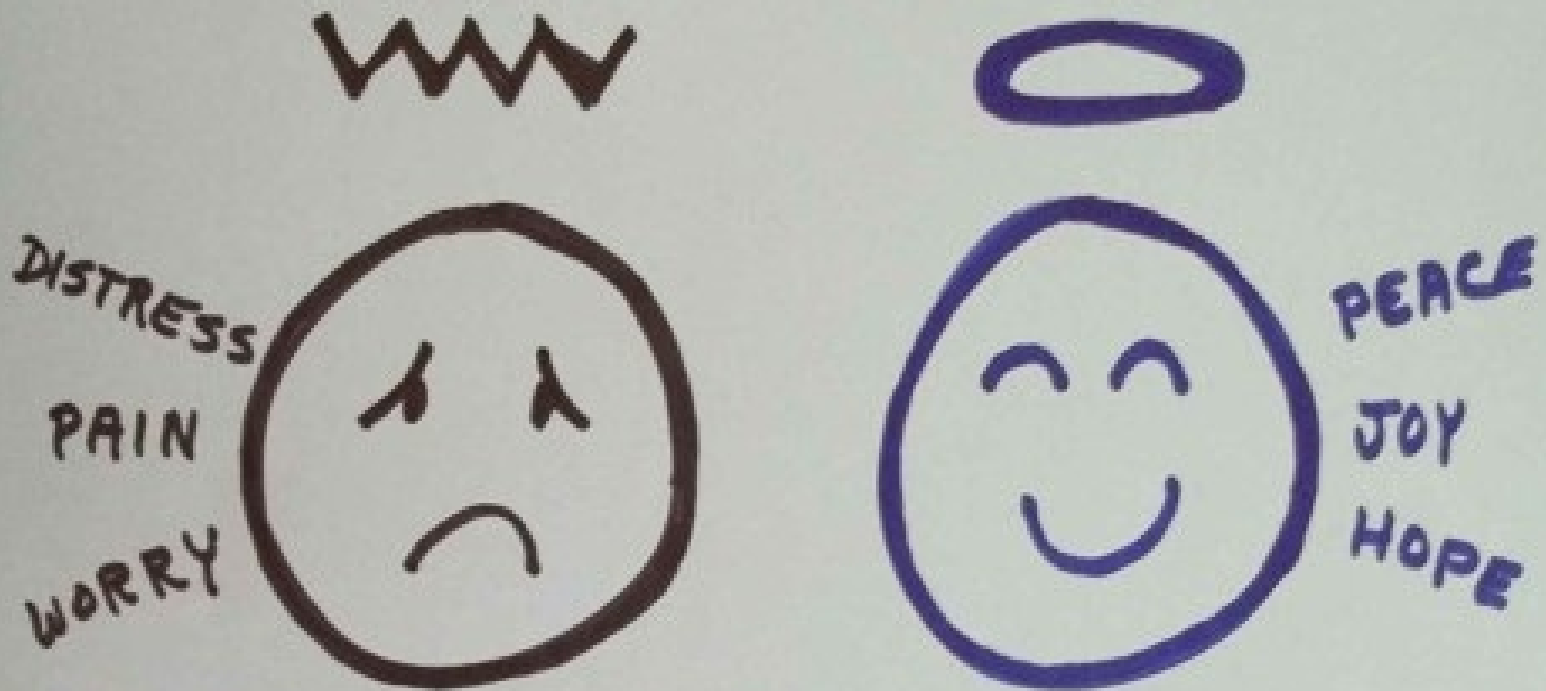


FEAR? or FAITH?



Which Will You Choose?

By Cheryl Lowery

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book,
from the depths of my heart
and in all gratefulness

to:

the only ONE TRUE GOD

(Father, Son, and Holy Spirit),

Who has lovingly delivered me from all my sins

in spite of myself

and in all the times I've failed Him,

given me a brand new life,

blessed me with His loving Presence,

helped me and guided me in His work

and in the writing of this book,

and Whom I love and trust

with my entire being

and my whole life.

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CHAPTER 1—Is Fear Ruining Your Life?

Are you too scared to move forward in your life, because you feel like you don't know how? Or you're afraid to go forward alone, yet you don't feel happy staying where you are? Do you get scared when God moves you into a different realm than you're used to? I do. I feel overwhelmed at times, and sometimes I just feel like I want to stick with the territory and habits that I'm familiar with and just serve God the "easy" way. But one day the realization came into my spirit that taught me that God does not want that for me (nor, I believe, for any of His children): *Don't settle for second best. What I have called you to, I have called you to.*

There are times when I have allowed fear to cripple me, to handicap me, resulting in my feeling very unhappy, incomplete, and unfruitful. Has this happened to you? Are you afraid that you have ruined your life by listening to your fears?

It is never too late to start being who God made you to be; it is never too late to start walking on your fears, with God's help; and it is never too late to live the fruitful life that God has called you to live. You *can* do it, with God's help. I don't mean that God will do it all. No, I mean that He will be with you to help and guide you as *you* do it.

Fear can be an addiction. We can fear letting go of our fears. We're used to them. We cling to them. We're used to letting them rule our lives. But, what kind of a life is that?

We know that people with other addictions need the help of people. What makes us feel that we can conquer fear alone? We cannot always do everything by ourselves. Don't expect others to. Don't expect yourself to. We need God's help. We need help from loved ones. And sometimes we need help from professionals. It is not wrong to reach out for help, nor to give help to others in ways that will not tear you down nor make the "victim" more crippled, as long as it does not compromise your walk with God. Yes, God is able to do it alone, but often He wants us to help each other.

People do need other people. How have we learned about God? Through people's testimonies, through the Word of God that people have written down, through a Sunday School teacher, through a preacher, *etc.* We are, after all, an extension of God's Hand to others.

Help each other, as you feel that God is guiding you. And let others help you, when help is needed. Of course, be reasonable. Don't lean on them too heavily, and don't let them lean on you too heavily. That can prevent growth and can end up creating more problems. But remember that *love* is a miracle-working "tool."

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. — 1 Jn 4:7, 16

This is part of a series of seminar-type books that I believe God has put on my heart. As is my desire with each of these books, I pray that God will guide you as you move into a new perspective that will enable you to live a happier, freer, more fruitful life in Christ and in His blessings.

I hope you can work with a group, or at least with one other person, because

together you will reap more knowledge, a better understanding, and more insight. And also, a group or another person can give you helpful support in fulfilling your goals. Through sharing, you can help others and they can help you, being careful not to pressure anyone who isn't ready to share; in time, hopefully, they will open up. Don't criticize nor critique anyone's feelings or thoughts. They need to feel "safe" and accepted. And don't you yourself allow others to pressure you. For those who must work on this alone, without the benefit of the input of others, may God help you to see these things through His Eyes and with His understanding.

Whatever you hear in your group of two or more must be kept confidential. Don't spread anything outside of the group. You will need to be able to trust one another if you want everyone to feel free to open up and expose themselves.

I've tried to write out the verses as much as possible, because I know how frustrating it can be to have to look back and forth in your Bible. The flow will then often get lost and will become a chore rather than an enjoyable learning experience. I hope this helps you. Please do take the time to really read, understand, and receive each verse. God's Word is important.

I have included worksheets with every chapter in order to help you to understand yourself and to help you to apply the teachings to your life. Take the time to search deeply within yourself, with God's help, so that you can get the most possible out of this book. Be honest with yourself. As with other things in our lives, the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it. Actually writing down the answers can help you. Hopefully, you have paper and a pen.

You will see that some chapters are longer than others, and that some worksheets require more time than others. It's important to take the time you need to really soak in and absorb all of the information as well as taking enough time to do the worksheets well. You may need to break up some of the chapters into smaller sections for your studies. Be led by the Holy Spirit. I pray that you will let God guide, rather than the calendar.

My prayers are with each one of you. Know that you're not alone and know that God is with you as you step out in faith and in His power. No, it isn't easy, it's hard; but it's worth it for a happier, more peaceful, more fruitful life. As I mention in another book, and as I taught my children, "Anything worth having is worth working for," and I would like to add, "Anything worth having is worth *fighting* for." God is certainly worth the fight! Besides, the real battle is His. He will help you. He will guide you through.

"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come." — Jn 16:13

"Listen, all you of Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, King Jehoshaphat! Thus says the LORD to you: 'Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's.'" — 2 Chron. 20:15

God teaches me while He teaches you. In other words, these books that I write do not come from me myself, but from a combination of my own experiences and knowledge (which I believe is a gift from God), and also from God's Word (which I employ in my writings), as well as from His Holy Spirit's guidance (He comes over me as I write). I pray

that you will learn through reading this book as much as I have learned through writing it. Isn't God awesome? Praise the Lord!

It's time to stop and do Worksheet #1. May God bless you all as you go forward in Him!

WORKSHEET #1—

Ask yourself these questions, and jot down your answers:

1. What would I like to accomplish in my life for God?
2. What would I like to accomplish in my life for myself?
3. Are they the same? Often, they are. I find that being fruitful for God is the most wonderful thing that I can give to myself.
4. If you are working with someone, perhaps you could share phone numbers and encourage each other between the lessons, if you so desire.

CHAPTER 2—Fear: What Is It?

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. — 1 Jn 4:18

Wow! “Fear involves torment.” Is fear something that we desire to have? Torment doesn’t sound very pleasant, does it? I guess we first need to ask ourselves if we would rather live in love and faith or live in fear? Think about it, because we do have a certain amount of choice in this decision.

There are many kinds of fear, some that we may not have even recognized as fear. Here are a few:

Ego can stem from fear of letting go and being humble. Perhaps we’re afraid that someone will take advantage of us or that we may lose ourselves or our rights; perhaps we’re afraid that someone may discover that we really aren’t as intelligent nor as skillful as we want them to think we are. Or perhaps we’re afraid that we really aren’t who we want to be or who we think we should be, so we put on a front of superiority for ourselves or for others. Or perhaps we really do feel that we’re superior in our thoughts or feelings, etc., and we would fear finding out any other truth. Perhaps we fear having to change our opinions or our ways, thinking it’s easier to stay in a mindset of self-elevation or stubbornness than to have to consider another person’s needs as important as our own. That might take effort, and we may fear having to put forth effort.

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. — Prov. 16:18, 19

Look at what ego did to Satan!:

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.” — Isa. 14:12-15

And here is an example of human ego (pride) versus humility:

“When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; and he who invited you and him come and say to you, ‘Give place to this man,’ and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, go up higher.’ Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. For whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” — Lk 14:8-11

Whew! Not only can our ego be hurtful to others, but it can be dangerous or embarrassing to us, as well. Of course, we don’t sit in the lowest chair with the *expectation* of being raised, because we may not be, and then our ego may really flare up, or our feelings may be hurt. Remember that it is God Who is the most important One. Don’t do things in order to be raised up here. Do things in order to please God, and *He*

will raise you up. Be truly humble.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. — James 4:10

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. — Phil. 2:3, 4

Greed can come from a fear of losing money, comforts, power, or position. Possibly we're afraid of having to struggle, having to work hard. Maybe we're just tired and need a rest. Or perhaps we've come from a background of poverty and know too well how difficult life can be in that circumstance, causing fear of that lifestyle. Or perhaps we have low self-esteem and fear what others think of us, and so we assume that through power or money, we will gain their respect.

Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?" And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." — Lk 12:13-21

Criticism is sometimes based on the fear that we are not the people that we would like to be; or perhaps we're reminded of someone else who acted the same way as the one we're criticizing, and because we were affected in a negative way by his or her actions or words, we fear that this one is like the other one. Sometimes we cannot tolerate what we ourselves do, and therefore we have no patience when others do the same thing. Sometimes, we fear having to look inside ourselves to make an effort to be understanding and kind. So, because of this and our feelings of guilt for this attitude, we tend to "take it out" on the other person, rather than have to change ourselves and our way of thinking.

Deliver me, O LORD, from evil men; preserve me from violent men, who plan evil things in their hearts; they continually gather together for war. They sharpen their tongues like a serpent; the poison of asps is under their lips. Selah. — Psa. 140:1-3

Prejudice can be based on a fear of those that are different, of what we're not accustomed to. This may cause us to want to put the "different" ones on a lower plane than ourselves, in order to gain control. Perhaps we've had a bad experience with someone that looks or sounds like this person, so we fear all who look or sound like them. Perhaps we have been carefully taught by others that someone who is different is somehow inferior to us. People were even prejudiced against Christ, God Himself in the flesh.

I'm sure you have all experienced prejudice in some form, and most or all of us have probably been guilty of it, too, even when we didn't realize it. I have experienced prejudice simply because I'm a woman. I have been considered inferior, less intelligent,

less important, a weakling, someone people shouldn't listen to, and a trouble-maker, simply because of my sex. I have also been discriminated against because of my being a Christian. I'm sure many of you can relate to instances of these and many more.

I have also seen cruel persecution when someone has been through a divorce. (Apparently, murder is more forgivable by some people than divorce is, whether or not the divorced person being judged is responsible.)

“Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” And they were offended at Him [Jesus]. — Mk 6:3

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” And Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” — Jn 1:45, 46

Laziness can be from a fear of work, fear of stepping out into unknown territory or of leaving home, fear that others will expect more of us than we desire to do or than we will be able to accomplish. Or, perhaps, it's fear that we don't know how to do the job, and we're afraid to ask for help, so we don't do anything.

(Read Matt. 25:14-30, if you are not familiar with the parable of the talents, noting the following verses):

“‘And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.’ But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. Therefore you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” — Matt. 25:25-30

As I read this passage, I felt that the Lord was guiding me that the servant had lost his talent because of fear. His fear had caused him to be unfruitful. I also believe that God showed me that fear is God's biggest enemy in all of us and that we must trust God. So, fear and laziness in this story went hand-in-hand.

Fear of standing up for ourselves can stem from a fear of someone's reactions, real or imagined. This can cause a fear of saying “No,” and can cause a person to allow themselves to be mistreated mentally, physically, emotionally, and even spiritually. It can change one's life completely, as they try to live to please others rather than God and themselves. It can even cause someone to be forced into unwanted sex (rape), and even into an unwanted relationship or marriage or a detrimental friendship or another negative situation. Then the victim may blame themselves for what happened to them, right or not. Do not blame yourself wrongly. Learn to value yourself. Learn to say “No,” and stand by it. (Of course, I realize that if your life or someone else's life is threatened if you say “No,” that may be a different story. Pray! Ask for God's guidance and help in that case.)

I know of many cases where someone is unhappily living someone else's plans for them. We have only one life here. It's up to us to make it a good one. Let's pray for guidance and stand up for ourselves, firmly but gently.

Lack of forgiveness can be caused by fear of admitting our imperfections and wrongs, even to ourselves; fear of not being esteemed nor respected by the one we forgive; fear of letting go and possibly forgetting, because it might happen again, and we'd be caught off-guard; fear that if someone is forgiven, they might think it's okay to repeat the offense; or fear that people won't understand how we have suffered. But we must remember that our own self-esteem grows when we are kind and loving toward others, including forgiving them, so if you can't do it for them, do it for yourself. Better yet, think of how Jesus suffered and forgave, and do it for Him.

Forgiving, especially when the "guilty" party hasn't even apologized, can be very difficult. However, if forgiving will set you free, isn't it worth it? The chapters about forgiveness will go into more detail.

Insecurity can be caused from fear: fear of rejection, loss of love, loss of having someone we can count on to be there for us, loss of income, or loss of control over our own lives. I've dealt with this one a lot. Christians shouldn't feel insecure, right? However, Christians are human, and even when we trust God, we still experience loss in many ways. It's really tough sometimes, especially if the losses are sudden or last a long time. This is what the Lord gave to me for those times: *Choose peace*. And the guidance as to how to receive that peace?: *Spend more time with Me*. So, as I've made a deliberate effort, I have seen a great improvement. Praise God! It really works! God knows what He's talking about!

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. — Isa. 26:3

Fear of change is a big one! We become used to our situation, our lifestyle, the people around us, our income, our home, our routine (or rut), our thought processes, our comforts or lack of them, *etc.* We're accustomed to these things, whether or not we're happy with them or in them. Many of the fears I've already mentioned relate to this fear.

I've known people who are miserable in their routine or in their situation, and yet they are so filled with fear of change and fear of what people will think that, instead of making a change that would lift them up and bless their mental and physical health, they stay as they are. Then this choice to remain as is causes them to be unhappy and even causes those around them to be unhappy, and this continual lack of fulfillment can cause depression, illness, and loss of hope. They are denying their own deepest needs, while telling themselves that they're doing the right thing. And Satan has deceived them so well that they often don't even see, or perhaps are afraid to see, the fears that are holding them in bondage. I've been there; have you?

God did not create us to live in fear. He created us to live in joy, in love, and in hope. He wants us to truly live! Jesus says about us,

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."
— Jn 10:10

Whatever you do, don't ever lose hope!

[We] rejoice in hope of the glory of God. . . . Now, hope does not disappoint. . . . — Rom. 5:2, 5

God will help you! Trust Him! Be ready to fight! For often, freedom requires warfare. But, as I said, God will help you!

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. . . . — Eph. 6:12-18

The Bible is so filled with the changes that we must make in ourselves and in our lives. Read the Word, and you will see that our lives are to be in a constant process of change. That's why we have the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17). That's why Jesus came—to change us into the people that we need to be so that we can treat each other right, love God first, and have an eternity of happiness in heaven.

He never said that it would be easy. On the contrary, He said that it would be tough. But He did say that He will be with us, that He will be our strength, that He will help us.

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” — Jn 16:33

And, as I felt in my spirit, *And so can you (overcome), in Me.* Thank God. I'm so glad that He never gives up.

“And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. — Matt. 28:20

Of course, there are more fears than these, some of which we easily see as fears, such as running away from an obvious danger, being afraid of the dark or of high places, *etc.* God can help you with *all* fears. The ones I've mentioned above are to help you to see that not all fears are the obvious ones. Some of them are hidden inside, where they do much damage because they have not been revealed to us. So, we are now revealing them so that we can finally be released from them. And, as I'm sure you've noticed, many fears seem to be interrelated.

Ask yourself, “Are my fears causing me to settle for second best? Am I happy with my life? Do I feel that I am doing all that God would have me to do?” Notice that I said, “all that *God* would have me to do?” I didn't say, “all that *people* would have me to do” nor “all that *I* think I should be doing.” I have found that it's impossible to please people and can even be impossible to please myself, so I ask, “What does *God* desire of me?”

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. — 2 Tim. 1:7

God desires the very best for us: His love, His help, His security, His blessings, His salvation, His power, a healthy mind, and to share His home in Heaven with us. Mostly, He wants us to know His Son—His most wonderful Gift of all! Don't take the above verse for granted! Really read it as if for the first time! Believe it! It is for you!

Now, let's see what the Bible says about living by fear, rather than choosing to walk on it. Living by fear does have an element of danger in it:

“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly ... shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” — Rev. 21:7, 8

Notice that the word is *cowardly*. I don't believe that the Bible is talking about the fear we feel when we need to escape from a physical attack by a person or an animal, for example. That fear is automatic and instinctive, and gives us adrenaline for strength so that we can outrun them or fight for our lives. And there have been times when God has protected people from even those dangers:

But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. — Acts 28:3, 5

Wow! I do believe that God protected Paul, because he had faith, yes, but also because it was not a purposeful thing. He was not tempting God by deliberately testing Him. He did not knowingly nor deliberately pick up that snake. Also, God had a purpose for saving Paul at that time. Paul still had much to do for Him.

As for me, when I was a child, living in the desert, I ran out into the darkness with no shoes on, after my Mom had told me to always wear shoes wherever I couldn't see. I got stung by a scorpion. Yes, it hurt all up my leg, and we went to the doctor, who gave me a shot, but the next day, I was fine. I had disobeyed my Mom, and learned the hard way that she knew best.

Later on, when I was an adult, and I was a Christian at that time, I was walking barefoot *in my own home* and *innocently* stepped on another scorpion. It felt like pearls. I quickly raised my foot, and no harm came to me. Years later, the same thing happened again, with no harm. I *went bananas*, but I was fine. And another time, I was squeezing out my mop, put the mop on the floor, and a big, healthy-looking black widow spider walked out of it. I *lost it*, but again, I was fine, thanking God that I hadn't been bitten. (And no disobedience these times.) So, I know that God has been very good to me, in spite of myself. I cannot say that I understand the times when bad things do happen to us (and plenty of them have happened to me and my family, too). I just know that truly, God is with us.

“Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” — Lk 10:19

But also remember that when Satan tried to get Jesus to *prove* God's power, Jesus quoted Deut. 6:16 to him:

Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’” — Matt. 4:7

Now, back to the word *cowardly*. I believe that God is not condemning us if we *feel* fear, but that He is telling us not to let that fear run nor ruin our lives, and that we are not to allow fear to cause us to sin. If you're more afraid of what someone else will think of you than what God will think of you, or if you're more afraid of change than you are of displeasing God, these can lead to sin. I don't believe that the natural feeling of fear is the sin, but the action or lack of action that is caused by the fear is what can be sin.

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. — James 4:17

Remember 1 Jn 4:18 (“Fear involves torment”)? If fear takes you over and possesses your life, not only might you be displeasing God, but you will surely be a very unhappy person. You will be tormented by your own dissatisfaction of yourself and your life. Don't let your fears cause you to avoid life and action. Don't let it conquer you. Instead, use that “fear adrenaline” to be a conqueror. Use it to fight for what's right. Use it to bring energy to your life. As you put that adrenaline into *positive* action, you will begin to feel the power of gaining control over your life.

It's your choice: Mere existence or true living?

WORKSHEET #2—

1. List your fears. Recognizing what they are is the first step toward getting them out of a position of control in your life.
2. Are your fears getting in the way of what you would like to accomplish in your life? (See the previous worksheet.)
3. Now, share with someone, if you can. They may open your eyes to fears you hadn't thought of (and v/v). Add those new ones to your list.
4. Using this list, decide whether or not you think the fears are reasonable and logical. Circle the ones you want to be free of. Add notes, if you want to.
5. Save this list. We'll be coming back to it later on.

CHAPTER 3—Fear and Loneliness

Are you a victim of loneliness? Fear of being lonely is a very common fear that too often gets overlooked or wrongly treated. There are many people who have this fear. It deserves a chapter of its own. I myself have suffered a great deal from this. But God has taught me various things that have helped me, and I pray that they will help you, as well.

Not only can loneliness cause hurt and feelings of rejection, but the hurt and feelings of rejection can lead to depression and discouragement. And if it is long-lasting or very severe, it can lead to a loss of spontaneity, because one's needs have been so squelched by a lack of gentle attention and a listening ear, causing someone to feel like less of a person, like no one could be interested in what they have to say. This can cause someone to become too self-conscious to just be able to relax, be themselves, and even have fun. Because of this, if they are in the company of others, they may feel so unwanted down inside that they have a hard time conversing with anyone, especially with confidence or a healthy sense of humor. They may have good words to say, but may not feel free to say them.

The stress caused by all of this can also cause *physical* problems, as well—lots of them! I realize that different people react in different ways and in different intensities to different situations. I'm just saying that sometimes the side effects of loneliness, rejection, and therefore stress, can contribute to, or help to bring on, these ailments. No wonder we fear loneliness!

Some people seem to think that if you have forgiven them for not being there for you, that you automatically aren't suffering from loneliness anymore. This makes no sense at all. Forgiving does not take away loneliness. One still hurts, even though they have forgiven.

Forgiveness does not take away our needs. Forgiveness is not a warm hug. Forgiveness cannot replace our need for the company of other human beings. Forgiveness may free us from bitterness, but it does not free us from having needs that need to be met. If it did, I wouldn't even have to give food to the hungry; as long as they had forgiven others, they wouldn't need food. Does that sound like a ridiculous comparison? No, I don't think so. The body isn't the only hungry part in us. Our spirits, our minds, and our emotions also need regular feeding. It is a known fact that if a baby doesn't receive attention and gentle touch, he or she may die.

What is loneliness? Loneliness is a feeling of being all alone, accompanied by unhappiness. It is often associated with a feeling of rejection. When someone is not esteemed highly enough by others that the others would desire to spend some time with him or her, the lonely person feels like they're not valued, that to others, they're not worth the others' time or attention. They certainly don't believe that they are considered truly *special* to other people, no matter what they're told. How can they? They don't see the fruits of the other one's words of spoken love.

“You will know them by their fruits. ...” — Matt. 7:16

Loneliness can also be present when, though you may be surrounded by people and even have people in your life who love you and show it, you are standing firmly for

something that you believe in without having the support of the group of which you're a part.

Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. And God said to Noah, " ... Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; ... And behold, I Myself am bringing the flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; and everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female." And Noah did according to all that the LORD commanded him. — Gen. 6:8, 13, 14, 17-19; 7:5

[God] saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly. . . . — 2 Pet. 2:5

Judging from the last verse above, I would say that Noah had tried to warn the people ("preacher of righteousness"). Wouldn't you agree? In which case, he certainly took a very lonely stand for God and for the people's souls. We can only barely try to imagine all of the jeers, scoffing, ridicule, and loneliness that Noah must have had to endure. I know that I would have been afraid, not only of people's reactions, but afraid that I hadn't heard God correctly, that I'd been wrong.

Thank God that Noah had his family's support or it may have been totally unbearable. But God knew that! And He provided.

And so Noah was not all by himself, even though I'm sure he felt lonely for himself and for his family in the midst of the townspeople around them as he was going through the very lengthy process of building such a huge structure with only his family helping him. And can you imagine how alone his entire family must have felt when they got out of the ark and set foot upon land, knowing that they were the only people alive on the entire earth? Sounds scary to me! Their only friends and family were themselves (eight in all) and those who would be produced through them in the future.

Imagine! It must have been quite lonely at times: no one to talk to except a relative; no older, wiser person from whom Noah and his wife could seek guidance (except God, of course, but I find that sometimes it's very helpful to hear an audible voice and to see a physical facial expression); no friend with whom to share, except your siblings or in-laws or parents, *etc.* Personally, I think that would be really tough for most of us humans, don't you agree? We need each other, and we need a choice and a variety, at times—different friends or family members can understand different things, and sometimes we feel more comfortable talking to a stranger, perhaps a counselor.

God, at times, has called a select few to follow a very difficult course of loneliness in order to accomplish His will. I praise God for those who have been successful in making it through, in spite of severe difficulties. Sometimes I don't even think we truly realize what God's children have gone through in order to be obedient to God's will. May we appreciate them and their sacrifices more fully.

Woe is me, my mother, that you have borne me, a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth! ... Every one of them curses me. — Jer. 15:10

Jeremiah was a man who was truly suffering and feeling all alone. He was a prophet of God, and yet he said that everyone cursed him. God had him delivering a depressing message to the earth. Jeremiah was obedient, and he paid a price for his obedience. He must have been extremely lonely. And I would think that he must have been afraid to continually open himself up to ridicule and retaliation. Yet he obeyed, anyway. Praise the Lord! May God grant us the courage to obey, as well.

Something that I believe God has been showing me is that, as I *accept* the pain and the loneliness as a part of my sacrifice to the Lord, it loses its power over me. And so, it fades. It no longer controls me like it did. This acceptance, then, actually ends up having a positive effect on my life. This has been a truly wonderful revelation and realization. I had not really understood this before. But when I experienced it, I saw things in a whole new light. Acceptance of the pain, for Christ's sake, can bring deliverance from the pain. However, holding onto that deliverance can be difficult day after day after day.

And when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. — Acts 5:40-42

The more we work for God, the more we are blessed with suffering for His sake. Loneliness has been, for me, a part of that deep suffering. Sometimes our suffering helps us to grow or to gain compassion, but sometimes we don't understand the reasons. Then, we must simply choose to trust God. Paul said,

I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness... — 2 Corin. 11:23-27

I believe that our “shipwrecks,” our “beatings,” and our “imprisonments” can be our fears, our loneliness, our rejections, our physical problems, our financial problems, and the other difficulties that we encounter as we go through our lives with Christ. It is so important that we trust God. I truly believe that His peace and His healings can add years to our lives. He can revive us. He really can make us new. He has done it for me. I honestly believe that if He hadn't helped me, I would truly have physically died from a broken heart. How many people are suffering like I've suffered? No wonder we fear being lonely!

Being lonely does not necessarily mean being alone. We all need times of being alone to think, relax, pray, rest, gain peace, and just enjoy being alone. Remember, being lonely is being alone and *unhappy* because of it. This often stems from being alone too much, not receiving the positive attention nor the loving affection that you need, or from being alone when you need the support of someone who loves you.

Are you lonely? How lonely are you? Does fear of continued loneliness get in your way of enjoying life? Does it cause you to make bad decisions?

Keeping ourselves busy can help us make it through each day, but it cannot fill all of our needs. God has guided me to take classes in college and to write books, and I enjoy doing these things, and it helps make life more bearable, but it is not a replacement for love and attention. It does not take away the loneliness.

Sometimes moving to a new location, a new home, can cause me to have fresh energy because of the newness of the things around me that I can explore, but when the newness wears off, the loneliness again sinks in.

There are many occupations where people work alone; for example, homemaker, forest ranger, or accountant. And there are the jobs where people feel alone because of their stand on certain issues, such as politician. And then there are the occupations where people feel alone because other people tend to put them in a non-human category of perfection, such as a priest, a minister, a deacon, or one of their family members.

There are other positions of loneliness, sometimes occurring suddenly, sometimes lasting a long time, some that we feel we have no choice about. Some examples of these could be divorce; widowhood; or perhaps being a caregiver for a loved one, never feeling free to get out and enjoy friends because of their concern about their patient. Are you in any of these positions?

Too much loneliness can be crippling. The television may be turned on just to hear a human voice. Some may go shopping just to get some comfort out of being around other people, but end up being shocked at how much money they have spent. Then, others may take a drive to keep from going crazy. Some may end up housebound because fears have taken over. Do you identify with any of these? And how about the sudden loneliness we feel going home alone after visiting with people?

Working for God can be very lonely. However, when God calls us to work for Him, no matter how difficult it may be, He will give us blessings for our obedience, which help us to gain healings and happiness. Here we are, doing our work because we believe God wants us to, not realizing that maybe we are the ones He wants to help through our service for Him. And then, amazing as He is, others get blessed, too! What an awesome God! Even so, there can certainly be loneliness involved. Remember, He didn't say that it would be easy, just that we would be rewarded.

We need to take care of ourselves by spending time with people who love and appreciate us, and we need to appreciate ourselves. Do you find yourself doing things that you don't want to do or being with people who drag you down, simply because you need to feel loved and accepted?

One way to help to prevent your own loneliness from becoming overpowering is to be kind to others who are lonely. First, open your eyes to your own family and friends. Are they being neglected? Then, open your eyes to others in need of a visit, in need of a friend. In the following verse, I believe that "the poor" refers to more than just a lack of possessions; it can also mean a lack of the basic needs of the heart, mind, and spirit:

Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard.

— *Prov. 21:13*

So, open up your heart to others who are lonely, and you will be blessed yourself, whether you are lonely or not. God and love are our greatest riches. We must share them. They are much more important than money. Though we do need material things, such as food and housing, we must have love to survive.

Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred. — Prov. 15:17

There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; and one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches. — Prov. 13:7

By this we know love, because He [Jesus] laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. — 1 Jn 3:16

People need to be *loved*, not “carried.” They want to know that they are *enjoyed* by others, not just “put up with.” We all need to feel that we are valued by someone. If we have to plead with someone for a visit, how can we feel valued?

I have played and sung many times at convalescent hospitals, especially on holidays of various kinds. A friend and I would go and play on Christmas morning, Thanksgiving Day, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, and Easter, simply because on those very days are the times when the residents would be the most lonely (not the day before, not the day after). On the actual holiday itself is when there are so few people that are left behind because the other residents are spending the day with their families. Even the staff is often thinned out on those days, which makes it that much worse. My friend and I played for them, off and on, for about five years. This was very important to us and really made our day that much more special. And our families understood. Sometimes our children would accompany us, sharing in this blessing.

Then, I moved on to another city. I just took my little baritone uke with me to a nearby convalescent hospital, and asked the activities director which people there were visited the least; and every week I went from bed to bed in that room of six precious women, singing and playing for them, talking to them, and praying with them. This went on for about a year and a half—until I moved again. I would often cry when I would walk out of that room of women, because I felt so helpless in the midst of their pain and suffering. But God blessed me for it, and I felt that at least they had a little company, every week that I was well enough to go, whether they remembered me or not. And, even if they did not remember me due to their physical condition, I knew that, in general, my presence was appreciated.

Did I say anything would be easy? No. It wasn’t easy for Jesus to die on the cross, and it isn’t easy for us to die to ourselves in order to help someone else. It’s not going to get easy here. It will get easy when we dwell in that wonderful city of God.

“That they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.” — Rev 14:13

Just look around you. And listen. As you help others, God will bless you. Don’t let your fears of seeing others in pain get in the way of taking away some of their loneliness.

I have noticed that there are parents who have neglected their children, children who

have neglected their parents, husbands who have neglected their wives, and wives who have neglected their husbands, as well as friends who have neglected friends. It is interesting to me that some people will go and visit a stranger or an associate or relative, but not take the time for their own family in their own home. That sets their spouse or children up for loneliness. Is that love?

Do you truly show love to the one whom you promised to love and cherish for the rest of your life? She or he is counting on you. Be there for them—mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Who are you raising your children to be? Do you want your children to be like you? Because, very often, they will be.

And what about the children that are home alone while both parents are working? Are they afraid to go home after school? Who is there for them? Is it absolutely necessary for both parents to work? Can you forego some of the not-so-necessary things that you spend money on? If you are a single parent, is there a healthy place where your child could go to spend your working hours? Maybe it would be possible for him or her to go to a safe after-school job, where the child could gain self-esteem and a little of his or her own income.

I see so many gangs, and I feel so sad for the young people that are looking for family and some sort of purpose, but in the wrong places. And then, it becomes a spiritual battle between evil and good, and even kids that do have loving parents get influenced to join in on these self-destructive activities and thought patterns. They are lonely. They are afraid. This is their defense. And it is so dangerous.

Fathers, mothers, you are *both* so very important to your child's happiness. Parents *can* make a difference! Get involved! Do constructive things with your children. Show them you care enough to be there for them. Excuses don't fill their needs, even if they seem to you to be good ones. They need *you*!

I can't even begin to imagine the terrible loneliness those precious people feel who live in convalescent hospitals, especially those who have lost their spouses. And what about those who lose their family and friends, as well, because no one wants to visit and see their pain? And loneliness isn't all. They have also suffered a loss of their own independence: they don't even get to make the most simple decisions anymore, like what they want to eat and when. There are people who are afraid to get old, because they don't want that to happen to them.

"Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you." — Ex. 20:12

Are your parents still living? Love is needed. Love. Take the time now, while you can. And your example now can help your own children to follow in the right path, the path of love, so that when you get older, they will hopefully be a blessing to *you*.

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. — 2 Corin. 9:6, 7

This does not mean to kill ourselves running around for everyone all the time. Jesus

told His apostles to rest. Personally, I find that I must have love to make it day by day, and when I'm bone dry, I find that I need to spend time just basking in God's love for me. I cannot live without love, and He loves me, so I need to just soak in His love. As I worship and love Him, He is loving *me*. What a loving God! Then I am able to carry on again. This is another way to fight loneliness daily.

And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." — Mk 6:31

Can the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present Creator God be lonely?

And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death." Then He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me." — Lk 22:31-34

Here, we see that Jesus knew ahead of time that He would have to face alone what was to come. And, what loneliness that must have been! Not only would He be standing alone for a cause (our salvation), but He would be physically and emotionally separated from His loving companions.

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, "What, could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done." And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. — Matt. 26:36-43

Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. — Lk 22:43, 44

Jesus cried out to His friends for help. He needed their support. He needed them to be alert with Him and pray for Him. He told them how deeply He was hurting. Yet, they fell asleep. He cried out to His Father, alone. The pain and loneliness must have been excruciating. Had He not been strengthened by an angel, His heart might have broken right then. The Bible does not say that He was afraid, but He certainly was "in agony," and He was in the flesh. I imagine that *I* would have been very much afraid.

Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him... Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled. — Matt. 26:50, 56

Jesus knew that this would happen, but that did not make it easy to bear. He knew that He would be deserted. He knew that He would be facing the toughest moments in His life *alone*. He did not blame His dear friends, but He felt the pain, nonetheless.

How many times do we have to bear our pain alone? Sometimes, we feel that our own hearts will break. Sometimes, we feel so very fragile, and yet, no one is there to help us. Sometimes, we even reach out and tell people how we're feeling, and even then they choose to ignore our needs. It hurts so much. We feel like we can barely live through it when it gets that bad. Then, we become afraid to reach out again, because of fear of more rejection, which would again increase the pain.

We can relate, even if only partly, to Jesus' suffering. How very alone He must have felt! Remember, Jesus was in a human body, just like we are. And yet, He was God—the *only* begotten Son of God. So that fact alone places Him in a unique, lonely position that no one else could share with Him. Only He could suffer and die for us as the sacrifice for our sins. Only He. Only He. Doesn't that, in itself, sound like a lonely position to be in for someone in a human body? Think about it. He was very different, and He knew that He was very different. He was set aside for a purpose. He was alone in this. It was only He Who could perform this for us. Only He. Alone. And lonely.

Jesus truly needed and appreciated those who stood by Him and were willing to suffer with Him throughout His ministry here. He needed His friends. He needed His Christian family.

"I am among you as the One who serves. But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me..." — Lk 22: 27-29

God understands loneliness. He created us. He knew that we would need companionship beyond His.

And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said; "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. — Gen. 2:18, 21-24

God said that it was not good for man to be alone. He created us to need other people. And with all the broken families, it's not surprising that so many people are so lonely, and that they are so *afraid* that their loneliness may continue.

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken. — Eccl. 4:9-12

I believe that the "threefold cord" can apply to two people and God. For example, like the Trinity is Three-in-One, so is a good marriage three-in-One (God+husband+wife). Yes, God completes, but He also provides another type of completion that most people need—that special lifetime companion of the opposite sex. And for those who have been called to a life of staying single, as well as for those who marry, He also provides friends,

Christian family, and relatives.

Some people try to fill their need for companionship with money. But there is no replacement for a companion, a friend, a family member, a partner in life. Money just doesn't do it. It cannot hold you when you're sad or afraid, it cannot squeeze your hand when you're needing encouragement, it cannot smile at you when you need to be lifted up, it cannot say a loving word when you feel alone, it cannot . . . , it cannot . . . , it cannot

Even Paul felt lonely. Even he needed someone besides God Himself.

For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. — Phil. 1:8

We need people. We need people who will be there for us. We need people who will love us, touch us gently, smile at us, look into our eyes, listen to our conversation, and respond to us in a way that lets us know that they have truly heard what we have said and that they value us enough to care. We all need that. We all need love.

God sets the solitary in families. . . . — Psa. 68:6

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” — Jn 13:34, 35

He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger. . . . — Deut. 10:18, 19

Keep in mind that joining church or community groups with people who have similar beliefs and interests can make a big difference and can reduce your loneliness considerably. Even living in a community situation can help, if it's uplifting to you and your spirit, but be sure it's a good situation for you.

God is so good! He loves you! He loves me! Trust Him!

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the LORD! — Psa. 150:6

WORKSHEET #3—

1. I have asked many questions in this chapter. Use this time to answer some of them and to put down your thoughts regarding your own loneliness and how you can help yourself.

2. Now, think about who else is lonely, and how you can help them—spouse, children, parents, relatives, friends, strangers.

3. Share, if you can.

CHAPTER 4—Fear and Sexual Relationships

Sexual relationships can result from the fear of being alone. After all, many people seek marriage, or affection and sex without marriage, trying to fulfill their need for love and companionship. Many are lonely, and need to have someone in their lives. Some think that if they just have someone to have sex with, that's all they need, blinding themselves to the full picture. Marriage, if done according to God's plan, can be beautiful, fulfilling, and satisfying, but sex outside of marriage can lead to a sense of loss, disappointment, insecurity, and even devastation. Let's look at some of these relationship fears:

Fear of commitment in marriage can be based on fear of being hurt (perhaps for a second or third time), or fear that what happened to your parents might happen to you. Or even fear that you might follow in your parents' footsteps and hurt someone else. Sometimes people have been through so much with someone of the opposite sex that they're afraid to ever trust anyone again.

I have known people who are afraid to commit to marriage, but they want companionship, so they refuse to let go of the one they desire to keep in their lives, causing their partner to be hurt over and over again, while giving them false hopes that things will change. So, either the two go through life unfulfilled and often displeasing God, or the one who is ready to make a commitment has to finally realize that the fearful one is deceiving them, and say "Good-bye" before any more time is lost. And, when they finally do split up, the fearful one will have lost their own happiness, too. Was it worth it? To cling to their fears and lose the person they care about seems to me to be a miserable way to live. And their loved one has suffered.

Fear of having to deny one's flesh is another problem, because it's hard to deny the fleshly cravings and to resist temptation, and because it may actually cause physical discomfort, as well. And, as I have said, some seek sex to fulfill their need for love. However, to some, sex has become nothing but temporary self-satisfying recreation at the expense of others. Some even treat sex as lightly as satisfying a chocolate craving by eating a candy bar, not even thinking about the damage that is being done within themselves as well as within the other person. This is very wrong and can have dangerous or crushing consequences now and in eternity.

Self-denial is an important part of living for God. And we, in turn, get God's blessings. It is all worth it! Sin is sin. Don't let sin take away your hope for heaven nor your joy here. Don't let your fleshly feelings open yourself up to rejection or even loss of life. Don't let those feelings dictate where you will spend eternity. Don't let counterfeit love steal from you God's true love and the love you can experience here with the right man or woman at the right time and in the right way (God's way).

Fear of being alone or of being lonely has caused many people to look for love within sex, whether they are single or in a lonely marriage, but sex is only a momentary relief, and then the results of the illicit sex can be far more devastating than the loneliness was. This can include physical disease and even death, emotional pain, feelings of rejection due to a lack of commitment, and spiritual death—a loss of closeness with God. Fornication and adultery (sexual relations with someone who is not your spouse) are

wrong, and sooner or later will lead to sorrow and pain, whether here or in eternity or both. If you are lonely, read the preceding chapter, and determine to trust God.

Fear of relating to the opposite sex may be caused by what someone has done to them or what has been done to someone close to them. Perhaps they didn't feel fulfilled in their relationship with their parent, so they're looking to fulfill that need in a sexual union with someone of their same sex. Perhaps they saw an innocent parent being hurt by the other, and because they're the same sex as the offender, they wrongly blame themselves for what their guilty parent did, and they then may fear that they may be like the guilty parent and hurt someone of the opposite sex just like their parent did, so they turn to their own gender. Perhaps they have been mistreated by someone of the opposite sex, so they feel safer with someone of their own gender. Or they may simply be influenced by wrong examples and teachings or by a lack of right examples and teachings, which can cause them to be afraid to overlook the chance that they might have "that persuasion" down inside of them, because they have experimented or had those thoughts when young, not realizing that the young go through normal curiosity about sex. So, they give in to that evil spirit which would rob them of their joy, and accept it; rather than let go of it, repent to God, and forgive themselves of their previous thoughts or actions, and go forward into what God has truly planned for them. Whatever the reason, if that's you, God can free you! God forgives! Just ask Him! Seek His help! Then, just let go (do your part) and live!

Therefore be followers of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. — Eph. 5:1-4

"You shall not commit adultery." — Ex. 20:14

"If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination." — Lev. 20:13

Now, let's complete the verses that I partially quoted earlier in this book:

"He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." — Rev.21:7, 8

(And see Romans 1:18-32.)

And how sad for those that are teaching our young people (and adults, as well) to be open to such things as premarital or extramarital sex or homosexuality. They also need the truth and our prayers. Jesus says,

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!" — Matt. 18:6, 7

There's just no getting around it. Sin is sin. And we are responsible for getting it out of our lives. Those guilty of any of these fears and sins must not be made fun of. This is

not a joke! This is sin. These people need healing of their hearts, their minds, and their spirits. They are hurting. They are wounded. Perhaps they have been misled. They need humble teaching of the truth, not our condemnation. They are not victorious; they are in bondage. They need love. They need hope. Love does not mean approval, it simply means that you care deeply about them and about their souls. Pray for them. Don't judge them more harshly than you would want to be judged for your sins.

Condemnation is not our job. We are to win people for God. We have all been guilty of sin. We must love and pray for others as well as ourselves. If they are living in sin, gently lead them back on track. We *are* responsible for telling them the *truth*.

Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. — James 5:20

If someone has simply fallen off track, temporarily, and they have gone to God about it (they are not habitually practicing sin), then just let it go. Obviously, they knew that it was wrong and have already taken care of the situation with God, and it's no one else's business. Forget it and go on, not sharing with anyone what you know, just like you would like others to let *your* past sins go. There is enough suffering *inside* of oneself. People don't need suffering imposed by someone else added to it.

“He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” — Jn 8:7

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck out of your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.” — Matt. 7:1-5

Jesus loved us when we were in the midst of sin. We must follow His example. He did not condone sin, but He loved people enough to tell them the truth. He spoke the truth with love. (See John 4—the Samaritan Woman at the well.)

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” — Jn 3:16-18

If you are a victim of sexual fears and/or sins or of misleading others, remember that God loves you. You have lots of company; these fears and sins are extremely common. Sexual sin is now too often accepted by the world in which we live, which makes it even more difficult to deal with. It is dangerous. It is wrong. And it can destroy you and your loved ones.

Notice in the following verses that, though they begin with a strong warning, there is a way out! His Name is Jesus! But we must love Him and obey Him, in order for our final destination to be changed.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor

sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. — 1 Corin. 6:9-11

If you have not yet received Christ's salvation, just stop right here and now and sincerely ask Him to cleanse you from your sins, and He will. Then, purpose in your heart to make Him Lord of your life, and follow Him.

“Sin no more.” — Jn 5:14

Don't look back. Just go forward with Him. Love of Him and obedience to Him is what will help you.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. — 1 Jn 1:9, 10

Be aware that loving God, giving our lives to Him, and having heaven as our goal require obedience to Him. If we say we love Him, but don't show it by our words, attitude, and actions, what are we proving? He sees your heart *and* your life.

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.” — Jn 14:15

“The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” — Mk 12:29-31

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, “I know Him” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. — 1 Jn 2:3-5

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” — Matt. 7:21

How we handle this topic of sex in our lives could be the difference between our salvation or our loss of it (our loss of an eternity in heaven), as well as a successful and victorious life here on earth or a life of misery and failure here.

Only marriage to a Christian of the opposite sex is where a Christian can have the freedom of a fulfilling sexual relationship truly blessed by God.

Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love. — Prov. 4:18, 19

Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. — Heb. 13:4

And, in this marriage relationship, there must be unselfish love, gentleness, kindness, and thoughtfulness, continual faithfulness in every way, uplifting words, a

listening ear, and a full dedicated lifelong commitment to the other person. These qualities must be present in order to remove fear and bring emotional security to both husband and wife. It is very important to be continually trustworthy in these things.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. — I Corin. 13:4-8

Obedience to God is necessary if you want God to hear and answer your prayers. If you want God's blessings, obey Him.

You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying; so He does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with good will from your hands. Yet you say, "For what reason?" Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. — Mal. 2:13, 14

For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence... — Mal. 2:16

Marriage should be a safe place for a man and woman who are fellow Christians, best friends, and lovers. Both people need to feel free to share their innermost self without fear of criticism or lectures from the other. Mutual respect must accompany the love. They should not fear opening up to their lifetime partner, but on the contrary, should feel more respected and more secure with their spouse than with anyone else. Does your partner feel that way in your presence? Do you feel that way in his or hers?

A note to parents: Your children may very well follow in your footsteps. They look to you as their example. Do you want them to be like you? If not, then it's up to you to show them what kind of people they should be. Words are important, but without example they mean nothing. Your children need both.

A note to children (this means all of us, for we are all children of someone): Remember that Jesus is your Way of escape from following the negative influences of your parents, siblings, teachers, those we've wrongly respected, or friends. This includes the sins that have possibly driven you or influenced you into immoral sex of any kind or into cruel and hurtful sex of any kind. God can and will help you. Do not be afraid. He will go through all of your pain with you to see you through to the other side. But it is your choice.

I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me. I cling to Your testimonies; O LORD, do not put me to shame! I will run in the way of Your commandments, for You shall enlarge my heart. Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. — Psa. 119:30-35

I had a really hard time stopping my quote, because it's all so fantastic! When you can, read beyond my quote. God will help you to be all that He has created you to be—in every way! Let Him have that opportunity! He wants to bless you! Let Him. Do your part.

Choose. And act upon your choice.

Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... . As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD. — Josh. 24:15

God forgives! He washes clean. He makes us new.

And, if you need the help of a counselor in your Godly endeavor, and many of us do need help because we can't do it alone, seek a Godly person whom you can trust to keep it confidential. Make sure that it's someone who will listen to you and support you in your goal, rather than someone who will be critical or tear you down in any way. And, of course, make sure that they stand strong in the Lord and in His ways. Be sure.

Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety. — Prov. 11:14

There is more about seeking and identifying proper counsel later on in this book. Always remember that God is your Number One Counselor, but that He doesn't expect us not to need the help of others. Just the opposite. We often *do* need each other. However, *He* is always first and foremost!

You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. — Psa. 73:24

It's important that, when we have gone to the Lord for forgiveness, we put the past behind us and go forward into the future that God has prepared for us. Sometimes we must leave behind old friendships and old places. But it's worth it to follow Christ and be free in Him!

One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. — Phil 3:13, 14

Don't get stuck in your fears. Go forward! Let's get started!

WORKSHEET #4—

1. Are you struggling with any sexual fears or sexual sins? Don't feel alone. It is a very prevalent problem. If you can, write down your struggles. If you are afraid of someone seeing your answers, use a code that only you can translate (initials, abbreviations, things that remind you of certain thoughts or actions, etc.). For example, if you were guilty of a wrong action or thought at a certain location, mention the location only. You will remember what you mean, but anyone else will not know the details.

To all involved in this study: be thoughtful of each other's privacy. People are much more likely to be honest with themselves if they have nothing to fear from others.

2. Now, look at your list and see if you can find within yourself the root problems that have caused these fears and/or sins. Make notes beside the listed items above.

3. Take time to share anything that you *want* to share. You may find out that you're not alone. And if you are the only one to admit to something, it doesn't necessarily mean that you're the only one who's going through that problem. It could mean that you're the only one who is willing to share.

4. Now, take time to pray, and to give it all over to God. He will help you, if you sincerely want deliverance in this area. It may not be easy. He may do the delivering as you step forth into obedience. Remember, God's promises are true. He does love you—deeply! Remember to accept your suffering as a gift to Him. Accepting it can help you.

CHAPTER 5—Forgiveness: A Good Foundation

What is faith without forgiveness? Forgiveness is our foundation, so that faith can be free to come in and live in our hearts. Forgiveness helps us to let go of the past so that God can indeed bring us new life. This is what came into my spirit one day: *Forgiveness frees!*

Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” — Matt. 18:21,22

God’s forgiving us rests upon our forgiving others:

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.” — Mk 11:25, 26

There is a torture attached to reliving painful memories. It is so hard to let go of them—once and for all. We keep remembering, reliving, and re-forgiving what we think we have already forgiven, whether someone did something to us or to our loved one or we did something to them. It can be a terrible cycle.

Are you desperate to be free of all the pain, of all the suffering? Are you ready to let go? Ready to get rid of it?

Do you look at photos that should bring back sweet memories, only to have your mind go back to the unhappiness or pain of that time or that situation? Are you in bondage to the negative past? Do you have a hard time remembering the good without the bad?

Are you still blaming others for what they did or didn’t do? Are you still blaming yourself for what you did or didn’t do?—whether yesterday or twenty years ago?

Do you forgive, but then the memories invade your dreams or invade your mind upon waking or when you have a moment alone? Do you think you’re free, only to again be reminded and dragged down, just when you feel you’ve been delivered?

There can be a variety of reasons for this occurrence:

We’re still with the person or the people who have hurt us or, especially, continue to hurt us;

Someone keeps bringing up topics that remind us of the past, which puts us right back where we were;

It was so against our character or our desires to hurt someone *else*, which makes it really difficult to fully forgive *ourselves*;

We often or constantly see the results of the past things that were done or left undone;

A similar situation puts our minds right back where we used to be;

Someone has not said that they’re sorry, so we’re afraid of its happening again, and therefore, we’re afraid to let go and forget it (we want to be prepared to defend ourselves), or their lack of apology tells us that they don’t recognize us as a person of value and don’t

care that they hurt us;

We want other people to know how we've been hurt so that they will sympathize with us and tell us they care, making us feel valuable;

Or possibly other reasons.

I have worked through many of these things myself, and I've learned that *forgiveness brings much freedom*. I pray that my testimony and God's hints to me, along with His Holy Word, will be a blessing to you.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. — 2 Tim. 3:16, 17

I want to start out with a Bible example of a man that sinned terribly and suffered for it, but then was fully delivered and forgiven by God. Notice that David was a man after God's own heart:

He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will do all My will." — Acts 13:22 (From 1 Sam. 13:14.)

Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her... ; and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, "I am with child." — 2 Sam. 11:2, 3

It is a good thing to turn to 2 Samuel and read the whole story, but I'll give a brief summary for you until you can read it yourself: Uriah was off at war, and David realized that Uriah would know that he himself was not the baby's father. So David had his men send for Uriah so that Uriah could sleep with his own wife, and it would just look like the baby was early when it was born. However, Uriah was a loyal servant to his king (David) and to the soldiers in the field, who were suffering in war. Uriah could not in good conscience allow himself the pleasure of sleeping with his wife while the others were being denied of their wives and their comforts, so he didn't sleep in his house. Then, since that didn't work, David had Uriah placed on the front lines of battle, alone, so that he would be killed.

Then in the morning it was so that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die." — 2 Sam. 11:14, 15

Did you notice? Not only did David set up this innocent, loyal man to be slaughtered, he sent the letter by Uriah himself! All to cover his sin. Another sin to cover up the first sin, and all it did was add more sins to the first sin rather than hide it. How sad. David did not get away with it (keep reading):

When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for

her husband. — Verse 26

The Bible does not say whether or not Bathsheba had a choice, but it does say that she was bathing when she obviously thought that David was in bed (“*David arose from his bed*”—see above) and that his men “took her.” Also, the fact that God obviously put the blame on David rather than on Bathsheba—see below—(remember that in the Garden of Eden *both* Adam and Eve paid for their sin, because *both* were guilty), and the fact that she mourned, shows that Bathsheba probably loved her husband. He seems to have been a very considerate and faithful man.

So, what happened next?

And when her mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD. — 2 Sam. 11:27

Then Nathan, a prophet, went to David and told him a story about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man had plenty, but the poor man had nothing but a little lamb that he loved and cherished. However, when the rich man needed to prepare a meal for a traveler who was visiting him, he killed the poor man’s only beloved lamb to prepare the meal rather than kill one of his own. Read David’s reaction to this story:

Then David’s anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.” Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel... ‘Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon.’” — 2 Sam. 12:5-7, 9

God saw it all. No matter what David did to try to conceal what he had done, he couldn’t hide it from God. God then proceeded to tell David his punishment, and that his punishment would be done in public, for all to see. (See verses 10-12.) Finally, David opened his eyes to what he had done. Instead of fighting it and getting angry at the prophet, he humbled himself, admitted his sin, and repented.

Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die.” — 2 Sam. 12:13, 14

The child that was born of Bathsheba became very ill. David pleaded with God for the sake of his son, fasted, and lay on the ground for seven days, hoping that God would change His mind. But the child died.

So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate. — 2 Sam. 12:20

This is a story that is filled with pain. The pain of Uriah, the pain of Bathsheba, the pain of the sick baby, the pain that David went through trying to cover up his sin and finally realizing what he had done, and the punishment that he and his new wife suffered

in the loss of their son's life. And yet, *God forgave*, and David *received* God's forgiveness into his heart. There is more to this story than what I have spoken here. Hopefully, you will read your Bible to learn more about David and his life.

In spite of his sins, David is considered one of God's beloved children. God forgives! If He forgave these terrible sins against him, can't we forgive each other? If David was able to receive the forgiveness of God, can't we receive our forgiveness from God? Remember what Jesus said about the woman who ministered to Him in the Pharisee's house:

"Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." And He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ... "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." — Lk 7:44-48, 50

I myself have been so hurt in my life, so many times, that I have had a lot to forgive. Maybe you can relate to this. I'm a firm believer that everybody has been deeply hurt, more times than any of us would want to remember. And I'm sure that I've done plenty to hurt others, whether it was on purpose or not. I'm human. It happens. I'm trying to do better, but it will catch me off guard when I don't want to hurt or offend anyone. Maybe I know about it, so I can apologize, or maybe I don't even realize how the words that came out of my mouth sounded to the receiver, so I go on my way without a thought that I'd hurt anyone. And that can happen to others hurting *me*, as well. Maybe they weren't even aware of how it sounded.

Think about it. Do we want to go on holding a grudge or a fear that may not even have any basis? We may be the only one who is aware of it, so we end up hurting ourselves. The problem is that then we may also proceed to hurt those we love because of our attitude. And they don't even know what they did to deserve our attitude. So, the one who offended us isn't the one who is suffering. We are. And we're spreading our suffering to the innocent. Then, the innocent will have to try to forgive *us* for *our* bad attitude. And, we've caused needless suffering to someone who didn't even deserve it. So it becomes a cycle, unless it's stopped by forgiveness and a change of attitude.

I ask, here and now, that all those whom I have offended or hurt will please forgive me, whether it was in my childhood or in my adulthood (I have lost track of many people over the years). I am so sorry. I mean this from my heart. I am truly sorry.

"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." — Matt.5:23, 24

Do you see just how very important it is that we apologize when we know that something is wrong? If someone seems to have a problem with you, and you don't know why, ask. Then you will know what you need to apologize for, if anything. (Don't make up something to apologize for if you haven't done anything wrong, just to smooth the waters! That doesn't repair the problems. Honesty, with love and gentleness, is what

repairs. But listen to their heart! Pray. Be sure.)

When a person apologizes to us, especially when they tell us what they are apologizing for, it makes it that much easier for us to forgive them and trust them. In the same way, your apology to them will help them to forgive you and trust you. Actually mention what you're apologizing for, if there could be any doubt, whether it was something that was accidental or something that was not. People need to know they have value.

Confess your trespasses to one another. . . . — James 5:16

I realize that there are times when an apology would simply hurt someone or cause more suffering. Pray for God's guidance in regard to these. Pray, and listen. Then, obey.

Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel answered, "Speak, for Your servant hears." — 1 Sam. 3:10

And, of course, always remember the importance of forgiving.

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." — Matt. 6:12

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." — Matt. 6:14, 15

In order to be forgiven, we must forgive. The first of the above verses is part of the *Lord's Prayer* (the *Our Father*). The following two verses are attached to the end of the same Prayer. Jesus felt that it was very important to further explain the words of His Prayer. He knew what He was doing. How often do we repeat that famous Prayer without really receiving what that one simple sentence says? Jesus made it very clear. We must forgive people in order to be forgiven by God. Wow! This is nothing to play around with, nothing to make light of. This is deadly serious. We must forgive.

I will go along in my life, thinking that I have forgiven someone only to wake up one morning with the realization that I'm still holding something against them. Perhaps I've forgiven them, in general, and am not even aware that I'm still holding onto something that they did or neglected to do which hurt me. Just when I think I'm free, I realize that I'm not. So, here we go again. But don't forget that God will help you, just as He has helped me.

His help does not excuse us from doing our part, of course. The Lord would not have instructed us to do it if He had planned on doing it all by Himself. We have to do our part, but He will help us to do His will.

How willing are we to give people new chances when they offend us? God takes a chance on *us* every day. We might cause Him to look bad by our actions or our words, but does that make Him give up on us or quit working with us? No, it doesn't. He just keeps giving us chance after chance. He perseveres. God doesn't give up easily. (Of course, if someone is *not good* for us, He may *not* want us to continue keeping company with that person, even though we've forgiven.)

Aren't you glad that God sees us as individuals and that He really listens to us? He's not afraid to hear our ideas, to allow changes. Maybe we just need to trust Him more.

Life will provide quite an assortment of areas in which we need to forgive. We don't have to try to find them. They'll find us. And they'll often come at moments when we are totally unsuspecting and unaware that they're on their way. Oops! Gotcha! Surprise! And then, we need to forgive again. (Oh, my!)

Make sure that you see your spouse as your closest neighbor, and then your children. And honor your parents, but don't put them before your spouse, for you left them to be joined to your spouse, remember? (Gen. 2:24) If you're the child at home, your parents and siblings are your closest neighbors. And there are our brothers and sisters in Christ. And, then, there are strangers. Give honor where honor is due.

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." — Mk 12:31

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. — 1 Tim. 5:8

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. — Gal. 6:10

I'd tried doing what others had said in order to forgive—things that I had thought made sense (and had seemed to be an easier way to forgive). These included forgiving with my mind and words, with a commitment in that direction, acting on my forgiveness, and putting the hurtful events and actions behind me (I'd think). I'd also tried asking the Lord for help, as in the following verse, when a father asked Jesus to heal his son:

Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" — Mk 9:23, 24

Jesus healed that boy, so I felt that if I asked in that way, that Jesus would help me to forgive. And I'm sure that He had helped me those many times. Yet there were still some areas where I hadn't fully forgiven.

Paul was a man who had been violent against the Christians. Then, Jesus appeared to him in a vision and called him to work for Him. And when Paul had been converted, he immediately started preaching the truth about Christ. What a drastic change! Praise the Lord! He had just been "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1), and now, suddenly, he was brand new.

Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. — Acts 9:19-22

Saul didn't let what people thought stop him, even though there was probably a lot of fear in them and possibly some unforgiveness toward him. Then, later on, he tried to meet with the apostles in Jerusalem:

And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. — Acts 9:26

So, Barnabas told them about Paul's conversion and his preaching for Christ, and the disciples received Paul into their fellowship. I'm sure that there was forgiveness going on in their hearts, and because of this forgiveness, they were all able to partner together for God's work to be done. It is important to be sure of someone, but it is also important to forgive, so that God's work can flow more freely.

So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. — Verse 28

Aren't we glad that Paul joined with them? Can you imagine how much shorter the Bible would be if he hadn't? There are many excellent teachings that God wrote through the hand of Paul.

God knows all things. He knew who Paul would be to Him. He did not hold unforgiveness in His heart against Paul for desiring to kill His children. God had let go of the old and embraced the new. So had the apostles. Will we?

God's way may not seem easy, but when it comes right down to it, His way sure turns out to be easier in the long run, with the best outcome. And isn't that what we all want?—the best outcome?

Okay, I'd tried all these different ways to forgive: I'd forgiven by my will, I'd forgiven through my mind, I'd spoken the words and done the actions, and I'd determined that it was done. I thought I was doing all right. But that wasn't enough. God let me know that I must forgive from my heart, not just with my mind and determination. He wanted me to *feel* my forgiveness of the person that had hurt me. I didn't know how to do that. So, He guided me as to what forgiveness is:

Forgiveness is letting go of the blame.

This does not mean that a person has treated you right, this does not mean that they were nice to you, this does not mean that they aren't to blame for hurting you, it simply means that *you choose to let go of the blame*. What has happened has really happened. The negative actions and words and the lack of positive actions and words have really occurred. The people have really allowed what they have allowed. They have really done what they have done. They have neglected to do what should not have been neglected, if they had really cared about your feelings at all. And it may have been with their full understanding.

Perhaps the person knew how deeply they would hurt you, and yet they had allowed it to happen the way that they did. Perhaps they'd had full power to change the situation, but they hadn't changed it. Perhaps they knew, and they did it anyway. And, not only that time, but other times, as well, knowing full well how you felt.

Maybe you had told them with gentleness and clarity how you felt, knowing that it was right to be honest, so as not to assume that they could read your mind. Perhaps you had done all that you could do. And yet, they had chosen to neglect your feelings. Maybe they didn't listen, maybe they didn't believe you, or maybe they just didn't care. They had actually chosen to do what they knew would hurt you. And that's why it's so hard for you to forgive them. Is this the problem?

I want you to know that there can be seemingly very valid reasons, through our eyes, not to forgive someone. I want to help you realize that forgiving does not mean that

we are to make excuses for the offender, nor that we have to understand where they're coming from. They may or may not have understood, but that isn't what our forgiveness hinges on.

We must simply forgive, without conditions. Forgiving is choosing to let go of the blame, and then actually letting go of it. Just let go. And if it tries to come back on you, let it go again. Don't pay any attention to it. Just tell yourself, "I'm worth letting it go. My life is important. My happiness is valuable. *I'm* valuable. It's just not worth holding onto." And let it go. Live with a positive attitude, and you will be the victor. And, in some cases, you may even find that you come to feel love for that person. You may even win back a brother or a sister. Christ can do amazing things, when we obey Him.

Another very important thing to keep in mind is to beware of telling other people about the episode of what the person did to you and how it turned out, how you had forgiven, or how they had apologized, *etc.* From my own personal experience, even when my purpose was to say something good, I've learned that as I relate the experience to another, I tend to get back into the old negative feelings again. Then it's really hard to get out of those feelings, and I end up having to forgive yet again, and having to ask God to forgive *me*. So, whenever possible, just let it go. If you must say anything, simply say that you're working things out, or that God has really blessed your relationship with the other person, or something else that doesn't involve going back into the past (even if the past was just yesterday).

Now, let's think about our value. You are valuable. Know this! The price that Jesus paid for us He wouldn't have paid if we hadn't been valuable. Did He die for anything else that was created? No. He only died for you and me. He died for people. He died to save our souls from hell, so that we could share in His glory. As mean and thoughtless as we are at times, He loved us so much that He went through terrible cruelties just so that He could reward us in heaven. And all we have to do is receive Him as our personal Lord and Savior, and live in obedience to His Word and His Spirit. Awesome!

Yes, Jesus Himself came down from heaven to love us, to teach us, and to be an example for us. He knew what awaited Him, yet He loved us so much that He came, anyway. He came to warn us that sin will lead us to an eternity of suffering, and He came to take those sins away the only way He could, by a blood sacrifice: His. Of course, we can still lose our souls if we insist on continuing in our sins, but we don't have to. He made a way out for us. We can come to Him, ask His forgiveness, and obey His Word.

For you and me Jesus was betrayed, arrested and convicted, yet innocent of the charges (He was set up). One of His closest friends denied even knowing Him, in order to save himself (rejection). His clothing was torn off of Him in front of a crowd of people (humiliation). And He suffered in so many ways that we cannot even understand.

Do you know that Christ forgave those who persecuted Him? As He was in agony, bleeding from the wounds inflicted by the nails driven through His Hands, the thorns that had been placed on His Head, and the whipping which He had received on His back, He cried out to His Father, the Almighty God, to forgive His tormentors. As He was hanging on a horrible wooden cross, He prayed to the Father for them.

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." — Lk

23:34

What a God! I'm speechless. Pause with me. Consider His Words, His Heart.

WORKSHEET #5—

1. Make a list of people you need to apologize to. Ask for God's guidance and help.
2. Make it a point to apologize. And, when you apologize, don't say, "I'm sorry, but..." That tends to undo the apology. Stomp on your ego. Your apologies must be sincere and from your heart, no excuses. And tell the people what you're apologizing for, as guided by God. You'll feel a lot better afterwards, knowing that you've pleased God. And, if you need to apologize to Him, do that, too.
3. You may want to share one or more of your apology plans with others, in order to help and encourage each other.
4. After you apologize, let it go. You live *now*. That event is in the past (even if it was only moments ago).

CHAPTER 6—Forgiveness (Part 2)

I'm learning not to be quick to judge others. They may live in an unhappy, abusive, or otherwise "handicapping" situation (which is often hidden from us). I don't know their situation. But I do know that the situation in which a person lives can really mess with their mind. It's not necessarily their fault. It's very difficult to pry yourself loose from a situation that has possibly "brainwashed" you in some way. I know not to quickly judge them. I am learning to have compassion on them. I must judge myself rather than others.

For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. —1 Corin. 11:31

This lack of judging is a difficult lesson that is continuing in me. I still have so much to learn. God judges by the heart (Praise God!), but since *I* am not always able to do that, I need to trust God to do whatever judging needs to be done, not me. Though I can, in some ways, "know them by their fruits" (Matt. 16), I cannot see into their hearts.

The LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. — 1 Sam. 16:7

I have also seen the results of childhood abuses, which have so deeply affected someone's adult life. We must be *so slow* to judge. We must avoid a critical attitude. We don't know where they've been, what they've been through, nor how their unique personality has handled their situation.

What I'm saying is not to be used as an excuse for those who have been in these positions. It is to be used as a tool for understanding and patience. It is to encourage us not to give up on listening to others and encouraging them in their lives. However, it is not a reason to allow them to walk on us nor to allow them to negatively influence our lives. We must take care of ourselves and our families, which may mean that we cannot keep close company with those negative people.

I do believe that a person has choices, and that they are responsible for the decisions that they make which will affect their lives and the lives of their family at home, as well as the lives of others. It is important that we make right decisions, and that we have compassion on our families, our friends, our co-workers, and our other neighbors. But we must not be quick to judge others. We do not know their circumstances.

And, we cannot continue blaming others for what we ourselves have allowed in our own lives, feeling like what we did was all their fault, not at all ours. We must take responsibility for our actions and our words, and then we will not be blaming others. And by doing this, we will have less to forgive and less bitterness to overcome.

People really don't always see things the same way. We must make our own choices. Sometimes, we simply need to say "No," and mean it. It may be tough, but if you do it in a confident, gentle but firm way, you may be amazed at the outcome. At least, if everything does fall apart, you will have taken care of who you are. You won't be lost in the shuffle, nor be a slave to someone else's desires. You won't be in bondage to them. In other words, I must think and do what is right for me. And I must allow others the same freedom.

I want to give you some ideas that may help you in overcoming unforgiveness:

First, journalize all of the bad things that have happened to you, from childhood on, especially if someone has hurt you very badly, until you have everything down. After a period of time, the day will come when you will have nothing left to write, because it is all in that little book. Make sure not to throw it away yet, because then you'll have to write it all down again. It's almost like a comfort for you to know that it's all on paper. Almost like it's there for someone to read, in case anything were to happen to you. It's like it justifies you. You may be crying out for people to know and understand how you have suffered. You may have a need for someone to know that you've been badly treated, that you were a victim, even though it is private for your eyes only (and God's, of course). It is very important to keep it until you are truly ready to let it go. It may be months before that time. When you are truly ready, throw it away. Then, but not before then, it will be freeing for you to get rid of it. But don't get rid of it simply because you think you should or because of being influenced by something someone else says. Be true to yourself. When it is the right time, you will know.

Also, there are many church programs that can help you in your quest to forgive. Some of them are for a whole weekend, so you can get totally immersed, some are one night a week over a period of time, some are in seminar style. It's good to hear others' experiences, good to be with people who may understand somewhat what has happened to you, and good to feel that they really care about you and your experiences (and vice-versa).

Another way to deal with unforgiveness is to not over-expect, so that you will have less to forgive in the first place. Let go. People will not be understanding things with your mind, and you may feel let down and hurt again if you expect them to see things your way. So, don't set yourself up for more hurt.

Something that I've had to admit to myself was that God has allowed all of the negative things to happen to me that have happened to me. So I also had to forgive God, besides others and myself. Yes, I had to forgive God. I didn't want to admit to myself that I was blaming Him, and I felt ashamed for feeling that way, but it was true, and so I forgave Him.

What now? How do I proceed from this point on? How can I replace the old negative habits with new positive habits? I've learned about forgiveness, but how can I get myself to live in this new freedom?

Talk to yourself. Tell yourself what you need to hear. The tongue is powerful. Our ears hear what our mouth speaks.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue. — Prov. 18:21

A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit. — Prov. 15:4

So let's use our tongue as a helper. Say the words that you need to hear. Words like "I'm free" or "That's been forgiven" or "I've let that go" are very helpful. Be a blessing to yourself, and in turn, you will be a blessing to God and to those around you.

Don't set yourself up by telling yourself things that can lower your feelings of self-worth, such as, "That was stupid" or "I know better than that," or telling yourself things

that can bring you down or make you hurt or angry, such as replaying the past over and over again. If you do those things, you will be the cause of your own misery. Tell yourself only things that will help and encourage you.

Make it a habit not to let the old thoughts return. Deliberately put your focus elsewhere when those thoughts try to come back on you. Don't let the past have control. This can be really difficult, especially at first, but it *is* possible. I know. I'm learning to do it myself! And it's great! I feel like I'm gaining control of my thoughts. What a relief! I have relapses, but I don't give up on myself. I just keep trying.

Jesus came to tell us that we have to change. That means learning to have self-control. In other words, we *can* do it, or God would not have asked it of us. We *can* treat others better, and we *can* forgive. God is truth. Listen to Him. Read His Word. Build yourself up in Him. Sing His praises! Moses did:

“For I proclaim the name of the LORD: ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He.” — Deut. 32:3, 4

Whatever we take in is our food. And whatever we eat is our nourishment. Wouldn't you rather be nourished with the pureness of God's Word and the freedom of forgiveness than be destroyed by the suffering of the past?

So, let it go. Control your own mind rather than letting something or someone else control it for you. Don't let the past hurts crush you again. Say “No!” Go your way. Deliberately put your mind on something positive. I like to visit and pray over people, minister in music, write books, plan for my future, work on a project that makes me feel fruitful, or put together jigsaw puzzles, conversing with the Lord and singing praises to Him as I'm doing these things. (I bring Him into these activities as my Partner.) Sometimes, I'll put on a Christian tape, sometimes I'll dance around and exercise. If my loneliness gets really bad, I might call a wise, uplifting friend. (Note the words “wise” and “uplifting.” I'm learning.) Another thing that helps me is to read a book that will bring me good thoughts. What helps you?

Personally, I find that television drags me down into being a couch potato, so I've given most of that up and I'm much freer and happier now. However, I've gone through times of being so desperate to hear a human voice that I've used it as my “companion.” I was addicted to the TV and watching others people's lives rather than living my own life, and I ended up being miserable. When I stop having that as an option, it forces me to look other directions, and now it's MY life I'm living! I'm so much more free and happy now!

There are times when I do need to focus on what is really bothering me. I'll stop and write it down, item by item, and face it right then and there. Then I can think it through, decide if it's worth my thoughts, pray about it, and then either do something about it (if something needs to be done), or just replace it with thoughts of something joyful or peaceful, or perhaps an enjoyable event that is coming up. As I've said, my writing also helps me and so does my music (composing, singing, or playing). And crying can help—sometimes I'll give myself the treat of just bawling my eyes out for a little while; then, I feel relieved, and the peace can re-enter. (I just make sure that I don't stay there in those tears.)

Try looking at your blessings. I am so blessed with such a wonderful, loving family, and I have some precious friends. We're not perfect, but we have love, and love is such a healer. Even when we're not together, I can think of how proud I am of my children. I can be grateful for their love of God and for the people they are.

It's interesting that when we're filled with unhappiness or unforgiveness, life can be too hurtful to even want to be on this earth. And yet, when we have forgiven, and when we deliberately put our minds on good things rather than the bad, life can suddenly seem so pleasurable and enjoyable. All of a sudden, our thoughts can turn to thinking of how very blessed we are and how good God is to us. What changed? We chose to put our minds on something else. We chose to do something about it. We have that power. We have that control. Truly,

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

Look at Joseph, Jacob's son. His brothers were jealous of him, and sold him to some Ishmaelites, who were on their way to Egypt. They allowed their grief-stricken father to believe that Joseph was dead (Genesis 37). Then, the Ishmaelites sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, in Egypt:

The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put in his hand. — Gen. 39:2-4

Wow! Look what God did with an unhappy event. Through the years, Joseph had gone through many good and bad experiences in Egypt, including being in prison, though innocent. But he had continued to serve God, and God had blessed him, even there. After God had used Joseph to interpret a dream for Pharaoh about a soon-coming famine, he had been put in charge of the land of Egypt!

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you." And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." — Gen. 42:39-41

So, many years after Joseph was sold by his brothers, God was still working His will. The great famine hit the entire earth, and even Joseph's family back in the land of Canaan was in need of grain. Because of Pharaoh's dream, Egypt, with Joseph in charge, had stored up much grain, in preparation for this time. So, guess what! Yep, his brothers soon came, seeking grain to take back to their home in Canaan.

Now, this would have been a perfect time to get even with them, by worldly standards. Joseph did play with them some when they didn't recognize him, but he did supply them their needs, and he eventually revealed to them who he was.

Then Joseph could not restrain himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, "Make everyone go out from me!" So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of

Pharaoh heard it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come near to me.” And they came near. And he said: “I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. . . . It was not you who sent me here, but God. . . . Hasten and go up to my father, and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph: “God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. You shall dwell in the land of Goshen. . . . There I will provide for you. . . .’” Then he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers talked with him. — Gen. 45:1-5, 8-11, 14, 15

When you can, read the entire story. It’s fantastic! See Genesis, Chapter 37 and Chapters 39-47. What a God!

Talk about forgiveness! Joseph had the power to do anything he wanted to do to his brothers, but in Joseph’s heart, there was no question—they were already forgiven. And more than that, they were loved, by the very brother they had wronged. Forgiveness is a wonderful thing! It frees! Isn’t this a great example on which to go forward?

Live in love. Love requires forgiveness. Forgiveness is part of love. So, if you are to treat others the same way that you would like to be treated, you must forgive them as part of your love for them.

“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” — Matt. 7:12

If you want to be forgiven, forgive. If you want to be loved, love. If you want another chance, give another chance. If you want patience, be patient. If you don’t want to be criticized, don’t criticize.

Jesus gave us beautiful examples of how to live our love. He is so gentle and kind. No matter what we people have done to Him, it gives Him no joy to see anyone lost. He came so that we would live, and He doesn’t give up on us easily. Do we give up on others easily?

They said to Him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?” This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, “Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said to her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.” — Jn 8:5-11

Jesus did not get into a discussion with the people. He didn’t ask them for their ideas. He didn’t ask them, “Where is the man she was with?” He didn’t ask them how they

had happened to find her. He didn't worry about their opinions. He cared about the woman. He forgave her. He made one simple comment, rather than preach a sermon, and their own consciences convicted them. Then, he turned to the woman. He did not ask her for details. He did not go into a counseling session with her. He did not condemn her. He simply let her know two things: that she was forgiven, and that she was not to repeat the sin. He did not say that the sin was okay. It wasn't. But He forgave her, anyway.

It is all so simple. Don't do or speak something that could harm another person, and, if you do offend them in some way, apologize. Also, if someone offends you in some way, and it is important to you, then tell them, gently, how you feel. Try to work through it so that both of you are satisfied, but if that is impossible, you have some choices as to what to do:

There are a variety of ways that you can go. First, recognize that your reaction is your choice. You can just let go of the situation and continue keeping company with that person, you can change your attitude about that situation or that person, you can decide that it would be better for you to avoid that person and/or that situation, or you can do something to change the situation. (Don't plan on changing the person.) Each circumstance will be different, and you will need to think through each one, deciding which is the best course to take. Pray about it. Read the Word. Don't think that God always wants to make things as hard on us as He can. That is not true. You must be open to go down the path that is right for you. Listen to God; listen to yourself; listen to the wisdom that God has given you.

God does guide us and counsel us through the words of others, at times. We do need to listen, but we need to be careful as to what we soak in. Listen. Pray. Think it through. How do you feel about what was said? Does it ring true? Does it agree with God's Word? Does it sound reasonable and possible? Or does it sound like someone else's opinion that isn't right for you? After all, if you are God's child, He will also guide *you*.

The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit. — 1 Corin. 12:7, 8

But, as I said, be sure that the words are of God, and not of the person themselves. The pastor under whom I found out Who Jesus is, many years ago, used to say, "When in doubt, don't." And I've personally found that if something does not agree in my spirit, and I pray about it and it still doesn't agree in my spirit, then it's best not to do it. If it is truly God, I believe that He will help us to know—through His Word, through His Spirit. Don't just blindly accept someone's counsel, but don't close your ears, either, until you've checked it out with God and within yourself. Use discernment.

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men." — Acts 5:29

I've found out that God is kinder to me than I am to myself, at times. He has taught me that He loves me and wants me to enjoy the blessings that He gives me. He wants me to choose to take care of myself, no matter what anyone else thinks. Make sure that you listen to God. And listen to yourself, deep down inside.

"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and

you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” — Matt. 11:29, 30

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” — Jn 8:31, 32

So, follow the truth. Follow Him. Come into His Spirit, knowing that HE LOVES YOU! Love Him. Love yourself by taking care of, and listening to, yourself. Then you can more properly love and forgive your neighbor and allow them to be free to properly take care of *themselves*.

As I mentioned earlier, if you take care of yourself, and you do what you know that God would have you to do, you won't need to forgive as often, because you won't be blaming others for your choices. We usually do have the power of choice. I love it. Don't you? Knowing that whatever I do is my choice has made my life so much more peaceful. I have power!

I learned in college that my personality type is only present in about one percent of the population. It was great to learn about who I am, to accept who I am (who God obviously made me to be), and to learn how to take care of myself. However, I began then to realize that if I'm so different, maybe other people really do not think like I do, that they really do not see things the way that I see things. So, I've been learning to try my best to use enough words to be very clear in what I am saying (though not a confusing overabundance), and to ask enough questions for me to be able to correctly understand what someone is saying to me. And not just to assume that I understand, just because I'm sure that I do.

What I'm saying is this: Be sure that you are understanding correctly, and be sure that your listener is understanding correctly. Repeat what you think you've heard, using different words, just to be sure. Don't get upset with them nor with yourself. You were made the way you are for a purpose. So were they. Be patient. Persevere. Be sure. Your problem with unforgiveness could be just a misunderstanding.

Also, different things are important to different people. Don't expect everyone to see eye-to-eye on everything. They won't. It's not necessarily that one is right and the other one is wrong, it's simply that we're different, and we're made that way.

If we were all the same, how could God do His work? An apple doesn't supply the vitamin C that we need, but an orange does. An orange doesn't supply the pectin that we need, but an apple does. We need both the vitamin C *and* the pectin, the apple *and* the orange.

I hope this helps you to see people in a different light, so that you can live God's love by appreciating who they really are. And, also, I hope that you will see yourself in a different light, and really appreciate who *you* are. Think about it.

Of course, there is no excuse for bad language and hurtful actions. They are wrong. But there can be reasons for our differences, and these can be a positive learning process. Be kind. Be thoughtful. Forgive. Take care of yourself.

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the

propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
— 1 Jn 4:10, 11

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” — Matt. 5:43-48

And remember, choose carefully what you do and don't do. Don't blame God nor others for putting you into a bad situation. Get out of it. Take care of yourself.

“Do not ... cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.” — Matt. 7:6

Living in forgiveness is not just automatic. It takes work. It is a regular, daily process which requires lots of practice. If you want to have a healthy heart, you walk every day; once a week won't bring you the results you desire. If you want to learn how to speak a foreign language, you must practice it regularly or you will never get the fluency that you wish to have.

Practice forgiveness. Don't ever give up on yourself. You *can* do it. It just takes a very willing spirit, a regular dance all over your ego, determination, and a heart that lets go of the blame.

I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. — 1 Corin. 15:31

For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more... . Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord... . But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. — Rom. 6:7-9, 11, 22, 23

True freedom, indeed. Choose to live in that freedom from God. Choose to obey. Choose to forgive. Choose freedom!

Yes, things will happen to remind us of what has previously happened or been neglected. A reminder of what has brought us pain in the past can cause the pain to return again. This is human. But, if we look at this occurrence as a chance to practice our forgiveness, it can be a blessing to us. A change of outlook can make all the difference.

“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” — Lk 6:37

We don't ever want to forget Who our Helper is. Christ and us, together, make a strong team. When He is our partner, we *can* do it all.

“With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” — Matt. 19:26

Ask God for His help. He doesn't expect us to do it alone. He knows that we need His help. He will help you, if you ask. He has helped me.

Make it a habit to forgive right away. But don't expect others to forgive *you*. It is good for them and nice for you if they can, but don't expect it, and then you won't be disappointed. We have the power to forgive, but we do not have the power to make others forgive us. So, don't worry about what you have no power over. You'll be much happier. You'll have more peace. And isn't peace what you're after?

Don't be too hard on yourself. And enjoy laughing at yourself in a spirit of love, when you get too serious about things. It will make life seem so much brighter. You will find that as you are kind to yourself, it will be easier to be kind to others.

Also, give God the freedom to guide others, as well. Just let Him do what He wants to do, without getting in His way. What He has done for you He can do for them. Don't underestimate Him. He is all-powerful, remember?

Choose to live in the freedom of forgiveness. Let go of the blame. Forgive.

Blessed be the LORD, because He has heard the voice of my supplications! The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him. The LORD is their strength, and He is the saving refuge of His anointed. Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance; shepherd them also, and bear them up forever. — Psa. 28:6-9

Wow! What a God! And He chose us! Wow! Thank You, Lord!! Amen.

WORKSHEET #6—

1. Forgive. Make a list of the people you haven't truly forgiven from your heart. Pray. Choose to let go of the blame. Forgive them—from your heart.

2. Now, forgive yourself. Write it down here.

3. Most importantly, forgive God.

4. Receive your freedom!

We're forgiven. What a beautiful word!

CHAPTER 7—Courage: If I Have It, Do I Lose My Fears?

I have heard people say that they wished they were as confident and unafraid as a professional singer, actor, minister, or musician. However, if you were to ask that professional person, they would probably tell you how very afraid or nervous they are when they sing or speak. Many famous people, including actors, have admitted that they get “butterflies” just before they go before a group of people, even if they’ve been doing it all of their lives.

According to the following verses, even Paul, that dear man of faith in God, the one who shook off the snake into the fire, felt fear. He just didn’t let it stop him from doing all that God had guided him to do.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. — 1 Corin. 2:1-5

My thought is this: If you didn’t have fear, you wouldn’t need courage. *Courage is doing something even though you are afraid to do it.* Courage is walking on your fears, even when you feel like the room is reeling or you’re nauseated, or, as in my case, when I’m shaking all over.

When I sing, play music, and speak for God, I often (not always, but often) shake. Sometimes, I shake a lot. It may be anticipation or excitement, but sometimes it’s just the stress of being in front of people (I’m a natural introvert) or the stress of having to keep up a certain pace. My keyboard has a built-in rhythm that I can use, and I do enjoy it at times, but it puts me under pressure to be sure to hit the right keys and buttons at exactly the right time, and that doesn’t agree with my nervous system. Plus, I have to think about, and do my best at, two things at the same time (playing and singing). This creates stress. (I prefer concentrating on only one activity at a time so that I can do my very best at that one activity.)

Stress and I don’t get along well. My nervous system doesn’t handle it well. I’ve been through a lot in my life, and though I have forgiven and put things behind me, my body still shows the effects of it all, so I live on God’s healings, and He always comes through for me. Praise God! I feel that this is one of my sacrifices for God. I don’t let it stop me from serving Him. He always gets me through and blesses me for obeying Him. And I usually have to sit and relax for awhile before I will calm down inside and stop shaking.

Another reason people have fear when they minister for God is that they’re afraid that they might mess up God’s purpose. I don’t worry about that one as much anymore, because I believe that God will work His will through me—either in spite of my shaking, or maybe even because of the shaking. God can do anything He wants to do, so I’ve learned that He *will* accomplish His will, one way or another, and I can’t mess that up. As long as I’m obedient to Him, doing my part the best that I’m able, that’s all He asks of me.

Ah, sweet peace. I don't have to worry. It isn't me at all. It's all Him. He knows His instruments well. After all, He made us, and He sees us every second of every day. So, He knows us well. We just need to have the courage to obey Him, no matter how we feel. That's all.

Then Moses went and spoke all these words to Israel. "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you." Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the LORD has sworn to their father to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. And the LORD, He is the one who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed." — Deut. 31:1,6-8

Then the LORD said to Joshua: "Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city, and his land." ... So Joshua arose... — Josh. 8:1, 3

Notice that Joshua obeyed God in spite of his fears. If you read the rest of the chapter, you will see that God's promise came to pass just like He said it would.

And the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not fear them, for I have delivered them into your hand..." — Josh. 10:8

This time, God was talking about the Amorites. Again, Joshua obeyed God rather than his fears. And again, God let Joshua know that He, God Himself, was the One Who was doing His work.

But the LORD said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid because of them. . . ." So Joshua and all the people of war with him came against them suddenly... And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel... — Josh. 11:6-8

Are you getting the picture? Joshua felt fear, over and over again. His courage in obeying God did not mean that he no longer was afraid. He continued to have fears, just like we do, but he didn't allow it to get in his way nor to get in God's way. Because of this, he accomplished many mighty deeds in the Lord, including the crumbling of the walls at Jericho (see Josh. 6). And, as I said earlier, God worked His will. All Joshua had to do was have the courage to obey.

So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout all the country. — Josh. 6:27

Centuries later, Joshua is credited by Paul for being a man of faith. He is not remembered for his fears, because he did not obey them. He lived by courage. He obeyed God.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. — Heb. 11:30

Joshua's fears did not cause him to sin. He obeyed God, no matter how he felt. He trusted God. He had faith in God. Consequently, God was with him. If we give God a chance to work through us, guess who gets the blessing—we do. And then God's will is

accomplished so that many more can also be blessed.

So, don't worry about messing up God's purpose, if you are doing all that you believe God is guiding you to do. He made you. He can certainly take what seems to be a failure to you, and make it into a blessing to the people.

There have been many times as I was singing or speaking that I'd felt like I'd really blown it—that my voice was awful or off key, *etc.* Guess what! Those were the times that I'd be approached by someone afterwards to tell me that they saw or felt God's angel over me or that the song really touched them and they wanted a copy of the song for themselves, or that my message changed their prayer life.

Don't underestimate God. He knows full well what He is doing. Praise the Lord!! Of course, He does expect us to prepare wisely and to do our best when He guides us to do something for Him; but then He fills in and works His will. *He* works His will, *we* don't. Praise God!! Isn't that a relief? Ah, what a wonderful God!!

God will never ask of us what we cannot do, with His help. He will not expect of us what we cannot give. He will not require of us anything that He will not help us to do. God's ways are amazing! I feel so honored that He has hung in there with me and has kept His Hand on me, leading me closer and closer to Him. I still have so much to learn. Heaven. That's when I will have the understanding I need—when I'm in heaven. And, with God's help, I'll cling to Him until I get there. Praise God!

When I was going through a tremendous personal battle years ago, I remember that God had guided me to see a particular man of God. He gave me a name, and it was up to me to find the man with that name. I found two in my local area. Well, I called one, and he refused to see me, so I called the other one, and he did see me. However, he was gruff with me, and that was really hard on me. But in the fifteen minutes we were together, he had mentioned the word "courage," and that word stood out, so I went and asked the Lord if that was the word that I was supposed to hear, and my answer was, *Yes*. I went through all of that just for one word, but that word has helped to change my life. It was worth it all. Courage!

My life with courage was not easy, especially at first. As I said the words that I needed to say, did the things that I needed to do, and refused to do the things that I believed I wasn't supposed to be doing, it was like explosions went off in my head and I was very, very afraid and insecure! But I did it, anyway. Eventually, it got easier. I just learned to accept whatever happened as God's will, to put it all in His Hands, and to stand up for myself, and I slowly received a freedom that I hadn't known before.

Today, I am doing so much better. I feel like a whole person who doesn't have to live up to what other people think. Yes, there are times when I tend to fall back, so then I just have to recognize and remind myself of what's happening, and stand up for myself again. Fear surely does have torment. I know. I've had to fight it many times, and it is **HARD!**

So, to answer our question: Courage doesn't necessarily take our fears away. Having courage simply helps us to obey God and to live a more fruitful, fulfilling life in spite of our fears. As we walk on those fears, they usually do diminish, but even if they don't, we certainly gain more control of our lives and have a much deeper, more meaningful joy.

Acting in courage helps to set us free. And, then, we also tend to feel much better about ourselves, which can also lift those around us.

People talk a lot about self-esteem these days. Obeying the Lord is perhaps the best way to build up your self-esteem, because, as you obey Him, you will be thoughtful of others and encourage them, you will worship Him and be a blessing to Him, you will stand up for yourself and encourage yourself, and you will minister in whatever way God guides you to, being fruitful for Him. Isn't this a great plan? Think about it. Have courage! Obey God.

I have learned, in the midst of my pain, to quit questioning God as to why terrible things happen to me, and instead realize that terrible things happen to everyone, so why should I be exempt? That realization has helped me so much. Of course, being human, I have to learn it again and again, because I really don't want to have to suffer. I have gone through times in my life when God was all that kept me from falling completely apart. But God brought me through! God is with us—forever!

“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” — Rev. 21:4

I *can* do it, because God will do it with me. Not only do I realize that I will suffer while on this earth, but I also realize that God does hear me and help me. He truly is my first Love. I am so grateful to be His child. I pray that everyone will open up to Him and receive Him and His amazing love. What a wonderful God!

“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power... .” — Rev. 4:11

WORKSHEET #7—

1. Write some occasions when you walked on your fears to do what was right.
2. What were the results?
3. Now, share at least one of these occasions with others, if you can.

CHAPTER 8—Faith Versus Feelings

We have already mentioned how Joshua went by his faith rather than his feelings. Now, let's talk about Gideon:

Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree which was in Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor!" ... And the LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man." Then he said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me." — Judg. 6:11, 12, 16, 17

Now, notice that the angel is calling Gideon a "mighty man of valor" (a man of courage and strength). The Lord promises Gideon His help, and then Gideon asks for a sign to be sure it's God he's hearing. If you will read on, you will see that this is not the only sign that Gideon asks for. Don't we often feel the same way? We want to be sure it's God before we take a chance. Now, let's read onward a little:

And it happened on the same night that the LORD said to him, "Arise, go down against the camp, for I have delivered it into your hand. But if you are afraid to go down, go down to the camp with Purah your servant, and you shall hear what they say; and afterward your hands shall be strengthened to go down against the camp." Then he went down with Purah his servant... — Judg. 7:9-11

Notice how God provided a companion to go with Gideon if he was afraid? And notice how Gideon took that companion with him? So obviously, he was afraid. But he trusted God, he did obey in spite of his feelings, and if you'll continue reading in Judges, you'll see that he was victorious. Obedience, in the face of fear, shows faith.

A note about the kindness of God: Sometimes, when we're afraid, God does provide a helper for us. He is so gentle and loving with us. Even Jesus sent His apostles out "two by two" (Mk 6:7). So, if God sends you help, don't let pride get in the way. If you feel that the help is from God, receive it with a joyful heart.

I know that I feel so much more peace when I'm not having to face scary circumstances by myself. I even gain more confidence because I'm then concerned for the other person rather than dwelling on my own fears. And, of course, if we're singing and playing music, it also helps to know that if I goof, my partner can help cover my mistake. God is so good.

Also, reading God's Word can help us in times of crisis. Granted, sometimes when we are hurting or upset, we may not *feel* His Presence as we read or speak His Word, but we often can get lost in the story or the verses, and even this helps us. Remember, the Bible is the *living* Word. It provides what we need when we need it, and can be a blessing, even when we're not *feeling* blessed.

As I've said, when I've felt like I've done badly in my ministry, or if I haven't felt God's Presence over me, God will often send someone up to tell me what a blessing that message or song was to them. God will plant His Word in their hearts, whether I've felt His Spirit or not. You cannot judge your closeness to God by feelings alone. Read His

Word. It will become a part of you. It will help you, whether you feel it or not. And the Word that is planted in your heart will then come forth to help others.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments. I am afflicted very much; revive me, O LORD, according to Your word. — Psa. 119:105-107

“You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, for in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength.” — Isa. 26:3, 4

When my children were in elementary school, and they would need to walk to the bus stop or to school, I would stand outside and watch them, praying for them, saying to God, “Lord, please be with them. I love them, but I know that You love them more than I ever could, and you can protect them better than I could.” I placed them in God’s care.

Of course, I didn’t take unreasonable chances with my children, but I did let them grow, despite my feelings of wanting so much to be able to protect them from everything bad. I handed all my fears over to God, and trusted Him with them, no matter how I felt that day. And, God not only protected them, He sent people to them at school that encouraged their growth in Him, and He allowed experiences that helped them to grow. God did His work deeply within them. Naturally, I was there when they needed my help, but I tried not to get in God’s way. It’s tough. But it’s worth it. Today, they have confidence in themselves and they trust God. They do not allow fear to take over their lives, no matter how they feel. They live in faith. And I give God all the glory. He is so good. Sometimes I stand in awe of the faith and the strength that my children have. And I thank God.

Faith is trusting God no matter how I feel. Faith in God and trust in God go hand in hand. If we have faith that God is truly God, then we must trust Him to fulfill all of His Word and His promises to us, whether or not we feel like it.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. . . . By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible. — Heb. 11:1-3

In other words, God is God, and He made all things out of nothing. We know this by faith. We have chosen to believe it. So, since we have chosen to believe the Bible, then also all of God’s promises to us must be true. Accept them for yourself. True faith is believing without proof. *Faith* is the basis of our beliefs, *not feelings*.

Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” — Jn 20:29

Feelings can include love, loneliness, joy, sadness, energy, tiredness, hope, despair, confidence, feeling secure or insecure, encouragement, discouragement, satisfaction, disappointment, etc.; and we can also have feelings of faith, doubt, and trust. It’s so important that we don’t lean on our feelings when our feelings take away our trust in God and in His goodness and faithfulness. God’s Word is true!—no matter how we feel.

Just think about what this world would be like if we lived by our feelings rather than our faith. One minute we might feel angry and the next minute we might feel happy. What

if we acted everything out every time our feelings differed at all? What confusion! Forget relationships. There wouldn't be any. And we would be very unhappy people. We must choose to have faith. We must choose God and His Word. This will give us a solid foundation.

“He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He.” — Deut. 32:4

But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King... — Jer. 10:10

Then Jesus cried out, as He taught in the temple, saying, “You both know Me, and you know where I am from; and I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. But I know Him for I am from Him, and He sent Me.” — Jn 7:28, 29

I, personally, know Jesus. Do you? I know Him to be as real as my own birth parents. I know Him in my heart, through what He has done in my life and the lives of others around me, through visions and words of knowledge that He has given me, and through what I have seen with my eyes and heard with my ears. I know Him by His satisfying Presence when I am spiritually hungry and thirsty. I know Him when He speaks to me in love and peace. But even before knowing Him in these ways, I *chose* to believe in Him. He drew me, I read His Word, and I willingly and joyfully received.

Yes, God gives me wonderful feelings of love and peace and joy, at times, but the feelings aren't always there. I cannot rely on my feelings. My faith is what holds me when the feelings aren't there. And God's Word keeps me true to Him when I don't feel His guidance.

When I felt like God wanted me to learn American Sign Language at college, I couldn't afford it, but God provided a way. And when I signed up for my classes, I did the best I could to pick out the right courses. I wasn't feeling God's guidance about my selections, so I asked Him to work out His will as I proceeded to do my best within my own knowledge. Well, I signed up for four ASL classes, but I needed one more class. So, I looked through the catalog to find a class with the right amount of units, and I found one about managing stress. Okay, that was fine. Then, I went to my classes on the first day, and a one-unit ASL class was canceled due to not enough of us students showing up. Then, I had to find a one-unit class to fill in the hole, so I again looked in my catalog and found a career class that I thought might be good. Okay. I was set. I attended my classes.

I enjoyed my first semester, and guess what! The two classes that were fillins turned out to be God's gift to me. As I took the three ASL classes to obey God, He gave me the gift of finding out more about myself and how to better take care of myself, thanks to the other two classes. What I learned in those classes have changed my life. They were loaded with unexpected, wonderful surprises for me! So, in the end, God had truly guided me, without my feeling His guidance. Faith won out. And I was truly blessed for simply trusting God. Faith did it, not feelings.

I am so grateful that God drew me to Him, that I came to know Him. Jesus has made all the difference in my life. He is Who He says He is. I know this inside of myself. And I know this from my own personal experiences.

Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” — Jn 8:58

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

This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. — 1 Jn 5:6

The above verses cover the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What a wonderful God! What a glorious Savior! I can't find words to fully describe such an awesome God! Thank You, Jesus! Thank You, Father! Thank You, Holy Spirit!

WORKSHEET #8—

1. Mention a time when you've chosen to do something on faith, even when you didn't feel like it (maybe you were too discouraged or maybe you felt sick, or... ?).
2. What were your motives?
3. What were the results?
4. Share, if you can.

CHAPTER 9—Faith Versus Logic

Well, we've talked about faith versus feelings. Now we'll approach faith versus logic. *Faith is trusting God no matter what I think.* It is believing God, without understanding.

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS. — Matt. 1:18-25

Wow! And we think we need to have faith? Look through what you've just read, using earthly logic: In the first place, Joseph's betrothed (which in those days meant that they had gone through the marriage ceremony, but he had not yet taken her into his home to care for her, and their marriage had not yet been consummated) was found to be pregnant, and he knew that he was not the father. Then, obviously a kind and loving man, he wanted to keep it a secret so as not to bring danger or disgrace upon her (in those times, adultery could mean death). Then an angel appeared to him (in a dream, no less!) telling him not to be afraid, that the Baby had been conceived by the Holy Spirit! Are you getting the picture? Wow! Talk about asking someone to have a mountain of faith! His wife is pregnant—not by him, an angel talks to him in a dream, he is supposed to believe that she is still a virgin and that the Holy Spirit made her pregnant! And there's more!:

Now, the angel tells Joseph that the Baby that will be born will be a Boy, and that this one little tiny Child that he will raise in his own home will be GOD and will save His people from their sins. Now, I don't know about you, but personally, I think I'd be in shock and in a state of disbelief, thinking perhaps I had lost my mind for sure. Think about it. Is this at all logical? Does this make any sense at all?

Joseph woke up and did as the angel in his dream had told him to do and took Mary into his own home, had no sexual relations with her until this Baby was born, and he called the Baby, Jesus. Now, you tell me, is this a set-up for what their neighbors might have thought of as a madman and an adulteress living by dreams and imagination? In all the problems I've ever had to deal with I've never had that big a mountain to absorb by faith. It would seem totally illogical, wouldn't it?

Then why do we think that our problems are different or more difficult than others' problems? Because they happen to *us*, that's why. (I pause to laugh at myself here. You, too? What tunnel vision we can have at times, right? Or am I the only one?)

Faith is not logical. Faith is not just a feeling. Faith can overcome the deepest fear. FAITH. Praise God that we're not expected to understand everything! Praise God for faith! Praise God that precious Joseph and Mary, whom we know were pure and faithful, were willing to believe and to trust God—no matter what they, their relatives, their friends or their neighbors thought; whether or not it sounded logical; and no matter how much they had to suffer through negative public opinion.

Is salvation logical? No, of course not. Why would a loving Father send His Son down to a world that He knew would treat His Son badly, abuse Him, torture Him, and execute Him in spite of His innocence, and He not lift a Hand to bail Him out? And yet, our Father's love for us is so great, so deep, so tremendous and so selfless that He did just that. It doesn't make sense, does it? Thank God He doesn't think like we do!

Thank You, Father, for sending us Your Son! Thank You, Jesus, for coming and being willing to go the whole way to the cross for us, in spite of Your pain! We cannot thank You enough! Praise God!! And, thank You, Father, that Your truth is so much higher than our logic!

“For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” — Jn 3:16-18

What a forgiving God! Did you notice that it says “should not perish” rather than “will not perish?” It is still each person's choice. There is no reason for us to perish. It's our choice to live eternally or to be in misery. He did not let any fears get in His way of sending Jesus to us, and Jesus did not let His fear of pain cause Him to say, “Forget it!” in spite of His agony.

And He [Jesus] knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. — Lk 22:41-44

Jesus had good reason to dread, good reason to fear, good reason to panic, but He continued on—no matter what. And because He did, we can be saved today. Thank You, God!

I want to share a very illogical personal experience with you. I was praying in church one day, and suddenly, in my spirit, I was aware that I was in God's throne room! It was like I'd been caught up into a huge bubble. As I looked around, I realized that God's throne was behind me, and then I looked down, and saw Jesus below me. I was appalled that Jesus was below me, and I felt guilty that I was above Him, and because of the guilt, I was rejecting what God was giving me, and so I lost that peace, and was losing my vision. Then I realized that the reason that Jesus was below me was because He was the Door through Whom I had entered. It had nothing to do with position of importance, but rather that we were in two different places within the throne room.

That day, God taught me a very important lesson. When He is blessing me, I'm not

to question Him because of what I've been taught. I'm just to receive. He will show me what I need to know when I need to know it. It will always be right, and it will never go against His Word. I must trust Him, no matter what I think. FAITH. It's so much better than logic.

Regarding logic, is the Bible logical? Is it logical to believe in it? Is it logical to believe in any book that contains things that we have not personally experienced ourselves? And yet, we believe our history books and other books that teach us things that we haven't experienced ourselves. That's how we learn.

Personally, I put a lot more faith in the Bible than in other books. I have chosen to believe the Bible. Have you? God has proven to me, over and over again, that He is true and real, as I have told you. That's enough for me.

And yet, there is this to think about: God inspired all of the verses in the Bible, but they were recorded at different times by different people, so you can see for yourself that it's not just one person's "opinion", not just the opinion of one country's tradition nor of one period of time. These books were written over a period of thousands of years and in various countries.

Our God is true! And He is a God in Whom we can trust! He has proven Himself over and over again throughout the ages. Amen and amen!

So, when God is guiding you to do something, and you know it's God, but it makes no sense to you why it would be necessary to do it, remember Jesus on the cross. Was it necessary? Yes. Does it sound logical to our human minds? Probably not. We might just think that God can do it all, that He could just forgive us without a sacrifice and that He can make us who He wants us to be without all the suffering. Right? Yet, it's often the suffering that *causes* the positive changes in us, if we allow it to. We need the suffering to change us, humble us, and bring us closer to God in worship and obedience. The suffering can build our faith. And the changes, the humble attitudes, the worship, the obedience, and the faith are what will help us to come to an eternity of joy in heaven.

So, instead of fighting your suffering, praise God for it, and He will bless it to your spiritual and eternal health. Instead of saying, "Oh, no! Not again!" say, "I trust You, Lord. You know what You're doing, and I thank You." Is this difficult? Yes! But it will become more of a habit as you pray for help and proceed to do it, and do it, and do it again. Remember that an offering or a sacrifice for God is sweet to Him.

"And you make an offering by fire to the LORD, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or in your appointed feasts, to make a sweet aroma to the LORD. ..." — Num. 15:3

And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. — Eph. 5:2

Praise God that He is not logical by our worldly definition! Praise God that faith does not require logic. It only requires trusting God.

WORKSHEET #9—

1. Write down a time that you chose to do something solely on faith that made

absolutely no logical sense at all. Use a different example than the one you used regarding feelings.

2. What were your motives?
3. What were the results?
4. Share, if you can.

CHAPTER 10—Fear? or Faith? Which Will You Choose?

We have a choice!! Yes, there are times when the choice seems to be made for us, but then we usually have a choice as to how we will respond to it. God has given us the freedom to choose.

“Choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.” — Deut. 30:19

*“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... We will serve the LORD.”
— Josh.24:15*

Let’s check in on Mary this time, and see what was going on in her experience:

*Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God...” Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”
— Lk 1:26-35, 38*

It’s obvious that Mary, in spite of her fears, chose faith. She chose to delight in what God had said to her through the angel. She didn’t understand, and asked the angel how it could happen, since she was a virgin, but when he answered her, she did not doubt. She believed. She trusted God. She had faith. Even though it was beyond logic, beyond understanding, beyond all that she had learned regarding pregnancy, yet she believed. And more than that, she accepted what she believed. She submitted to God without doubt. This is faith. No wonder God chose her to raise His Holy Son.

Was Mary afraid to look foolish or afraid to put herself in danger by sharing this news? Was she concerned that she may be wrong, and then would have to go through the embarrassment? Was she afraid of being laughed at? Did she second-guess herself and tell herself that it was just a figment of her imagination? Did she fear how the world might judge her? Apparently not. According to Lk 1:36, 39, 56, and 57, she went immediately to tell her cousin, Elizabeth:

Now, Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of

your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.” And Mary said: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.” And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house. — Lk 1:39-49, 56

Did Mary sound afraid? Just the opposite. She sounded very happy and confident. She didn't even have to tell Elizabeth the news; because, as soon as Elizabeth heard her voice, she was filled with the Holy Ghost, and she knew! Mary rejoiced! Isn't God wonderful? Notice that He chose someone who would believe Him to bear His Son, in order that His will would be accomplished and accomplished with the right spirit and attitude.

Mary chose faith. Elizabeth chose faith.

And, later, Joseph and Mary left everything they knew and everyone they knew—homeland, friends, relatives—to obey God and save that precious Child. Do you think they were afraid? Even though they trusted God, I would imagine that they would have been afraid to go to Egypt. I believe that I would have been. However, they didn't let that stop them—not for a minute. They went on faith. They walked on whatever fears they had, and went forward, in obedience to God.

Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.” When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.” — Matt. 2:13-15

Do you see what peace there is in simple obedience to God, rather than arguing with Him? They didn't spend their energy pleading with God. They used their energy to obey Him. In this way, and only in this way, was God's Word fulfilled. And, God knew that they would make this choice, and that He could trust them to do so.

What a wonderful thought. Imagine that God can trust a person. Wouldn't it be great if He could trust me? or you? Can He? If He asks us to do something or to refrain from doing something, will He ask us because He knows that He can trust us to actually obey Him? Fantastic thought. Can you imagine being so trusted by God? I have much growing to do. Do you?

Joseph chose to have faith in God. He chose to obey and to lead his family to safety. His wife chose to follow God's leading through Joseph, in faith. Awesome!

Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. — James 2:17, 18, 26

God keeps guiding me, lately, to trust Him rather than man. We must put our trust in

Him. We must have faith in Him. *People must earn our trust, and even then they can let us down. Do not trust people to guide you when you know that God is guiding you otherwise, no matter how much you respect or fear the person. Pray. Seek the Lord. And then, when it comes right down to it, we must obey God.*

It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. — Psa. 118:8

But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. — John 2:24, 25

Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited. Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD. For he shall be like a tree planted by the water, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.” — Jer. 17:5-8

I don't want to end up all dried up inside, in a desert, away from God's Presence and His peace and His joy. I want to be the green, lush tree by the water, yielding fruit and feeling productive and happy. It's up to me to make that choice. It's up to you, too.

Lazarus' sister Mary chose to wait on the Lord rather than to let Martha tell her what to do. She chose God. And, in that way, she also chose to do what was right for her:

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.” And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.” — Lk 10:38-42

Like the saying goes, “We are what we eat.” If I don't feed on His Presence enough, how can I expect to be full of His Spirit? We need to choose God over people. We need to have faith in God rather than fear what people think.

Had Joseph and Mary trusted in people or in people's opinions, rather than in God, or had they thought it was all in their imaginations, where would we be today? No Savior? Still waiting? Thank God that He chose the right people, whom He knew would choose to trust Him. May we all choose to trust Him, rather than to fear.

A few years ago, God guided me to move to another town. It was a town that I had never heard of, and I checked all the state maps in my U.S. atlas and couldn't find it. However, I chose to believe God, and checked another map, a larger one. There it was! So, in obedience to His wishes, I went to check out the area in person. It was beautiful, just what I would have loved. It would have been perfect for me. There was a nice church, and the scenery was right for me. I felt at home.

But, while I was there, the Lord guided me to move back where I had been living.

He wanted me to leave my apartment and live in a *house* in the next town over. I had no money for a house, but I started looking anyway, knowing that if God wanted me in a house, He would provide one. I looked and looked. Then one day my daughter took me with her to check out a room that she was considering renting. I went with her. Well, she decided against it, and I moved in myself. I had never even considered *sharing* a house with anyone. But God had planned it all out. He knew how to get me there. And it turned out to be a great experience!

Later on, I felt that God was guiding me to move to a different town, but as I went forward, I kept getting stopped from going there. I'm not sure that I fully understand why I never made it, unless it was just His way of getting me out of the place I was in, which is very possible. I've prayed about it, and I have felt that perhaps I understand, but I'm not sure. Anyway, I chose to obey God rather than fear, and as I went forward, He guided my steps. I don't have to worry about His reasons. I choose to trust God. He has never let me down. I've gotten bewildered and confused, at times, but I choose to trust Him, simply because He is God, my best Friend. I have *chosen* to have faith in Him.

As for the first place I mentioned, I checked it out later on, and it was no longer the right place for me. The church I liked was gone, and it no longer felt like home. Interesting. The time was past. Perhaps He'd just wanted me to enjoy that trip, or perhaps it was a test of my faith. I don't know. But God does.

Of course, everything that I've done has caused reactions all around me, whether good ones or bad ones, so maybe something important happened in those reactions. Only God knows. I just know that I'm still here, I'm still alive, and I did accomplish many things for Him on those side trips. And He accomplished many things in me. Was that the purpose?

Though I don't always understand what happens, I choose to trust God, and because of that, my life has grown in ways I could never have imagined. It has become more interesting and more fulfilling than I could have dreamed. Perhaps this is all part of my education and preparation for my future.

Serving God can be scary, but it's sure not boring. It's exciting!—IF you choose to have faith in Him. Choose Him, whether you understand or not.

FEAR or FAITH—Which will you choose?

WORKSHEET #10—

1. Make a choice. Will you choose fear or faith?
2. Look at your lists of fears. Write a prayer that God will help you to overcome them.
3. If you have a partner or a group to pray with, pray together for God's help. Encourage one another.

(We'll work on conquering those fears in the last chapter.)

CHAPTER 11—You Are Precious in God’s Sight

“The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you in His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.” — Zeph. 3:17

One day, this is what came into my spirit: *I love you more than the cattle on a thousand hills.* I needed that. Do you? Do you need to know that God loves you that much? He does. I believe that all of us who love Him are that important to Him.

“For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me [Jesus], and have believed that I came forth from God.” — Jn 16:27

Even the whole world is so important that He sent His Son to suffer and die for everyone (Jn 3:16). He loves each and every one of us on this earth that much. Receive this Love that is so deep that we cannot even begin to understand it. Just receive it. Receive Him.

God is love. — 1 Jn 4:8

“And I [Jesus] have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.” — Jn 17:26

If you still aren’t convinced that God loves you that much, reread the following verses. Even in Jesus’ agony, which He did not want to have to go through, He was willing to obey. And, even though God saw how deeply His dear, precious Son was suffering, He allowed Him to suffer, because of His great love for you and for me.

And coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. When He came to the place, He said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” And He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if it is Your will, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless not My will but Yours, be done.” Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. — Lk 22:39-44

Just being a Christian is not an automatic cure-all from pain. And, trusting God does not mean that we won’t suffer. But it does mean that we have God’s love here and the promise of an eternity in heaven, if we love and obey Him. Look at Stephen:

But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord... And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. — Acts 7:55-60

Stephen was killed for serving God and telling the people about Him. He did this for the sake of their own souls and for the God Whom he loved. This is love. But notice that, though he suffered, he was received into heaven. His suffering ended. He was in the arms

of Christ. He was God's child. He had obviously been forgiven of all past sins. He had died in service for God, his Beloved.

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints. — Psa. 116:15

“Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O hades, where is your victory?” The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. — 1 Corin. 15:54-57

As we serve Christ, it may not be easy. It will probably be very difficult, but we have God's love and His promise. Then, when it is *His* time, He will take us home. We must simply love and obey Him until He calls us home.

To those who may be wanting to give up and just go and be with Jesus right now (I've been there myself): we cannot speed up the process. If we want to go to heaven, no matter how much we want to just go home, we must wait for God. Our time to be with Him is His choice. Granted, He sees our suffering, and there are times when I believe He has granted that relief, but we must not do anything to ourselves in order to make it come to pass. The Bible clearly teaches us that we cannot take our own life (nor anyone else's) if we want to have Heaven as our eternal home.

“You shall not murder.” — Ex. 20:13

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are... murders... and the like; of which I tell you ... that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. — Gal. 5:19, 21

Trust God to help you make it through whatever you are going through at this time in your life. Follow some of the hints that are in the Bible, in this book, and in the messages and writings of others. As I heard in my spirit, *Don't give up!* And, as I have determined to obey Him, He has truly been with me, and has truly restored my life to me and given me hope for a better future.

“So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten.” — Joel 2:25

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. — Jer. 29:11-13

So, as Jesus was willing to suffer for us, and as His apostles were willing to suffer as they served God, so we also need to accept whatever we must go through in our service for God. We must go through our suffering, too, trusting God to be with us, to help us, and to deliver us.

As we learn to truly believe God, trust Him, and really see the truths contained in His Word, we can learn to let go and receive His love and His forgiveness. Open your eyes. Open your heart. Believe that He loves you. No matter what we encounter in our lives here, He will never leave us alone. He will face it with us. He has even let me know that when I cry, He cries with me, because of my pain. He does this willingly. He is a compassionate God.

For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may

boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” — Heb. 13:5, 6

God loves us so very much. Years ago, I “saw” (in my spirit) that God was laughing at me. At first, I was offended. But then, I asked God about it, and He let me know that he was laughing at me in love, in the same way that I used to laugh at my children in love when they were very young and would try so hard to look grown up and mature. How sweet. It was a laugh of love, not of making fun. I thought my children were so cute! So, then I realized more fully how God loves me as His own child, and that He deeply cares for me as He sees me try so hard to please Him and to be all grown up. What a loving Father. Praise God!

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” — Matt. 6:9

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” — Matt. 7:7-11

As I read these verses, I heard in my spirit:

I will give great gifts to My children. Great gifts. I will give them their hearts’ desire as their hearts are in Me.

Praise the Lord! I have to testify that this is true. God has given me great gifts. I would willingly endure all of the suffering that comes with life here, as long as I have the comfort of God’s Presence. His anointing is worth it all. Yes, I have heaven to look forward to, and there are times when I long to go and be with Him, but His Presence is more important to me than all of the superficial joy that the world has to offer. I would choose *Him*, even if there were no afterlife. I love Him that much. I need Him that much. I long for Him that much. And the only time I feel true, deep peace is when I am in His Presence. Thank You, Father. Thank You, Jesus. Thank You, Spirit of God.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. — Rom. 8:28, 35-39

There are many, many promises in God’s Word to let us know that our worries are unnecessary. He will provide. Of course, we must do our part. We cannot sit on the couch and figure that a job will come to us, because we’re afraid to get out and look or we’re afraid of rejection. We cannot buy food and then expect it to be self-preparing. We must do our part. And then, do trust God to help the right thing come to pass.

I knew that when I started writing I would probably be rejected by many publishers before my work would be accepted, so I just prepared myself for that rather than let fear of rejection get in my way. I did my part and wrote and wrote to people, but I trusted God to open the right door. Rejection is tough, but not trying until you succeed is even tougher. Get in the habit of trying, and the rejections will just become a matter of course rather than a personal hurt. God will open the right door if you knock on it, but if you don't knock (and keep knocking, if necessary), how can it open?

“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” — Matt. 6:25, 32-34

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. — James 1:2-8

God has guided me, through more than one source, that worship and praise are major keys to having our prayers answered. When we give God the credit that belongs to Him, and we let Him know how much we love and trust Him, it frees Him to work. I know this to be true by my own experiences. When I cried out to Him, over and over, in misery, it seemed like my prayers weren't being answered. But when I started focusing on Him and His love, worshiping Him, and really trusting Him, my prayers started being answered, and being answered more quickly (just like it says in James, above). I was excited! And my faith was increased! And, of course, He is truly worthy of our worship, whether or not He ever answered our prayers, simply because *He is God*. Awesome!

My throne room experience may never have occurred if I had not spent enough time with God to draw close to Him, love Him, worship Him, and get “me” out of the way. You'll notice that as soon as my own thoughts got in the way, the vision began disappearing. Spend time with God. Minister to Him. Love Him. Worship Him. For then, your fears can melt away. Then, God can bless you fully and bring you His peace. But don't do all the talking. Let Him talk to you. Remember, He wants to minister to you, too.

Because He is your LORD, worship Him. — Psa.45:11

And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!” Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: “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.” — Rev. 4:8-11

“Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.” — 1 Sam. 3:9

One of the many wonderful things about God is that He is always ready to help a sincere person, no matter what difficulties we’re having. God is merciful. He is kind. He knows our hearts. Be honest and sincere with Him. Ask for His help. He loves you.

Take care of yourself, for you are the temple of God. If you make sure to take care of His temple (your body, mind, and spirit), you will be better able to serve the Lord and to get rid of your fears. When I am tired, I don’t have the strength that I have when I am refreshed. And my mind doesn’t work as well, either. Also, my spirit can get discouraged.

It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep. — Psa. 27:2

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? — 1 Corin. 2:16

Even our Creator God rested:

Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. — Gen. 2:3

And Jesus rested. He understands our fears, yet is our example that we don’t have to let fears control us. Jesus stood up for Himself and for His Father. He did whatever He needed to do, no matter what anyone thought, even if He had to do it alone. He confronted people, when necessary. And occasionally, He avoided people in order to protect Himself. He used wisdom. He did not let fear overpower Him. How did He accomplish all of this within His human form? He took time off with the Father to restore His strength.

And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. — Mk 6:46

If Jesus Himself had to spend time with the Father, how much more do we? We must be in constant communion with God. Worship Him. Love Him. Let Him help you overcome your fears.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing. — 1 Thess. 5:16, 17

Sometimes, when I feel like I’m hurting so much that I might break, I think deeply about how Jesus suffered for me, *step by step*, even though I feel like I can’t bear any more pain, especially His. I find that, after going through Christ’s suffering with Him for awhile, my problems seem to diminish, and He fills me with compassion for Him and fills me with His love. Or I may receive a numbness or a peace, so that I get a temporary relief. And then, I’m more able to rest or to go forward in Him. So, when my pain gets unbearable, I focus on *His* pain, and *my* pain then diminishes. As strange as this may sound, it works. What an amazing God!

And then there are the times when the Lord wants me to concentrate on His resurrection rather than His death, because He wants me to focus on life rather than pain and death. The important thing to do is what God is guiding you to do at that time. Be flexible. Be open to Him. Let Him guide you.

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I

ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You. For You have formed my inward parts; You have covered me in my mother's womb. — Psa. 139:7-13

I feel such peace reading the above scriptures. Ahhh. How God blesses us. Be assured. God is with you, wherever you are, all the time. This is His Word. And God is true.

Choose your friends carefully. Generally, avoid being around people who tear you down. Be with people who lift you up and draw you closer to God. And do the same for them.

Another thing we must realize is that we cannot please people, no matter what we do. Oh, we may please a few for a season, but it's impossible to really please anyone all the time. It's also impossible to please *everyone*. I can't even please myself all the time, so why should I expect more out of another than I myself am able to do? (I'm laughing at myself again.)

One of the best ways to be happier in your life is to be fruitful for God. Pray about what God would have you to do. And then, get involved. If doors seem to close, don't give up. Pray. Maybe it's the wrong door or the wrong time. Or, just maybe, God wants you to fight for it with perseverance. Get involved in doing something for God. Serve Him in whatever ways He guides you to. He has called us to love His people and those in need. He has called us to tell people about Him and His Son, Jesus. Serving God will bless you.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. — 1 Jn 5:20

When I spend the time to draw very close to the Lord, and I come into His Presence, my fears leave, because His love is perfect. When I am immersed in His love, I am free of fear at that moment. Remember the verse that I quoted previously:

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear... — 1 Jn 4:18

Some people sing the following verse as a beautiful song. Let's sing it together for our precious Lord. If you don't know a melody, just sing with your heart. We so often talk about ministering to others rather than ministering to God. Isn't our ministry to Him the most important of all?

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. — Psa. 95:6, 7

You are precious in God's sight. You are precious.

WORKSHEET #11—

1. Think of some of the times that you could see God's love for you. Write them

down.

2. Share, if you can. It could be a great help to you or to someone else.

CHAPTER 12—Faith = Power!

So Jesus answered and said to them, “Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.” — Mark 11:22-24

Wow! Power! And God gave it to us! Yes, I know there are times when we will ask, and we really believe that our faith is strong, and yet it doesn't seem to happen the way we thought it would. Don't let that cause you to lose your faith. God is a loving Father. He will do what needs to be done, in His way. And His way truly is the best way, not something that we need to fear. Your mountain might be a problem, or it may be a real mountain. In either case, God loves us enough to help us through it or to take it away, whichever He knows is best for us. That doesn't mean we have lost that power. It just means that God is in control, and all we need to do is to trust Him, and He will take care of it for us or with us (or sometimes, around us). Notice that the following verse says that we must be abiding in Him. I believe this is so that our desires will be the same as His desires for us.

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” — Jn 15:7

We serve a limitless God, which means that we are limitless, as well, because we are His. He will not put something into your heart unless He makes a way to achieve your goal. Also, He will not let us suffer through a problem alone.

Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him... . But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the LORD shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in Him. — Psa. 37:3-7, 39, 40

Why will He do this? “Because they trust in Him.” Do we trust in Him? God is so good. Do we limit God by our own understanding or lack of it?

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” — Isa. 55:8, 9

Every time that we think there are two options to a situation, God may have 200. So, don't let His methods and ways throw your faith. Instead, let them *increase* your faith. I find that it's really exciting to serve God, because you never know what to expect. It's really great! What a God! He is certainly not boring! If anyone is bored, just serve God, obeying Him with all your heart, and the boredom will have to leave. It (the boredom) may try to land on a temporary basis, but it won't get very far, if we are truly in obedience to God. Yes, it can seem pretty scary, at times, not to know what to expect today or

tomorrow; but as long as we're in His will, and we're *trying* to do what we think He wants us to do, He will honor that effort, and He will bless us for our faith and for our faithfulness to Him.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. — Rom. 8:28

If you have received Christ as your Savior, and have decided to follow Him, then God has a plan for you. Some people say that they don't know what their calling is, and yet they are serving God in a mighty way. Perhaps it's the word *calling* that they don't understand. But all Christians have been called into service.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. ...” — Matt. 28:19, 20

I have to share the following verse from Isaiah 55, because the promise here is so fantastic!:

“For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; the mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.” — Isa. 55:12

Wow! Praise God! I have to admit that there have been times when the mountains were so majestic that *I* burst forth into singing. I've also heard the wind rushing down the gorges between the bluffs. It's exciting! Have you listened to the wind blowing in the trees and watched their upper boughs waving in praise to the Lord? Open your eyes to God's beauties, and it will increase your faith. It will cause you to see just how powerful He is and the power that you (yes, you!) have in Him. Soak in His Word. Keep your mind centered on the things that are good. Focus.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. — Phil. 4:8

One time, when I was going into the hospital for surgery, I asked God what He wanted me to be doing while I was there and while I was mending at home, afterwards. He guided me to do a “Bible Soak” while I was recovering, which meant that I was to read my Bible so thoroughly that I would soak in every word. I started with Matthew, and worked through the New Testament and Psalms. There are some places in my Bible where even the word *the* is underlined because of its significance in that verse. It was fantastic, and kept me plenty busy for months afterwards—long after my initial healing time had ended.

An interesting note about that surgery: The lady next to me had the same surgery with the same anesthesia, and yet she was in tremendous pain, and I had absolutely no pain at all. I never did. I figured that God knew that, at that time, I couldn't bear any more than what I was already going through in my personal life, and so He took all the pain away. Even after I got home a few days later, I needed no pain pills. My only problem was lightheadedness when I would sit up or stand. I needed lots of rest, but it was a true rest,

without pain.

What an amazing God!! He provided what I needed when I needed it. There are lots of other times that He has allowed me to suffer terribly. But this time it was not His will. He knows what we need to go through and what we don't. And I was uplifted mentally, as well, because my mind was in His Word and off of my personal problems. For a couple of weeks I felt like I was on vacation! That's how awesome God is!

I have given you this testimony to encourage you that there is truly power in God and in His Word and that God *does* care. So, read the Word and enjoy! Whether you feel anything or not. And the positive feelings just may follow. They usually do.

It's like when we do something right, even though we don't feel like it or we feel sick, or something else happens that could keep us from doing it. And then, as we act *anyway*, the positive feelings come, or we get confirmation that what we did was right. And, there are the times that we simply act on the faith that God is guiding us, no matter what. This happens frequently when we're serving God. I have heard many testimonies about this as well as knowing this from my own experiences.

Isn't God wonderful? He knows what each person's need is, and He takes care of us and guides us in *His* way. He knows. Trust Him.

PRAISE GOD! I CAN DO IT!

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’” — Matt. 25:31-40

Praise God for His love, His kindness, His sufferings, and His rewards for *our* sufferings. His righteousness and His glory are so beyond our understanding.

As I said, we must do our part. Keep focused on the Lord, and work on a closer relationship with Him through worship, prayer, praise, reading His Word, and obedience to Him. He is truly deserving of this, and you will receive the blessings that this faithful life will bring to you. Listening to Christian music may help you greatly in drawing into God's Presence and into His love. Don't forget that His love is perfect and that *“perfect love casts out fear”* (1 Jn 4:18). If you spend enough time worshiping in His Presence, His love can overpower your fears, at least long enough for you to have some relief and be able to know what His will is.

Make a plan to alleviate your fears, and stick to it. Ask God to guide you. Denying

your fears is another way of denying your flesh, so that you can gain control of your life. Then, fear will lose its grasp. Faith will come to life. You will have *power*.

Trust Him! Trust Him! Trust Him!

WORKSHEET #12—

1. Now, think of a victory in your life—a time when you were an overcomer and made a change in your life that was very positive for you. Write it down.
2. Share your victory, and listen to others' victories, if possible.
3. Know this, that if you accomplished that change, you can accomplish even more, one at a time. Tell yourself, "*I can* be all that God wants me to be. He will help me. I trust Him." Remember *Phil. 4:13*—"*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*"

CHAPTER 13—Choose and Conquer: One Day at a Time

Have you made your choice yet? I have. I want to have faith. I don't want to follow fear anymore. How about you?

Years ago, I learned my first lesson about conquering my fears. I had been dying inside because of a lack of worship, and I was afraid of a reaction at home, so I sneaked out to a church to pray where I figured I wouldn't be seen. As I knelt down to pray, I literally shook with the feeling of release as the peace flowed into me. It was so wonderful. What a relief. Eventually, I quit sneaking around. I walked on my fears. At first, it was like warning lights flashed in my head, and it led to some very difficult times, but it had a very good ending, and now I'm free to worship when and where I please.

However, I had to walk on my fears in order to receive this freedom. God never left my side, but He didn't bail me out, either. I had to stand up for myself. I had to stand up for my time with God. I believe God was pleased, because it was for love of Him. I love Him so very much. I chose, and then God helped me to conquer, one day at a time.

In the past, I had heard many testimonies as to what God had done in people's lives, and I'd praised the Lord for it, but I had not realized that they'd had the same fears that I have. It hadn't fully sunk into my mind that they had *not* accomplished what was done in their lives because it was *easy* for them. *Now*, of course, I understand that since they are human (like I am), they had probably dealt with the same types of feelings that I've dealt with. And yet, they had come out on the other side. They were victorious in spite of their fear. They didn't let it stop them. Does this mean that God can still bring *me* through? Of course! Does this mean that once a mountain has been removed, another mountain will not arise? No. Does it mean that when a problem leaves, it will never try to return? No. It simply means that God *can*, and with our willingness and obedience, *will* bring us through one mountain at a time, one day at a time, as we trust Him.

Choose faith. Conquer fear. One day at a time.

I lived in a California beach town for awhile, temporarily sharing a very nice house with three other Christian ladies. It was a good experience. Not all shared living experiences are good, but this one was an exception, because of a couple of the ladies that were in the same house.

After living in that house for about a year and a half, we three ladies had the feeling that we were to be moving on. We all had a feeling of the different directions that we were supposed to go, but I had no financial way of being able to move. So, one day, while I was home alone, I prayed for God's definite guidance as to whether or not I should move. God gave me some encouragement through Christian messages on television and at church that morning, but then He got more definite: while I was praying, the mailman delivered a letter addressed to the lady who had lived there the longest. It was from the landlord. Well, when she got home that evening and opened it, it turned out to be a letter of eviction for *all* of us, because the owner wanted to move back into the house where we were living! Talk about a definite answer! What a God!

However, because of this upcoming move, I went through a lot of fear and stress due to a lack of money (still hadn't learned to trust enough), but one step at a time God

worked. First, He provided a temporary home, which was not a happy experience for me, but God used it to help me to accomplish some of His work that I would not have been able to accomplish in my next home. (He knows these things!) Then, after God's work there was done, I knew that it was time to leave, so I began looking for a place, trusting God to help me. He did.

It was then that He provided help from friends so that I could move into an apartment of my own. God is amazing. When we feel fear or stress or confusion, yet we've put ourselves into His Hands, He will take care of us and work His will. I chose to have faith, and then God helped me to conquer, one day at a time, in spite of my fears and insecurities.

It takes perseverance to live for God and receive His peace. It takes perseverance to have a life that is blessed in Him. It takes perseverance to live by faith rather than fear. It doesn't get easy, it just gets easier, because we have *chosen* to live for God. And as we serve Him more and more, and we see more and more of His mighty work in our lives, this gives us the courage to trust Him more and more. Make it a habit to serve God, to follow Him every day. Be consistent in making and sticking with your commitment to Him, and He will be there for you. He will help you.

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying: "There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city; and she came to him, saying, 'Avenge me of my adversary.' And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, 'Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.'" Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." — Lk 18:1-8

The widow chose to pursue justice (apparently over and over, one day at a time), and she conquered. Persevere. It pays off. No matter how tired you get, don't give up.

Ezekiel was a prophet who was very unhappy with what he was guided by God to do. He obviously had fear, or else why would God tell him not to be afraid? I wonder why we think that life should be so simple for us as Christians when Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets all suffered. They had to walk on their fears and submit to God's will, in the midst of the dangers around them.

And He said to me: "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them... . But the house of Israel will not listen to you, because they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted... . Do not be afraid of them, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house... . And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' whether they hear, or whether they refuse." ... So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me. — Ezek. 3:4, 7, 9, 11, 14

Any of us that have had to go and talk to someone who was not willing to listen, especially if it would put us in danger, perhaps knows a little bit of what Ezekiel may have been feeling. Not only would he not be liked by the people and could be in danger from

them, he also had to go through other physical suffering, as well (read beyond the above scriptures in your Bible). If you want to feel better about what God is requiring of *you*, just read Ezekiel. We must remember that where people spend eternity is more important than our comfort here and now. And note God's POWER! He *is* all powerful! He really *can* help us! Praise God!

When things get really rough and hard to handle, we need to keep focused on Jesus, and just remember that Christ has a great reward waiting for us in heaven. Sometimes, I just long for that day. But I know that God is in charge, and that's the way I want it. I'm so grateful that He cares so much for me. And I'm so glad that I live after the time of Christ's teachings and His sacrifice. Thank You, Lord.

God truly does hear the prayers of His children. When He told Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham pleaded with Him for mercy. God listened to Abraham's cries, and He agreed to do as Abraham had asked. God did listen. And God listens to us today. Remember that. (See Genesis 18:16-33.)

I know that some of the things that God guides us to do, as well as some of the things that we have to deal with in our daily lives, can be very difficult to conquer, but living in fear is torture compared to living in faith (remember *1 Jn 4:18*—“*Fear involves torment*”). Living in faith is such a relief.

I have actually heard of people that have made faith such a habit in their lives that they really *don't* get all stressed out over their situations or happenings. They go forward *without* fear, obey the Lord, and accomplish whatever needs to be accomplished, having *peace* all the way. Am I so different? Or do they go through initial fear before they conquer it? Years ago, God gave me a verse that He wanted me to apply to myself. It has really helped me. Receive it for yourself:

“In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.” — Isa. 30:15

Too often, fear makes things seem more difficult than they actually are. I have been guilty of not telling someone about Christ when I felt that I should tell them, because I've been afraid of their reaction. Then I've had to suffer the feelings of concern for that person's soul, had to go through the guilt, had to pray for them, and had to ask God for forgiveness, feeling that I'd let Him down.

The times when I've obeyed, in spite of my fears, I've ended up feeling uplifted and good about myself. I know I've pleased God, and the person's reaction is usually not as bad as I might have been afraid it would be. And, when it was a negative reaction, it was over very quickly, and I felt positive about myself because I had told them. So, it had turned out to be a good experience after all. And sometimes, I have found out that the person was a fellow Christian, which was a blessing to me. Perhaps they just needed to know that they were not alone. Or maybe it was because *I* needed that blessing. I don't know, but God does.

Obedying is filled with peace and joy. Disobeying is misery. *Walk on your fears!* Even if you have to suffer for it, it's better to suffer for doing right than for doing wrong.

For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before

God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps. — 1 Pet. 3:20, 21

WORKSHEET #13—

1. Now, return to your lists of fears. Look at them.
2. Write a victory list. Write notes about what you can do to conquer each one of the circled fears on your lists.
3. Put down one item from your victory list. Figure out the steps you will take. If you work on only one item at a time, you can better concentrate on it and have a better chance at changing it. Make a decision that you will conquer this one item with God's help, and do it.
4. Pray for God to help you to follow through and to determine, with His grace, to accomplish what He has put in your heart to accomplish.
5. If you can keep in touch with your study partner or group (if you have one), continue encouraging each other after this study is over.
6. Beside your conquered fear, write your victory date.
7. Perhaps you could have a victory "Praise God Party" after everyone conquers, or has walked on, one of their fears! (Or you could have your own, if you've worked alone.)
8. Then, after you are victorious over this first one, decide on another fear to tackle. Go through the steps again.

Continue these steps until you get your fears under control. Don't expect it to be easy. It probably won't be. It isn't and wasn't for me. There are times when the same fears will try to come back on you. They're sneaky. Remember that you're more powerful, in Christ, than they are. God gave you the power to conquer. Just keep conquering. Victory can bring freedom and peace. And peace is a wonderful thing to have. Just have patience with yourself and with others, too.

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." — Jn 14:27

Choose FAITH. Choose POWER. Choose PEACE.

And CONQUER!—*One day at a time.*

May God be with you!