants. God says, "*I have made you, you are My servant; Israel, I will not forget you. I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.*" (21b-22). Verse 23 is a command to heaven and earth to rejoice and sing because "*. . . the Lord has redeemed Jacob, He displays His glory in Israel.*"

How wonderful when God opens our eyes to the sin and folly of depending on the world! When I came to the end of myself and the inevitable painful end of idol worship, I saw that the thing I had done was detestable. After confessing my sin and returning to God, I considered God my only hope. I was obeying Isaiah 8:13:

“The Lord of hosts—regard Him as holy and honor His holy name [by regarding Him as you only hope of safety], and let Him be your fear and let Him be your dread [lest you offend Him by your fear of man and distrust of Him]. AMPC)

We offend God when we fear people and distrust Him. Selah.

We offend God when we fear people and distrust Him. Selah.

BUILDING ON SOLID GROUND. God’s truths built truth into my mind at the same time it tore down lies. All my Bible study, for forty years, had been building on a broken foundation. No wonder depression and fear stormed in so often! I had poured a concrete foundation on a plot of ground littered with busted up blocks and wood then, on top of that, had built three new walls and left one teetering, termite-infested wall. The wisdom of building on a solid foundation is the last subject in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew -7). Jesus taught the crowd

²⁴ “Therefore. . . “ (and the therefore referred to the passage before which taught about being a true disciple) “. . . everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” (Matthew 7:24-27, NIV)

Healing through the Word came one slow step at a time as God led to just the verses that would tear down strongholds of lies and change habits of heart and hand. I was depending on God alone before I knew it! It was like riding on two wheels of your bike with training wheels not touching the ground. You are unaware but your proud Papa---who is running right beside you—knows it. I was able to stay at home, in His peace, and read my Bible to calm down, rather than running desperately to a coffee shop just to avoid being alone with the fear and negative thoughts.

As I kept studying, truth replaced the lie I had believed for years that I would always have to cope with fear and depression because of my personality and my past. I now regularly experienced God’s peace as I kept my mind on Him and meditated on His truths. Verses I memorized were renewing my mind so that now, when fear came, the truth hidden in my heart guarded and kept me safe. Now, when negative thoughts and feelings started, I repeated out loud verses that reassured me, verse like Lamentations 3:25-16 (God is good), Genesis 28:15 (He is near), Psalm 27:14 (I can wait), and not fear (Isaiah 41:10).

Building wisely takes time and faith. It takes faith to spend the time needed to draw from a verse or passage the understanding God has lovingly prepared for us. “Light is sown for the [uncompromisingly] righteous and strewn along their pathway. . . (Psalm 97:11a, AMPC). Our human tendency is to rush on, like swallows skimming a lake for a few drops of water. We must settle down into the water and paddle around slowly, like water fowl coming into roost at sunset.

Human reasoning, and likely our educational experience, says the more we read the better. It is certainly true that the more of the Word we have in our heart, the better off we are. However, if our understanding of that Word is superficial, if we only read and never dig deep and study, and study diligently, we are building a house with flimsy balsa wood rather than the beautiful cedar God has prepared for us.

THE BLESSING OF DESPERATION AND PERSISTENCE. Desperation was a blessing because it (1) made me learn how to study diligently, (2) keep studying, and (3) helped me “accidentally” start meditating. God used difficulty remembering Bible verses to lead into the habit of meditating. This is so essential to the healing I experienced that it has its own chapter--Chapter Six.

Every path of healing is different. I sought healing a good while before learning about God’s medicine bottle. Then I studied diligently a good while before seeing results. People who knew my journey commented on my persistence and, indeed, I did persist.

So, I plead with you: Be persistent! “If we seek God, we find Him.” Jeremiah 29:13 says, “*Then you will seek Me, inquire for, and require Me [as a vital necessity] and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.*” (AMPC). Notice that God is talking about desperate seeking—inquiring for Him and requiring Him as your vital necessity and searching for Him with ALL your heart.

TRUSTING IN GOD. . . DREAMS BEING RESTORED. Psalm 37:4 says “*Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He will give you the desires and secret petitions of your heart.*” (AMPC) Wow, oh, wow, did God ever do that! I had not blogged or written regularly since 2016, when I learned about some minor heart conditions. I thought it was just a temporary break from writing but I blogged no more in 2016, managed only three posts in 2017 and one in 2018, the worst year of depression. In spring of 2019, when diligent study and meditation began, God nudged me back into writing.

Writing was and is the delight of my heart. For years, I had felt God’s presence when writing and finally, once again, I felt that same closeness as I began blogging again. And I also felt His presence when I studied diligently. Gradually, writing became as much Bible study as it was writing. Oh, what joy!

As for all the other hours of the day, emotional tidal waves grew less frequent and God gave grace to address the fallout of being depressed for months on end. In His

strength, I tackled one cluttered area of the house after another, meditating on truth the entire time. I resumed regular exercise and healthier eating. I still saw my family nearly every day and kept in touch with people. All of life grew brighter. God was giving my life back, richer than it had ever been. Through it all, hour by hour, day by day, I kept feeding on manna, on new passages of His Word.

These things happened, I believe, because I was leaning on Him FIRST, depending on Him and the power of His Word for healing, not trusting in my own effort and worldly methods. God was teaching me how to live the life described in Psalm 1. I was learning to live a life of meditation, the subject of the next chapter.

“And they who know Your name

[who have experience and acquaintance with Your mercy]

will lean on and confidently put their trust in You,

for

You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek

(inquire of and for) You

[on the authority of God’s Word and

the right of their necessity.]’ Psalm 9:10, AMPC, emphasis added.

Ponder each line above. Slowly. Do you see that last golden truth, that your need gives you a right? You and I both need God. And we need to depend on Him first, As we obey and try our best to trust, He gives us experiences so that we, too, can lean on and confidently put our trust in Him -- first.

I also continued using the many good tools I had learned through those long ago years of Al-Anon, as well as wisdom from the accumulated years of counseling and the recent support group. But I was acutely mindful they all were based on Biblical truth. For example, the Al-Anon slogan of “One day at a time” is based on Matthew 6:34 where, after telling His disciples to consider the birds and the flowers so wonderfully cared for by God even though they did not work. I also kept seeing my Christian counselor regularly. She continued to provide support, encouragement, reminders, and so much more.

CHAPTER 6

GOD'S WAY

Isaiah 30:19-22 . . . continued. GOD LEADS US WITH HIS WORD. God tells us to lean on, trust in, and be fully confident in the Lord with all the heart and mind, casting away all dependence on anything but Him (Proverbs 3:5-6). Only God can renew the mind and heal the heart so that we live out Proverbs 3:5-6. To reach that beautiful condition, the Word must be planted deep within the soil of the heart. That comes only by diligent effort that breaks up the fallow ground, deposits seeds of truth and then husbands those seeds unto fruitage. Part of this process is diligent Bible study; another part is diligent meditation.

At first, though sincerely seeking, I did not know how to diligently study His Word, but as I continued to cry out, this blessed One Who IS the Living Word taught me to diligently study and diligently meditate. He always pours out mercy and lovingkindness *“in proportion to our waiting and hoping for”* Him. (Psalm 33:22, AMPC) God desires that we walk in the way of habitual meditation, 24/7, as Psalm 1 clearly says.

January to March 2019 continued.

- God led to a lifestyle of meditation.
- God gave more healing, more strength, and more light.

APPLYING THE WORD

Isaiah 30:19-22 - Continued

Chapter Five showed how God taught me to do desperately diligent Bible study. Chapter Six shows how God taught me to desperately meditate. Both these processes were part of applying Isaiah 30:19-22. As I put the Word first:

- God stopped the tears,
- I saw my Teacher,
- I heard my Teacher, and
- I cast away all my idols.

It all happened as I began keeping the Word I had diligently studied in my conscious thoughts – all day, in other words as I began meditating diligently.. This chapter explains the what, why and how of meditation.

What is meditation?

1. Meditating on the move.
2. So, what is meditation?

Why do we meditate?

3. Meditation can heal your heart and your life
4. Why do we meditate?

How do we meditate?

5. Start with what you need
6. Practice and persist in your practice.
7. Diligent study first.
8. Then diligent meditation.

How does it work?

9. How does God’s Word renew your mind?
10. Meditate with the intent to _____?
11. Seeing God’s laws through “Peter Marshall” notetaking SAME AS C5??
12. In summary IS C11 HERE SAME AS SIMILAR SECTION IN CHAP 5???
13. What do you want your life to be?

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WHAT IS MEDITATION?

MEDITATING ON THE MOVE. *“The Lord is good to those who depend on Him, to those who search for Him. So, it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the Lord.”* Lamentations 3:25 and 26 (NLT).

I looked once more at the half sheet of paper, folded it in half once more so it fit into my purse, then walked out the door, repeating *“The Lord is good to those who depend on Him, to those who search for Him. So, it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. Lamentations 3:25 and 26. The Lord is good. . .”* As I walked down the stairs, my frayed blue and white paisley gym bag, the one my daughter Holly had used in high school, banged against my knee.

“Hmm..” I half moaned as stiff hips complained. *“Lord, thank You that I live on the second floor. That gives more exercise for the hips and low back. Help me, Lord, not complain!”*

A slight breeze moved cool morning air over my face as three chestnut brown sparrows flushed into the dense bushes bordering the sidewalk, chirping in chorus as they flitted from sight. I put my gym bag in the back seat, my purse in the front, pulled out my verses and read them again, slowly, before backing the car up.

“It is making a difference, Lord, it really is. Your Word pops into my mind so often now when the enemy shoots thought arrows of fear and discouragement.”

“The Lord is good to those who depend on Him. . . uh. . . “The Lord is good to those who depend on Him. . . uh. . . mmm.” Up and down the little hills on First Street I struggled to remember the next phrase. Finally, at the stop light, I glanced at my paper. *“to those who search for Him. So, it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. Lamentations 3:25 and 26.”*

“Ah! Yes, that was it! ‘The Lord is good. . . ’” During the five-minute sprint on the interstate, where there were no stoplights, I managed to repeat the whole passage in my mind. During the next hour of stretches, weights and recumbent bicycling, I repeated that passage and talked silently with the Lord about it.

“Well, Lord, that says to me that You want me to depend on You and wait for You, with patience, and to keep searching for You. So, how do I depend on You today, right now? Hmm. . . well . . . if I am depending on You, then I will not worry about . . . ”

So far from the mark before. God knows exactly how to guide each one when we seek Him whole-heartedly. He uses every aspect of life, for He controls it all (Isaiah 46:9-11). He used the desperation created by my extreme depression for my great good (Romans 8:28). How? Desperation to keep fear and sadness away created the habit of keeping the Word in front of my eyes all day long. I carried verses on pieces of paper whenever I left the house, like the gym scene depicted above. At home, verses were on every surface.

God also orchestrated learning the habit of slow pondering, another essential of meditation for me. Doing weights at the gym---necessary to keep my back strong--forced me to slow down between weight machines and repeat one phrase at a time, over and over until I memorized it, before going to the next phrase. I might not have done that otherwise.

God is full of mercy! In His mercy, God led in using the weapon of His Word. I had been ignorant of what God means by meditation and taking his Word like the medicine it is until He led me to “accidentally” do it.

Some reasons we fail to follow God's clear commands about meditation are:

- Meditation does not come naturally. Forming new habits requires discipline and self-control. We may not even know how important it is. How often do you hear about meditation?
- Our enemy knows how dangerous and powerful the Word in the mouth of a believer is, so he sets roadblocks using lies, distractions, and our flesh. How often I said, “I just do not have time” or “I just cannot remember” or “I tried but it will not work for me.”
- Pride blinds the eyes of the heart. 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns us, “So, if you think

you are standing, be careful that you don't fall!" (NIV)

- Also, comparisons blind us to the truth. How tempting to think we do well because we do more in some areas than others. We are unwise if we compare ourselves with others and use ourselves as the standard of measurement (2 Corinthians 10:12b, NLT). A piano tuner uses a tuning fork, not another piano.

I had to confess a very ugly, very bad attitude. I remember reflecting that constantly thinking about God's Word was for people "far out there" with God. Wow was I in danger! Fortunately, God convicted me, and I confessed and turned from that attitude. Now, I do the same thing I, regretfully, so long spurned.

SO, WHAT IS MEDITATION? To meditate is "to dwell on anything in thought; to contemplate; to study; to turn or revolve any subject in the mind." (www.webstersdictionary1828.com). Synonyms include to ponder, muse, brood, concentrate, be lost in thought, think deeply and carefully upon and--my favorite—to chew the cud! Cows chew their cud up to eight hours a day, chewing each mouthful 40 to 60 times so the grass will be digested properly and absorbed by the body. The cow eats the grass and, later, chews it. We read the Word, and, later, we think about it until it is digested.

Meditation on the Word changes us from the inside out. To meditate means to ponder and think about a verse or passage so long that it becomes part of you. Grass, properly chewed, becomes part of a cow. The Word, properly meditated upon or thoroughly chewed and swallowed, becomes part of who we are. The Word changes our innermost being. It renews our mind (Romans 12:1-2).

Meditation is NOT yoga. When we meditate, we do not repeat a mantra or focus on our breath or anything else that is part of yoga. We are thinking about and talking with the God Who made heaven and earth, the Most High God, and His Word to us. We are *purposefully thinking*, not trying to turn off our thoughts as in worldly meditation. We are pondering on, contemplating, thinking about God's qualities and His law – His instructions to us on how to live.

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WHY DO WE MEDITATE?

MEDITATION CAN HEAL YOUR HEART AND YOUR LIFE. *The power of God's Word can heal your heart whether your problem is addiction, anger, self-control, loneliness, depression, or fear. Then, as your heart changes, your life will change.* Hebrews 4:12 says God's Word is alive and full of power, and that it "judges the thoughts and intents of the heart." (NIV) That phrase means to me that God's Word in my mind enables me to discern, or to judge, whether thoughts and feelings are good or bad, true or false, beneficial or detrimental, holy or corrupted, whether they are from God or from the devil,

On my own, I often believe lies from the enemy. But God's Word in my mind enables me to replace those lies with God's truth.

and whether they lead toward life or lead toward death.

On my own, I often believe lies from the enemy. But God's Word in my mind enables me to replace those lies with God's truth.

The light of truth banishes the darkness of lies. The light of truth chases the darkness of lies away, just as dawn chases the darkness of night away (Proverbs 4:18). In the months of being deeply depressed and cowered down by fear, most thoughts were negative. The enemy and my downtrodden heart generated thoughts and feelings of hopelessness and discouragement, day after day. But, **as God's truth increased in my heart, lies and darkness decreased.** As I meditated on God's truths, truth occupied more space in my thoughts than lies. Gradually, truth became dominant, or foremost. You eventually make salt water drinkable if you add enough pure water. Really, it is more like a desalinization plant because the salt, or lie, is actually removed, not just diluted!

I heard recently that it takes ten seconds for your mind to process that something good is happening but only one-fourth of one second to perceive something negative. Think long and hard about that. That partly explains why the enemy attacks us with so much negative and why it is so hard to overcome lies we have believed about ourselves. It also suggests that it takes much time, careful thought and many repetitions of God's truths to demolish strongholds and to build up His fortresses of truth in our hearts.

The enemy builds strongholds in our hearts by telling us lies over and over. Hear something often enough and you believe it, Then, for you, it becomes true. Proverbs 23:7 tells us "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." If I believe I am just hot-headed and cannot control my temper, I will not try very hard. I will doubt that God can overcome that fleshly tendency.

If we keep walking in the light we have, God gives more. "The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day." (Proverbs 4:18, NIV).

The light of truth changes our habitual thoughts. I believe that is one reason God tells us, many times, to

think about His Word all day long. As we keep His Word in our mind, hour by hour, day by day, we begin to think about life and situations like God thinks about *because we have more of Truth about life and those situations in our hearts.* We start to walk in truth, to live in truth, to think like God and to act in more godly ways. Brick by brick, we can tear down those old strongholds the enemy built and in their place we can build strongholds of God's truth. How? By meditating on what God says about us and things in our life.

The light of truth reveals snares of the enemy. As we continue diligently studying the Word, treasuring up truths in the storehouse of our mind, we step into Satan's

snares less often, and strongholds constructed of his lies crumble. His Word in our mind is a lamp that shows us the next few steps to take, including snares in our path. His Word in our mind also shines light further down our path (Psalm 119:105). If we keep walking in the light we have, God gives more. “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.” (Proverbs 4:18, NIV).

WHY DO WE MEDITATE? First, God tells us to meditate on His Word. That is enough for me! Secondly, God promises blessings. Joshua 1:8 gives a succinct summary:

This Book of the Law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall **meditate** on it day and night, that you may observe *and* do according to all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall deal wisely *and* have good success. (AMPC) (emphasis added)

So God is saying that talking and thinking about His Word all the time will lead us to obey His laws and then—*because* we obey His laws—that will make our lives fruitful, and we will be wise and successful. This same promise is repeated in Psalm 1. Part of the godly life described in Psalm 1:1 is to “desire His law and find delight in it and to “habitually meditate (ponder and study) by day and by night on His law (the precepts, the instructions, the teachings of God.)” (paraphrased). If we live that godly life in verse Psalm 1:1 and meditate by day and by night—constantly:

- We will have constant supply (“like a tree firmly planted [and tended] by the streams of water”),
- We will do the right thing at the right time (“ready to bring forth its fruit in its season”);
- Our “leaf also shall not fade *or* wither” and we will be successful in all we do (“everything he does shall prosper [and come to maturity].” (Psalm 1:2, AMPC)

One more benefit of meditation is wisdom. Slowly read Proverbs 1 through 8. See how important wisdom is for the believer! Pondering verses 8:34-36 tells me that seeking and finding wisdom daily leads to life and God’s favor. To miss wisdom is to hurt ourselves and “court death.”

How God feels about meditation. For more proof of how strongly God feels about meditation, consider the entire sixth chapter of Deuteronomy. In the opening chapters of Deuteronomy, after wandering in the desert forty years because of doubt, unbelief and rebellion against God, the children of Israel were finally about to enter the Promised Land. At that point, in Chapters 1:6 through 5:34, Moses reviewed the history of God’s goodness to them---in spite of their doubt and rebellion--and he explained God’s law in detail.

In his second address, Moses urged the people to follow the decrees and laws of

God, repeated the Ten Commandments, and again urged them to obey God so that they and their children could prosper. Then Moses tells them that for God's blessings to continue, each must “. . . *love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*” (Deuteronomy 6:5, NIV).

Then the very next thing in verse 6 through 9, Moses explains how to do that—by meditating – all day long.

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9, NIV).

These verses tell me clearly that we are to think about God and His Word all day long, right in the middle of our activities of daily life.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 tells me clearly that we are to think about God and His Word all day long, right in the middle of our activities of daily life.

Meditating is part of loving God.

The fact that God's command to meditate comes immediately after His command to love Him with all our heart means to me that keeping His Word constantly in my mind is part of how to love Him with all my heart and soul and strength. Let's look at God's commands in these verses in more detail.

“These commands . . . are to be on your hearts.” If something is on my heart, it colors everything I do. When my loved one is sick, he is on my heart, in the forefront of my thoughts, all day long. I am preoccupied with his well-being. I cannot get him off my mind. That is how we are to be about God's laws. If I have been trained in the laws of good manners, those laws are *on my heart*. I will say please and thank you in every situation, all day, every day. It will be natural. If I have been trained in God's laws, they will be on my heart. It will be natural to live a holy life, to love others as I love myself, to show mercy, and so forth.

Impress them on your children. Israel was instructed to impress God's laws on their children. That means to imprint or fix God's laws in their minds. How to do that? By talking about God's laws ALL DAY LONG, which means at home and away from home, from getting up to going to bed. Then God says put reminders of His laws on your hands (so that as you reach out to do anything, you will think how God's law applies to what you are about to do) and on your forehead, symbolizing that your every thought is to be controlled by God's law. Furthermore, God said write them on your doors and gates so that you see them when you enter your house and when you come and go from home. That will be a reminder and a witness to your children as well as other people.

Chapter Six concludes by telling parents that when their children ask what the

laws of God mean, they are to explain how God delivered them from slavery “with a mighty hand” to bring them to the promised land, how He commanded them to obey all His laws and to fear Him so they would “. . . *always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.*” (V 24). Parents were to tell their children that “*If we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness.*” That way, when the children hear their parents talk about God's law and when they see the visible reminders, they will also remember that God promises blessings for obeying. God was working to ensure that each succeeding generation would give Him and His Word first place in their hearts. He put those words there for you and me, too.

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HOW DO WE MEDITATE?

START WITH WHAT YOU NEED. God wants you to use His Word to help you have an abundant life. His Word covers every need humans have and every situation we encounter. If your arm is broken, you do not put the splint on your leg. In the same way, you apply the Word where you need it. If you struggle with depression and fear, look up Scripture passages on depression and fear as well as the opposite, such as encouragement, peace, confidence, and joy. God will lead. The verses that helped me take those first steps out of the dungeon of depression and fear are given in Appendix B, God's Arsenal for Peace and Security. (Also on the Books and More page at www.wordsofhopeandhealing.com) Holy Spirit will lead you to the verses you most need—if you try.

God's Word contains all we need for life and righteousness. It is THE operating manual for human life. You will find verses about what you need—and you need those verses! You may already know what the biggest need in your life is. If not, pray and ask God to show you. Meditating on what you need gives motivation, and when you see your need starting to be met, motivation will increase even more.

PRACTICE AND PERSIST IN YOUR PRACTICE. Practice, even though you “fail”, until you find the “right” way for you, then persist in your practice. Meditation takes practice---and practicing the “right” way for you. Like learning to manage money wisely, developing the habit of meditating takes time and much practice. And you may feel like you fail many times along the way, even though you try desperately. When I finally began trying to study the Word for what I needed and meditating upon it, I failed at first. Be assured that the enemy will try to lure you away from meditating because he knows the power of the Word in the mouth and mind of a faith-filled believer. I hope the following list of reasons I failed at first help you avoid the same errors. So why did I fail?

- First, I was not diligently studying God's Word when I first tried to meditate. (More about that in a minute)
- Second, I had not allowed Holy Spirit to teach me the truths in those Scriptures and personalize them for me. That would have happened during diligent study.
- Third, I was trying to meditate on lists of single verses about my needs. I read those lists over and over but the verses would not stick in my mind. Again, I was not studying diligently.
- Fourth, I deeply doubted I could meditate “the right way” and I had doubts, subconsciously, about “using” the Word.
- Fifth, I did not know how to meditate.

Why those doubts (no doubt from the devil!) Why? First, I felt so inadequate compared to teachers I was hearing. Comparisons are dangerous. Don't do it! Second, I was a relatively new believer when the “name it/claim it” teaching reached its zenith. There is power in speaking and believing the Word of God with faith--OF COURSE!--

but unfortunately in that era the enemy led many believers, Bible teachers and pastors into extremes, into the error of trying to use the power of God's Word for selfish ends. This was also called the "prosperity gospel", and many believers, like me, backed so far away that we got off balance. So, when I tried to start meditating many years later, those same doubts remained. Subconsciously, I felt meditation was "using" God's Word for my own ends, but that is just what He wants us to do – when what we seek is in accordance with His will!!!

To succeed at anything, it must be done correctly. The biggest reason I failed was that I did not know how to meditate. I can watch one baseball game, then try to play shortstop but until someone tells me specifically to throw the ball to first base to get the player out, I may throw to second base. I may try to bat, but until someone tells me, I will not know what and where the strike zone is. There are steps, procedures, and rules to follow in any process.

Please hear me clearly, dear fellow pilgrim: I dare not presume to know exactly how God wants us all to meditate. I just know He does command us to meditate, and I know what did and did not work for me. Seek the Lord--for yourself---about how to meditate. God's way for you may be similar to mine or different. You will know it by the fruit, the result, of your efforts. However, you will have to keep trying, patiently, as God guides you into His way for you. And He will guide you!

DILIGENT STUDY FIRST. God faithfully directs our efforts to please Him. Only after diligent *study* was I ready for diligent *meditation*. As you just read in Chapter Five, in March 2019 emotional distress led me to sit down with my Bible and begin finding verses for myself, in the area of my needs. That is, I sat down with Holy Spirit and the Word—no writings by anyone else--and began looking up verses about fear and peace. I thought I was following God's instructions but I was just copying verses from the concordance or lists of verses someone else had compiled and trying to repeat them constantly. That did help but just barely. However, when I engaged in truly diligent study--for myself-- I was finally following God's instructions on how to take His Word like medicine (Proverbs 4:22).

Truly diligent study made meditation easier. Gradually, I began studying truly diligently. I read the whole chapter a verse was in, read it in other translations, followed up the cross references, and wrote the verse down in long-hand, and often the passage containing the verse, and made diagrams of it. I did that with each verse before moving on to the next one listed in the concordance.

For a few days, I felt little. But, desperation, so often a blessing, kept me at it. Gradually, I began hearing Holy Spirit speak through the Word. He put such clear thoughts in my mind as I studied, and I began seeing cause/effect linkages. As I thought about what God was saying—the if-thens—I felt hopeful about getting free. With hope, faith began to grow. Hope and faith produced strong motivation to keep those verses in my mind, all day long because when I thought about them, I was okay.

God faithfully directs our efforts to please Him. So, I tried,, desperately, to keep my mind on the truths I had diligently studied. I kept my little list of if-then verses with me all day. However, there were still hours when I could not look at my verses, like when driving, cooking, shopping, working, etc. That is when I began true diligent meditation– by Divine accident.

THEN DILIGENT MEDITATION. I never heard the term “diligent meditation” (though surely someone used it before) until I was struggling to write this. I vaguely knew that diligent meant hard-working, conscientious, and careful in one’s work, but taking time to look up synonyms turned on the lightbulb about what meditation really means. When pondering synonyms like meticulous, pain-staking, exacting, careful, thorough, and tenacious, I realized that God had, in His great and loving grace, taught me not only how to *study* diligently but also how to *meditate* diligently in the spring of 2019.

God led me into diligent meditation as I persisted in trying to memorize my special verses. **PLEASE DO NOT STOP READING** because I started talking about memorizing! I backed into *meditating diligently, therefore* successfully, precisely *because I was trying to memorize*, to keep the security blanket of my special verses wrapped around my heart. Both meditation and memorizing involve similar processes. So, if you oppose memory work or think you cannot do it, please let me explain.

Countless repetitions. In those first desperate weeks, with emotions so raw and mind so cluttered, I had to repeat each phrase of a verse I had diligently studied over and over and over again. In doing those countless repetitions, I was being meticulous, thinking about each word in the phrases I was repeating. I was being painstaking and exacting. I carefully and thoroughly thought about the phrases in a verse, and then the whole verse and why it was in the place it was in the passage that contained it. I was diligently meditating *because* I was trying to memorize those verses. And it involved countless repetitions. That is a necessary part of meditation.

Remember that **it takes ten seconds to perceive something good, but only one quarter of a second to perceive something bad.** To me that means that it takes ten seconds of really focusing on one truth – like that God is with me when I am with Him – for me to even perceive it, much less for it to sink deeply into my heart.

Remember that it takes ten seconds to perceive something good, but only one quarter of a second to perceive something bad. To me that means that it takes ten seconds of really focusing on one truth – like that God is with me when I am with Him – for me to even perceive it, much less for it to sink deeply into my heart.

I started the habit of carrying pages of printed verses with me everywhere – to the gym, the grocery, sitting on a park bench watching my grandsons play. I repeated a phrase over and over and over until I could say it. And as I did so, God always showed me what that phrase meant or showed how it linked to another one. Then I would repeat

another phrase over and over and then link the two together, repeating the two verses over and over. It sometimes took an entire week to memorize a long passage. Even getting one phrase firmly in my mind sometimes took an entire day, but I kept at it. And, praise God, once I had it “hidden” in my heart, I could think about that verse or passage all day long. Right away, those verses began popping into mind when dark thoughts threatened.

Below is another example of what a person’s thoughts might be while they are “diligently meditating”, for example, on Hebrews 13:5.

Let your character or moral disposition be free from love of money [including greed, avarice, lust, and craving for earthly possessions] and be satisfied with your present [circumstances and with what you have]; for He [God] Himself has said, I will not in any way fail you *nor* give you up *nor* leave you without support. [I will] not, [I will] not, [I will] not in any degree leave you helpless *nor* forsake *nor* let [you] down (relax My hold on you)! [Assuredly not!]

“Okay, Father,” I prayed, “that must mean I can be content in any situation, including still feeling depressed, still having such a struggle. That next phrase, that next promise from You where you said, “I will not in any way fail you or give you up or leave you without support.” You said you will not fail me in any way. That must include right now, having the strength just to walk through this next hour when I feel so afraid I just want to cry. You say You will not fail me in any way so that means You can keep me calm, and Ha! That is part of what Isaiah 26:3 means, isn’t it? It must mean that as, or in proportion to how I keep my mind on You, You will keep me in peace. . . and support means that you will give me support, or help, in every detail, including how to stay in peace when I take the boys home and come back to that empty condo . . .

Meditating and memorizing both help hide the Word in your heart. Meditation and memorization both involve countless purposeful, thoughtful repetitions.

It still takes countless repetitions before something is hidden in my heart. Think about it – to hide a treasure in the ground, you spend time digging a deep hole, shovel by straining shovel. So it is with hiding God's Word or planting

His seeds of Truth in your heart. *It takes effort.* As we repeat His Word by intentional, conscious effort, His Word, which is alive, carves out a place in our mind and heart and spirit where the Word will stay covered so it can grow. And it does grow, first a sprout, then a tree, then fruit!

Meditating and memorizing both help hide the Word in your heart. Meditation and memorization both involve countless purposeful, thoughtful repetitions.

The process of meditating is very similar to the process of memorizing in that when you memorize something, you repeat it over and over in your mind or out loud. The same holds with meditating – you think about a statement or a word over and over,

trying to understand it, asking Holy Spirit to show you. It is what we do when someone we love sends a message. We think carefully about what they said – because we love them and what they say to us is important.

I did not talk about “memorizing” at first in this chapter because I did not want to scare you off. Let’s not get hung up on terms. As you have just seen, I was not able to successfully meditate all day long until I began intentionally trying to memorize those personalized verses I desperately needed. So, I say meditate with the intent to memorize or else try to memorize and you will be meditating in that process. *Don’t stumble here!* Just take a verse phrase by phrase, think about what it means, and repeat that phrase again. Think about what each word means. Be patient with yourself and refuse to listen to any self-criticism or doubts about your mental abilities. Even if you do not get the verses memorized, you will be meditating and the basic thoughts in those verses will come back to mind when you need them.

For me personally, diligent meditation **is** memorization, or as close as I can humanly accomplish. God will show you what diligent meditation means for you. He will show *you* how to hide His Word in *your* heart.

Diligently meditating—constantly--gives us the chance to “practice” applying God’s Word. Many passages, such as Psalm 1 and Philippians 4:8, make it clear that we are to *meditate all day long*. I think one reason God says to keep our mind on His Word all day is that when we face situations we have trouble with and we remember to use the Word, we develop skill and strength in those situations. A coach can tell a batter “Practice hitting low, inside balls” but if there is no ball coming at him, what good will it do? Some skills must be practiced in real-life circumstances. Imagine trying to learn piano by practicing on a keyboard drawn on plywood or trying to learn to swim by doing strokes standing next to the water.

God knows we need genuine practice, so He lovingly puts us in genuine situations. We have real health problems, we have real unexpected bills, our loved ones really disappoint or hurt us. In all these, **IF** we have our sword in hand—if we have the Word in our mind--we will gain experience in battling darkness as we think and speak God’s truths about those situations.

I have found God consistently puts me into situations that provide real-life practice using whatever verses I am working on at that time. God is a good, good, good Teacher!

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HOW DOES MEDITATION WORK?

HOW DOES GOD’S WORD RENEW YOUR MIND? We act and feel based on Who controls our innermost being and what beliefs and truths are stored there. Our actions, thoughts and feelings are:

- primarily determined by Who controls our innermost being—God or Satan?
- greatly determined by our beliefs and the truths we know, and
- also determined by external factors (environment, physical health, brain chemistry, etc.)

The Word heals hearts because it renews our mind. Getting God's truth into our innermost being changes our beliefs. Then thoughts and feelings follow in accordance with those beliefs. Romans 12:2 operates in our life as God's Word makes our mind new.

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” (NIV)

What creates beliefs? Experiences in the world, innate tendencies, and the enemy can create beliefs about ourselves, the world, and God that are simply lies. For example, someone may believe “My life has no purpose.” If such a person studies the Word and starts filling mind and mouth with truths like Jeremiah 29:11 (that God has plans to give him a future and a hope), the light of the Word will penetrate the darkness of the heart and tear down that stronghold of lies the enemy built. In its place, the good seed of the Word, faithfully tended, will grow and produce good fruit. That person will begin believing God really does have a purpose for his life. Feelings change. The work of the devil is destroyed!

During the months of deep depression, I consistently had thoughts like “I am hopeless. I will never get over the depression and fear. It is getting worse. No one really likes me or understands me. No one is going to help me because they are tired of being around me. I am a failure. My life is ruined.” UGG!!! Thoughts like that bubbled up into conscious awareness—and created destructive feelings--because I truly believed those lies. The enemy had repeated them countless times in that long slide into the miry pit and many times before, for many years. But by diligently searching out truths for those specific hurts and continually thinking about and speaking them, God replaced each lie with Truth. God renewed my mind, and the truth—now my belief—bubbles up into consciousness during daily life.

For instance, consider the arrival of an unexpected bill. My old, unrenewed mind and heart reacted with “Oh, no! I can never pay this. I am not going to have enough money for food and rent.” But now several truths come to mind before fear can take hold, truths like “My God shall supply all my needs” “Nothing is impossible with God”. These truths are now my beliefs because I have meditated on them and God's Word has done its work deep inside, the work that He promises in Hebrews 4:12.

Exposing and judging lies. I believe it is accurate to say the Word goes into the subconscious mind, that “deepest part of our nature” where the enemy builds strongholds made of repeated lies.

For the Word that God speaks is alive and full of power [making it active, operative, energizing, and effective]; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the dividing line of the breath of life (soul) and [the immortal] spirit, and of joints and marrow [of the deepest parts of our nature], exposing *and* sifting *and* analyzing *and* judging the very thoughts and purposes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12, AMPC)

Holy Spirit uses the Word as the sharp spiritual sword it is to penetrate your inmost being. God's truth and the light that comes from His Word:

- exposes the lies you believed about something,
- sifts through lies so that your most important beliefs about that something become visible
- analyzes, carefully examines the now exposed details of that something,
- and finally judges, or forms an opinion about, that something, and you decide whether that something is true.

This is how strongholds of darkness are demolished and strongholds of truth established in their place. As I study and meditate on verses like "I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13) and "Nothing will be impossible with God. (Matthew 19:26, ESV), I start to believe I can control my temper, and I try to do so. As I have a few successes and keep meditating and believing God's Word, my beliefs and behavior both will change.

I know, from experience, that the enemy flees as I speak the Word of truth. My innermost feelings and beliefs about everything are daily being made new as I take up my spiritual weapons. With God-given power to resist the devil, the world, and my flesh, I am shaken from a stance of faith far less often and only until I get my mind back on God and His Word. That is a miracle.

As food changes the body, the Word changes and heals the heart.

As food changes the body, the Word changes and heals the heart. When we chew food then digest it, that food becomes part of our body. It changes the composition of our body, with both immediate and long-term effects. When you feed a starving person, light-headedness and weakness go away. With enough food, that starvling gains strength. When we eat the Word, by chewing on it (meditating!), then digesting it, that Word becomes part of our innermost being. It changes the quality of heart and mind. That truth that is now part of our heart equips us to live like God says. That truth also garrisons our heart.

MEDITATE WITH THE INTENT TO . . . ? MEMORIZE! YES, I ACTUALLY SAID MEMORIZE. Unfortunately, some say "You don't have to memorize. God understands if you just can't." I emphatically disagree! Nothing is impossible for God! Ask and He will help you. And then give it your whole-hearted effort – and do not quit until you see fruit! ***If*** you diligently meditate, you will come close to memorizing anyway. So, press on a bit as you meditate and get those truths hidden in your heart where the enemy can never

steal them and so that they can lead you out of any darkness you stumble into

God's Word in your mind, a bodyguard. Having what God's Word says about life's situations available in memory is powerful. Having God's Word in your heart is having a Gibraltar of a body guard *for your heart* 24/7. With the Word planted in your mind, Holy Spirit, our perfect Guardian and Protector, brings Scriptures to mind when needed.

Truth keeps the enemy out of your mind. The deceiver may shoot flaming arrows of all kinds, but even the worst of his thought arrows bounce, harmless, off the shield of Truth. As described earlier, if you ponder on one verse a day, phrase by phrase, going over each phrase many times during that day, you will nearly have it memorized. If it is not fixed in memory during that day, focus on that same verse another day and another if needed.

Memorizing, or nearly memorizing, God's Word weaves it into the fabric of our very being so that it guides our actions. A child who has been told often enough to "Say thank you" finally starts doing so automatically. Hiding God's Word in our heart works the same way. It helps keep us acting as God wants. Hiding His Word in our heart keeps us living as God desires (Psalm 119:11) And do not stress about getting the words perfect. You will still have the basic truth planted in your mind and heart if you switch a few words around or leave part of a phrase out. If you are trying to get His Word in your heart, God will guide you. In Jeremiah 1:12b, God says "I am alert and active, watching over My word to perform it." (AMPC)

How the Amplified helps. As you try to memorize, you are actually **diligently** meditating, being thorough and pain-staking, paying attention. The Amplified helps because the "extra" words and phrases automatically make you dive deep into the meaning of each word and phrase if you read it slowly and carefully. As we said in Chapter Five, the Amplified uses the New American Standard text, including clarifying details, after certain words or phrases. These details make clear shades of meaning speakers of the original language would have automatically understood. These "amplifications" are enclosed within parentheses, brackets, and dashes. They intensify the meaning. They explain it like a teacher explaining a new idea or word.

Reading the AMPC slowly and thoughtfully is indeed one way to meditate almost automatically. When you meditate on anything, you are thinking about, pondering, considering, trying to understand what someone said or someone wrote. You think about that one thing they said over and over, wondering "What did he mean when he said that?" When you read the Amplified, you are thinking through the shades of meaning in the words God used. You are thinking "What did God mean in this verse?"

This slows the mind down. (Remember it takes ten seconds to perceive something good is happening?) Slowing down also guides the thought process so that your ponderings come closer to how God thinks. For example. If I meditate on Isaiah 26:3 in the NIV or the NKJ, I will come up with my own ideas about what "perfect peace" and a "steadfast mind" and "trust" mean, but the amplifying words are, I believe, the first

thoughts we should dwell on because they represent levels of meaning that God intended when He inspired the writers of Scripture.

In using the Amplified, I believe you are thinking more like God thinks because your mind is hearing the full meaning of the words in the original language. If you keep steadily meditating/memorizing, you will find that when thinking about Biblical terms, such as blessed, the full original meaning comes to your mind. For example, when you read that we are to “Bless (affectionately and gratefully) praise God” in Psalm 103, Holy Spirit will remind you that “blessing God” includes “affectionately and gratefully praising Him” whenever you see or think about this phrase. I never heard that until I read it in the Amplified.

In using the Amplified, I believe you are thinking more like God thinks because your mind is hearing the full meaning of the words in the original language.

Additionally, the Amplified makes cause/effect or if/then statements clear. So does diligent meditation.

SEEING GOD’S LAWS THROUGH “PETER MARSHALL NOTE TAKING”. What can also be called if/thens or cause/effect statements are actually God’s laws. These could also be called His promises. I began diligently meditating (which for me is memorizing) passages where I saw God promise that if I did x, then y and z would follow. For example, as described in Chapter Five, if I fulfilled the conditions of the first two verses of Psalm 91, then I would receive the blessings of the rest of the psalm. This is also a statement of cause (my obedience) and effect (God’s reward for that obedience). And it is a law because it shows how God says things work and the consequences--“His decisions against and for particular lines of thought and conduct.” (Psalm 119:7, AMPC)

If I obey the laws of my city, the city police will protect me. If I disobey, or break the law, by for example, driving dangerously, the city police might give me a ticket or put me in jail. If we clearly understand God’s laws, that understanding will guide our conduct. One way to find and highlight God’s laws is to diagram these if/thens. The Peter Marshall method of note taking helps to diagram the Amplified text, as we talked about in Chapter Five.

As you will recall, to use this style of note-taking, start a new line with each main idea and with each added point about that idea, indent again. You can break a passage down based on whole sentences or in more detail, as the Lord leads YOU. Here is an example, again using Isaiah 26:3-4 (AMPC.)

[3] “You will guard him and keep him
in perfect and constant peace
whose mind
[both its inclination and its character]
is stayed on you,

Because

*he commits himself to You,
leans on You and
hopes confidently in You.*

[4] **So,**

Trust in the Lord
(commit yourself to Him,
lean on Him,
hope confidently in Him)

for

the Lord God is an everlasting Rock
[the Rock of Ages].

(emphasis added)

Do you see the causes and effects, the words that diagram the if/thens—“because”, “so”, and “for”? Do you see how the phrases after “trust in the Lord” in verse 4 explain what God means when He says trust? To God, trust means to commit yourself to Him, to lean on Him, and to hope confidently in Him. Indenting each amplification highlights definitions like this given in the text.

Taking time to diagram verses or passages this way shows me how to apply the Word and also helps me remember it more easily. Gazing at the diagram imprints it in the mind.

Please give this kind of note-taking and meditation an earnest and diligent try. Do not fret if it feels awkward at first. Do not worry you might get it wrong. There are many ways to diagram any verse or passage. *It depends on what Holy Spirit is showing you at that moment.* Holy Spirit is your teacher and He loves it when we seek to study His Word diligently. Would a human father not teach his child how to toss a ball? Would he not smile when the child catches the ball, after five misses? How much more must our loving Heavenly Father rejoice as we learn to meditate! We are taking time to be with Him. That delights His heart.

IN SUMMARY – A PROMISE OF GOLD. Before we resume the story, let me give one more nudge toward trying to meditate-with-intent-to-memorize. (Please remember you do not have to get a verse memorized perfectly.) Let me nudge you with a promise of pure gold from God: if you approach His Word like He says, *studying the Word will become very pleasant to you.* Slowly, carefully read all of Proverbs 2 below and see what else Holy Spirit shows you. God says to us:

. . . **if** you will receive my words and treasure up my commandments within you,
² **Making** your ear attentive to skillful and godly ^[a]Wisdom and inclining and directing your heart and mind to understanding [applying all your powers to the quest for it];

³ Yes, **if** you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding,

⁴ **If** you seek [Wisdom] as for silver and search for skillful and godly Wisdom as for hidden treasures,

⁵ **Then** you will understand the reverent and worshipful fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of [our omniscient] God.

⁶ **For** the Lord gives skillful and godly Wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.⁷ He hides away sound and godly Wisdom and stores it for the righteous (those who are upright and in right standing with Him); He is a shield to those who walk uprightly and in integrity, ⁸ **That** He may guard the paths of justice; yes, He preserves the way of His saints.

⁹ **Then** you will understand righteousness, justice, and fair dealing [in every area and relation]; yes, you will understand every good path. ¹⁰ **For skillful and godly Wisdom shall enter into your heart, and knowledge shall be pleasant to you.**

¹¹ **Discretion shall watch over you, understanding shall keep you,** ¹² **To deliver you** from the way of evil and the evil men, from men who speak perverse things and are liars, ¹³ Men who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, ¹⁴ Who rejoice to do evil and delight in the perverseness of evil, ¹⁵ Who are crooked in their ways, wayward and devious in their paths.

¹⁶ **[Discretion shall watch over you, understanding shall keep you] to deliver you** from the alien woman, from the outsider with her flattering words, ¹⁷ Who forsakes the husband and guide of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God. ¹⁸ For her house sinks down to death and her paths to the spirits [of the dead]. ¹⁹ None who go to her return again, neither do they attain or regain the paths of life.

²⁰ **So** may you walk in the way of good men, and keep to the paths of the [consistently] righteous (the upright, in right standing with God).^m²¹ **For** the upright shall dwell in the land, and the men of integrity, blameless and complete [in God's sight], shall remain in it; ²² But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the treacherous shall be rooted out of it. (emphasis added)

WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR LIFE TO BE? The Word clearly says that the course of our life is determined by our heart. Proverbs 4:23 cautions “*Guard your heart above all else for everything you do flows from it*” (NIV). I have found that diligent meditation *guards* my heart but *persistence* in diligent meditation *builds a garrison* round about it. My earnest prayer is that you will find the same, in whatever way Holy Spirit guides you to diligently study and meditate.

Please note: Chapters Five and Six are long because they are the keys to healing your heart. Not only that, they are the keys to staying healed and moving forward with God. They must become life-long habits. God says they will become pleasant habits.

Ponder Psalm 1:1-3.

Blessed (happy, fortunate, prosperous, and enviable) is the man who walks and lives not in the counsel of the ungodly [following their advice, their plans and purposes], nor stands [submissive and inactive] in the path where sinners walk, nor sits down [to relax and rest] where the scornful [and the mockers] gather.

But his delight and desire are in the law of the Lord, and on His law (the precepts, the instructions, the teachings of God) he habitually meditates (ponders and studies) by day and by night.

And he shall be like a tree firmly planted [and tended] by the streams of water, ready to bring forth its fruit in its season; its leaf also shall not fade or wither; and everything he does shall prosper [and come to fruition]. (AMPC)

Do you see that we are to delight in and desire God’s Word? We are to ponder and study, His Word. That means 24/7. If we do that, we will be as fruitful as a tree planted beside water. Such a tree never withers because it has an unlimited, unceasing supply of water. Think about it. Without water, thirst causes human bodily systems to malfunction. Is it not clear that our soul and spirit need the Living Water throughout each day and night?

With God’s Word planted in our hearts, we have light inside, light that chases away ALL darkness. That light comes from His Word—the Living Word HIMSELF in our hearts--showing us how to live day by day, hour by hour. As God promises in Isaiah 30:19-22, He hears His people when they cry out to Him, and He answers by letting us constantly hear His clear instruction. If we are crying out to Him for help, we must do what He says to receive that help. We are told repeatedly in the Bible to diligently study and meditate on His Word. See, for example, Psalm 1, Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Joshua 1:7-9, Psalm 143:5, and Philippians 4:8.

As you diligently study and then meditate on what Holy Spirit has revealed, “*your eyes will constantly behold your Teacher; your ears will hear a word behind you, saying,*

This is the way; walk in it, when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left.”
(Isaiah 30:20b-21)

CHAPTER 7

GOD'S LIGHT

Isaiah 30:23-26. Unbelievable light while God heals and guides. God abundantly blesses our efforts to obey. As I obeyed what God revealed about daily, constant meditation, He trained my hands for war by building an arsenal of spiritual weapons, precisely what I needed for *my* particular battles. God will give you spiritual weapons---verses and experiences—perfectly fitted for *your* hands. Trust and obedience build up our spiritual arsenal and our fighting strength. While we serve God in this way, He heals weaknesses and wounds we did not even know about. As we persist, He sorts out whatever might have become unbalanced in our season of affliction.

March to December 2019

- I kept faithfully storing up the Word and growing.
- When the part-time job stopped, I wrote more.
- I heard God clearer than ever and became more aware of His daily presence.

APPLYING THE WORD

Verse 23-24. Such rich and plentiful blessings!

- Renewing the mind – Romans 12:2
- Living by faith, not feelings
- Daily, constant abiding
- Daily manna
- Daily thinking on good things

Verse 25. So much living water – everywhere!

- A servant's heart
- A servant's home
- The Master's daily work
- Avoiding snares
- The Master's assignment

Verse 26. Such bright light! Such healing!

- The bright light that comes from peace
- The wound God healed
- A balanced life.

ISAIAH 30:23-24 SUCH RICH AND PLENTIFUL BLESSINGS!

Isaiah 30:23-24 Then will He give you rain for the seed with which you sow the soil, and bread grain from the produce of the ground, and it will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will feed in large pastures. The oxen likewise and the young donkeys that till the ground will eat savory and salted fodder, which has been winnowed with shovel and with fork.

Comment. When we plant seeds, when we make an effort to grow and occupy the land God has given us—our own heart and our own life--He blesses our efforts abundantly. He sends rain for the seed we plant in the soil of our heart and our individual life. He causes our efforts (the seeds we plant) to produce richly and plentifully all that we need. He gives abundant space—large pastures—for our souls to feed in and gives us carefully prepared spiritual food, even as He gave Israel carefully prepared food for their oxen and donkeys. As you read this chapter, bear in mind that Isaiah 30:23 through 26 are all one thought.

ISAIAH 30:23-24. SUCH RICH AND PLENTIFUL BLESSINGS! *From March 2019* on I kept faithfully storing up the Word, one verse, one passage at a time. God abundantly supplied what I needed, blessed my efforts and gave the finest carefully prepared food for my soul as we worked. And all the while, He was healing the “wound He had inflicted because of my sin” (Isaiah 30:26b.)

Israel conquered one area of Canaan at a time, driving out the enemy and possessing the land in that area, then going on to conquer another area. Even so, each truth God rooted in my heart drove out the enemy in that area, then bore fruit that gave strength to reign in that area and go forward to gain more ground. God blessed the warriors of ancient Israel and fought mightily for them AS—in proportion to how--they depended upon Him. Sometimes He wipes out the enemy while we stand still and simply trust, as Israel did at the Red Sea. Other times, He fights with us so that He can train us. Psalm 94:12-13 says that God trains us so that He can give us the power to keep ourselves calm in days of trouble.

12 Blessed (happy, fortunate, to be envied) is the man whom You discipline and instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law, (13) That You may give him power to keep himself calm in the days of adversity, until the [inevitable] pit of corruption is dug for the wicked.” (AMPC)

RENEWING THE MIND. Healing depression and changing what had caused it was a spiritual battle. Before, in my ignorance, I had used spiritual weapons ineffectively. Now, though, God began training “my hands to war” (Psalm 18:34). He truly is “The God who girds me with strength and makes my way perfect, (Psalm 18:32 AMPC). In 2 Corinthians 10, Paul defended his ministry against those who thought he

“lived by the standards of this world.” Although he lived in this world, Paul did not rely on outward appearances or his own power. Rather, Paul depended on God, as did the successful kings and leaders in Old Testament times. In depending on God rather than things of the world, Paul used *spiritual weapons*. In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Paul said:

For though we walk (live) in the flesh, we are not carrying on our warfare according to the flesh *and* using mere human weapons.

⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood], but they are mighty before God for the overthrow *and* destruction of strongholds,

⁵ [Inasmuch as we] refute arguments *and* theories *and* reasonings and every proud *and* lofty thing that sets itself up against the [true] knowledge of God; and we lead every thought *and* purpose away captive into the obedience of Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One).

This is the process of renewing the mind God talks about in Romans 12:2. Paul's faith in God was a spiritual weapon and so were the truths he preached and taught. Deep healing of depression and fear began when I began using spiritual weapons – faith in God and in the power of His Word. The enemy had, brick by brick, built bad life experiences and wrong thoughts, into strongholds of false beliefs and attitudes about myself and the world. Some of those strongholds of false beliefs were: I will always be depressed; there is something fundamentally wrong with me; I will never feel loved and secure; and I will always feel inferior to others.

Those strongholds had to be overthrown and utterly destroyed. And God did that to the extent that I learned to contradict and prove wrong the old thoughts and every proud attempt of Satan that opposed “the true knowledge of God” (v. 5). What helped me learn to “lead every thought and purpose away captive into the obedience of Christ?” (2 Corinthians 10:5c, AMPC) What helped conform my thoughts more into the image of His dear Son? (Romans 8:29). It was letting the Word do its work of renewing the mind.

2 I appeal to you therefore, brethren, *and* beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service *and* spiritual worship.

² Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, *even* the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you]. (Romans 12:1-2, AMPC, emphasis added)

Romans 12:1 urges us to offer our entire self to God as a living sacrifice because this pleases God and it is the appropriate thing to do. Romans 12:2 tells us *how* to be a living sacrifice that pleases God, which is to: live a life transformed from the pattern, behavior and customs of this world and into godliness. Romans 12:2 says believers are not to conform, or adapt, to the world and let it shape us; rather, we are to let God transform, or change, us. *Conform* means to be similar or identical, to be obedient or compliant (Webster's 1828 online dictionary.) *Transform* means to change in composition or structure, character or condition; to convert. The root of both words is form, which means the "shape and structure of something as distinguished from its material." (www.merriam-webster.com). From one lump of clay, a potter makes a bowl but, before the clay is fired, the potter can trans-form that same clay into a jar. These vessels are as easily distinguished from each other as obedient believers are from unbelievers.

So how do we get trans-formed into vessels more like Him? By letting His Word make our mind entirely new. When we diligently study and meditate on His Word, the purifying aspect of His Word destroys lies and transforms, or replaces them, with new ideals and new attitudes which are true. The NLT says God transforms you "into a new person by *changing the way you think.*" When you change the form or structure of something, you change the way the parts that make up that thing are arranged and how those parts work together. *God's Word changes how your mind works. God's Word destroys the lies of the enemy as thoroughly as fire destroys twigs.*

God's Word changes how your mind works. God's Word destroys the lies of the enemy as thoroughly as fire destroys twigs.

Meditating on God's Word gave me entirely new goals as well as faith that I could, through Him, achieve those goals. His Word showed me that, if I followed His prescribed ways, I could have peace, I could be free from fear, and I could have a consistently joyful and meaningful life, no matter the circumstances. These were new beliefs for me. I had believed Satan's lies so long that they had become true for me. I began to understand the "good things" God has for us. This was the result of the "so that" in on Romans 12:2. God had new habits of hand and heart for me. One of those good habits was to, at last, learning to live by faith, not feelings.

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LIIVING BY FAITH NOT FEELINGS. Now, by God's grace, I was learning to live by faith, not feelings. However, victory was at first inconsistent and fleeting, like that 42-degree, cloudy morning as I stood with my daughter and son-in-law watching my kindergartener grandson, Ansel, costumed as Ralph S. Mouse and my first-grader Ben (Tock the dog), along with 200 other schoolchildren march around the freshly-mulched schoolgrounds for the Book Character Parade. Parents sipped coffee from go mugs and shared stories of last-minute costume disasters. I silently thanked God for the blessing of being close to my family and for the healing He had begun. The happiness that

warmed me from the inside out began to fade as I parted from my family and headed back to the car, alone. Those old self-doubts and fear began spinning. Uh oh!

Negative feelings are part of normal life – for everyone. By God's grace, I stopped the negative spiral as I reminded myself that *negative feelings are part of normal life and having negative feelings did not mean I was not healed.* Feeling depressed for so long, with such rare moments of feeling good, had led to habitual monitoring of feelings. With the least bit of negative thinking, I panicked. "Oh! I'm going to feel that bad again!" But I was learning to be less critical of my own humanity, assuring myself that God says every temptation and problem we face is something other humans do, too (1 Corinthians 10:13).

That morning, I remembered to remind myself "God has healed me. There is nothing wrong with me because I have these feelings right now. Thoughts and feelings like this are normal. Everyone feels a bit sad when parting from loved ones. This little sad feeling does not mean anything is wrong. Calm down Freda! Feelings cannot hurt you!"

Living by feelings brings darkness and death but living by faith brings light and life to soul and spirit. As I walked back to the car, I reminded myself that Psalm 34:5 says that *"Those who look to Him for help will be radiant with joy. . . "* (NLT) I told myself, "I can focus on one thing at a time. If I think about God and His goodness, I experience His joy. If I think about myself, my mind is not on God and sinks into the pit again. God is helping me and I am getting better every day!

Monitoring feelings keeps you stuck in them. When tied to the anchor of self-focus, thoughts about me me me swirl around and drag me downward toward the pit. "How am I feeling? Down? Fearful?" But day by day, God exposed the enemy's tactics quicker so that I perceived when I had my mind on me. It was hard to resist that old downward pull but, as I tried, God helped me do what I could not do myself. As I faithfully looked into the mirror of God's Word, He revealed what needed to change. (James 4:22-25) More and more, feelings controlled me less and less.

Feelings stopped determining my actions. Philippians 2:12c-13 tells us: *"Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. (13) For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him."* (NLT) In those early days of retraining habits of heart and hand, God helped greatly.

I would deliberately start repeating a Scripture, out loud if possible, and remind myself of His promises to care for me. Then I looked for something to do for Him, no matter if I still *felt* afraid or sad. I smiled at the person standing in the grocery store line and said something positive, or I did the next task in my hands when I was at work as unto Him. If alone, I smiled up at God, prayed for someone and tried my best to honor God by trusting Him to take care of my heart. Psalm 33:22 motivated me and I often repeated: *"Let Your mercy and loving-kindness, O Lord, be upon us, in proportion to our*

waiting and hoping for You.” Keeping my mind fixed on Him grew easier each day. Kenneth Copeland says “Faith comes from believing what God says, fear comes from believing the lies the enemy says.” I was learning to believe what God said.

Another result of the renewed mind God was creating was the excellent habit of constantly abiding “under the shadow of the Almighty.”

DAILY, CONSTANT ABIDING. Realizing the desk chair was getting uncomfortable, I walked to the window and carefully picked up Daddy’s old AMPC with both hands so as to avoid further strain on the binding that had loosened and separated the last quarter inch of pages from the back cover. As I rocked by the window, I ran my eyes over the thens, fors and because I had highlighted in Psalm 91.

“Father, thank You for showing me to look at connecting words. I think the promises in this entire psalm must depend on our dwelling in Your secret place. These if/thens are part of Your promises and they give me such confidence because I am depending on You, not me, as I do my little part of Your promise, like here, in Psalm 91.”

I picked up the yellow highlighter I kept on the window sill and darkened the circles around the thens, because and fors.

“Oh, Father! I see that the entire psalm is all one thought really, isn’t it? Oh, keep helping me remember to look at entire chapters and passages not just one or two verses. And thank You that You keep bringing other verses to mind related to what I am studying.”

“Oh!” I said out loud as I read the footnote at the bottom of Psalm 91. “The rich promises of this whole chapter are depending upon one’s meeting exactly the conditions of these first two verses. Exodus 15:26. Oh, thank You Father! You are reassuring me that my understanding of this psalm is right! Wow! You really are my Teacher. And I think You are also showing me to keep studying Your Word directly, not second hand.”

I went back to the desk and diagrammed Psalm 91 then in Pete Marshall style. I saw that morning that if:

IF. . .I am so often in the secret place of His presence that I essentially dwell there, THEN
God would keep me “stable and fixed”, as the AMPC said, “under His shadow”.
(And the phrase in brackets reassured me that no foe could withstand His power.)

I also saw that I must “say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, on Him I lean and rely and in Him I (confidently) trust!” I must express, speak out, my intention to trust in Him, with confidence, as my refuge.

IF I did that, THEN He would take me out of the enemy's traps, and THEN He would come close enough to cover me with His feathers. I realized that an eagle hovering over its nest casts a shadow over the eaglets but that in order to cover its little ones with its wings, the eagle has to come close. *Once I was close to Him*, under His wings, I would be able to trust and find the shelter I was seeking, as I kept burrowing in under His outspread feathers, closer and closer to Him, *after* I had said I He is my refuge, the One I go to for shelter..

I sat for a long time that morning, looking out the window at the branches swinging back and forth, slowly rocking and smiling, once in a while just whispering out loud, "Thank You, Lord, thank You so much. . . You are teaching me, just You and me and Your Word. . . "

With the gift of a more peaceful mind, the importance of another daily habit became clear.

DAILY MANNA. I sat on the edge of the bed, mind fuzzy and eyes heavy. With head in hands and a dry morning voice I began "Because I have set my love on You, Lord, I know You will deliver me. I know You will set me on high because I know and understand Your name. I do have a personal knowledge of Your mercy, love and kindness and I do trust and rely on You because I know You will never forsake me, no never."

I paused, still aware of the fear that had awakened me before the alarm, that same old stinking fear. Only the red numerals on the clock radio perched high on the overflowing bookcase illuminated the darkness. Tears came as I kept speaking out loud.

"Lord, You say in Psalm 91 that when I call on You, You will answer me. Thank You that You will be with me in trouble, You will deliver me and honor me. You will satisfy me with long life and show me your salvation, which I have learned also means deliverance from harm as well as eternal life. I don't know why these feelings came back but I trust You, Father. I know Your Word works. I know Your promise in Isaiah 26:3. That was the first thing I memorized. Oh, help me, Father!"

Tearing down strongholds of lies and false beliefs and replacing habits of thinking and feeling is WAR! While God led Israel through the wilderness, for forty years, purging their unbelief and doubt, He gave daily sustenance through manna. While God led me through healing, He gave daily sustenance through the Word I was meditating on with-the- intent-to-memorize.

| |
|---|
| Tearing down strongholds of lies and false beliefs and replacing habits of thinking and feeling is WAR! |
|---|

Week by week, month by month I experienced the truth that the enemy flees when we submit to God and resist his attacks of negative thoughts and feelings (James 4:6-10). I had carried printed pages of my basic verses everywhere so long that they were now frayed and coffee-stained. The truth in those bedraggled pages was changing

my heart deep inside. I had repeated those first nine verses in my arsenal so often that they were now memorized and I could repeat them without pause whenever needed. God was developing the habit of thinking, not on things I feared, but rather on good things, which was another habit leading to power, love and the sound mind He longs to give us (2 Timothy 1:7).

DAILY THINKING ON GOOD THINGS. I put the first nine verses I had studied and meditated upon into sheet protectors, calling these my arsenal. While typing a list of those verses, I was delighted to see that the topic of each passage made two sentences:

Peace never fails to return to the secret place—
peace (Isaiah 26:3) never fails (Hebrews 13:5) to return (Isaiah 30:15) to
the secret place (Psalm 91).

God is good, He is near, I can wait, and not fear and keep myself calm—
God is good (Lamentations 3:25-26), He is near, (Genesis 28:15), so
I can wait (Psalm 27:4), and not fear (Isaiah 41:10), and keep myself calm!
(Psalm 94:12-15).

Now, using those two sentences as memory cues, when I was out and about and unable to look at my verses, I could still recall and ponder God's promises and thereby calm my heart. I was finally learning to practice Paul's instructions in Philippians 4. God's peace was indeed guarding my heart and mind, and the God of peace —of 'untroubled, undisturbed well-being' as the AMPC puts it--was with me.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:4-9, AMPC)

Personal daily positives. Satan used trauma early in my life to build strongholds of feeling unloved, rejected and insecure. Now, as Holy Spirit moved me to diligently study my Bible for those particular individual needs and to meditate on what I read, God's truth about those subjects began replacing the enemy's lies in my mind. I began to feel loved, accepted, and secure in God. God also used counseling and positive life experiences to reinforce those truths. More and more, I was able to control negative thoughts, to take those negative thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

A suggestion heard somewhere along the way also helped renew my mind. It was to read a list of positive statements about myself each morning and throughout the day whenever self-critical thoughts intruded. The list went something like this:

- Freda, you are aware of God's love and approval and presence all day, in each thing you do, for you do it for Him.
- Freda, God reminds you all day of what is needful to stay in love, peace and joy.
- Freda, your spirit, soul, mind, body and life are healed.
- Freda, God has a beautiful, joy-filled and productive day prepared for you.
and
- Freda, you will bless many people today.
- Freda, your loving God keeps you actively content and in His peace.
- Freda, God is working powerfully in your every effort at writing and living for Him.
- Freda, all your family are blessed and safe in God's hand. He is working with them.

and

- Freda, God approves of you and loves you just as you are and He is and will be helping you through each moment of each day.
- Freda, God is reminding you to worship and sing and talk with Him all day and He will keep doing that.
- Freda, you are an important person and your life is important.
- Freda, God adores you and He is with you every minute.

Much later, I simplified this into four truths I speak often each day.

- God, I know You are right here with me.
- You will always help me feel better.
- You will always help me with what I am doing.
- You will always be in control of the details of my life.

God will lead you regarding what positive things to tell yourself about your particular life. Ask, seek and knock and keep on asking, seeking and knocking. Thinking on Bible verses and a string of positive truthful statements about yourself when you are stressed is life-changing!

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Isaiah 30: 25. So much Living Water – everywhere!

Verse 25: And upon every high mountain and upon every high hill there will be brooks and streams of water in the day of the great slaughter [the day of the Lord], when the towers fall [and all His enemies are destroyed].

Comment: In Isaiah 30, God promised Israel a rich and plentiful abundance of all they needed when they turned back and depended on Him for strength and protection against their enemies while He healed the wound He had afflicted because of their sin of depending on idols and worshipping them rather than depending on Him.

What He did for the Samaritan woman at the well, He longs to do for us. Jesus said, *“All who drink of this water will be thirsty again. But whoever takes a drink of the water that I will give him shall never, no never, be thirsty any more. But the water that I will give him shall become a spring of water welling up (flowing, bubbling) [continually] within him unto (into, for) eternal life.”* (John 4:13-14, AMPC, emphasis added) God provided living water everywhere I needed it as He continued fighting for me.

Isaiah 30: 25. So much Living Water – everywhere! Unknown to me, the path to my personal abundant life required more time writing. So, God led by discontinuing that part-time job in late 2019. Ta da! (I say that now, but then it felt more like uh-oh. Here comes the hard part!) I gulped and decided to use the extra time for writing, trusting God to eventually bring supplemental income from it. By then, the good habit of pondering the Word of God all day was solid, writing was becoming more regular, and I was more aware than ever of God’s presence throughout the day and especially when writing and studying. In all this, He continued further strengthening good daily habits. And—what a gift!—He also helped me start thinking more about others again.

A SERVANT’S HEART. Early in my walk with Jesus I saw the truth that we are to be sold-out servants of Christ, living for Him all day long and shining His light every hour and every day. In those early years, I helped in the kitchen at church and the nursery and children’s classes. I developed the habit of speaking about Him with strangers, at work and in my personal life. That sense of our mission to be a light glowed steadily for years, but had dimmed during depression.

Now, though, as mental and emotional clouds evaporated, that sense of mission re-emerged. It was a sense of mission to not only live each moment of daily life with and for Him but to also to serve Him with the gift of writing. The heart that receives comfort and healing burns with zeal to share that God-given comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). As I redeveloped the habit of thinking about others, I relearned how God cares for every detail in the life of His mission-focused servants.

The steps of a [good] man are directed and established by the Lord when He delights in his way [and He busies Himself with his every step]. (Psalm 37:23, AMPC)

Some of those details God busied Himself with healing were habits of heart and of hand, such as being more responsible about daily routines and the atmosphere of life insofar as it was in my control.

A SERVANT'S HOME. God is very practical. He gives us wisdom for daily life when we prayerfully, with thanksgiving, make specific requests. *“Do not fret or have any anxiety about anything but by prayer and petition (definite requests) with thanksgiving, continue to make your wants known to God.”* (Philippians 4:6, AMPC)

I had read numerous times that clutter was stressful. Now, I asked God to help rid my home of clutter and make it a pleasant place to write and study with Him. Friends had helped me organize and beautify some areas during the last two years after the move from the tiny apartment. And with extra money from the part-time job, I had recently purchased a couch from the Salvation Army, as well as organizing aids like an over-the-door towel rack, small hanging bins and small wheeled carts that gave extra storage in nooks and corners. This actually and visually enlarged the living space. My son-in-law helped purchase and set up two used bookcases that, sitting at the back of my big table/desk, worked well as a credenza. Two inexpensive but new storage units got boxes off the bedroom floor.

Years ago, when I wrote *Unjealous Heart* (that personal experience novel I mentioned about how to help God give your child the gift of an unjealous heart, regardless of income), I had studied how to make a home attractive on a pinched budget. Now, I applied those principles as I created clean surfaces, coordinated colors the best I could and arranged items purely for beauty in corners and on walls. I kept soothing music playing quietly and often lit vanilla or lavender-scented candles. I indulged in a bottle of cologne and sometimes took myself to dinner at an inexpensive soup and salad spot.

I could not account for the strange urge to take better care of myself, but results were dramatic as I continued tackling the fall-out of being depressed so long. Beautiful surroundings were water to a soul parched by self-neglect. Outward beauty and peace freshened the writing which, in turn, amplified desire to share Him with others and use each hour for Him. Doing God's work, in whatever form, became food, and I saw that every field around me was “ripe unto harvest”, with the writing, at the gym, the grocery store, church-- everywhere in my regular routine.

“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. ³⁵ Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶ Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. (John 4:34-36, NIV)

THE MASTER'S DAILY WORK. A devoted servant focuses on his work, which keeps him “occupied with gladness of heart.” (Ecclesiastes 5:20, NIV). As days of focusing on God's work turned into weeks then months, actively trusting God replaced the habit of monitoring feelings. When old feelings did surface, more and more often now I turned my

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| As days of focusing on God's work turned into weeks then months, actively trusting God replaced the habit of monitoring feelings |
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mind to God, watered my soul with Scripture and got busy with whatever aspect of God's work was available at that moment, whether that was speaking a word about God to the person bagging groceries ("God has given us such a beautiful day!") or showing simple kindness to the frazzled postal worker ("You must be tired from waiting on so many people all day.") The Master was giving two great treasures— the gift of His presence and the gift of joy in serving. Solomon observed:

"This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart. (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20, NIV, emphasis added)

Part of that gladness in God was awareness of His presence as I went about daily life. I especially remember one afternoon in September 2020, when I wrote the blog post: "God notices you – always."

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God notices you - always. *"Behold, I am with you and will keep [careful watch over you and guard] you wherever you may go, and I will bring you back to this [promised] land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."* Genesis 28:15 (AMPC). This was part of God's promise to Jacob, when he left his father Isaac's house.

"Behold, I am with you." I stepped out of the front door. Cool air caressed my face. I inhaled deeply, relishing the crispness, hoping the chilly days of February would linger. In the passenger seat of the car I put my purse, thermos of water, and two napkins, which my grandsons would put in their laps to, somewhat, catch cracker crumbs from their after-school, on-the-road snack, in the passenger seat, the usual weekday routine. As I backed up and drove down the neighborhood street under oaks that nearly met overhead, I repeated Genesis 28:15, my current meditation verse.

"Father, that phrase 'Behold, I am with you', starts with 'Behold', which means to pay attention to something, to stop and take notice, like when angels told shepherds of the birth of Jesus. You want me to stop and realize You are with me, don't You?"

Tears moistened my eyes. My throat tightened. *"Thank You, Father that You know how I feel. You know I still feel so small and unimportant and so guilty sometimes for wasting two years in depression and fear. I am so, so grateful that You are healing the depression as You give strength to keep my mind on You and Your Word all day.*

And to know, to have You say to my mind almost audibly through that verse, that You are right here with me in this car, that You are here with me in all my failures and

fears, well, Father, it is more than I can understand but I thank You so much for letting me feel Your presence. Thank You, Father, thank You. If You are with me, everything will be okay. Help me remember that."

"I will keep watch over you with care." I turned left on Stassney, then right on Manchaca, heading toward school, driving through streets surrounded by faded brown winter trees and grass and a low, gray sky above. Leaving the heater off gave the air inside the car a pleasant, brisk bite.

"And the thought, Father, that You keep watch over me, why that is a military term, isn't it? You want me to think of You like a soldier standing guard through the night and the day, purposefully focused on protecting that which he is guarding safe. And You say you keep watch over me with care, which means diligently, paying attention to each detail. And it is You, You, Lord, Who made and sustains the entire universe, You Who are keeping watch over every detail of my days, every day. Too wonderful to understand, Lord!"

"I will take notice of you wherever you may go." The familiar road dipped down then up then turned left in a slow arc as I drove by offices and stores. Excitement and pleasure built, as always, when I was about to see my grandsons.

"Lord, there is something about that phrase "take notice of you." I know it means to pay special attention to, or to be interested in. The dictionary said it means "to observe with special attention." Father, what comes to mind is a parent noticing tiny things her child is doing and how much that little child wants the parent to notice, to pay attention, to help build a block tower or to take a walk in the park to find roly-polies and pine cones.

I guess that's why that phrase means so much to me, Lord. You know the hurts of the past. You know I felt unnoticed and unimportant growing up. I did not feel loved, even though I was. And You know how the enemy so often used those lies to torment, to steal good things and to cause depression and discouragement.

Thank You, Father, that Your Word, Your truth, is changing my heart at the root level as I keep thinking about Your truths, over and over a hundred times a day even with the same truth, like now, that You, You, Lord up in heaven, are noticing me, right now, this very moment. And to think that what I am doing—this ordinary, mundane thing—is precious in Your sight! You are noticing how I have prepared the little snack the boys love, You notice how I love the cool weather You've given, You notice that I am trying to memorize Your Word, You notice that I am trying with all my heart to please You and do what You want all day long.

You notice me, Lord! Help me never take that for granted. You notice when I feel I have failed, and the truth of Your wonderful Word tells me that Your love for me is as high as the heavens are above the earth, that Your love has separated my sins—and that includes my failures—as far as the east is from the west. Your Word tells me that

You do all that because You love me and have compassion on me like a father loves and pities his children, and that You have imprinted on Your heart that I am just dust, a frail human being. Thank you, Father, for those comforting truths in Psalm 103.

Thank You, Father, thank You. To know that You notice each thing I do, that You observe me with special attention is comforting. It gives me strength to keep going and to trust that You will continue the healing.”

“. . . and I will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done all of which I told you.” I parked on the street bordering the school, along with other parents and grandparents, then walked up the sloping hill to the entrance, slowly to avoid getting too short of breath. Sitting on the bench encircling a grandfather oak, waiting for the bell, I saw Ansel, head swiveling as he walked out, third behind his teacher. He broke out of line, said something to her, then, as she saw me, she nodded to him, bumped fists, and he ran toward me, backpack lurching from side to side, his face lit up.

“Nana!”, he yelled. “I knew you were coming!”

We waited on Ben’s class, then the three of us walked to the car. As we drove home, I listened to their brotherly chatter in the back seat. I also listened to what Holy Spirit whispered in my heart as I repeated the last phrase of Genesis 28:15-16.

“Thank You, Lord.” I silently prayed as Ansel asked Ben if he had seen the new swings on the playground, *“Thank You that I know You will finish the good work of healing You have started. Thank You that I know You will be with me every moment, just as You are right now.”*

AVOIDING SNARES. Before the healing, the paralysis of analysis often snared my mind. When negative feelings appeared, I wondered why and focused on fixing the feelings. That was wrestling with glue! That was cleaning white linen with a muddy rag! Oh, self, self, self – will you ever die!

How often I relied on Paul’s teaching in Romans 7 and 8, that we are released from law and bound to Christ, even though we still struggle with our sinful human nature. How comforting to know that there is no condemnation, therefore, when we “live according to the Spirit” and “have our minds set on what the Spirit desires” (Romans 8:5, NIV). As the NLT puts it “. . . *those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.*” Romans 8:5b-6) In choosing whole-heartedly to obey Him, I offered myself to God as His grateful slave, determined to put Him first. As I did so, Holy Spirit consistently helped free me from self-analysis and led me into a life of greater peace, away from the darkness of self-focus and unrest.

¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. (Romans 6:16-18, NIV)

Dreading. Another bad habit of heart was dreading. I often dreaded the day, even after most days became good. I dreaded the countless little daily tasks necessary to sustain human life. God's teaching though, brought conviction. I knew fear in any form was NOT God's plan— never, no never, no never! Dread is fear in disguise and the soil in which it grows. Dread means "to fear greatly" or "to feel extreme reluctance to meet or face" (Webster's 1828 online dictionary).

"Fear not [there is nothing to fear], for I am with you; do not look around you in terror *and* be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen *and* harden you to difficulties, yes, I will help you; yes, I will hold you up *and* retain you with My [victorious] right hand of rightness *and* justice. (Isaiah 41:10, AMPC)

So, I asked God's help to stop dreading, and I set my mind to think positively about each day and each task in that day and to find pleasure in it (Ecclesiastes 2:24). Little by little, that and other bad habits disappeared. God was training me, out of His law--by allowing the logical consequences of wrong thinking and wrong behavior and rewarding good thinking and good behavior.

Blessed (happy, fortunate, to be envied) is the man whom You discipline *and* instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law, **that** You may give him power to keep himself calm in the days of adversity, until the [inevitable] pit of corruption is dug for the wicked. (Psalm 94:12-13, AMPC, emphasis added)

THE MASTER'S ASSIGNMENT. Romans 12:1 urges us that "*in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship.*" I urge you: be being busy about *your* work in the Kingdom! God has an assignment specifically for you. I found that as, in proportion to, I focus on others and the Kingdom, joy increases. God has a unique life and work prepared for each of us, and great joy stored up for us as we fulfill our assignment. Why do I say assignment rather than purpose? In his must-read book "Vessels of Fire and Glory" on pages 116-7 evangelist Mario Murillo says:

"Let me break it to you gently. A better word than purpose is assignment. Aren't we to be purpose-driven? No, we are supposed to be Holy Spirit driven. The one with purpose is Jesus. You, my friend, have an assignment within that purpose.

What is Christ's purpose on the earth? First John 3:8 says, "He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of god was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."

Your assignment in the army of God is your individual expression and extension of Christ's destruction of the works of the devil. You are a destroyer of the works of the devil. God will give you a way to do it that is all your own. Until that gets through to you—until you admit and agree to those terms—God will remain silent about your assignment."

Again, I urge you: take Mario's words to heart, yes even while you still feel depressed, even while it seems truly impossible. God waits and longs to help you!

Isaiah 30:26 Such bright light and such healing!

Isaiah 30:26. *Moreover, the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, like the light of seven days [concentrated in one] in the day that the Lord binds up the hurt of His people, and heals their wound [inflicted by Him because of their sins]."*

Remember --- verses 23 through 26 are all one thought.

Comment: Verse 26 teaches us that the Lord inflicts a wound because of our sin but that He heals it and binds up our hurt. Furthermore, while He does that, He gives us complete provision, *which includes all the light we need for understanding.* That light is so bright that it lights up the dark just as the moon lights up the night. That light is seven times as bright as the light of the sun! "Seven represents God's complete provision. . ." (Wilson's Dictionary of Bible Types, p. 400). Just as nothing is hidden from the heat of the sun, nothing could be hidden from that much light! Complete healing includes things hidden in our hearts that we perceive only as God reveals them through His wisdom, which He freely gives when we ask with faith (James 1:5-7).

THE BRIGHT LIGHT THAT COMES FROM PEACE. While God heals the wounds He had inflicted because of our sin of rebellion, He makes things in shadows easily visible and gives concentrated light for understanding. This exceptional light from God exposes things hidden in darkness, including things deep within ourselves that we cannot see. Job 12:22 says "*He reveals the deep things of darkness and brings deep shadows into the light.*"

The light of God's Word exposes things hidden in darkness, including things hidden from ourselves.

As I put on the armor of light, the light of His wisdom revealed the “deeds of darkness”—those old sinful habits of fear, self-pity and resentment I was unaware of. (Romans 13:12) I join with Daniel in praising God, because God “*Gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.*” (Daniel 2:20b-22, NIV)

Read Job 28. God says wisdom cannot be found in tunnels under earth, the animals of the earth, or the seas and cannot be bought because “*the price of wisdom is beyond rubies (Job 28:18b, NIV).* God “*alone knows where it dwells*” and He says that when “*He established the force of the wind and measured out the waters, when He made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm, then He looked at wisdom and appraised it; He confirmed it and tested it. And He said to man*” *The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.*” (Job 28:23-28)

When we fear God, He gives us the light that comes from peace with Him. And how do we learn what “the fear of the Lord” is? Obey what God says to do in Proverbs 2! Diligently, diligently, diligently accept His words and store up His words within you (surely that must mean memorize or close to it), call out and cry aloud, look for wisdom as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure. That surely means to ask for guidance, and then to look long and hard, to take time to dig deep, and to persist. Knowing that the reward will be great gives great motivation.

In the fall of 2019, I continued hearing Him clearer than ever. The more of His Word that God helped me store up in my heart, the more balanced and joyful life became. And all the while, He was healing the wound He had inflicted because of my rebellion against His ways, my sin of making self-effort and worldly ways of handling depression my idol.

THE WOUND GOD HEALED. What was that wound? He had, for a time, withdrawn awareness of His presence and the gift of enjoying writing and studying and just being with Him. That got my attention when other warnings had not. But now, once again, I was aware of His presence and enjoying alone times. Fear of being alone was stamped out and trampled in the dust. Together, we trampled “*the young lion and the serpent*” *underfoot.*” Psalm 91:13, AMPC))

Now, each time I sat down to write, I understood His Word with increasing clarity. What a gift! He now gave light as a floodlight whereas before there had been light as from a candle. I kept digging in the Word, asking God to reveal His messages for others. Day by day, understanding of and faith in the power of God’s Word multiplied. Each insight was as cool water on a hot day (Isaiah 30:27). No matter what part of the Word I turned to, God gave more light to see how to fight (Isaiah 30:28).

I knew God was working mightily on my behalf in *all areas* of life, not only writing for Him. New ideas about how to improve daily life just fell into consciousness or were

clarified through “happenstances”. The more time studying the Word and the more mindfulness of His Word, the greater the clarity of His voice. I voiced my thankfulness all day long, for each little and big thing, for each moment and day of freedom and for the privilege of writing for Him.

A BALANCED AND PEACEFUL LIFE. God equips and trains His servants for the particular tasks and life that He long ago planned for them. Part of my training was learning to maintain a balanced life. That included proper diet and exercise as well as adequate time for rest and play, rather than fretting that I was not doing enough writing. One beautiful autumn day in October 2019 God showed me how important staying balanced and in peace is. That was the day I wrote “Finding Peace in a Park”.

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Time to stop fretting myself. “Yes, darling, you can run ahead to the playground. I’m right behind you.” My grandsons, six and a half and almost eight, ran at top speed toward the play equipment in the center of Garrison Park. I swung my big green bag to my left hip, holding the thermos of cold water in my right hand. The bag—the same type of nondescript, reusable grocery bag I used for years as my “Nana” day bag when I spent weekday mornings with my preschool darlings—contained a snack for the boys, my cell phone and a lime green folder. The folder contained three different bunches of paper, paper clipped together, filled with margin notes, crossed out lines, and numbered points, the fruit of a two-month struggle to write the second in a series of blog posts about seeking the presence of God.

The boys raced over a field of grass lightly browned from lack of rain. Soon, it would be truly brown from the frost of fall mornings. I sighed as I trailed slowly behind them. I was not ready for change, for the boys to continue growing up, and not ready for autumn, my favorite season. I had planned to have more writing done by now!

I had counted my blessings all morning, straining mightily for a positive attitude while grappling at the computer for four hours.

“Thank You, Father, for the idea to take the boys to the park. How sad it would be to miss this good time with them because I was cooped up, fretting about my work for You.”

I paused in my thoughts. Wow! In that moment, truth shifted perspective as well as feelings. I knew God did not want any of His children fretting about their work for Him. Jesus stated, *“My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”* (Matthew 11:30. KJV) And God tells us to rejoice always. Always means each minute of the day, which includes work of all kinds.

After seeing that Ben was on the slide and Ansel was on the ramp, I plopped on the shaded wrought-iron bench. Wind blew gently, starting in the towering old oaks

bordering the playscape. Like an invisible curtain, the wind swirled around and downward, small brown leaves polka dotting its movement, making the unseen visible.

Accepting change. Autumn was in process. Change was coming, no matter how much I wished for delay. Cars whizzed by on Stassney, which bordered the park's western edge. Swings creaked, back and forth. Creak, c-r-e-a-k. Cool air caressed my cheek. Children shouted and laughed and yelled, each of them all at once, a soothing, happy sound. The hamburgers for the birthday party folks at those three picnic tables, stirred appetite. A father in a red shirt goo-gooed at a tiny toddler in a white-laced playsuit as he pushed her on the baby swings.

I ponder. "In the last seven years how many memories have I stored up from this park, memories of collecting rocks and acorns, building fairy houses out of twigs, marking our path in the dirt with a stick while taking an adventure hike on the trails. How many?" I recognized the distinctive sound of Ansel laughing and wondered how close humans come to the capacity of sheep and other animals to distinguish the cry of their own young from that of others.

The heart of a child about my work for God. I brought the boys here so they would have a fun outing. I also brought my request to God, a request as tangible as the green folder holding the paper-clipped pages.

"Father, keep speaking to me, as I look at the trees and children and listen to the birds. Speak to me about peace regarding my work for You. Lately I always feel I am not doing enough or doing it well enough."

Children do not fret about their "work" – their task of growing up, because they trust their parents. Oh, may we trust our heavenly Father with the heart of a child about everything!

I watched Ben huddle with three other boys atop the monkey bars, pointing and, as usual I was sure, giving directions. My eyes roved over the whole playscape, at kids running after each other, jostling to climb up the ladder to

the slide, sitting on the ground in a huddle to split up a Hershey bar. Do these children fret about their work, this task of growing up that they are eagerly doing this moment? No! Why? Because it is in their nature to trust their parents and enjoy each moment.

"Okay, Lord, I get it. Thank You! I know our work for You will sometimes be difficult but You never want us to fret about it. You tell us to approach You like the little children we are and simply trust. I do know how often You warn against worry and fretting and I know Your Word is filled with reassurances against fear. Oh, Father! Give me the heart of a child about our work! Help me remember Your many reassurances – that You work everything out for our good, that You busy yourself with each detail of our lives, that You show us the way to go if we ask You, that You make our plans succeed if we commit them to You, and so many more life-giving promises. Lord!"

Ansel walked slowly toward me, flushed from running, sweat on the edges of his hairline, face filled with little brother frustration. I patted the space beside me and handed him the thermos of cool. He leaned against my shoulder. I took out some clean paper from the folder, drew a tic-tac-toe square, and handed him the pencil. Soon big brother walked towards our bench, sat on my other side, and took big gulps of water. I gave him a sideways hug, and kissed the top of his head, inhaling deeply of the same scent that had been his mother's at that age, that sweet time when Holly and I sat on the couch as soon as we got home after day care and read Dr. Seuss, her dusty little toes in sandals wiggling as her short legs extended straight out from the couch. Ben's hair smelled of sunshine, fresh air, and a healthy little body. Impossibly sweet, touching memories. Ben took his turn with the pencil next, drawing stick figures and asking how to draw feet for stick figures.

A beautiful dance. I wish I had a picture of us, an older woman in black shorts, stretched out turquoise tank top and support stockings, a young boy with straight brown hair pressed against her right side, his small hand resting on her arm and another boy on her left side resting halfway in her lap, drawing. I could not take a picture, but, as I have learned, I can deeply imprint this memory on my heart by being fully present and letting love engrave the sights and sounds, the feelings and thoughts. I smiled, listened to the wind rustling the leaves, and enjoyed feeling cuddled.

“Thank You, Father! Thank You so much for these precious moments today. Help me remember that You care far more about me than about any work I can do for You. Help me trust and rest in You more. And Father, help me accept change. I know that as I yield to Your plans for my life, like brown leaves in this autumn wind, we will make a beautiful dance. I love You, Lord, and I trust You!”

That day is as clear in my heart as yesterday. How wonderfully kind and loving and tender is the Father's love for His children! He knows the desires of our heart (Psalm 37:4) and He delights in giving them to us. May we always, always, always intentionally share that joy with Him Who is the Giver of all gifts

God provided hinds feet as I made progress *because of and on* the very places of difficulty

So, as fall of 2019 continued, God continued using daily life as training in maintaining balance. He provided hinds feet as I made progress *because of and on* the very places of difficulty. Times of testing and trouble are dangerous, but God gives us just what we need for where we are – hinds feet—and He sets us securely in that very high place .

¹ For who is God except the Lord? Or who is the Rock save our God,

³² The God who girds me with strength and makes my way perfect?

³³ He makes my feet like hinds' feet [able to stand firmly or make progress on the dangerous heights of testing and trouble]; He sets me securely upon my high places.

Each truth God rooted in my heart drove out the enemy in that area, and then bore fruit that gave strength to reign in that area and go forward to gain more ground—more ground in the kingdom of my heart and more ground in His kingdom. God was giving me double for the trouble I had seen (Isaiah 61:7).

CHAPTER 8

GOD'S POWER AND GLORY

Isaiah 30:27-29. Unbelievable anger as He fights for us. These verses tell us that the Name of the Lord, with indescribable consuming fire and power, fights for us. The God whose power was described in Psalm 18 annihilated my personal Assyrians, my bitterest enemy, the thing hardest for me, the thing I could not overcome, those deepest roots of depression and fear. And as God and I fought, each step was with intense joy and celebration. What rejoicing! What singing!

January to December 2020:

- I felt closer to Him than ever.
- Unrecognized shame about being depressed
- Songs in the night and gladness of heart.
- Victory in Jesus!

APPLYING THE WORD

Verse 27. The burning anger of our All-Powerful, All-Knowing God

- Our God fights for us
- Our God is all-powerful—omnipotent!
- Our God knows just what we need

Verse 28. Total destruction of the enemy

- Only God can annihilate our enemy – but He can and He will!
- Only God knows where the enemy hides
- Only God can judge the thoughts and intents of the heart

Verse 29. Songs in the night and gladness of heart

- Songs in the night
- Persist in your resisting!
- Do not give up!

Still persisting through 2020 - More of the story

- God busies Himself with your details
- Troubles, trials, distress and frustration!
- Fretting is forgetting, eyes off what He has done
- Look! The Lord my God is near!

ISAIAH 30:27. THE BURNING ANGER OF ALL-POWERFUL, ALL-KNOWING GOD

Isaiah 30:27 Behold, the Name of the Lord comes from afar, burning with His anger, and in thick, rising smoke. His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue is like a consuming fire.

Comment: The way God is described as fighting for Israel and for us in Isaiah 30:27 is the same way as in Psalm 18:7-19, when David praised God for rescuing him from all his enemies and from Saul. God fights for His children with an earthquake and coals of fire (v. 7-8), a hail storm (v. 12), and a thunderstorm, (v. 13). This same God who fought that way for David, fought the same way for Israel when they repented and turned back to Him. He fights the same way—today---for you and me--with “. . . a devouring fire, amid crashing blast and cloudburst, tempest, and hailstones.” (Isaiah 30:30, AMPC). When we call upon the Lord, relying upon Him as our Lord, our cry goes into His very ears (Psalm 18:6) and He saves us from our enemies.

ISAIAH 30:27 OUR GOD FIGHTS FOR US. *Isaiah 30:27* says behold, which means pay attention to this remarkable thing. What remarkable thing? How the Lord Himself fights for us! Please take time to consider—to behold (stare at, contemplate, pay attention to) -- the power of the One who fights for us. Selah. Psalm 18 gives other details of how God fights for us when we fear, revere, and worship Him. Slowly, carefully read Psalm 18, in perhaps the NIV or NLT to grasp the general outline, then slowly ponder Psalm 18 in the AMPC. The main thoughts I see in this galvanizing psalm are:

- V.1-3 David praises God for saving him from his enemies.
- 4-6 When utterly helpless, about to be destroyed, David called upon God and his cry went into God's very ears.
- 7-19 Evocative, arresting, flaming details of how angry God is on David's behalf and how He fights for David.
- 20-24 God fights that way because David has been righteous.
- 25-30 God is faithful to the faithful and saves the humble.
- 30-36 God's way and His Word are flawless. He shields those who take refuge in Him and teaches them to fight.
- 37-45 In God's power, David obliterates his enemies.
- 46-50 David again praises God by declaring some more of God's attributes and deeds.

In Psalm 18 and in Isaiah 30, we see how furious God is when His children are hurt and how fiercely He fights to rescue them. I believe God describes His power and His anger in such detail to encourage us, to let us glimpse how strong and mighty and all-powerful He is and how aroused He is when we are hurt. If we recall that this God, this Almighty One--this Supreme One who actually shakes the earth, the sky and the seas--is fighting for us, His dearly cherished children – wow! How can we fear? (Isaiah 41:10)

God further describes His power on our behalf when He gives details about battles He fought and miracles He performed for His people in Bible times. Such stories make us feel safe. And why did He perform such wonders? He is merciful, He loves His children, and He is just. He fights for those who follow Him whole-heartedly. *“He remembers his covenant forever, the word He commanded for a thousand generations.”* (Psalm 105:8a, NIV)

This covenant-keeping God is the same One Who is with you and with me! *God wants us to know how powerful He is and He wants us to know that He will fight for us and that the battle is His! He also wants us to know that He is merciful and long-suffering with our weaknesses and our sin.* Review Psalm 105 through 107 and see how often He forgave Israel. He wants us to be the wise person described in Psalm 107:43: *“Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD.”* (NIV) One of the “these things” we are to ponder upon are the innumerable times He has saved us from our distresses when we cried out to Him, thus showing His great love for us.

OUR GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL—OMNIPOTENT!!! God IS omnipotent. The more we know about God’s nature, the better our life will be. God wants us to have the peace that comes from meditating upon His omnipotence. The following verses about His omnipotence are foundational to faith. Ask God to open your ears.

6 *“One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. 7 The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.”*

8. *Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”*

9 *“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. 10 Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hand, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”*

12 *The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.”* (Job 1-6-12, NIV)

Forty plus years ago, as late afternoon shadows lengthened, I paused from my reading, staring blankly at the bookbag and red sweater on the couch across the room, where Holly had flung it when we came home, before she went out to play. The sweetness of laughter floated through the window, drifting up from the playground in the center of the complex, where my daughter and the neighbor's little girl played together. As a new believer, I was reading my way through the Bible each evening after supper. That day I started the book of Job.

"Wow!" I mused. "So, Satan has to get permission from God before he does anything. So that means God is more powerful in all ways than Satan! That's good to know."

It was indeed good to know that particular truth, from *personal* Bible study, early in my walk. Since that blessed afternoon, this truth together with the truth that God loves me personally, have garrisoned my frail heart (Philippians 4:7, AMPC) each time I bring it to mind..

Remembering that our omnipotent, loving Heavenly Father is near brings peace. Focusing

the mind on God's nearness as well as His greatness calms the human soul. Because my father worked in and later became superintendent of a lime rock mine, he wore heavy boots to work. Each evening, when he stepped through the door, leaned over and removed those lime-rock encrusted boots, my heart was at peace. The prototypical strong, silent man's man, my father loved his family and was home each evening. When Daddy came home, the house quieted. Shouting ceased and fights were few, with Daddy's quiet presence calming oil upon troubled waters. I adored Daddy. Even now, merely thinking about his work boots by the door brings peace, and stirs deep, deep affection. Our all-powerful, tenderly loving *Heavenly* Father is with us, this very moment, and He never leaves us. He wants us to find rest in His presence. He wants us to feel His peace, knowing He is with us and in us and that we are safe because of that.

Remembering that our omnipotent, loving Heavenly Father is near brings peace.

Meditating on God's power is calming. Why do people and animals alike quake at explosions of thunder? Thunder speaks of power we instinctively know is far greater than we are. God's Word often urges us to consider nature because nature demonstrates His power. Psalm 8 says the whole earth speaks of God's supreme kingship, or majesty. Psalm 19 says the heavens and the skies make known God's magnificence. When God wanted to strengthen Elijah, who had become discouraged after having been very zealous for God (I Kings 18), God showed him a "*great and powerful wind (that) tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD*", then an earthquake, then a fire (verses 11-12). "*And after the fire, came a gentle whisper.*" (verse 13).

Meditating on God's power is calming.

OUR GOD KNOWS JUST WHAT WE NEED. In the early, strenuous months of healing, awareness that this omnipotent loving God was fighting for me nourished my

heart like an underground stream. God met the need for *constant* reassurance of His love and His presence.

God also met the need for training in spiritual balance. He knew that soon the covid plandemic (yes, I meant to say it was planned) would shroud His beloved world. By His grace, because of the healing He had already done, I remained in peace throughout 2020 and 2021, in spite of the plandemic, the stolen election, and the evil unleashed on America through wicked leaders.

God also, mercifully, led me to Flashpoint and Victory News on the Victory Channel (www.govictory.com) where I heard God's truth about what was happening in the world and found great strength and encouragement. For more information about these and other resources for God's truth about today, see the "What is God Doing?" tab on www.wordsofhopeandhealing.com.

God perfectly times the birth of each human. *"All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them ever came to be. (Psalm 139:16, NIV)"*. God has specific work for each of us, just as He had specific work for Esther (Esther 4:14). The times into which we are born are no accident, no matter what it looks like. God is sovereign. Period.

We all need continuing growth. Finding complete healing requires continuing growth, so does staying in victory. God knows where each of us needs to grow. As earthly fathers discipline their children for their good, so God disciplines His children (Hebrews 12:1-13). I urge you to study and meditate upon the following passages about our need for continuing, unceasing growth.

- Hebrews 12:1-13 – Endure hardship as discipline, which leads to holiness.
- 2 Peter 1:3-11 - We participate in God's Divine nature through His promises.
- John 15:1-8 – We bear much fruit when we "abide in the vine."
- Philippians 3:7-16 – Follow Paul's example and press on – always.

We all need joy for the journey. We also all need continuing joy for our pilgrimage to the Holy City above. God knows each detail of your life and the world around you in whatever month and year you are reading this book. I do not believe you found this book by accident. I beg you: seek Him for healing and for growth. He longs to heal you. And He also longs that your journey be one of daily joy. He has provided for that. Pray, specifically, for Holy Spirit to teach you to rejoice as you purposefully walk toward your own healing and even deeper maturity.

There is an old praise chorus "The joy of the Lord is my strength." This come from Nehemiah 8:10, when Nehemiah told the Israelites, who had just heard and understood for the first time how bad their sins against God were, not to grieve "because the joy of the Lord is your strength." We are to ask God to reveal our sins, then confess and turn from them but then God wants us to live with the knowledge that

our sins are forgiven and removed as far from us as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:8-14).

As healing continued and spiritual maturity grew, God gave distinct gifts of joy. One huge gift was how He poured out ideas for writing. Throughout autumn that year, I wrote one blog a week and also worked on other writings. When I wrote, fresh ideas bubbled up. As I searched for context, Holy Spirit unveiled new topics. I grabbed blank paper, sketched an outline, then dove back into Bible study only to see another exciting topic unveiled.

As a writer and lover of books and study, my personal surroundings always overflow with papers, folders, and notebooks. But now, I had more project outlines in my head and stacks of notes than I could keep organized! Oh, happy day when we serve God with the gifts He gives us! Joy has no bounds when God is the one pouring the oil of gladness on us! The gift of working for Him excites and engages one's full attention and garrisons the heart—all this while God continues destroying our enemies.

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ISAIAH 30:28 TOTAL DESTRUCTION FOR THE ENEMY

Isaiah 30:28. And His breath is like an overflowing stream that reaches even to the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction; and a bridle that causes them to err will be in the jaws of the people.

Comment: Take time to ponder Isaiah 30:27-33 in the AMPC. Understand that this passage is one cohesive whole, a picture of how furious God is at the enemy who hurts His children. Look at what God has prepared for our enemies. “*For Topheth [a place of burning and abomination] has already been laid out and long ago prepared; yes, for the [Assyrian] king and [the god] Molech it has been made ready, its pyre made deep and large, with fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it.*” (v. 33).

Notice that the breath of God is spoken of in verses 28 and 33. Notice that the breath of God destroys nations.

ISAIAH 30:28 HEALING – ONLY GOD CAN ANNIHILATE OUR ENEMY. *The idea of totally destroying our enemy and his strongholds seem too great for mere humans, but nothing is impossible with God. When Gabriel told Mary she would give birth to Jesus, he told her that Elizabeth, even in her old age, had conceived “For with God nothing is ever impossible and no word from God shall be without power or impossible of fulfillment (Luke 1:37, AMPC). In another passage, God reassured His people through Jeremiah that nothing was too hard for him. God said, “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is there anything too hard for me? (Jeremiah 32:27, AMPC)”*

Then God said that, although they would be taken into exile for 70 years, He would bring them back home and restore them. Take time now to read Jeremiah 32: 27-44. You will be amazed and comforted.

Nothing is too hard for our God! Consider the seemingly impossible things God did for His people – preserving Noah and his family, the birth of Isaac after decades of waiting, deliverance from Egypt, the conquering of Canaan, earthquakes that opened prison doors, and on and on. This is our God – and the battle is His.

As we trust and obey. How does God’s power over impossibilities operate? Through obedience and faith. Regarding obedience, Hebrews 12:14b instructs us to “. . . pursue that **consecration and holiness** without which no one will [ever] see the Lord.” (emphasis added) Regarding faith, when His disciples asked why they could not drive out a demon out of a boy, Jesus explained:

Because of the littleness of your faith [that is, your lack of firmly relying trust]. For truly I say to you, if you have faith [that is living] like a grain of mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, Move from here to yonder place, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. (Matthew 17:20, AMPC)

Was Jesus limiting this potential to a few special believers? NO!!! Jesus is explaining that you only have to have a little bit of faith. He knows how we are made. God earnestly imprints on His heart that we are merely dust (Psalm 103). He knows that sometimes all we can do is have a tiny bit of faith. And He tells us clearly that we have but a small part to play in the battle because the battle is His!

The battle is the Lord’s. Consider King Jehoshaphat’s response when surrounded by a vast army. He set his mind to inquire of the Lord, told his people to fast, then he prayed. *“O, our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.”* (2 Chronicles 20:12, NIV) (emphasis added). Then, God spoke through Jahaziel, one of the prophets there with all the people standing before God and listening to King Jehoshaphat. God said, *“Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army, for the battle is not yours, but God’s (v. 15) . . . “You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you.”* (v. 17).

As they set out, King Jehoshaphat told the people *“Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in His prophets and you will be successful.”* (2 Chronicles 20:20, NIV) Then he stationed singers praising God at the head of the army. What happened? The enemy annihilated each other. (v. 23). It took Israel three days to gather the plunder.

The pattern we see in Jehosophat’s story is:

- set your mind to inquire of the Lord and to fast,
- pray, admit your helplessness and affirm your trust in God,

- believe God’s Word and His prophets and stand fast, and
- begin your fight with praise.

I look forward to hearing about the plunder God gives you as He annihilates your enemies before your eyes.

ONLY GOD KNOWS WHERE THE ENEMY HIDES.

To completely annihilate my Assyrians, God had to root out another deep cause of depression, specifically lingering shame about being depressed, even though I had identified it during group therapy and talked about it. The root causes of recurrent depression are buried deep within the human heart, and only God knows the heart (Psalm 139, Jeremiah 17:9.)

In great kindness, God led me to the biography of that great “prince of preachers”, Charles H. Spurgeon, who lived during the Victorian era. His and others’ candid writings about depression demolished that feeling of shame. I learned that, in spite of struggling greatly with depression, Pastor Spurgeon and many other spiritual giants were highly productive for the kingdom. Many believers in the Bible experienced depression, including David, Job, Elijah, Jeremiah, and others. The list for later days includes Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, William Cowper, C. S. Lewis. (<https://spagmag.com/articles/having-struggles/inspirational-people-believers-who-suffered-depression/>)

In “Steal Away Home”, by Matt Carter and Aaron Ivey, I learned that Pastor Spurgeon battled depressive thoughts and uncontrollable sadness even more, it seemed, than I did. The enemy hissed in his ear the same stinking poisons I heard, lies like the enemy would win, that the darkness would always return, that God was going to let him fall, and that his work was worthless. Other writings by Pastor Spurgeon deepened lessons I had learned early as a believer, such as:

- God sometimes puts us in the furnace to purify us,
- **BUT** God is always in the furnace beside us,
- God always turns the experience for our good and His glory,
- God truly is omnipotent,
- and the devil can do nothing without God’s permission (Read Job 1 and 2, especially verses 1:9-12 and 2:1-6).
- So—because of all that--we need not fear!

I knew that Elijah, Job, Jeremiah, and other Bible heroes suffered from depression. However, “Steal Away Home” told the story of a modern-day hero – and it told the story in detail. Knowing that spiritual giants struggled exactly as I did and remembering that God uses trials to refine us, helped me feel normal about the depression I had battled off and on every five years or so for all my life. It banished the unspoken fear that I had disappointed God and would only sporadically know the joy of walking closely with Him.

I stopped thinking my struggle was caused by my own failures, spiritual and otherwise. In the light of truth, that foul, crusty shell of shame cracked open, revealing the creature God created me to be. I finally truly believed that my sensitive personality and mind were gifts from God. God's truth shut the doors of self-criticism and self-condemnation. "*What He shuts no man can open; and what He opens, no man can shut.* (Isaiah 22:22b, NIV).

Satan tries to destroy every child. He damages little hearts that stay hurt for decades, and he often uses family members who have good intentions but who, as we all are, are but frail human beings.

Poisoned at the wellspring. God did dramatic healing in 1981 upon conversion, but huge deposits of shame and related emotions still remained underground. *Strongholds-- the root causes of depression and fear—can only be demolished through the living Word of God.* God's Word penetrates "to the dividing line of the breath of life (soul) and [the immortal] spirit, and of joints and marrow [of the deepest parts of our nature], exposing *and sifting and analyzing and judging* the very thoughts and purposes of the heart.(Hebrews 4:12, AMPC). Now, as I persisted in studying and meditating upon God's Word, His living Word judged, or evaluated, the ugly lies I had come to believe as a young child.

Those root causes of shame, unperceived, had grown deep inside, at the foundational level of mind, will and emotions, since earliest childhood. Satan can damage little hearts that stay hurt for decades. In my case, a hard-to-please parent addicted to prescription drugs, and a hyper-sensitive nature meant I grew up feeling unworthy, unloved, and constantly expecting to be criticized. With time, those lies became strongholds. I really believed them to be true.

Relentless self-criticism and perfectionism meant I never felt I was good enough in anything, including my relationship with God. For decades, I had striven to love and serve God the best I could, but deep inside, I felt I was not pleasing to God, that He did not really love me, that He was mad at me, and that He would not take care of me like He did other people. *The deadly lies from childhood that I believed about myself poisoned the wellspring of my heart, tainting thoughts and feelings about everything.* Satan stirred them up every few years to cause depression and fear, and he used them daily to hurt me and others in my life.

Our enemy uses many forms of trauma to steal, kill and destroy God's beloved humans. To be emotionally healthy, a child needs eighteen years of loving, focused attention and nurturing from two parents. That is God's plan. Few people get that, however, especially in our world today. Furthermore, even if a child is nurtured and not abused or neglected, a child's malleable heart is easily shattered by other trauma. Trauma as an adult has a similar shattering effect.

Only God knows and can judge the thoughts and intents of your particular heart. Only the light of God's truth can fully heal souls burdened and shattered by such lies. Only God's healing love can make a human heart whole, trusting, and confident, like that of a deeply cherished child. Only God knows which particular truths each heart needs to hear.

So, as God did in Psalm 18:15 for David, when He exposed the valleys of the sea and laid bare the foundations of the earth, so God exposed the submerged pathways of my poisonous thoughts and revealed the foundational causes of my sorrow and fear. Ephesians 5:13 (NIV) says, "*But everything exposed by the light becomes visible-and everything that is illuminated becomes light.*" God and only God could have exposed the strongholds of the enemy and revealed the camouflaged lies.

God and only God, Who is love, can heal rejection and fear imprinted on young hearts. Children accept what adults tell them about themselves and the world. In early stages of development, children use "magical thinking", believing that they cause things, such as a parent's anger or divorce and other traumatic events. They are too young to stand against the wicked lies the enemy gouges into their innocent minds. Only God knows which truths will root out those lies for each individual.

Only God knows which truths will root out the lies each individual hears.

Chapters Five and Six described how God showed me to study the Word and meditate on it. I beg you: ask God to show you the way He has for you to study and meditate and which Scriptures your heart needs. **I believe the only way to completely heal specific needs in the human heart is with God's specific truths about those specific needs. Holy Spirit will lead you!** He wants to heal you more than you want to be healed! He wants to teach you more than you want to be taught! A lifetime of study on the topic of God's love alone would barely scratch the surface. God loves you and has good plans for you! (Jeremiah 29:11).

In my particular case, the devil twisted my childhood experiences to create deep anxiety and feelings of insecurity, inferiority, loneliness, and hopelessness. So, I needed to experience, at root level, the truths that I am secure in God, that I am loved and accepted without criticism, that He is with me and that there is always, always, always hope. It took months of God's soaking my mind with God's truths about these topics before I could even perceive-- let alone step out of--that toxic undercurrent of lies raging just below conscious thought.

I believe the only way to completely heal specific needs in the human heart is with God's specific truths about those specific needs. Holy Spirit will lead you!

Once aware, I meditated, intensely, on verses that say God adores me, that He is pleased with my smallest efforts to please Him, and that He will take care of every need. I also spoke them out loud. Gradually, truth filtered down to the foundations of

soul and spirit. More and more, when external events or internal reactions caused storms, calming oil for those troubled waters bubbled up from within, from the Word planted inside. Holy Spirit whispered soothing truths of God's great love and His promises.

I believe the verses in "The Arsenal of God's Word" will help anyone taken captive by depression because those verses impart peace and a sense of God's personal love and presence. Your essential verses may be different, but please! Just ask! He longs to show you!

"If any of you is deficient in wisdom, let him ask of the giving God [Who gives] to everyone liberally and ungrudgingly, without reproaching or faultfinding, and it will be given him. (James 1:5, AMPC)

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Isaiah 30:29 SONGS IN THE NIGHT AND GLADNESS OF HEART

Isaiah 30:29 You shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept, and gladness of heart as when one marches in procession with a flute to go to the temple on the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel.

Comment: The extreme joy and celebration described in verse 29 happens while God is destroying Israel's enemies. The joy is likened to a holy feast. Study the feasts in the Bible and you will see God knows how to celebrate! This is the joy God wants for us while He heals our hearts. He wants you to enjoy the journey of healing along with Him. Doesn't it make you happy to help the one you adore, the one you cherish above all else? This, this is our loving Father, the Loving One who "girds me with strength and makes my way perfect (Psalm 18:32).

Keep that truth in mind while God is training your hands to war (Psalm 144) and while God is strengthening you. Lean on that truth while He is annihilating your enemies and those hidden strongholds. He is setting you free! He heals you *by* destroying the enemy's strongholds in the territory of your soul. And He does it with great joy and celebration! That is what I, by grace, found.

ISAIAH 30:29 SONGS IN THE NIGHT, SONGS OF DEEP AFFECTION! In the middle of seeking God desperately, knowing my life depended on it, God gave yet another great gift -- greater awareness of Him and greater joy than ever in being alone with Him. Satan had stolen that awareness and joy for a season, but now one of the end results of that desperation to feel better—which came only through great, lovingly-given affliction—was closer closeness with Him.

Let me be clear [well, actually I cannot be clear about this because God does great things beyond our understanding (Job 36:26)], but I do know that deeper awareness of God's presence is always a gift from God. No human can tell God to do anything nor can we make ourselves more aware of God's presence. However, God

does promise to reveal Himself to those who love and obey Him (John 14:21-23). So, all I can say is seek Him with all your heart, keep His word in your heart and before your eyes all day long, ask Him to reveal any sin in your life, and ask Him for greater awareness of His presence. Awareness of His presence imparts impenetrable strength. *“The Lord will give unyielding and impenetrable strength to His people; the Lord blesses His people with peace.” (Psalm 29:11, AMPC).*

The little book *“The Practice of the Presence of God”* by Brother Lawrence is a little book I reread regularly. It helped greatly in learning to be aware of God’s daily presence. I pray your relationship becomes one of great affection for our Heavenly Father, for He cares for us affectionately. After he tells us to humble ourselves before God, the apostle Peter said, *“Casting the whole of your care [all your anxieties, all your worries, all your concerns, once and for all] on Him, for He cares for you affectionately and cares about you watchfully.” (1 Peter 5:7, AMPC, emphasis added)*

One more aspect of that renewed closeness with God was the awareness that God wants us to be affectionate with Him.

#####

Our affectionate God. The evening of day four of the initial guidelines to quell the coronavirus, **I stopped typing and said out loud. “I love You, I love You, I really just love You!** Thank You again, Father, for a wonderful day!” I paused a moment, eyes closed, face tilted upwards. “I simply just love You, Lord!” Then I resumed typing.

It had been a truly wonderful day. Up at six to feed Barny and have devotions; then shopping for things I might need for two weeks of the lockdown, like allergy and cough medicine; finding Reese’s Easter eggs and Hershey bunnies for the grandsons’ Easter baskets and other little delights to surprise them with when they spent afternoons with me while school was out; and finally, finding new nuggets in the Word as I worked on a booklet about worry.

I sometimes touch my grandson’s foreheads with mine, make googly eyes, and say, “I love you, I love you, do you know I love you, don’t forget I love you, did you remember I love you. . . etc.” I am affectionate with my grandsons because I have an intimate relationship with them. **Should we be affectionate with God? Yes!!**

“Behold, bless (affectionately and gratefully praise) the Lord, all you servants of the Lord [singers] who by night stand in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands in holiness and to the sanctuary and bless the Lord [affectionately and gratefully praise Him]!” (Psalm 134:1-2, AMPC) (emphasis added)

God’s Word tells us to be affectionate with Him. A searchable, on-line Bible website, like Bible Gateway, shows 23 times in the AMPC when “affectionately” is used to amplify the meaning of “bless the Lord.” Look them up. Think about that. “Blessing God” includes being affectionate with Him.

Being affectionate with God requires time. Think about it. Can you be affectionate with someone if you are in a rush? Your mouth says “I love you” but your actions say “I love this thing I am rushing off to do (work, the kickoff on TV, an errand) more than I love you.” Affection requires full, focused attention. You cannot even give your dog a truly affectionate pat on the head while zooming by.

Being affectionate with God requires time.

Start each day by taking time to be affectionate with God. Notice that most results for the word affectionate in the AMPC are in psalms, so often used for daily devotions. Psalm 145:10 tells us, *“All Your works shall praise You, O Lord, and Your loving ones shall bless You [affectionately and gratefully shall Your saints confess and praise You!]”*

Our love for God is important to Him. Consider when Mary kissed the feet of Jesus, washed them with her tears, dried them with her hair and anointed them with costly perfume. *“... and as she stood behind Him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured perfume on them.”* In verse 45, the AMPC says that Jesus told the Pharisee that Mary had, from the moment He came into the room not stopped kissing His feet “tenderly and caressingly.” Read the whole story in Luke 7:36-50. Jesus obviously approved of the affectionate way Mary demonstrated her love. He said *“Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”* (Matthew 26:13, NIV). Consider also that John 13:23 tells us that John was leaning on Jesus’ bosom, or chest, at the Last Supper.

God values our unseen acts of love and affection for Him just as much, perhaps more I believe, as those seen by others. When was the last time you just closed your eyes and smiled at Him? Do you talk with Him all day? Do you tell Him “Thank You, Lord” for the little things He does for you all day long just as much as if He were a human person?

As you go about your daily life, be affectionate with God. We can show God our affection by giving our best effort, for Him, all day, in whatever we are doing. (*“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might (Ecclesiastes 9:10a, NIV).* We also give Him our best by loving Him with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our might (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Another priceless reason to be affectionate with God. Next, notice that, in 1 Corinthians 11:24 during the Lord’s Supper, Jesus gave thanks, broke the bread, and said “Take, eat. This is my body which is broken for you. Do this to call Me [affectionately] to remembrance.” And He repeats His request when the wine is taken, in verse 25. *“Similarly, when supper was ended, He took the cup also, saying, This cup is the new covenant [ratified and established] in My blood. Do this as often as you drink [it], to call Me [affectionately] to remembrance.”* (emphasis added). Each time I observe the Lord’s Supper, *Jesus wants me to remember Him with affection.*

I knew that believers in Jesus observe the Lord's supper to honor and respect Him by remembering His incomprehensible sacrifice for us. However, until I read this verse in the Amplified Classic version of the Bible, I did not know that Jesus specifically asked us to remember Him *with affection*. He could have, very appropriately, said to remember Him with awe and respectful fear. This is certainly part of the way we must approach God and, in my opinion, the most basic way. But He also clearly wants us to think of Him affectionately.

I believe that in these words at the Last Supper, Jesus was putting us above Himself. He knew that thinking of the agony He endured for us would make us sad. Obviously, we must remember and deeply honor His sacrifice, but I think Jesus wants us to be happy along with Him – because of what Calvary did for both of us, Jesus and us.

When I think about my earthly father, I recall the changes to his body caused by the sacrifices he made out of love for his family. I would, if he were alive, affectionately kiss and hold Daddy's hands, hands roughened by years of operating heavy equipment, strong hands covered with sun-bronzed skin and scars. I would gaze with fondness at the tan lines on his forehead and arms, acquired through decades of loving labor for his family. I would do the same for my mother's chore-roughened hands. How much more, when I think about what Jesus did should I be affectionately grateful.

We are affectionate with those we know intimately.

We are affectionate with those we know intimately. Synonyms for intimate include private, personal, secret, innermost, cherished, familiar, dear, devoted, and deepest. Help us, Father, to be more intimate and affectionate with You!

Being affectionate with the Lord did not come naturally at first. As a new believer, I had an overly formal attitude toward Him. I had the proper reverence and respect and awe (Deuteronomy 13:4, I Chronicles 16:25, Psalm 2:11) but I also had an unhealthy subconscious fear that I was not doing enough, fear that I was not worthy, and fear that God would one day abandon me because of that. As I said before, such wounded attitudes are the work of the evil one. However, God brought those hurts into the light of His love as He taught me to ask Him into each moment, including undignified times (like exercising or scrubbing the bathroom) and times when I failed Him (like when losing patience with technology!)

My search for closer closeness with the Lord led me to read "*The Practice of the Presence of God*", written in the 17th century by a friar called Brother Lawrence. This little book helped me overcome the last remnants of over-formality with God. In this dynamo of a book, Brother Lawrence talks about chatting with the Lord while he worked in the monastery's kitchen. Brother Lawrence said

“. . . during any daily duty, lift your heart to Him (God), because even the least little remembrance will please Him. You don't have to pray out loud; He's nearer

than you can imagine. . . We can make our hearts personal chapels where we can enter anytime to talk to God privately. These conversations can be so loving and gentle, and anyone can have them” (page 36).

Slowly, I began talking to God more and more during the day, finding that as I drew near to God, He drew near to me (James 4:8) and that He was, indeed, with me when I was with Him (2 Chronicles 15:2). I remember thinking initially that the kind of closeness Brother Lawrence described, where throughout the day he just paused and smiled at Jesus, was for a special few. No, it is for you and for me. Does God have favorites? No! (Romans 2:11). Persist in your pursuit of His presence! He rewards those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

God is affectionate with us. Ponder that. Ponder it again. And yet again. Beloved, God says He “. . . cares for us *affectionately* and cares about us *watchfully*.” I Peter 5:7 says, *“Casting the whole of your care [all your anxieties, all your worries, all your concerns, once and for all] on Him, for He cares for you affectionately and He cares about you watchfully.”*

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| <p>God is affectionate with us. Ponder that. Ponder it again.</p> |
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This is not the only place in the Bible where God clearly shows His affection and the depth of His love. As you pursue your daily personal Bible study, make note of these places and imprint them on your heart, i.e., memorize them! Some of my favorites include particular verses in Psalm 139, Psalm 136, John 3, John 14, Joshua 1, Isaiah 26, 2 Chronicles 14, and Ephesians 3. The Bible overflows with God’s love. It is, indeed, God’s love letter to us, as many have said.

Persist in your resisting!

Persist in your resisting! You’ll drive the foe away,
For in the one in whom the Word abides, in that one, death can’t stay!
Dark death – it seeks to blind your mind, to veil, so you can’t see
The truth that, in His glorious love, you have full liberty.

Don’t hear the lies that darkness tells! Don’t feed on death’s dark fears,
but feast on He who yet indwells, Who woos you oh so near,
So near to His great heart of love, so close that you are one,
For in that oneness, sealed by love, *your* fighting is all done.
Then, though the world and trials press in, and tribulations rise,
your heart will stay secured in Him. Fresh hope will yet arise!

As God continues healing your heart, as you keep getting closer, more intimate and more affectionate with Him, keep persisting in identifying areas where you need healing. These areas are likely the things that trouble you most. These things may be troubling you because you are believing lies. For example, if you constantly worry about finances, you likely need to ponder verses about God’s unfailing provision because you are believing lies from the enemy that you will not have enough money or some other

means to take for yourself and those you love. If you struggle with jealousy, you likely are believing lies that God is unfair and does not love you as much as He loves others who have what you want.

I believe complete healing would not have happened without affliction – two years of it in my case. I also believe it would not have come had I not persisted--the best I could, not perfectly--to study the Word in my particular areas of need and to follow God whole-heartedly. I persisted in resisting the tendencies of my flesh, the world, and the devil while I kept studying the Word in my personal areas of need..

But, please hear me: I know it happened because God worked in me, through grace. As Ephesians 2:8-9 says “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.* (NIV)” I dare not take credit for it. I stand in awe of God for His healing and I am amazed at His power. I know everything I have comes from Him. I try to follow Paul’s instruction in Philippians 2:12 to continue walking with God, working out my salvation “with fear and trembling” because I know it is God who is working in me “to will and to act according to His good purpose.” (Philippians 4:13,NIV)

Please! Understand that you can do all things, even enduring a long process of healing and restoration, because God will give you His strength to do it (Phillipians 4:13). He will work in your heart to give you the desire to persist. It will be God working in you. All you have to do is honestly, earnestly seek Him.

DO NOT GIVE UP!!!! Even if you are struggling mightily, do not settle for anything less than the daily habit of active joy, not just avoiding depression and fear. Learn to say to your flesh: I AM happy, I AM excited, I AM feeling good today.

Learn to perceive when Satan lies to you. The enemy is not happy about your healing and he will lie that you are not really healed, it will not last, that God may heal others and give them joy but God cannot create a joyful life for you because you are too messed up . . . LIES! LIES! LIES! When you hear those thought arrows zing toward your head, proclaim, out loud, the exact opposite! Again, reading the declarations in books by Steve and Wendy Backlund are a great help.

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| He will work in your heart to give you the desire to persist. It will be God working in you. All you have to do is honestly, earnestly seek Him. |
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At first, I heard those lies over and over but I kept speaking what God said about me in His Word as He, by great grace, brought verses I had meditated-upon-to-the-point-of-memorizing, to mind. And the same God who fought for me longs to fight for you! The battle is His! We win because God never, no never, no never fails, in anything, at any time, in any way, for anyone who follows His Word and His ways.

We win because God never, no never, no never fails, in anything, at any time, in any way, for anyone who follows His Word and His ways.

“And they who know Your name [who have experience and acquaintance with Your mercy] will lean on and confidently put their trust in You, for You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek (inquire of and for) You [on the authority of God’s Word and the right of their necessity.” (Psalm 9:10, AMPC)

PERSISTING THROUGH 2020 – MORE OF THE STORY. The rest of this chapter consists of parts of blog posts I wrote during that stressful first year of covid, from June through December 2020, while I persisted, often desperately, in resisting the enemy and continuing to identify areas needing healing. It helped to remind myself that God cared about each detail of my life.

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God busies Himself with your details. I signed in at the office and walked down the hall, gazing fondly at pages taped to walls, grouped by classroom, thickly-penciled letters sprawling above and below that distinctive blue-lined paper, with red dots splitting each line. The mashed-potatoes-and-baking-bread smell led me to the cafeteria, filled with mostly empty metal folding chairs. “Whew!” I took a seat on the front row. Waiting for fifteen minutes was a small price to ensure Ansel saw me. I touched the gold-plated spiral pin clipped to the neck of my tank top and tugged my long skort forward to cover more of two pudgy knees. Haskell would think I was gorgeous, that was all that mattered.

God busies Himself with your details.

I talked with the mom who joined me on the front row, musing that she was about the age of my daughter, who had to work this morning. Then, students filed in, class by class, the principal welcomed everyone to the award ceremony, and called the two kindergarten classes to the stage.

Ansel was the twelfth kindergartner in line. When he turned around, wide eyes searching the audience, I stuck my hand up high and waved. He smiled a tight, self-conscious, close-lipped smile and waved back, lifting his hand just above his waist.

“Had the teacher told them not to wave?” I wondered.

Then Ansel touched his neck, at the spot where I wore the pin and smiled the wide, full-hearted smile I loved. Tears sprang to my eyes as I touched my hand to the clip at my neck, nodded, and gave him two thumbs-up. After he had spotted that clip in Nana's joo-ree box a few months ago, I had worn it, whenever he asked, which was often, and wherever he wanted, which included the gym and the grocery, and while vacuuming, delighted that he wanted to decorate his Nana.

"Thank You, Lord, that I remembered this little detail. It is huge to him!"

Teach me gratitude, Lord, for Your daily attention to details of my life. As I drove back home, I reflected on what I remembered of Psalm 37:23, that God busies himself with the steps of the righteous. When I got home, I looked it up:

"The steps of a [good] man are directed and established by the Lord when He delights in his way [and He busies Himself with his every step]. (Psalm 37:23, AMPC)

"Oh, Father" I said. "I was overjoyed when Ansel noticed I had worn our special pin. His smiling face said 'Thank you, thank you, thank you, Nana!' Father, help me remember to thank You, with my whole heart and a big smile, for the countless details of everyday life You prepare just for me, like songs on the radio, a text from a friend and smiles from strangers, just when I need them. You truly do arrange every detail of the life we share, don't You, Lord?"

Teach me gratitude that You are the loving Father who teaches us. Back home, I focused on Psalm 37-22-23 in the New Living, NIV and the AMPC. As I read and reread the verses, cause and effect linkages emerged:

[1] When we live a godly life, God delights in our way, or our manner of life.

[2] When God delights in how we are living, He busies Himself with every detail of our lives,

[3] Because of [1] and [2], even though we stumble and fall, we will not stay down because the LORD holds our hand and supports, sustains, and strengthens us.

At first glance, the NIV and NLT, which said we would never fall, seemed to disagree with the AMPC, which indicated we *would* fall.

"Hmmm, Lord? What is the key to understanding this? Well, if I think of a father holding the hand of a little child as they walk together, that child could stumble and fall, but a loving, attentive father, like You are, Lord, would grasp that little hand even more tightly the moment the child began falling so that the child would fall only to his knees and not all the way to the ground, as he would have if the father were not holding his hand and pulling him back up.

Oh, Father! Teach me to always, always, always hold on to Your mighty hand! Let me be grateful You hold my hand. Let me not resist but agree willingly when Your

hand tugs me in a specific direction. Keep teaching me to have the same mind as You, to agree with You, so that we can walk together (Amos 3:3). Keep my feet on the paths of righteousness that lead to eternal life. (Proverbs 12:28) What comforting reassurance these verses bring! Thank You, Lord!

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Troubles, trials, distress, and frustration. It is a good thing that God does indeed care about each detail in our lives because this world is filled with troubles.

“I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace and confidence. In the world, you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration. Be of good cheer [take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I am overcome the world. [I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you.] John 16:33, AMPC

The “tribulations and trials and distress and frustrations” of being human filled the first hours of one morning in mid 2020. As I ate my oatmeal, I felt guilty for sleeping late although health issues required extra rest right now. Irritated that negative thoughts, which had led to depression in years past, now swirled in my mind, I asked myself “Are these health problems going to drag me back toward the pit? I am doing the best I can, Lord, but it is really hard.”

“Lord, thank You for leading me to John 1:33. I needed that today, desperately. I agree that in this world we do have troubles, trials, distress and frustration. Help me be of good cheer, like You said, and to remember that You have overcome the world for me.” I paused. “Even though it surely does not feel like it today!”

Next, after 45 minutes at the computer, I hit save, bagged up the garbage to toss in the dumpster and headed out the door for my daily short, and slow, walk.

“I’m frustrated about the writing, too, Lord. You always give so many thoughts and I want to include so much of the Bible, but I read that people do not want to read long blog posts. And there are so many projects I want to write but my back cannot take long hours at the computer like before. Oh, Lord! Forgive me for complaining! It is such a gift and a privilege to serve You and live for You. I know You will guide, Lord, and show just what to do each day. Help me focus on Your truths and not my fears and frustrations!”

God speaks through nature. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.” (Psalm 19:1-2, NIV). I started walking slowly down the short street bordering my building, striving to put my heel down first, as the physical therapist had coached me to do, noticing again how the trees along the sidewalk formed a straight line all the way to the first intersection, which abutted the neighborhood elementary school. When I walked earlier in the morning, several men in work clothes stood together, waiting for a ride to their work, but by late morning, like today, it was just

me and the Lord and an occasional cat, napping under a broken toy wagon next to the sagging and soggy yellow couch and the splintered bookcase.

My walk usually ended at the intersection but the wind blowing through the trees along the small, gravel track at the elementary school enticed me. I sidled through the open gate and walked to the green wrought iron bench. Still feeling tired and discouraged, I texted a friend whose husband was facing yet another surgery and another friend whose teenager was being, well, a real teenager. As I looked, the wind kept moving the overgrown grass in rippling waves, fluttering the leaves of the trees, murmuring in my ears, bringing back the pure pleasures of childhood, like the feel of Florida's sugary soft beach sand curling around bare toes, the cool touch of the conch shell pressing into my ear, and the sound of the ocean's power echoing within its twisting chamber. Finally, I really looked. Finally, I started listening to God.

Who can know the path of the wind? Who can know the way of God? Part of Psalm 103 bubbled up from within: "As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more." (NIV)

"Lord, surely, I am indeed a blade of grass. Teach me, oh Lord, to "number my days aright" so I can live wisely. (Psalm 90:12) Help me remember that I am here on earth, and You are there in heaven, ruling and reigning over all things. Help me remember I cannot understand Your ways any more than I can tell which way the wind will blow next, like that verse in Ecclesiastes I memorized so long ago, that as I "*do not know how the body is formed in the womb, so I cannot understand the way of God, the Maker of all things.*" (Ecclesiastes 11:5). Help me stop trying to figure everything out, which I know makes me *feel* in control. Help me trust You when things seem to be going all wrong."

I looked intently at the grass. The green of the bottom two-thirds blended into yellow and pale brown, with dark brown spikes at the top of each stem, like mature heads of wheat, pulling the entire strand of grass over in the moments the wind was still. The up, then down, left, then right, then swirling patterns made the path of the wind visible.

"How many strands of grass?" I wondered, "cover this little track, the in-field, the surrounding areas up to the fence and then toward the playground. Thousands? Millions? Yet they all move as one when the wind touches them. Each blade is so fragile, but together they make a grand symphony of motion."

The way of the word in the heart. "Oh, Father! Please help Your silly child. Help me get in the right rhythm with You again, to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Galations 5:25). Help me return to depending on You and not my own strength to keep myself together. That is what I was doing the last few days, right? Help me yield to Your ways and Your leading, just as these blades of grass yield to the wind and in so doing are

beautiful. Help me yield, Lord! Help me trust! I trust You, Lord! Help me trust You more!
“

“I know every single person also has loads of troubles, trials, distress and frustrations, just as I do. They are just different for each person. Help me honor You, Lord, in my individual life, this day, this hour. Help me be cheerful, and take courage and be confident, certain, and undaunted, as You told your disciples just before Your arrest and trial and crucifixion. Help me remember that You have overcome the world and that it cannot harm me because You have deprived it of that power. Help me fix my mind on heavenly things and KEEP it set, because that is where my real life is, with You, not here on earth.” (*And set your minds and keep them set on what is above—the higher things—not on the things that are on the earth.*” Colossians 3:2, AMPC).

“Remind me that You are a partner in my work. Help me live each hour with that awareness. “Help me remember that *“the Lord delights in the way of the man whose steps he has made firm”* and that *“though he stumble he will not fall for the Lord upholds him with His hand.”* (Psalms 37:23-24, NIV). And as the Amplified says You busy Yourself with his every step. That, truly, is remarkable!”

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| Fretting is forgetting, eyes off what He has done. . . |
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Fretting is forgetting.

Fretting is forgetting, eyes off what He has done—
victories He has given, battles He has won.
My peace is in the knowing, eyes fixed on Him not me—
heart pondering His power. In trusting, I’m made free.

A few months later, on the first truly cold day that year, in the fall of 2020, I sat in the rocker with the window cracked two inches, relishing the truly cold air and the predawn darkness outside the window, re-reading my journaling notes back to when I had felt so close to God and joyful and excited about each day. I have heard, more than once, that when you feel distant from God, it is you who moved, not God. So, I knew that because I no longer felt close to God meant that I had moved away, not Him. I prayed and began taking notes as I reviewed the month.

Fretting is forgetting, eyes off what He has done. I had by grace been walking in the light (Psalm 56:13), ***BUT*** when several physical problems intensified simultaneously (asthma, feet issues, joints, heart concerns, etc.) I spent precious time and energy doing the best I could with each problem, which included prayer, going to doctors, refining my diet, adding more stretches and exercise as well as rest, etc. That, I saw now, was where my eyes turned off God and toward the problems, thus, toward darkness.

The path of fretting leads to darkness. Although I know better, I began fretting, focusing on problems, rather than God's promises. We can focus on only one thing, so in turning my focus away from light, and toward my problems, I was heading toward the darkness with its deadly snares of discouragement, fear, and despair. And I kept on in that direction, unaware that my pathway was growing darker, my vision growing dimmer. God lovingly warns us in Psalm 37:8 b: ". . . *Do not fret-- it leads only to evil.*" (NIV)

Without God's power and victories consciously in our mind, we often start thinking our current situation is impossible.

The victories He has given, the battles He has won. Even though this book I was finishing describes the many victories God had given over depression, I was not thinking about them myself and thanking God for them afresh, which would have kept my attention on God's power and my heart filled with light. Without God's power and victories in mind, we

often start thinking our current situation is impossible. We begin losing hope and subconsciously begin doubting God and His power and His love for us. Eventually we can even start to doubt His goodness and fall for the same lie Satan told Eve in Genesis 3:4-5. Satan told Eve that God was withholding good from her and Adam, that He was not giving them the best. Those kinds of evil thoughts can flow subconsciously, in our hearts, beyond our awareness because, as Jeremiah 17:9 cautions, "*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*" (Jeremiah 17:9, NIV).

Psalm 105 to 107: the wisdom of often remembering what God has done. Psalm 105, 106, and 107 clearly tell us it is wise to consciously, intentionally recall what God has done. These three psalms show the wisdom of regularly observing and heeding the Lord's "*goodness and loving-kindness and His wonderful works to the children of men.*" The key idea that links these psalms is Psalm 107:43:

"Whoso is wise [if there be any truly wise] will observe and heed these things; and they will diligently consider the mercy and loving-kindness of the Lord. (AMPC)." (emphasis added)

"These things" are God's goodness and loving-kindness and "His wonderful works for the children of men", some of which are recounted in Psalm 105 and 106.

Psalm 105 opens with "*O give thanks unto the LORD; call upon His name; make known His deeds among the people*" (KJV) Verses 1 through 5 tell us five things to do: thank the Lord, sing to Him, glory in His holy name, look to Him and His strength, and remember "the wonders He has done." In the rest of Psalm 105 God reminds Israel, and us, of how faithful He was to them, beginning with Abraham all the way through their history to when He gave them the promised land in order that "*they might observe His statutes and keep His laws (hearing, receiving, loving and obeying them).*" (AMPC) In other words, He created a people of His own and put them in the wonderful land He

had prepared so that they could love and follow Him. He does the same thing when He matures us, taking us on a journey to a position of right-standing with Him, so that we can enjoy the fulfillment of His promises.

Psalm 106 starts with praise for God and His merciful doings and then confesses that “*our fathers in Egypt understood not nor appreciated your miracles; they did not [earnestly] remember the multitude of Your mercies, nor imprint Your loving-kindness [on their hearts], but they were rebellious and provoked the Lord at the sea, even at the Red Sea (v. 7, AMPC)*” Then we read that “nevertheless, He saved them for His name’s sake [to prove the righteousness of the divine character], that He might make His mighty power to be known.” And we read how He saved them over and over when they kept rebelling all throughout their wilderness journey. Read for yourself and see how merciful God was with them, “nevertheless” hearing their cry and how:

“He [earnestly] remembered for their sake His covenant, and relented their sentence of evil—according to the abundance of His mercy and loving-kindness [when they cried out to Him]” v. 45, AMPC)

They forgot what God had done and turned away over and over and over but every time God rescued them when they called out to Him.

Psalm 107 opens with “*O give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; for His mercy and loving-kindness endure forever.*” (AMPC). Notice that the idea of thanking the Lord for his goodness and mercy and loving-kindness is repeated four times as a lament, in verses 8, 15, 21, and 31. The psalmist is deeply grieved that people are not doing that. He laments --“*Oh, that men would praise [and confess to] the Lord His goodness and loving-kindness, and His wonderful works to the children of men!*” *Psalm 107* concludes with verse 43, which tells us it is truly wise to “*observe and heed these things*” and “*diligently consider the mercy and loving-kindness of the Lord.*”

God is clearly telling us what to do—we are to “Give thanks to the LORD because He is good. His love endures forever.” (Psalm 107:1, 136:1, NIV) The phrase “*His mercy and loving-kindness endures forever*” is repeated in all 26 verses of *Psalm 136*, after statements about His great wonders from the time of creation to His current bountiful provision for Israel. God wants us to remember that “His love endures forever.”

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| God wants us to remember that His love endures forever. |
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That morning, I paused and lamented . . . If only I had remembered to remember His countless gifts to me personally and His eternal loving nature, I would have recalled the battles He had fought for me and the victories we had won as He had been training me to keep myself calm in times of adversity (*Psalm 94:13*). I would not have kept fretting about my problems and looking to my own strength. I could have stayed out of the snares of discouragement and despair that bound me up in self-focus.

My peace is in the knowing, eyes fixed on Him not me. In hindsight, I can see where I failed in my part of the blessed promise in Isaiah 26:3

“ You will guard him and keep him in perfect and constant peace whose mind [both its inclination and its character] is stayed on You, because he commits himself to You, leans on You, **and hopes** confidently in You.” (AMPC)

My heart remained committed to Him but I was leaning on my own understanding--my mind not fixed on Him-- as I tried to figure out solutions to the problems. I got trapped in the snare of fretting and worry because it made me feel in control. I had stopped hoping confidently in God. How the enemy must love it when he manages to steal our hope and our conscious confidence in God!

. . . heart pondering His power. . . in trusting, I am free. When my mind is on God, either through talking with Him or pondering on His Word, I am free from hurt from the world, my flesh, and the devil. Keeping my mind on God and the truths of His Word keeps me trusting, believing, and waiting with confident expectation.

There is a deep mystery and connection for me between the words trust, faith, hope, confidence and expectation and what it produces in the life of God's believing children. I see a faint glimmer of how it works. I believe the mechanism of its operation, the way it works, is summarized in “We live by faith, not by sight” or as I heard paraphrased recently, “We live by believing not by seeing.”

To me, that means we have to reach out, into the unseen and eternal spiritual realm (2 Corinthians 4:18) and when we do, our faith (which is trust, hope, and belief) is doing our part and then God responds. I know our faith pleases God, because He says we have to believe in Him and have to believe that He will reward our diligent seeking of Him.

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6, NIV)

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LOOK! THE LORD MY GOD IS NEAR!

I untwisted my scarf, snugged it more closely around my neck and kept walking. The cool air felt good on my cheeks but stung my nose and bare fingers. Brown leaves tumbled over each other, scratching along the sidewalk in the intermittent breeze.

“Lord, help me have the right attitude about exercise. Help me not complain about needing to do so much walking and stretching and everything else. Help me just be grateful, Lord! Help me not be afraid about health. Help me overlook the discomfort. This body is Yours anyway, not mine! I will choose to rejoice in You and all You have done. . . .”

I continued walking and began humming one of the 14 Christmas carols for which I had written new lyrics. (See the Books and More page on www.wordsofhopeandhealing.com) The one in my mind that morning was additional lyrics for “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”. I began:

[Verse 1] Look! The Lord my God is near, He will keep me safe from fear.
Though the enemy roar, God is king forevermore.
I submit to God’s great hand. He will lift me up to stand.
Casting all my care on Him, on His love I can depend.
Look! The Lord my God is near, He will keep me safe from fear!

[Verse 2] I can keep my heart controlled. God Himself indwells my soul.
I’m alert, and I watch out for the devil prowls about.
I resist him, I stand strong, though the trial might feel long.
In my weakness, He gives grace, so I rise and run my race!
I can keep my self controlled. God Himself indwells my soul!

“I can keep my heart controlled. . .” As I walked, one of my stand-by verses floated into mind. “Thank You, Lord, for Your promise in Isaiah 26:3, that *“You will guard him and keep him in perfect and constant peace whose mind [both its inclination and its character] is stayed on you, because he commits himself to You, leans on You, and hopes confidently in You.”* So, Lord, because I know Your wonderful promise in verse 3, I am committing myself to You, I am leaning on You, and I am hoping confidently in You and I know You will strengthen me, for You alone are my source of strength. (from Isaiah 26:4, AMPC)

[Verse 3] My God covers me with peace. All my fears and worries cease!
He will keep me in His rest as I think on what is best.
In my weakness, He is strong. He will keep me from all wrong.
I will walk with Him in love. I will keep my mind above.
My God covers me with peace. All my fears and worries cease!
“God Himself has full control. He Who rules earth rules my soul!”

My God covers me with peace. All my fears and worries cease! In that Christmas season of 2020 the visible world overflowed with the “tribulation *and* trials *and* distress *and* frustration” Jesus spoke of in John 16:33 (AMPC). The year before, when I was just learning to lean on God and His Word, I had desperately needed God’s peace. Now, by grace, I had His peace often.

[Verse 4] God Himself has full control. He who rules earth rules my soul!
He will give me grace to fight. We will win o’er darkest night!
Nothing that attacks me stands, for He holds me in His hand!
God is faithful. He will save! This the banner that I wave!
God Himself has full control. He who rules earth rules my soul!

#

Our God is good! Life is indeed hard, but our God, the God who made heaven and earth, our God is, INDEED, good! That Christmas season of 2020 was challenging, but I knew God was continuing His healing work, the best Christmas gift of all, next to Jesus.

CHAPTER 9

GOD'S JOY AND OURS

Isaiah 30:30-32. Unspeakable joy while God annihilates our bitterest enemy. This is another astounding description of how God fights for us in spiritual realms. Verse 30: God will let our enemy see Him, Who is their destruction, coming. Verse 31: Just as we were terrorized, our enemy will be terrorized with every blow of the rod of God. Verse 32: We will have joy as God fights for us. We will celebrate because God has well-prepared the place of total destruction for our enemies. As the enemy sees destruction coming, he fights even harder. Yet, in all this, God promises joy and celebration as we fight alongside Him.

January to December 2021

- Healing had to continue . . .
- . . . through many more trials
- Maintaining--then regaining—peace and balance

APPLYING THE WORD

VERSE 30. THE ENEMY SEES HIS DESTRUCTION COMING.

- No foe can withstand God's mighty power.
- All by grace, not works.

VERSE 31. THE ENEMY IS TERRIFIED – AS HE SEES US GETTING STRONGER.

- The pressure has to be real
- Using the Word out loud.
- God gives light as we fight.
- Then, God gives even more light.

VERSE 32. JOY WHILE GOD FIGHTS FOR US – THROUGH TRIALS

- We learn more when our way is wobbly.
- Wobbly times are good for us.
- Making progress *because of* trials
- Confident--like Habakkuk
- Do trials ever end?
- On to the last chapter!

ISAIAH 30:30. THE ENEMY SEES HIS DESTRUCTION COMING. (30) And the Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard and the descending blow of His arm to be seen, coming down with indignant anger and with the flame of a devouring fire, amid crashing blast *and* cloudburst, tempest, and hailstones.

Comment: Perhaps it is part of God's justice that, just as we were terrorized by the enemy, so God not only destroys the enemy, but He terrorizes them before He destroys them. Though the enemy fights harder, the battle is the Lord's and we can trust in Him, with confidence, while He uses everything for our good. God knew that I needed the pressure of more trials to force my roots to dig deeper.

NO FOE CAN WITHSTAND GOD'S MIGHTY POWER (PSALM 91:1 AND PSALM 46). At this point in the story, January 2021, I had, by grace, enjoyed nearly two years of consistent victory over depression and fear, rarely falling into the pit of negative thoughts and feelings. I thought I was doing well. I actually was, but what a danger to think so! God still had much work to do. He had to:

- Deal with pride as well as a works attitude
- Teach more about enduring and overcoming trials
- Teach how to get back up after a fall

All of that was part of God's destroying my bitterest enemy—Satan's ability to ensnare me and drag me back down into the pit. I was, indeed, doing well but, over the next few months God was going to ensure healing would continue by allowing trials that would force my spiritual roots to dig deeper. So, 2021 was another year of healing and training. The first lesson that year was about pride and it began in a startling way.

IT IS ALL BY GRACE, NOT BY WORKS. "If you think you are *leaning* well, take heed lest you start standing up straight." I lay in bed, aware Holy Spirit was speaking. It was one of those mornings of getting straight out of bed and sitting at the desk—no splash of water in the face, no cup of tea, not even a moment of formal devotional time.

When I looked up the verse Holy Spirit had used to make a little joke, I knew it was HUGELY important. "*So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*" (*I Corinthians 10:12, NIV*). In this verse, God lovingly warns against pride. When we get prideful, about anything, a fall is coming. Proverbs 16:18 warns "*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall*" (*NIV*). I had been thinking I was doing a good job of leaning. I had tried so hard to trust God and not rely, or lean, on my own understanding, as Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to do. I had known these three verses for decades, yet despite trying to take warning, I had gradually become proud of how well I leaned on Him.

We humans are so vulnerable to pride! How the enemy loves to use this weapon on believers who are striving to walk well with the Lord! But, the enemy is less than an ant in comparison to God. Nothing he does against God succeeds, and God uses everything for our good (Romans 8:28, Genesis 50:20.)

Whenever I talk about staying in victory, I preface my comments with BY GRACE ALONE. Why? I have (by grace alone!!!) learned the danger of thinking that walking well with the Lord comes by my effort. Here are four Bible-based reasons I know this is true.

[1] *All we have comes from God.* Romans 11:36 tells us “*For everything comes from Him and exists by His power and is intended for His glory*” (NLT). When King David was offering to God the treasures he had accumulated for building the temple, he acknowledged God's greatness and God's ownership of the heavens and earth:

“Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand are power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. Now, our God, we give You thanks, and praise Your glorious name. But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.” (1 Chronicles 29:13-14, NIV)

God repeats this truth often in His Word. Obviously, He wants it imprinted on our hearts. It is a shield against pride. James 1:17 tells us: “*Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. He chose to give birth to us by giving us His true word. And we, out of all creation, became His prized possession.* (NLT)” And Ephesians 2:8-9 declares: “*God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.*” (NLT)

[2] *Only God can change the heart.* You have likely heard Jeremiah 17:9, which says “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly perverse and corrupt and severely, mortally sick! Who can know it [perceive, understand, be acquainted with his own heart and mind]? (AMPC).*” The KJV says “*The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?*”

So, who can understand the human heart? In I Chronicles 28:9 God says He understands the heart and the mind and every thought we have. In light of the natural state of our heart, how good it is that God promises a new heart! *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.*” (Ezekiel 36: 26-27, NIV) How blessed we are that God not only tells us how to get a new heart but also a new mind. In Romans 12:2 He spells out: “*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will.*” (NIV)

In I Chronicles 28:9 God says He understands the heart and the mind and every thought we have.

[3] *Even our desire to please God comes from Him.* When a crowd was arguing that Jesus could not really be the Bread of Life because they knew His father and His

mother Jesus replied:

“Don't bicker among yourselves over me. You're not in charge here. The Father who sent me is in charge. He draws people to me—that's the only way you'll ever come. Only then do I do my work, putting people together, setting them on their feet, ready for the End” (John 6:44-46, The Message, emphasis added).

I Corinthians 1:30 firmly declares who is responsible when we finally think right and live right. *“Everything that we have - right thinking and right living, a clean slate and a fresh start - comes from God by way of Jesus Christ. (The Message).”* That is crystal clear!

[4] *We are truly only humble servants.* Philippians 2:12-13 says it is God working in us that causes us to want to do His will and live so that we fulfill His purpose in our life. Prayerfully ponder Paul's words in verses 12 and 13 using the Amplified version. Paul urges an attitude of reverence and awe BECAUSE it is God who is working in us, giving us the power and desire to follow Him.

(12) *“Therefore, my dear ones, as you have always obeyed [my suggestions], so now, not only [with the enthusiasm you would show] in my presence but much more because I am absent, work out (cultivate, carry out to the goal, and fully complete) your own salvation with reverence and awe and trembling (self-distrust, with serious caution, tenderness of conscience, watchfulness against temptation, timidly shrinking from whatever might offend God and discredit the name of Christ). (13) [Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight.”* (AMPC, emphasis added).

Although it is sometimes gut-wrenchingly painful, I will always be grateful for God's loving discipline. I will always need it – desperately, because the human heart is desperately wicked and deceitful. Only God can understand the human heart (Jeremiah 17:9). Only God can give us what we need to heal and thrive, as He intends for us to do.

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ISAIAH 30:31. THE ENEMY IS TERRIFIED – AS HE SEES US GETTING STRONGER (31) At the voice of the Lord the Assyrians will be stricken with dismay *and* terror, when He smites them with His rod.

Comment: God will annihilate your bitterest enemy. These beautiful verses in Isaiah 30 describe how God would annihilate the Assyrians, the bitterest enemy of Israel, who, besides being famous for their cruelty, were also the best fighters in the ancient world. To annihilate is to totally destroy, obliterate or wipe off the face of the earth. It means to destroy something so completely that there is no chance of its continuing existence.

THE PRESSURE HAS TO BE REAL. In mid 2021, God lovingly dealt even deeper with my deadly pride in self-effort. It was a thorough wringing out experience! I have a vague memory of my Mother using a wringer washer. As she fed a towel into the wringer, it emerged from the slit between the two wringer arms not only flat but so stiff that it stood up like crumpled cardboard when it fell into the catch bucket. The wringer surely changed that towel! Once God washes our soul with the water of the Word, He has to squeeze that soiled wash water out. That can include a lot of pride. And that is not pleasant!

In mid-2021, as the months of physical and other problems dragged on, I sunk deeper each day into the muddy mire of negative thoughts and feelings, hurting nearly as much as when deeply depressed two years earlier. It felt like something pressing down on my mind and on my head physically, from the outside. The burden of oppression had become that heavy. I could not think clearly enough to repeat my personalized verses. Negative thoughts and feelings flooded in and stayed, no matter what I tried. I believe the attack had affected my brain chemistry at that point.

I knew, from much experience with depression, that our own negative thoughts can cause feelings of heaviness and discouragement, but I also knew that sometimes that feeling comes from Satan's attacks. Two days earlier and each day since, I had prayed, "Lord, I think this current struggle with negative thoughts and feelings and discouragement and all that old mess involves a chemical imbalance in my brain. I cannot seem to think clearly and I cannot remember to keep thinking on the Word. This is a legitimate real need I cannot fix for myself and I am asking for healing on the authority of the Word and by right of necessity as You say in Lamentations 3:25. I have tried for three days, Lord, and I cannot keep my mind on the Word. I truly need You, Lord. Please help me!"

I awoke that Saturday with heavier than ever depressing thoughts, having slept very late again as I had been doing due to increasing fatigue. Skipping gym several days had caused extra stiffness so, after my best, although weak, effort with devotions, I packed my gym bag and walked to the car, carrying the frayed bunch of papers on which I had hand-written my personalized arsenal of Scriptures.

USING THE WORD – OUT LOUD! On the way to the car, I repeated out loud, to myself, Lamentations 3:19-23.

(19) O Lord] remember [earnestly] my affliction and my misery, my wandering and my outcast state, the wormwood and the gall.(20) My soul has them continually in remembrance and is bowed down within me. (21) But this I recall and therefore have I hope and expectation: (22) It is because of the Lord's mercy and loving-kindness that we are not consumed, because His [tender] compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great and abundant is Your stability and faithfulness."

Then I said out loud as I drove, praying the Word back to God. "Lord, it has truly been hard lately and I do ask You to earnestly think about this. I have been thinking

about how hard things are and my soul has been cast down. But this I recall and therefore I have hope and expectation. "It is because of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed. Great and abundant is Your faithfulness." Then I began repeating those two phrases over and over. *"It is because of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed. Great and abundant is Your faithfulness . . ."*

As I kept driving and speaking those two verses out loud, I thought about God's faithfulness. Into my mind popped a verse I had memorized several days earlier when I could still think clearly. "Trust (lean on, rely on, and be confident) in the Lord and do good; so shall you dwell in the land and feed surely on His faithfulness, and truly you shall be fed. (Psalm 37:3, AMPC)

Now, as I drove down Interstate 290, I said, out loud, "*Lord, Your faithfulness is truly abundant. You are taking care of all my needs so well, just like always. I am being fed and You say truly I shall be fed. I trust that verse, Lord, even though I do not feel like it right now. I am sorry, Lord. 'I believe. Help my unbelief! (Mark 9:24, NIV)'. And forgive my weaknesses.*"

Persisting in speaking the Word and meditating. I walked into the gym carrying the stack of verses in my free hand, checked in, then went to the weight room and put the verses on the edge of the weight rack, resuming my recitation of Lamentations 3:19-26 with verses 24-26. As I stretched, I repeated:

(24) The Lord is my portion *or* share, says my living being (my inner self); therefore, will I hope in Him *and* wait expectantly for Him.

(25) The Lord is good to those who wait hopefully *and* expectantly for Him, to those who seek Him [inquire of and for Him and require Him by right of necessity and on the authority of God's word].

(26) It is good that one should hope in *and* wait quietly for the salvation (the safety and ease) of the Lord.

I repeated those three verses over and over for 30 minutes as I lifted weights, carrying the stack of papers with me from free weights to the weight benches to the Precor machines. As I finished the last of the weights, I put Psalm 9:10 on top of the stack and read.

And they who know Your name [who have experience and acquaintance with Your mercy] will lean on *and* confidently put their trust in You, for You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek (inquire of and for) You [on the authority of God's Word and the right of their necessity]. (AMPC)

Silently, as I walked upstairs to the recumbent bicycles, I said, desperately, "Yes, Lord, I do seek You, and in fact I really require You. Oh, Father! Let me not be presumptuous, but respectfully, I say You have to help because I truly cannot fix this by

myself. I know You will help with this because I cannot go on without You healing this, and I cannot do it myself."

GOD GIVES LIGHT AS WE FIGHT. Upstairs, as I pedaled the bike, I skimmed through a book I had studied during midway through the depression healing—*"Healing from Trauma: A Survivor's Guide to Understanding Your Symptoms and Reclaiming Your Life"* by Jasmin Lee Cori, MS, LPC). The author explained that even years after trauma, certain circumstances can trigger thoughts and feelings that accompanied the original trauma. When that happens, the person may experience the same thoughts and feelings all over again. Being triggered like that into "trauma thinking" often evokes feelings of helplessness and hopelessness because that is how trauma feels.

I paused the pedals a moment and stared straight ahead as truth well up from within. "I had indeed lost hope the last several days, perhaps even before that. And all that negative probably did cause chemical imbalance in my brain." I was shocked.

"No!" I thought immediately and indignantly and loudly. "That is NOT true at all! I *do* have hope because *I know* what God has done before, for me and others and everything recorded in the Bible and more! I *know* God works. Absolutely no situation is too hard for Him. I *do* have hope! I *do* trust Him! I *do* have faith in Him, great faith! The lying, thieving enemy must have blinded my mind and my heart for a while. *I do have hope and lots of it!"*

All the while, as I finished cycling, then walked out to the car, *palpable relief started*. The feeling of something heavy on top of my head started lessening. In one of Joyce Meyer's books she described feeling a heavy pressure on her head for days until she commanded the "mind-binding" demons to stop and leave her. That is, I believe, what had happened to me, that plus the effects of letting negative thoughts and feelings linger.

"That is why I felt so bad! Isn't it, Lord? I had lost hope again, just as I lost hope when I was so deeply depressed. Sometime these last few days, I stopped believing I would ever feel right and balanced and normal again. No wonder each day had become such a dread and drudgery. No wonder the fatigue was like walking through molasses. Thank You for Your grace in not letting it get any worse."

As I drove home, I talked to God non-stop, "Oh Father! Forgive me! I did not realize I had been doubting You! You have always, always, always met my needs, all my life so faithfully, just like You provided for the Israelites over and over and over again, in spite of their sin and weaknesses. You have done the same for me. You have poured out so many blessings. You have picked me up so many times after failures and problems and hurts and everything else we've been through together.

I admit it still feels impossible for You to once again fix my mind and my feelings because this time it is so messed up. So far, it does not seem that the wonderful things You taught me before are working this time, but I do trust You! I do have hope in You! I

do have confidence in You! You are indeed good and merciful and kind and loving and faithful. . . “

THEN, GOD GIVES EVEN MORE LIGHT (ISAIAH 30:26). Back at home, I tossed my gym bag in the corner and flopped into the rocker, staring blankly out the window. Then I found myself saying, as I had said a few times in the previous two days, only this time with strength: “Satan, I am submitting myself to God, and the Word says if I do that and resist you, that God will restore me after I have suffered a little while (I Peter 5:6-11). Well, I am resisting you and doing my part of this verse so you have to flee! In the name of Jesus, I plead the Blood of the Lamb over my mind and my life. I take authority over you and command you to leave!”

I got up, opened the door, yelled “Leave!”, and slammed the door. Then I sat down in the rocker and began telling God every good thing I knew about Him and thanking Him for everything I could think of, over and over. I prayed in tongues when my mind snagged and I could not think. Each time I prayed in tongues a few moments, another of God's innumerable good qualities came to mind.

After a long time, I noticed I felt better. I just sat quietly, silently this time, just telling God thank You and loving Him – and letting Him love me.

It was hard to persist! Dear friend, I want you to know that in those moments---as I drove to the gym and kept trying to repeat the Word, and especially right before the fog started to lift after I was home again, it took *so much effort to speak the Word out loud and to try and believe.* I honestly did not think I could do it. It was purely grace that enabled me to keep speaking and to think clearly enough to perceive God speaking to my spirit, telling me what to say and do.

Praying in the Spirit, or speaking in tongues as it is also called, builds up your spirit (Jude 1:20, I Corinthians 14:2. This is a wonderful gift from God, for every believer. To find out more about this gift of God's power, see the second half of the booklet “The Remedy for Desperation” on www.wordsofhopeandhealing.com.

For days before that, I had often flopped on the couch, trying to pray, trying to repeat the Word—I had really tried—but my resources had become depleted and I don't think I made a sincere, all-out effort. However, I remember deciding that Saturday when I left for the gym: “*I am* going to struggle, *I am* going to fight to believe, one minute at a time, just like when the depression was so bad. *I am* going to choose to believe, *God will* help me, *He promises* . . .”

The importance of memorizing, meditating, and speaking the Word. That experience reinforced that I must continue memorizing the Word! It also showed me that it is essential to repeat the Word over and over and over, constantly, dozens of times, not only to get the Word memorized but to let it root down deep into your spirit, into the bedrock of your inmost being. We need the Word to filter down into our spirit and subconscious mind, to the root level of what we truly believe (Romans 12:2, Proverbs 4:23, Luke 6:45, Hebrews 4:11-12.)

We need the Word to filter down into our spirit and subconscious mind, to the root level of what we truly believe. (Romans 12:2, Proverbs 4:23, Luke 6:45, Hebrews 4:11-12.)

It is essential to constantly repeat the Word, for minutes, hours or even days when under attack, even though it feels like nothing is happening. This constant repetition is one way of obeying God's command to meditate on His Word from sunup to sundown (Deuteronomy 6:7) and to think about His Word "day and night" (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2).

Joyce Meyer tells about of a man who was having a terrible time with his thoughts, though he kept repeating the Word. Just when he considered giving up, God let him see that every time he spoke the Word, a sword came out of his mouth. He persisted speaking the Word, with renewed faith, until breakthrough came.

The good fruit of all that struggle. That day God taught me a valuable lesson. The process took less than four hours, beginning the moment I left for the gym, desperately praying and quoting the Word. Not one thing changed externally, but after persisting in using the Word at the gym and then taking authority over the devil when I got back home, I suddenly felt life was back on track again. Inside, I felt totally different as I outlined a blog post about the experience even though writing had been impossible for a whole week.

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Isaiah 30:32. JOY WHILE GOD FIGHTS FOR US. . . THROUGH TRIALS. And every passing stroke of the staff of punishment *and* doom which the Lord lays upon them shall be to the sound of [Israel's] timbrels and lyres, when in battle He attacks [Assyria] with swinging *and* menacing arms.

Comment: God will annihilate your bitterest enemy – and the enemy knows this. These beautiful verses in Isaiah 30 describe how God would annihilate the Assyrians, the bitterest enemy of Israel, who, besides being famous for their cruelty, were also, the best fighters in the ancient world. Annihilate means to totally destroy or to obliterate or to wipe off the face of the earth. It means to destroy something so completely that there is no chance of it continuing to exist. God will give joy while he does this.

To annihilate, or utterly defeat an enemy, requires a long war with many battles. To annihilate the fleshly tendencies that had caused depression

and fear, required a long season of especially difficult trials. God knew I needed that much training and experience to wipe out old habits of heart and hand and replace them with godly, healthy habits. He knew I needed that much experience to equip and train me to fight, and keep fighting, the good fight and to stay strong the rest of my life.

I wobbled and kept wobbling. Our loving heavenly Father has such a sense of humor! While skimming the internet about improving balance, I saw a video of four young girls walking in rapid tandem across a balance beam. Next came a video of an, uh, *older* man staggering from side to side as he tried to walk on what looked like a deflated fire hose lying flat on the ground. Guess which one I felt like? Ha.

Growing up with two brothers and a father who coached Little League, Pony League and high school baseball deepened natural tomboy tendencies and helped ensure I was picked early in elementary school playground games. However, junior high gymnastics was different. Having grown several inches that summer. I watched as my shorter classmates (which was all of them!) did fairly well on the balance beam set a few inches off the ground. However, Coach Crippen kindly shook her head and smiled as I repeatedly failed to take more than two steps without falling off. "That's okay, Freda. Good job trying!" Now, decades later I am far better at keeping my spiritual balance than I was at walking the balance beam! Why is that? Because God has *lovingly* given me lots of practice, and then more practice, including fighting the enemy the entirety of 2021. The practice was especially challenging in late 2021.

#

WE LEARN MORE WHEN OUR WAY IS WOBBLY. I sniffed, yet again, blew my nose, yet again, squinted my watery eyes, and stood up to take an allergy pill. I opened my eyes wide in a futile effort to shake off the drowsiness caused by allergies and rolled my shoulders in an effort, also futile, to alleviate the stiffness. I chugged a full glass of home-made ginger tea with the pill, then twisted side to side a few times and reached overhead, one arm at a time, twenty times each side, in an also futile attempt to shrink the roll of just plain fat that had taken up residence at my waist for lo too many months. My loud "Ugh!" startled Lily, my calico beauty napping next to the computer. (God had provided Lily from the animal shelter after my beloved Barny went home to be with Jesus.) "Why does the weight keep going up? I don't know what else to do. I am trying . . ."

I sat back down, scratched Lily's head, and scrolled up and down, up and down the document, labeling pages and paragraphs. Then came twenty minutes cutting, pasting and reordering paragraphs that had scrambled themselves like so many eggs during the last two days of editing and re-editing one simple chapter. Finally, the line of thought flowed and I hit save. I stared in silence a full sixty seconds at the pop-up "File Permission Error. . ." Last week, my son-in-law, my technical support hero, had spent hours fixing that problem, which was far beyond my capabilities. "Ohhhhh!" I wailed. The family was out of town this week.

Two hours later, blood pressure elevated, shoulders even tighter, eyes aching, and head throbbing, I gave up and made notes on paper of the order in which I had arranged paragraphs on the computer file which would NOT SAVE!!!--beautiful, gorgeous paper that never said “file Permission Error” or “Read-Only File”. By then it was time to start dinner, and too late to tidy up the frustration-inducing clutter, which had crept into my little condo like an invasive vine during the last three days of writing angst. It was also too late to take my little evening walk which would have eased emotional as well as physical kinks. And. . .

Whew and UGH! Sound familiar? I am sure it does, though the details of your “Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad” week are no doubt different. (For a most excellent book to teach children that we all have bad days, see “Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day,” by Judith Viorst.)

Teetering, leaning, and wild waving of arms. All the previous week had been like that one day and as the days wore on, old bad habits had threatened to steal my hard-won peace. Each new and ongoing frustration grabbed my attention more and more, leaving less mental space and energy to keep my mind on God, talk with Him and ponder a passage of the Word as I went about the business of daily life. The day I described above had been the last straw. And that turned out to be a very good thing.

“Ha!” I said out loud to the devil as I fixed supper. “You are not going to steal one more hour of my peace. God says He laughs at you and that you are already defeated so I can laugh at what you are trying to do, too. I know Romans 8:28 is true, and Genesis 50:20, and Psalm 94:12-13! I am going to rejoice in this very day and this very hour because God has made it, He is right here with me, and He will never, no never, no never fail me in any way! He is good in all that He does, He rules everything that is and was and is to come, and He adores me! My name is written in the palm of His hand, He sings over me, He delights in me, and He watches my every step with care, and He is using all this to teach me. . . “

Guess what? Before I knew it, I was truly rejoicing and truly laughing then making notes about wobbling our way through trials. Why, when we are trying our best to love and serve Him, does God let us experience hard things that make us wobble?

WOBBLY TIMES ARE GOOD FOR US. God allows trials—things that make us wobble---because He loves us and they are good for us. God lovingly tells us in Proverbs 3:11-12, NIV) “*My son, (notice the tenderness in the words “My son”) do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent His rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those He loves, as a father the son He delights in.*” Hebrews 12:1-4 tell us to throw off everything that hinders us from running our race and says that if we “Fix our eyes on Jesus” and think about what he endured from sinful men we “will not grow weary and lose heart.” Because. . .

(4) *“In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding*

your blood. (5) And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: (6) 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son'.

(7) Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? (8) If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. (9) Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! (10) Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. (11) No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been exercised by it.

*(12) **THEREFORE**, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. (13) 'Make level paths for your feet', **SO THAT** the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.' (NIV)*

Please, please stop and ponder Hebrews 12:4-12 s-l-o-w-l-y. I should underline every word of this passage. These verses state clearly that enduring the discipline of trials leads us to share in His holiness and eventually produces righteousness and peace once we have been trained by those trials (Hebrews 12:10-12). Did you catch that? *Trials train us for our good.* It is clear to me that we must continue through the training experience and not bail out. We must persevere SO THAT so we may become mature (James 1:4-8.) As we cooperate with God through trials and let Him produce righteousness and peace in our lives, we are serving Christ and are pleasing to God and approved by men because “*the kingdom of God is . . . a matter of “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* (Romans 14:17-18, NIV).

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| Trials train us for our good. |
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God wants maturity for us all. So, we all must walk the same path that leads through trials and tribulations of all kinds. Along the way, God provides whatever is lacking in our character, whether that is healing of deep hurts, curbing impatience or rooting out pride and self-focus. Trials give the opportunity to persevere and lead us to maturity. Ponder James 1.2-16.

Following are five truths about trials.

[1] Trials teach us things we learn no other way. Understanding the truth of Psalm 94:12-13 gives a godly perspective on trials. We are truly blessed when God allows trials in our life.

“Blessed-happy, fortunate, [to be envied]--is the man whom You discipline and instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law that You may give him the power to hold himself calm in the days of adversity, until the [inevitable] pit of corruption is

dug for the wicked.” (AMPC, emphasis added)

These verses explain that God instructs us, by using His law, SO THAT He can give us the power to keep ourselves calm in hard times. Think about that. Can your toddler gain the ability to balance himself and walk by himself and get himself up off the ground if you hold him perfectly upright every step he takes and if you put him back on his feet each time he falls down? God must let us wobble and fall down so that we learn how to keep our balance. And when we fall, He must hold back and let us grapple until push ourselves up to standing. Some trials come because of mistakes we make as we learn to walk more closely with God. Others are inevitable because of fallen humanity and our fallen world. I believe God allows some specific trials, out of His boundless love, so that we can gain better balancing skill.

*[2] We learn by experiencing cause and effect, by experiencing the natural consequences of our actions. Trials give us the chance to experience the result of our actions, to experience cause and effect, to experience the effect of God’s laws. How does that toddler learn balance? He learns by experiences with the law of gravity. If a toddler leans too far forward, he wobbles or falls; through that experience, *the law of gravity teaches him*. When a person steals, he eventually lands in jail. Through that experience, the law of man teaches him. If I let my mind dwell on negatives, I become fearful. Through that experience, the law of God teaches me that “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7, NIV.) We learn how to stay spiritually balanced by experiences with the laws of God, when we get the natural consequences of our right or wrong actions and thoughts. The corrections that come from discipline lead us to life (Proverbs 6:23)*

[3] Trials are necessary for the continuing growth that is part of maturity. James 1:2-4 says:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, BECAUSE you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work SO THAT you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (NIV)” (emphasis added).

Could God be any clearer??? We are to think about, or consider, trials as a good thing. God says trials are good because they give a chance to use our faith, which develops the ability to keep going in spite of difficulties. Then, after our need to persevere has done what it needs to do in our character, we will be mature and complete. God is giving a kind warning so we can prepare our minds and hearts for a long process. He is telling us there is a good thing coming at the end of the process. He knows we need the hope and strength that piece of knowledge gives.

I memorized this passage as a new believer, and it has floated up into consciousness countless times since. At first, I approached this truth with a begrudging attitude. Looking back over many years, I now understand how God worked good out of each and every trial (Romans 8:28). I have a greatly improved attitude toward trials!

[4] Continual growth is part of being a Christ follower. It is a refuge, a way of life that keeps us safe. If we strive to keep growing, we will be kept safe. In 2 Peter 1:3-11, Peter tells us how to “make our calling and election sure SO THAT we will not stumble or fall (v.10-11.) He assures us that God has already given us everything that we need to live and to be godly. Through God's promises we can become like Him and overcome the moral decay of the world. In verse 5 through 7, Peter lists qualities we are to make every effort to obtain: faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love.” (Notice the similarity to the nine fruits of the spirit in Galations 5:22-23.)

Why should we strive to keep growing? The next verse tells us clearly that pressing on makes our Christian lives effective and productive. Verse 8 says “*For IF you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Notice the “*increasing measure*” concept. That says we have to keep growing and keep growing and keep growing. And just as continually bearing fruit is no trouble for a fruit tree, so will our spiritual fruit bearing be natural.

Notice also the stern, loving warning in verse 9: “*If anyone does not have them*” [those qualities in increasing measure]”, *he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.*” It is easy for the enemy to lead a nearsighted or blind person off the path of godliness. God clearly warns us against behaviors that lead to blindness, such as depending on idols (Psalm 115:3-8). Satan uses spiritual pride and whispers that we have arrived spiritually and we do not need to keep striving so hard. Danger! Danger! Danger! God warns over and over against pride and complacency.

[5] Trials protect us from the deadly condition of complacency. If we do not keep growing we tend to become complacent. Stop exercising for a week and see how hard it is to get yourself back to the gym! God knows how easily we slip back into old habits, so He speaks through the prophet Amos and warns “*Woe to you who are complacent in Zion. . .*” (Amos 6:1, NIV). Peter ends his second letter to believers by telling us to live holy and godly lives and *keep growing* as we anticipate the return of Christ:

“ . . . be on your guard SO THAT you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. BUT GROW in the grace and knowledge of our LORD and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18, NIV) (emphasis added)

In Matthew 7:26 Jesus warns that we pursue our own ruin if we do not act on His words. Jesus said “*Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.*” Ever heard “There are no atheists in foxholes”? In desperate situations, we become more intense in seeking God. Have you

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| When God uses trials to get us focused on Him, He is acting in love. |
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heard someone recall a very hard time and say almost wistfully, “But I was never so close to God as I was then.” When God uses trials to get us focused on Him, He is acting in love. He wants us to have a passionate love for Him because loving, revering, worshipping and obeying Him keeps us safe and brings multitudes of blessings.

In the NIV Bible, the last section of that great chapter 12 of Hebrews, verses 14-29 is labeled “Warning Against Refusing God”. Verse 25 says

“See to it that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from Him who warns from heaven?” and Verse 28-29 urge us to “be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’” (NIV)

In saying “*our God is a consuming fire*”, the writer of Hebrews is referring to Exodus 19:12-13 when Israel was warned not to even approach the foot of Mount Sinai, where God had met with Moses, else they would be killed. They were to treat God with reverence and fear and awe. WE ARE TO DO THE SAME TODAY. God has not changed and He will never change (Hebrews 13:8). He is steadfast, enduring, ageless, matchless, and eternal! He is our Rock, our Refuge and our Redeemer, our “King of kings and Lord of lords!” (Revelation 19:16)

If we appropriately remember who God is and who we are, we will strive with all our heart to obey Him. We will not treat Him or anything about Him lightly or half-heartedly, and our love for Him will be fervent.

If we appropriately remember who God is and who we are, we will strive with all our heart to obey Him. We will not treat Him or anything about Him lightly or half-heartedly, and our love for Him will be fervent. This will go far in keeping us from having a lukewarm heart. Read Revelations 3:14-22. God detests a lukewarm attitude toward Him. It is a condition from which we must earnestly repent (verse 19). In verse 19, God *pleads* with those who are lukewarm to open the door of their hearts to Him.

The love and kindness and compassion He has for us is higher than the heavens are above the earth (Psalm 103). When He helps us avoid complacency—no matter the means He uses--He is acting in love, for our good though it may not seem so at the time. We *can* make progress in our life because of and during trials.

MAKING PROGRESS DURING TRIALS. *We CAN make progress DURING trials because God equips us with what we need to walk through the trials.* Trials do not stop our journey with God, and they do not stop our growth. The truth is just the opposite! They are a lovingly planned part of the path of every believer's life.

He gives exactly what we need. Just as God gives mountain goats specially constructed hoofs and powerful neck and shoulder muscles, Psalm 18:33 promises He will give us what we need to walk on our high places *securely*.

“He makes my feet like hinds' feet [able to stand firmly or make progress on the dangerous heights of testing and trouble]; He sets me securely upon my high places.” (AMPC)

Notice also that times of testing and trouble are dangerous. But be encouraged! God's special provisions equip us to stand firmly as well as make progress *upon, through and because of* the very difficulties themselves. If a mountain stands in our path, with no way around it, we can go right over the mountain and keep going forward along our desired path, in the same direction, making progress *upon the mountain itself*.

This powerful verse, verse 33, comes in the middle of Psalm 18, a psalm which gives us courage to endure trials with confident hope and expectation. Psalm 18 starts with praise to the LORD for His strength. Then David recalls how, when facing death and destruction, God answered him and fought mightily for him, setting him in a spacious place. Why? Because God delighted in him. David declared that God had rewarded him according to his righteousness (v. 24) because *“To the faithful You show yourself faithful, to the blameless You show yourself blameless. . . .”* (v. 15)

David keeps encouraging himself as He describes God's power and mercy on his behalf, including (in verse 32-36) how God had enabled him to make progress and “stand on the heights”. David concludes with more praise for the God who saves him from his enemies and shows unfailing kindness to him and his descendants forever – that includes you and me! Like David and like Habakkuk, we can also be confident while we are walking through trials.

CONFIDENT IN TRIALS – LIKE HABAKKUK. *No matter what happens, we can--like Habakkuk—be confident God will get us through the trial.* Most of the book of Habakkuk speaks of the coming judgment on God's people because of their wickedness. (To see how applicable the Bible is to this present world, read the minor prophets and reflect on the apparent victory of evil we now see in the United States and other parts of the world.) Nevertheless, even though judgment would come, Habakkuk concludes with praise to God and a declaration of trust in God. He says:

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD. I will be joyful in God my Savior.” (Habakkuk 3:17-18, NIV)

Think about what Habakkuk is saying – though every single thing I usually depend on fails me (figs, grapes, olives, fields, sheep and cattle, which was everything people in those times depended upon) - yet even so, in spite of all of that, I WILL be happy in God and I WILL be joyful in the God who is my Savior. I think Habakkuk could make that declaration BECAUSE Habakkuk was thinking about the last verse, verse 19:

“The Lord is my strength, my personal bravery and my invincible army; He makes

my feet like hinds' feet, and will make me to walk [not to stand still in terror, but to walk] and make [spiritual] progress upon my high places [of trouble, suffering or responsibility]!" (AMPC- notice the ! At the end).

Wow oh wow oh wow! How can we not be encouraged! God will BE our strength, He will BE the bravery we need and He will BE our unbeatable army. He will make our feet as perfectly suited for our personal path as a deer's feet are suited for mountains. God will cause us to walk. He will not let us stand still and be terrorized. He will cause us to make spiritual progress *upon the very trials themselves*, whether the trials involve trouble, suffering or responsibility.

Without some true trouble,
some stress and real strain,
I confess much of self would
still yet remain.

We have to have true troubles! "Without some true trouble, some stress and real strain, I confess much of self would still yet remain." That couplet popped into my mind more than 30 years ago, when I was returning home after taking my eleven-year-old daughter to school. I typed medical dictation at home

that year, since the tiny company I worked for had gone bankrupt. I pinched each penny. Hard. Back then, although I constantly worried about providing for my daughter and myself, God was teaching me to trust Him and to see whatever hardship came up as loving training from Him. And that lesson is as applicable—and just as hard sometimes—today as it was then.

DO TRIALS EVER END? The short answer? No. Why? It is because of the nature of our fallen world, the nature of man, the nature of our enemy, and the nature of God's plan for mankind. BUT GOD HAS MADE A WAY TO LIVE IN VICTORY AND JOY!

The nature of our fallen world—so long as we live on this earth, we will have troubles. The world is under the curse described in Genesis 3. We will not enjoy the Edenic type of life that God planned for mankind until our inmost beings leave the earthly tabernacle of this flesh and live in the presence of God Himself in heaven. "*Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward*", Job 5:7 tells us.

The nature of man. So long as we live on this earth, we will struggle with sin (Romans 7:7-25). Psalm 51:5 tells us we are all born as sinners. Romans 3:23 says we have all "*sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" but verse 22 joyfully proclaims the righteousness which comes "*from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.*" Once saved through faith in Jesus, we must keep pursuing and obeying God, as we saw earlier. No person, except Jesus, has ever been and can ever be good enough. Right before he died, the great apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church at Philippi. In Chapter 3 of that letter, he explains why he puts no confidence for salvation in anything he does (*or "in the flesh"*) but rather he keeps pressing on, he says, toward "*the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*" (Philippians 3:14, NIV). And that was right before Paul died. Think about that!

The nature of our enemy. So long as we live on this earth, Satan will constantly

seek to “*steal, kill, and destroy*” (*John 10:10*). For an excellent teaching on the activity of Satan—and a teaching that will calm fear and fill you with hope!--see “Satan's Ten Strategies Against You”, by John Piper at www.desiringgod.org. Eventually, at the end of time Satan will be “*thrown into the lake of burning sulfur . . . and will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (Revelation 20:10)*”. In the meantime, throughout each of our lifetimes, we can walk in the victory over Satan and sin that Jesus purchased for us.

The nature of God's plan for mankind--As Genesis 2:16-17 records, God made humans with the freedom of choice. That includes whether or not we love Him, and whether we choose life or death (Deuteronomy 30:19). We can, through Him, choose NOT to sin, as we see in Romans 6:11-14. We can overcome sin, through offering our whole selves to God and choosing to love and serve Him (Joshua 24:15).

If we truly love God more than all else, we will place more value on heavenly things than on things of this life. If we “*set our minds on things above, not on earthly things*” (Colossians 3:2, NIV), we will then be empowered to consider what we learn through trials of greater value than whatever inconvenience, hard work and even suffering trials may cause. In light of all that, we can be encouraged and accept trials as part of life and as of no more consequence than the fact that we must keep breathing, eating, and sleeping as long as we live. Certain things are just part of life.

And our life can be abundant! We can choose to believe what Jesus told us in John 16:33, that in Him we:

“may have [perfect] peace and confidence. In the world you have troubles, trials, distress, and frustration; but be of good cheer [take courage, be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world. [I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you.]

For me, investing time and energy in meditating on and memorizing that Scripture and many others has gone far in developing a better attitude than I once had about the trials of daily life. I know that, the more we wobble, the less we will. Frail humans can never attain perfection while on earth, but we can, by grace, attain spiritual maturity that lets our spirit soar far above this world's troubles, with Him, as God intended.

On to the last chapter! Things did go very well—by God's grace!--for a long time. Then came a time of more concentrated growing. It began in October 2022 when I began investigating reasons for the worsening fatigue. That concentrated growing came because of serious challenges of all kinds, which continued through the summer of 2023 when this book was finally finished.

CHAPTER 10

GOD'S PATH FOR US

Isaiah 30:33. GOD PERFECTS THINGS THAT CONCERN US. Psalm 138:8-a says, “*The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy and loving-kindness, O Lord, endure forever—forsake not the works of Your own hands.*” As we saw in Chapter 9, the utter destruction of our enemies “has already been laid out and long ago prepared.” (Isaiah 30:33a). God completes what He begins. God always enables us to do what He commands us to do, and He says to press on to maturity, which includes demolishing the last remnants of demonic strongholds in our lives.

January 2022 to May 2023

- Carving out a level path ahead
- Remembering, with gratitude
- Stepping into the future

APPLYING THE WORD

VERSE 33. WHEN WE WAIT ON THE LORD, HE DAILY RENEWS US

- God's sovereignty never ends.
- The last big battle of the war
- Digging out those last few—and deepest—roots

Summing up:

- Caring for your body and your surroundings
- Maintaining victory
- Continuing growth
- Beware!!!
- One last vignette . . .

ISAIAH 30:33. WHEN WE WAIT ON THE LORD. “ For Topheth [a place of burning and abomination] has already been laid out *and* long ago prepared; yes, for the [Assyrian] king *and* [the god] Molech it has been made ready, its pyre made deep *and* large, with fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, kindles it . ”

Comment: God knows the end from the beginning. So when His Word teaches us that destruction has been prepared for our enemies and that we can see that destruction if we obey God and wait on Him, our weakness is renewed with strength, our earth-bound frame mounts up with wings like eagles, we run without weariness, and we walk without fainting(from Isaiah 40:31).

GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY NEVER ENDS. Holly bent forward in her seat and waved as I walked toward the car. I waved back. With effort, I tugged the corners of my mouth upward just in case she could distinguish details of my face through the slight drizzle and the weak light of early morning that hung suspended, almost as a solid thing, between glowering clouds and darkened earth. I opened the back door and plopped my overnight bag onto the back seat then stepped up on the little running board to hoist myself up through the front door she had opened and onto the seat, grateful for the financial health of my daughter and her family to which the size of the SUV attested.

“Thank You, Father, that they are doing well enough to have two cars and this SUV is bigger than their last one. Thank You that I have a car, that I have insurance and Medicare, and that You have shown doctors how to take care of the physical part of the heart. . . .”

“How ya doing Mama?” Holly’s brows were tightened, the outer corners of her eyes turned slightly down, her mouth a straight line.

“I’m fine, baby. I’m okay.”

“Tell me again why you have to go to get shocked? Always before you just took that pill and waited it out at home until your heart rate slowed.”

“Well, those were atrial tachycardia episodes, when the heart was just beating fast. Last week once I saw the heart rhythm specialist. . .” I paused and made finger quotes in the air. “. . . the electrophysiologist he is called. That does not even sound like a doctor, does it? Well anyway, he wanted me to get that little portable EKG that I showed you, you know where you put your fingers on a pad the size of a business card and it takes a single lead EKG and stores the data and you can share it with the doctor? Well, that little monitor started showing I had atrial fibrillation, not just a fast heart rate.”

I paused a moment as I slowly exhaled, silencing the long outflow of breath begun as a sigh, a deep sigh that held the frustration and fear of lying in bed the last thirty hours, waiting for the heart rate to slow, not knowing, the whole time, if it would,

not knowing much about atrial fibrillation, other than it sounded far more dangerous than plain old tachycardia.

“Yeah but why can’t they just give you something?”

“He said that because it has been going that fast for more than a day he needs to get it back into normal rhythm and the way to do that is to bzzzzzt you.” Here, I extended both arms, holding imaginary defibrillation paddles.”

“And you have to bring an overnight bag because. . . ?” We were at a red light now and she turned to look at me. I smiled.

“Just in case there are complications and they want to observe you afterwards. That’s all. The nurse said they do this all the time. No problem.” As the engine idled at a redlight, I stared at the glistening beads of rainwater on the burgundy hood, rounded glass ovals, quivering, like my heart.

For the next twenty minutes, as we stopped and started along the Monday morning, rain-slowed Interstate 35 car train, I kept the conversation on non-me topics. Then, too fast, we were in front of the covered drop-off area. Moon-white against fire-engine red, the words “Emergency Room” silently yelled “You are in danger! This is a bad, bad situation, Freda. You might die you know.” Carefully schooling my features, I leaned over and kissed Holly’s cheek.

“You sure you don’t want me to come in with you Mama?”

“Sure I’m sure! You can’t go in the back with me anyway. I’ll be fine. I’ll text you when I know something. Thank you again, baby, for taking me here.”

“Of course! Love you Mama!”

“Love you, too, baby!”

Then I was clumsily stepping onto the running board and then onto the pavement, slamming the car door and turning for one more wave before stepping onto the pressure sensory mat that made the wide emergency room doors spring open with a jerk.

Getting signed in, then waiting, then walking through the double doors with a nurse, then explaining who my doctor was and why he had sent me here, then changing into one of those delightful hospital gowns, then getting not one but two intravenous lines started (“Cardiac patients always have two lines” the nurse explained even before I asked), then silently watching while two nurses tricked me out with EKG leads and a blood pressure cuff which they connected to a big monitoring device that hung suspended from the ceiling like some big-brother-is-watching-camera from a scifi movie, and then waiting with them while one called off numbers to the other – all that took about an hour.

“This is taking a bit longer,” one of them said “because the whole computer system failed, network wide.”

“Has this happened before?” I asked.

“No!” was the reply. “And we have never had to do everything on paper either” she said, the middle of her lower lip pushing her mouth upward before beaming a smile at me, a real smile that warmed her eyes. Then they both left and closed the door, after, of course, showing me how to use the call button and telling me to call if I needed anything at all, I remember thinking, “You know, this is not like the emergency rooms in the movies, where the place is just rooms created by curtains hung from the ceiling that they snatch open and shut as they come and go. Did they put me in a special area or is this the way all ERs are now and I am just fortunate enough to have not seen one in person before?”

Over the next 33 hours hooked to those same machines, Diltiazem drip going to control the a fib until I could get zapped, I remained in that same bed in the ER. I stayed there 33 hours, from eleven Monday morning until Tuesday afternoon, when the computer was fixed and the patients who had been waiting to be discharged, electronically of course, were indeed discharged and a bed was available for me upstairs. I was to have received my bzzzt and possibly gone home Monday afternoon. Instead, because of the crimp the computer crash had put into everything, they kept the Diltiazem drip going. And I waited. As I waited, I had time to reflect on the months long sequence of events that had brought me to the ER.

I pondered silently with the Lord. Hmm. . . the year 2022 had proceeded much like 2021, with continuing spiritual growth and a steadily growing ability to stay emotionally balanced, this in spite of an eight hundred dollar, my-fault fender bender, being scammed for about a month’s income, and the steadily worsening fatigue and shortness of breath with which I had coped for many months. Blood pressure medicine and aging were known contributors to that. However, when I told a friend how much I had to rest each day and how much time I spent in bed each night, she suggested that the cardiologist investigate the fatigue. The family physician and allergist had ruled out anemia and general systemic causes months ago.

In September 2022, when I reported to the cardiologist that, besides the nearly debilitating fatigue, the episodes of tachycardia (rapid heart rate) had been occurring every few weeks rather than every few months, he ordered a week-long heart monitor and a repeat cardiac catheterization as well as consultations with a pulmonary specialist and an electrophysiologist (a specialist in heart arrhythmias). The monitor and cardiac catheterization in early October revealed nothing new. Because of Austin’s population explosion, the earliest appointment with the electrophysiologist was November second and the earliest available appointment with the pulmonologist was in late December.

“Wow!” I reflected as I tried to ignore the stiffness that was settling into my back and the annoying beep of the overhead monitor, which blared like a foghorn when the

heart rate jumped too much or when the IV drip ran out or apparently for no good reason. “Thank You, Father, that You perfectly arranged the timing of everything. Today is November 10th. Had I not seen the electrophysiologist last week, I would have just stayed home, thinking my rapid heart rate was the same tachycardia I’ve had for so long now. But, because I had seen the arrhythmia specialist, I was using the a fib monitoring device, which had detected that the a fib lasted too long. That, in turn, had led to this going to get defibrillated.

“Oh! Help me keep trusting You, Father. Forgive my doubts and help me just keep trusting You!”

Eventually, on Tuesday afternoon, November 10, the heart converted back to normal rhythm without being defibrillated, thanks to the Diltiazem drpp, and by late Tuesday evening, after more than 33 hours in the ER, I was put in a private hospital room, connected to a less obnoxiously loud monitor, and discharged Wednesday morning. I saw Dr. Smith (not his real name) the next Wednesday on November 16th. I agreed to have cardiac ablation, a procedure where the parts of the heart that are causing a fib are cauterized. To my amazement as well as that of Dr. Smith, there was an opening in his surgery schedule for Monday, November 21.

In short, God moved me to begin investigating the worsening fatigue *just in time* to obtain referrals and get me under the care of Dr. Smith *just before* the a. fib became dangerous. And then, God got the ablation done superfast, nearly two weeks sooner than my original follow-up with Dr. Smith had been scheduled! In less than three weeks, the initial visit with Dr. Smith about the a.fib, the prolonged ER visit and the ablation were all done and all before the first follow--up visit was to have happened!

However, after the ablation surgery and all through the Christmas 2022 season, fatigue deepened, largely because of the two a fib meds. In the months before ablation, when fatigue had been worsening, I had had several bouts of feeling blue and discouraged and my counselor helped me see that it was likely due to the effects of long-term fatigue. Knowing that had helped me cope. But this time, after the ablation, it felt like that same depression from 2017 and 2018, when I had been living through the experiences described in the opening chapters of this book.

God powerfully used that entire season from May 2022, when I first began seeking answers about the fatigue through the 2022 Christmas season and then on through May of 2023. He used some excruciatingly painful experiences that forced me to dig deeply enough to pull out the deepest root causes of depression---some specific emotional weaknesses and unmet needs—that, despite all the diligent effort, still controlled part of my heart.

THAT LAST BIG BATTLE OF THE WAR. The last big battle of the war was an emotional crisis in March 2023. I was as patient as I could be with recovery from ablation but the reduction in physical activity had a cumulative effect. After a repeat ablation to sever the connections that had, unfortunately, reconnected, came an

emotional crisis one morning in March of 2023. Over the last four months, besides the worsening fatigue a variety of other physical ailments had galloped in, like tummy troubles which made efforts to maintain weight (let alone lose any!) a mere dream, increasing shortness of breath, aching joints, and new feet problems, all of which severely restricted exercise, the very thing I needed for mind as well as body.

Those problems were converging, at the same time, on spring break, a stretch of six days when the family would be out of town. I kept trying to focus on the good and count my blessings and do all the other things I knew that had turned the depression around before, but I simply grew tired of the constant struggle. Although it was untrue, I felt abandoned, alone, unloved and rejected. Truly, God makes us face what needs to be healed when He knows the time is right.

What were those deep roots? That crisis morning in March 2023 began with copious tears as I talked with God about feelings, desperately trying to stop the emotional pain swirling just below consciousness for months, that sickening constant sadness and intense loneliness that had poked its ugly head up increasingly often. In preparing to speak with my counselor that morning, I reviewed previous journal and counseling notes, including one that said: "I am still afraid that God will not take care of my feelings and I am still afraid of being alone, especially when my mood is negative. Is that why I have occupied my mind with writing, or memory work, or listening to books or being with people? Have I returned to using those things as an idol?"

Triggered needs from the past. That morning, my counselor explained how recent situations had triggered needs and feelings from infancy and childhood. For months, my circumstances had felt overwhelming. That had recreated feelings from the past when I was in fact overwhelmed by trauma and by being alone. In childhood, I had been unable to stop the negative feelings, and no one had been available to give the calming, soothing words and touch I had needed to feel secure and loved. After we talked a while, she made the following cogent points:

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|--|
| Current situations can recreate feelings from previous traumatic situations. |
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- *We must learn to sit with hard feelings and thoughts that led us to believe things that are not true. We must learn how to sit with feelings and know that they do not predict our future or reflect reality, that they are just uncomfortable and that we are still receiving God's love in the middle of trials. Part of reality is that these feelings come from childhood when we were actually sad, helpless or lonely but now, as adults, we have more resources. We are not helpless and we have to reparent that little child inside.*
- *So, when hard thoughts and feelings come: remember they are not real, they come from the past. Holy Spirit and I can turn to that little girl part of me inside who is afraid and remind her that she does not need to be afraid. We can reassure her over and over until she is no longer afraid. We can give ourselves compassion and love*

and nurturing when we feel bad. We can remind ourselves: We are not alone in these feelings. God is with us.

- *Although it is difficult to feel sadness or helplessness or loneliness, we can love on that little girl, talk to her, comfort her and meet some of her unmet childhood emotional needs. We can remind her that God sees her, that she is loved, that she was not alone in the past times even though God allowed her to go through some hard things. We can tell her: she does not need to be afraid of her feelings, and that God is healing her feelings.*
- *When negative thoughts come, we can use the simple reassuring message: God is with me and He loves me. And we can replace the negative thoughts with thoughts of God and His love for us.*

As she spoke, I saw clearly how recent circumstances had triggered feelings from the past and those triggered feelings were what was making me feel sad and lonely and without hope. She also said: *“Remember whose battle it is. Remember that God will fight for us. In the Old Testament, when God told leaders “I am giving you victory for this battle” and the leaders moved forward, they won. But when they took on battles by themselves, things did not turn out well.*

She continued: *“I tried many things to fix my own fatigue that lasted five years, but I had peace only after I said ‘Lord, this is Your battle, I will do what you show me to do but You will have to fight it and I need your grace to wait and watch. I am your servant, I am Your daughter. I cannot fix this and the doctors cannot unless You show them. So, I surrender to You and I say: ‘This is your battle. Please give me grace to rest in You and rest in hope. And while I am resting, I will keep counting on you. Lord, to fight for me and take me to the other side of this.’ ”*

Her healing from fatigue took a good while. Along the way she often thought she had found the special spiritual tool that would guarantee victory, but it did not work that way. The healing was a process for her. Along that years-long process, she often had to ask herself “Do I trust God? Do I trust His love and mercy when I feel I am missing out on so much in life?”

I interrupted. “My issue is do I really trust God to keep the negative feelings away? Do I trust that He can help me feel good emotionally even if and when I cannot do “the right” thing?” Her comforting reply was swift. *“God is with you when you feel bad just as much as when you feel great and are able to do writing and study and meditation, etc.”*

I knew those facts and would have told someone else the same. Yet, when we yield to feelings, we are ensnared and are faced away from God and His light. In our

emotional darkness, the enemy conceals truth and makes lies seem true. That morning, the darkness was deep.

At the end of the hour, despite the insightful and encouraging words, I was still unsteady emotionally and very discouraged. For practically the first time ever after talking with her, I had little hope of improving. She had not even suggested going back on the antidepressant because she knew how opposed I was to it. Desperately I read and reread my notes and tried to cling to that golden truth: *“God is with you when you feel bad just as much as when you feel great and are able to do writing and study and meditation.”*

God is with you when you feel bad just as much as when you feel good and are able to keep up your spiritual disciplines.

DIGGING OUT THOSE LAST FEW—AND DEEPEST ROOTS. Two days later, that first morning the family was to be out of town for six days, God began digging out those last deepest roots. The old “I am afraid to be alone” feelings surged up more violently than ever. After going to Holly’s to feed the cats, I took extra time with morning devotions, re-reading the notes about reassuring that little girl inside. Then, while reading many many Psalms out loud, I ended up in Proverbs 16:3: **“Roll your works upon the Lord** *[commit and trust them wholly to Him; He will cause your thoughts to become agreeable to His will, and] so shall your plans be established and succeed.*”

I stared out the window and prayed, *“Lord, You know I am trying the best I can to demolish once and for all the lies inside that keep causing fear and loneliness and sorrow. I commit this completely to You and I trust You. I know You will show me how to do this. I will face this day, with You, and I do commit this whole thing about these feelings still popping up to You.”*

I moved to the computer, looked up Proverbs 16:3, printed it and put it on the kitchen counter. Then I picked up one sheet of my personally recycled notepaper from the inch and a half stack of discarded first drafts lying on a shelf underneath the printer. I folded the piece of paper in quarters, as usual, so that the unused blank side faced out, then made a to do list, re-writing undone items from yesterday’s list which always occupied the leftmost corner of the big black faux marble kitchen counter.

One baby step at a time. With a deep breath, I repeated “Roll your works upon the Lord [commit and trust them wholly to Him; Roll your works upon the Lord [commit and trust them wholly to Him, Roll your works. . . “ as I straightened the stack of books threatening to topple off the fifty-year-old knotty pine toybox pushed against the wall next to the printer. I kept at it, phrase by phrase, as I watered the peace lily atop the bookcase, refolded the rumped throw in the corner of the couch, and moved my mug back to the sink from where I had left it on the tiny table by the rocker tugged close to the window.

God *will* establish your thoughts.

As I tidied the front room, four distinct thoughts came to mind. I wrote them on the piece of paper just below Proverbs 16:7 that I had printed out.

1. God is right here with me – always,
2. God will always help me feel better.
3. God will always make whatever I am doing easier.
4. God will always be in complete control of my life.

As I pondered these four statements I realized they were simply restatements of the truths in Hebrews 13:5 in the AMPC, the second verse God had led me to memorize when He first began healing depression in 2019. I sensed that I had to get these four truths anchored deeper in my heart. I did not understand why it seemed so urgent at the time but God knew.

God knew these four truths are the four essential cornerstones of emotional health and feelings of security that I *personally* needed to replace what was missing in my past. Those last few months of the fatigue, the enemy had been more subtly than ever whispering the exact opposite of these truths, the lies I had subconsciously heard all my life – You are all alone, no one will help you, you will always feel this bad, things will always be this hard, and no one cares about you. Those lies had recreated that perpetual sense of insecurity and panic that thrives in the unpredictability of chaotic environments.

I had set my mind to accomplish several tasks while the family was out of town, chief of which was to organize my writing papers. File folders, paper-clipped stacks of paper, and opened books ever and always multiplied and overflowed the various cubby slots in the ersatz hutch over my desk as well as surfaces in the front room. Just looking at the clutter engendered a feeling of confusion and stress. I had learned, and relearned several times during the past, the value of keeping things tidy but in recent months, there was not enough self-discipline to be organized day to day much less to do the thorough purging that would set all to rights again.

So now, throughout that entire first day of the family's vacation, I steadily chipped away at what seemed a mountain of neglect. And, as I straightened and organized the top of the desk, then each cubby slot, then both bookshelves, then the three small side tables and then the filing cabinet wedged between couch and wall that served as a side table, I kept stepping back to the countertop to review those four truths. Simple statements, granted, yet the mental strain of remembering those few words was akin to slogging through knee-deep mud, requiring long, long seconds of concentration to remember each one.

“God, I know You are right here with me. I know You will help me feel better. I know. . . “ Before taking the stack of three books to the bedroom to be reshelved in their proper place, I walked back to the counter and peered at the paper. *“Oh, yes, that’s the next sentence! You will always make what I am doing easier, and You will be in control of each moment of my life. Okay. Let’s do it again. Lord, I know You are right here with*

me, and that You. . . You . . . ! Oh, why is it so hard to remember these four little statements?” Back to the counter, yet again, I went, this time pausing long enough there to repeat all four statements twice.

Deep truths for deep healing. Gradually, as that first day crept onward, I kept committing each segment of the day to God via Proverbs 16:7 (*Okay, Father, now that lunch is done I roll this afternoon upon You, I commit and trust it wholly to You, and I know You will cause my thoughts to become agreeable to Your Will, and my plans will be established and will succeed.*”) As I continued tidying up, those four blessed truths did finally get anchored deeply into my heart. Internally, God was doing something almost touchable.

God knew that, despite the great healing that all the Bible study and meditation had accomplished, four fundamental lies about myself flickered inside, those emotional conclusions I had drawn during the preverbal years, those very earliest years, those years when my Mother was so very stressed. Those circumstances had deeply imprinted some specific feelings. *I still felt* that I am all alone, *I still felt* I will always feel this bad, *I still felt* no one will help me, and *I still felt* no one is taking care of me.

God knew how much pressure was needed to push those feelings to the surface long enough to be seen clearly, and He used the many months of various afflictions—the unfixable fatigue, worsening feet problems, aching joints, seemingly accelerated effects of aging, and real damage to finances—each of which seemed hopeless. That much pressure had recreated the old basic feelings that must have begun in the formative years when the enemy had begun building his evil strongholds of fear, insecurity, low self-esteem, discouragement, and despair.

But all that day and the next, as I meditated on and repeated my four new statements along with Proverbs 16:5, healing kept deepening. As I continued with daily tasks planned for the week, God poured out peace, despite not having the usual social connections with family. After that experience, I concluded that those four truths are as necessary for me as the other truths in my basic arsenal of meditated upon and memorized scriptures. I repeat them almost daily.

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SUMMING UP. When I began writing this book, I thought the experiences to be included had ended in December 2020. Then I thought it was done in 2021. In 2022, I realized the week-by-week lessons I was living also should be included, as well as those from early 2023. Although it has taken much of my free time these last few years, I want to keep sharing what I am learning. However, I am certain such lessons will continue until heaven. So, I will end with some tips about taking care of the body as it relates to depression then some encouragement about continuing to walk in *your* hard-won victory.

CARING FOR YOUR BODY AND YOUR SURROUNDINGS. God is very practical. He tells us to seek peace and pursue it. He tells us what will help our physical body, not just our soul and spirit. Think of all the specific instructions He gives about our physical bodies and the world around us. Following are some things I learned.

- *If you need medicine, take it* and do not feel condemned about it. Take it under a doctor's guidance, of course, and do not abuse it. You may need an anti-depressant or an anti-anxiety medicine for a while or long-term. Pray about it and seek the best doctor you can. I have found it very helpful to take a small dose of anti-anxiety medicine. For my life right now, and with my background and temperament, it is needed.
- Do all you can to *identify and correct physical problems* because these may contribute to depression.
- *Get adequate daily rest* and extra rest during difficult times.
- *Get regular exercise*, with a balance of cardiovascular, strength and flexibility work.
- *Eat foods rich in tryptophan.* Foods rich in tryptophan help the body manufacture serotonin, a chemical messenger that acts like a hormone. Tryptophan is thought to play a key role in depression, anxiety, and other key aspects of health. It is called the body's natural "feel-good" chemical. Sunlight also increases serotonin levels as does reducing stress and some herbal supplements. Because of arrhythmia, I could not take herbal remedies like St. John's Wort but boosting tryptophan-rich foods helped.
- *Clear up physical clutter in your surroundings.* Physical clutter also leads to mental clutter and a feeling of confusion. Look around you, make a list of areas that need to be purged, and tackle one or two a day, checking each one off your list as you go. You can change a disorderly home to a fairly tidy one, if you persist.

MAINTAINING VICTORY. The following habits of hand and heart will help maintain victory over depression. They also help shortstop those occasional blue moods we all have, even those of us who do not tend toward depression.

- ***Meditate—all day long.*** *Each day, have some verse or passage upon which you are meditating-with-the-intent-to-memorize.* I call this my daily manna. For a while, I nearly made meditating on the Word an idol. When I realized my error, in typical fashion I took it to the other extreme. Thankfully, I am now balanced about it. Most every day I have a passage on the kitchen counter that I am purposely thinking about and trying to memorize. And I keep a loose-leaf binder of the printed verses. I am working on being more systematic about reviewing the memorized verses because, otherwise, they fade from memory and my heart.

We need fresh manna daily, just like we need physical food daily.

- **Resist negative thoughts at the onset.** *Cultivate the habit of stopping negative feelings and thoughts – at the first onset – and replacing them with praise, talking with God, and meditating on Scripture.*
- **Nourish your spirit daily.** *Daily listen to and/or watch podcasts, videos, or televised Bible-based teaching and encouraging, wholesome, uplifting programs and books. No one has it easy. We all need encouragement. We all need to hear other human voices and see other human faces. It helps us feel emotionally connected. That is why so many folks have the television or radio on constantly, especially if they live alone.*
- **Worship daily.** Psalm 33:1 tells us “Praise is becoming and appropriate for those who are upright in heart. (AMPC). Besides that, God dwells in our praise (Psalm 22:3) and, there is power in praise and worship. Worship and just plain music -helps keep your spirits up. Get acquainted with various kinds of worship music and with other kinds of music as well. Experiment. Sometimes you will find that spa music soothes you. Other times you may need grand and glorious swelling notes of movie themes or a sprightly melody that mimics bird song. Music is, I believe, one of God’s greatest gifts to humans. You partake of the variety of food He provides. Why not partake of the variety of music He provides?”
- **Stay connected with people.** *Maintain regular connections with people the best you can. Establishing and maintaining friendships, even casual acquaintanceships, can be challenging in this busy world. But technology is a great help, if used correctly. Use phone, text, and emails yes, but make sure to regularly connect, face to face, in real time, with people. And put your phone away while you are with people!*
- **Try journaling.** *Journaling regularly is a great way to connect with God. Writing down your thoughts to God, as well as recording prayer requests and answers, is especially helpful for some, me included. On hard days, you have a personalized record of God’s faithfulness that you can review. Backward journaling can help you unwind at the end of a long day. A counselor once suggested to me that when you find yourself keyed up at the end of the day simply start writing what you did that day, working back from the present moment. For some reason, it seems to unburden your mind. Try it. It helps. And especially if you direct your thoughts to God as you write.*

As you press on to greater victory and joy, I urge you: Refuse to settle for anything less than the joy-filled, peace-filled, contented daily life Jesus died to give you. Work specifically for peace and joy daily.

As you press on to greater victory and joy, I urge you: Refuse to settle for anything less than the joy-filled, peace-filled, contented daily life Jesus died to give you.

- *Set aside some time each day, even if just a few minutes, to purposefully talk positively about yourself, to yourself.* Look in the mirror and tell yourself that you did a good job cleaning the supply cabinet at work, or getting the bills paid after dinner, or remembering to “listen with your eyes” to your kindergartner. If this seems silly, and it did at first to me, just ponder how many times a day (and throughout your life) the enemy whispered negative things to you. God wants us filled with joy and peace and our minds to be on good things. Let’s help Him!
- *Find something to look forward to each day, each week, each month, and so on.* Reward yourself with little things like an hour with a good book and big things, like a trip somewhere.
- *Search for joy and humor each day.* It can be hard to find clean humor in today’s world, but God will help. I have read that kids laugh about 230 to 300 times each day, while adults average around 20. Can you believe that? Selah!
- *Stop the habit of procrastination.* It leads to mental clutter. If you put off making appointments, shopping for particular items, calling someone you need to call and so forth you have all that hanging there in your subconscious mind. Take time to make a list of things you need to do then start doing one or two tasks a day, checking each one off the list.
- *Take time to reward yourself and celebrate things you accomplish, little as well as big.* I learned the hard way, and relearned it, that *all work and no play* lead to burnout

CONTINUING GROWTH. I refused to settle for merely not being depressed, although that in itself is an immeasurable blessing. I asked God for His supernatural help and continued to work until my daily life became one of joy. Somedays, of course, I had and still have to consciously choose to be grateful and joyful, but Holy Spirit works in me and empowers me to walk in the abundant life He has prepared for me, in the midst of troubles, trials, distress and frustrations that are an unavoidable part of this human life.

I acquired this attitude from hearing others who have fought a long battle to overcome past trauma say the same thing about their particular challenges. At the time, that seemed truly impossible. But I kept trying and God kept working. Nothing is impossible with God. You can have a joyful life, not merely an undepressed one!

This chapter was written after that second ablation for a fib while waiting to see if I could have a Watchman device. This device, implanted in the left atrial appendage

of the heart, usually allows people to discontinue blood thinners, which can cause extreme fatigue. As I write, the future is uncertain but I know God is in control of every nuance of my life, that He is always with me, that He will always help me feel better, that He will always help make whatever I do easier. I know that if I commit whatever I do each day and hour to Him that He will make my thoughts conform to His will and that our plans will succeed. (Proverbs 16:3). I refuse to settle for anything less than the abundant life Jesus died for you and for me to have! (John 10:10). You can do the same thing!

Everyone has truly troubling times, especially in the present day. “Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy.” God says we all have our own genuine problems. He warns us not to think we are suffering more than anyone else. Do not believe the enemy’s lies that your particular problems with the flesh are worse than someone else has. I learned the hard way that such an attitude leads to paralyzing self-pity. In First Peter 5:9, God carefully instructs us how to deal with the devil, and He tells us to remember that it is not only we ourselves who have such struggles, but that the whole body of Christ struggles in the same identical way. Identical is the word God uses.

Do not believe the enemy’s lies that your particular problems with the flesh are worse than someone else has.

Withstand him; be firm in faith [against his onset—rooted, established, strong, immovable, and determined], knowing that the same (identical) sufferings are appointed to your brotherhood (the whole body of Christians) throughout the world. (1 Peter 5:9, AMPC)

Some things we simply must accept. One such thing is the fact that some have more of a tendency to depression and fear than others. Another is that we all have problems equally as troubling BUT we do not have to be controlled by our human tendencies or our particular problems. We also must accept that some seasons of life will be very, very, very hard, for *everyone*. That is part of living on earth as a human. We cannot escape that any more than we can escape breathing oxygen.

With God’s grace, each of us can work steadily, patiently, and without self-condemnation, to clean up fallout from depression and anxiety. We all can learn new skills for living free, including how to be happy. We can press on, with faith, with the particular life God has given us, with a grateful, trusting, obedient heart. We can persist until peace and joy are our habitual frame of mind. In spite of all the “troubles, trials, distresses and frustrations” (John 16:33) we will surely have in this earthly pilgrimage, we can say—confidently and expectantly---with Habakkuk:

Though the fig tree does not blossom and there is no fruit on the vines, [though] the product of the olive fails and the fields yield no food, though the flock is cut off from the fold and there are no cattle in the stalls, Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the [victorious] God of my salvation!

The Lord God is my Strength, my personal bravery, *and* my invincible army; He makes my feet like hinds' feet and will make me to walk [not to stand still in terror, but to walk] *and* make [spiritual] progress upon my high places [of trouble, suffering, or responsibility]! (Habakkuk 3:17-19, AMPC, emphasis added)

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Beware! As you have read this story, have you noticed how often the cycle of falling and getting up again repeated? Why? The healing and maturing process is always like that. It was long for me because the strongholds were life-long. I pray that your time of actively healing will be shorter. But remember that the enemy of our souls never stops attacking and we must fight the good fight until we each finish the race God has personally marked out for each of us. All glory to our loving Lord that He gives us His presence, His strength, and countless other rich blessings every step of the way.

Know this also: All along the path of your healing, the enemy will fling lies at your mind, telling you that you are not healed, that your season of victory was just your imagination, and that there really is something fundamentally wrong with you that God cannot fix. Your enemy will tell you keeping the Word in your mind and your mouth and everything else I have said is silly and will do not work or at least will not work for you. Beware! Beware! Danger! Extreme danger! Those are all lies I heard more than once. Fight those lies with the truth of the Word. Do not let Satan steal your peace and joy and victory! Laugh at his lies and speak God's truth.

YOU CAN STAY HEALED. You *can* stay healed of depression, you *can* learn emotional stability, and you *can* make much of your life, no matter your circumstances. Take time now to ponder Psalm 103, and especially verse 5. Your God is the One:

Who satisfies your mouth [your necessity and desire at your personal age and situation] with good so that your youth, renewed, is like the eagle's [strong, overcoming, soaring]! (AMPC, emphasis added)

I am now seventy-one, with several health issues that make it hard to write and study and do other things, but God is abundantly pouring out blessings and provision and I am deeply content in this life I live with and for God. Nothing is impossible with God, nothing, no nothing, no nothing! Persevere! Persist! Then persevere and persist some more! Earnestly remember Isaiah 30:18:

And therefore

the Lord [earnestly] waits
[expecting, looking, and longing] to be gracious to you; and
therefore
He lifts Himself up,
that He may have mercy on you *and* show loving-kindness to you.
For
the Lord is a God of justice.
Blessed (happy, fortunate, to be envied) are
all those who [earnestly] wait for Him,
who expect *and* look *and* long for Him
[for His victory, His favor, His love, His peace, His joy, and
His matchless, unbroken companionship]! IAMPC)

ONE LAST VIGNETTE. Dear friend and fellow pilgrim, I leave you with one last sketch of daily life. Thank you sincerely for honoring my efforts by reading this book. I pray with all my heart that God will send His Word and thoroughly heal you and those you love.

Much love and prayers,
Freda

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Light is sown for the [uncompromisingly] righteous *and* strewn along their pathway, and joy for the upright in heart [the irrepressible joy which comes from consciousness of His favor and protection].

Rejoice in the Lord, you [consistently] righteous (upright and in right standing with God), and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness. (Psalm 97:11-12, AMPC)

Just doing the next thing. *“Father, I do not know if this walk will do much good. It is so much less than what I did just a month ago. But the joints are so stiff I must do something.”*



I walked slowly, taking care to stand fully upright, shoulders back, consciously using muscles that weeks without working out had weakened. The neighborhood street bordering my complex was lined with only one- and two-story apartments, so I had a full view of the sky overhead. From horizon to horizon, the inverted blue bowl of God's heaven, dotted with wisps and puffs of cottony white, elicited a feeling of being covered, of being shielded, of being safe. Vast as the sky is, it seemed close and comforting. I glanced at the paper in my hand.

Light is sown. . . "Light is sown for the [uncompromisingly] righteous and strewn along their pathway. . . "

"You know, Lord, when I first memorized this a few months ago, I thought about it in the order in which it is written, that You plant light for us and scatter it along the path of our life. But, today, what I see is that there are two separate actions. You plant good things, like light, far down our path but that You also scatter light right where we are, because it takes time for planted things to bear fruit, so we need some of it now.

To strew means to scatter things on the surface, so Your scatter light we can get to easily, now, right on the surface. But You are always providing for our future so You have also planted light for us to use in the future. Perhaps that light takes time to grow and will be a stronger and brighter than what we find so easily today. Perhaps some of that planted light will grow into a tree. Maybe it will be a fruit tree or a shade tree, providing food for the hungry and rest for the weary."

Resisting the enemy. Thoughts and sorrows started to push their way into consciousness—When will my family finally yield to Your love? How will I ever get back to health? How will I pay all the bills?

"No! I will not give in to these thoughts. Satan, get behind me! It is written if I am subject to God and I resist you and stand firm against you, you must flee (James 4:7). It is also written that I can do all things because Christ gives me strength, and that includes being vigilant about your attacks, and being firm in faith against you at the onset. God's Word tells me that my fellow believers all over the world have the 'same identical sufferings' (1 Peter 5:8-9). I am not being singled out with trials.

Lord, You said that while we are in the world we all have "troubles, trials, distress and frustration." I will do what You said. I am setting my mind to be of good cheer. I will take courage and be confident, certain and undaunted! I can do that because I believe what You said Lord, that You have overcome the world and You have deprived the world of power to harm me and have conquered it for me. (John 16:33, AMPC).



I will meditate on and delight in the things that are eternal, the unseen things, those things the enemy cannot touch. I will be grateful and thank You for all You have done. I will be thankful for the comfort of Your precious Holy Spirit, for knowing You have prepared a beautiful eternal home for me, and that while on earth I can abide in You and bear much good fruit for Your kingdom. And You reminded Your disciples, and me, of these things so that we may have “perfect peace and confidence.” That means complete peace and complete confidence, about everything.

Help me stay safe in You, Lord! Oh, help me stay in You, safe within You Who are my Rock, safe within the mental and spiritual fortress I create when I say I am taking refuge in You, when I put my trust in You, as Jeremiah did in Lamentations 3:19-33. I remember,

Lord, that verse 25 says You are good to those who wait hopefully and expectantly for You, to those who seek You. Then the brackets after seek says “inquire of and for You and require You by right of necessity and on the authority of Your Word.”

My precious, precious Heavenly Father, my Faithful and Loving One, I do have need of Your power to overcome this habit of worry and fear that has returned. This is a real need, and I am trying my best and I have the authority of Your Word that reassures me You will give me strength to do this. I will resist these doubts and fears from the enemy at their onset. (I Peter 5:6-9). I will ponder on and speak of the great deeds You have done. I will remind myself of Your mercy and loving kindness toward all that You created. I will think on good things. . . “

As I told that young mom at the park yesterday, ‘You can have as much of God as you want’, Lord, I want all of you that I can absorb and more! Oh, deal with this worrisome flesh, these weaknesses, these tendencies to doubt and fear. Forgive me, Father! I know You are sovereign over all things, I know You are working all things together for Your good and for Your glory and You can only do good. I know that. Please help my heart absorb that truth yet again as I meditate on Your Word, Your precious, loving and living Word.”

Little trees. . .big trees. Along both sides of the street, at each driveway stood a pair of ten-foot-tall cedars. I knew these must have been planted 35 years ago when this area was military housing. Then they would have been no taller than a kindergartner. I know that because in the home where I lived from age 8 to 16, my father planted a pair of cedars bordering our driveway when we first moved in, and in a few more years, these should grow to about the same size.

“What children,” I pondered, “had played chase around these cedars 35 years ago, as my brothers and I had, while they waited for their father to come home from the

base as we waited for our father to come home from the rock mine, dodging each other around the little trees, perilously close to the street, a fact about which our mother never worried in those days when kids played, unsupervised, for hours at a stretch, in those long ago days?

Had those children stood proudly beside their dad while he watered the little trees, coaxing them to grow even as he coaxed his children to grow. Had they wheedled him into a short game of catch before they all went in for supper?"

What a deep vein of memory that row of paired, more than mature cedar trees touched, that vein of memories etched into the bedrock of my heart by my father's love and attention, night after night, homecoming after homecoming to his family.

Childhood. What a mystery! When in it, unaware of the sacrifices of those who love and nurture us, and unable to articulate what the warmth and security mean to us, we seldom express gratitude. It usually takes years before we understand and, far too often, the ones who loved us so well and so very thoroughly are gone.



"But, Lord, I know Daddy understood. And thank You that I did thank him, many times, once I was older, before he passed away. And I know that the love he had for me was directly from You, that he was a channel for Your very own and Your very fierce fatherly love for me, for me, Father! What a thought! What a gift!"

Help me be grateful, Lord! *"Oh, Father! Help me be aware of what You do for me. Help me give You thanks and gratitude. Help me see what You do, like giving light and joy as this psalm says. You gave given me a very good life, even to the present time, to my gray hair season, as you say in Isaiah 46:4."*

"Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you. (Isaiah 46:4, NIV)."

I reached into my pocket to read the next phrase of Psalm 97:11 but it was gone. I must have not tucked it far enough into the pocket of my hoodie. Turning around, I saw only leaves tumbling down the black asphalt. The wind must have already blown it away.

"Just like that," I pondered, "We in America could lose our Bibles. Help me, Lord, get more Word hidden in my heart. Help me truly to treasure Your Word."

In the pondering. As I walked, I pondered verse 11. That familiar rustling stirred inside, that treasured gift of having a thought not my own pop into awareness. How wonderful and how loving that God's Word is actually alive and interacts with our

innermost thoughts and feelings (Hebrews 4:12). It is almost like God speaking to us with an audible voice.

So, I talked that verse over with God, in my heart, as I walked.

¹¹ Light is sown for the [uncompromisingly] righteous *and* strewn along their pathway, and joy for the upright in heart [the irrepressible joy which comes from consciousness of His favor and protection]. (Psalm 97:11, AMPC)

“Lord, I know this verse means that You scatter light along my path, in unexpected places here and there, and that You also prepare light that I will need far into the future. This verse says the same thing about joy – that You have put joy here and there in unexpected places and also prepared it for the future. The verse says “along the pathway”, which means not just in one spot but all along the length of the path of my life.

Irrepressible joy. I continued thinking, aware that “The irrepressible joy which comes from awareness of His favor and protection” was an instruction, that it suggested being aware of God’s favor and His protection produces joy so intense it cannot be pushed down, not even by the enemy and his vicious attacks on God's children.

“That is what I need, Lord! Joy! You tell us over and over to rejoice, to cast our cares on You and do not worry. And I know that “the joy of the Lord is my strength.”

I remembered that Ezra said this well-known verse when the people were weeping over their sins because they had just heard and understood the Law and their sins. Yet You told them to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, and not to grieve. You said, right in the midst of their tears of repentance:

*“Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet drink, and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. And be not grieved *and* depressed, for the joy of the Lord is your strength *and* stronghold.”* (Nehemiah 8:10, AMPC)

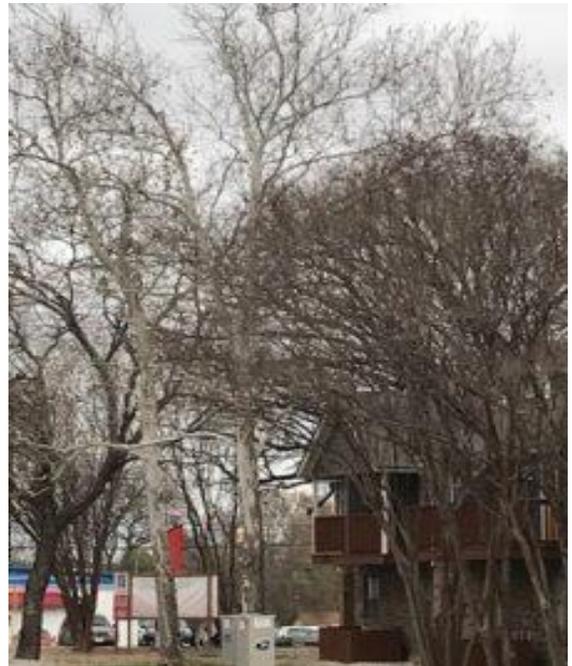
A stronghold is a place that is fortified against attack. I know You have prepared a place of safety and a source of strength for me, and by Your grace I will look for it and run into it. Father, You know how little joy I have experienced lately but I trust You to help me find that which You have lovingly prepared, just for me. I know You say You busy yourself with our every step when our ways delight You. (Psalm 37:23).

“The trees of the field shall clap their hands.” (Isaiah 55:12). I hesitated before going back inside to resume the day, pausing, as usual, across the street from the three stately sycamores alongside the complex next to mine. Taller than the oaks beside them, their white trunks in stark contrast with the brown of the oaks, their almost bare branches rocked left and right, as smaller branches wobbled in the wind. In the

topmost branches, the few remaining clusters of broad leaves fluttered against one another and crackled, a soothing whooshing sound.

“Lord, You have spoken with me, in so many ways, so many years. I remember that cold February morning walking to work in 1985, occasionally glancing at an index card with John 3:6 written on it. When You first opened that scripture for me, You possibly put the identical thought into my mind that You had put into Nicodemus’s mind on that long ago night when he asked Jesus how to be born again. I know Jesus explained to him that the spiritual world is unseen, like the wind, but that the spiritual world reveals itself by the effects it has, just as the wind reveals itself by the effects, like sound, that it has.

“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8, NIV)



“Father, I cannot see You, but I know You are with me this moment by the peace I feel. And in these recent times when I could not feel Your peace, I know You were with me just as much. I do not know what You are doing to do, any more than I know which way the wind will blow, but I trust You, Father, I trust You with it all, with every care on my heart. And I know You already know each one.

So, on that February morning, 2023, as I watched the sycamores bear witness to the wind, I said in my heart, *“You are good and all that You do is good. I know You will help me. I know You have prepared light and joy for me, this day and far into my future. I know You will lead me in the path You want me to travel (Proverbs 3:5-6).*

And I know You will give that “irrepressible joy that comes from awareness of Your favor and protection.” By Your grace, I will think about You and the good that You do, I will mind heavenly things, I will cast my cares on You and rejoice and think on good things. Your Word never fails, Lord, and You promise peace if we keep our mind fixed on You.

Father, I know You are always with me, You will always help me, You will always give me Your joy and You are always in complete, sovereign control of my life. So, I will rejoice and again I say, I will choose to be joyful. I love You so much, Father, I just love You and I thank You, I thank You, dear, dear Father for. . . .”

And so, I continued with the rest of the day God had made, for me, and for you. And so, on an ordinary day, in an ordinary life, the fight of faith was being fought – with victory.

The End

References

Carter, Matt; Ivey, Aaron. (2017). *Steal Away Home: Charles Spurgeon & Thomas Johnson, Unlikely Friends on the Passage to Freedom*. B & H Publishing Group.

Clinton, Tim; Sibcy, Gary, Drs. (2002). *Attachments: Why You Love, Feel, and Act the Way You Do.* Integrity Publishers.

Murillo, Mario. (2019). *Vessels of Fire and Glory: Breaking Demonic Spells Over America to Release A Great Awakening*. Destiny Images Publishers

www.biblehub.com. MacLaren's Expositions,

www.biblehub.com/commentaries/Isaiah/30-18.html.

www.gotquestions.org. Gotquestions.org/authority-over-Satan.html

www.ignitinghope.com

APPENDIX A

How to Find Verses in the Bible

Feel free to share this document as you wish and God bless you!

[1] Understand that the Bible is a collection of books.

The titles of the books of the Bible are at the top of each page. Each book is divided into chapters, and each chapter is divided into verses. The notation is like this: Isaiah 26:3 (or Genesis 50:20 or 2 Peter 1:5). Isaiah 26:3 means the book of Isaiah, the 26th chapter, and the third verse in that chapter.

[2] Use the Contents page

In the very front, or toward the front, is a Contents page that lists the books of the Bible, divided into Old Testament and New Testament. The books are not in alpha order, so just look through them until you find the book you want.

For example, to look up Isaiah 26:3, scan the Contents page until you find “Isaiah”. The page numbers given in the Contents are the first page of that book. So, turn to page 593, and you are at Chapter 1, verse 1.

[3] The “concordance” (at the back of the Bible) is an index of subjects found in the Bible. For example, under “Peace”, you find a list of references (chapter number, then a colon, then the verse number). Looking under peace, you would find Isa 26:3 and then the first few words of that verse. “You will keep in perfect p.”

You already know from the Contents page that the first page of the book of Isaiah is page 593. So turn to page 593 and then flip forward until Chapter 26, then go down to verse 3. “You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in you.”

The books of the Bible are abbreviated with two or three letters, such as IS for the book of Isaiah. Bible book abbreviations are available on the web.

It is an excellent habit to read the first few verses before and after a particular verse, even the whole chapter. That gives a bit of context.

Some publishers call the concordance an “Encyclopedic Index” or “Dictionary Concordance” but the format is basically the same. And nearly all Bibles have some sort of concordance, or index, at the back. All Bibles have a Contents page.

[4] How to get help for a particular need.

You can search the concordance and you can also just type “verses about _____” into a search engine. Be cautious, though, about comments from the person who compiled the list. The internet is full of errors and that includes people who write about God and His Word!

[5] Where to start reading in the Bible?

I recommend reading the Gospel of John, more than once. Then, read the very short book of First John, which specifically shows how to know if you have become a believer in God. For more about how to study the Bible, including a list of chapters to read first, see the booklet “Diligent Bible Study” on www.wordsofhopeandhealing.com.

[6] What version to use?

Any Bible reading is far better than none! The King James can be challenging to understand, but there are many translations that use everyday language. You can use a web-based program, like Bible Gateway, to look up verses or passages in dozens of translations. The New International Version or New American Standard are excellent translations. The New Living Translation is also very easy to understand.

I pray that God will “give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you.” (Ephesians 1:17b,18a, NIV)

Blessings,

Freda

APPENDIX B

God's Arsenal for Peace and Security (list only)

| <i>Scripture</i> | <i>Key Thought (Memory Cues)</i> |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Section One | |
| Isaiah 26:3 | [1] Peace |
| Hebrews 13:5 | 2. never fails |
| Isaiah 30:15 | 3. to return |
| Psalms 91 | 4. to the secret place. |
| Section Two | |
| Lamentations 3:25-26 | 5. God is good, |
| Genesis 28:15 | 6. He is near, so |
| Psalms 27:14 | 7. I can wait, |
| Isaiah 41:10 | 8. and not fear, |
| Psalms 94:12-15 | 9. And keep myself calm! |
| Section Three | |
| John 16:33 | 10. I can be of good cheer! |
| Psalms 18:30-36 | 11. (because) God is perfect. |
| Psalms 1 | 12. I can think about Him all day. |
| Psalms 107 | 13. And I can thank Him. |
| Section Four | |
| II Chronicles 15:2 | 14. I will find Him |
| Philippians 4 | 15. as I rejoice, and |
| Psalms 103 | 16. and praise Him. |
| 2 Chronicles 16:9 | 17. He longs to strengthen me. |

APPENDIX C

Recommended Resources

Books about Depression – by believers

Carter, Matt; Ivey, Aaron. (2017). *Steal Away Home: Charles Spurgeon & Thomas Johnson, Unlikely Friends on the Passage to Freedom*. B & H Publishing Group.

Piper, John. (2006). *When the Darkness Will Not Lift: Doing What We Can While We Wait for God – and Joy*. Crossway Publishers.

Other Resources

Backlund, Steve and Wendy. *Let's Just Laugh at That*. Filled with the ammunition of truth, to destroy the lies of the enemy of our souls.

Lawrence, Brother. (2022). *The Practice of the Presence of God*. CrossReach Publications. A must-read classic for every believer.

Meyer, Joyce. (1995). *Battlefield of the Mind: Winning the Battle in Your Mind*. Warner Faith. Joyce Meyer has a wealth of resources at www.joycemeyer.com.

Prince, Derek. (1995). *God's Medicine Bottle: A Guide to Restoring Physical, Mental, Emotional and Spiritual Health*. Whittaker House. This book, and many other helpful resources are available from Derek Prince Ministries at www.derekprince.com.