

2 Books In One

*Who Am I
And
Where Am I Going*

And

Jesus, My Best Friend

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Where Am I Going*

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Introduction

How many times have you asked yourself the question, who am I and where am I going? Young people and older ones alike ask themselves that question. What direction are you headed in with your life? What are your goals? Who are you and how do you fit into God's plan and purpose for your life? These are common questions that teenagers ask. How you answer them can determine a lot of things. If you are just drifting through your life with no real plan or purpose, then it is easy to drift into trouble, and to drift into things that can mess up your future. If you have no vision or goal for your future, then you won't guard it. You won't keep things out of your life that can mess up your future. If you don't have a goal for tomorrow, and you hang around with people who don't have goals, then it is easy to fall into actions and attitudes that can mess up your future, even if you don't see it at the time. The Bible says that when people lack a vision, they perish. To put it in modern day talk, if people don't see a purpose in their lives, if they lack a direction, they will perish. I see this so much.

It is important to find your identity in God . If you know who you are, then you won't fall into the traps that many people who have a lack of self identity fall into. If you have an identity, then you won't let other people take your identity away. You will stand up for who you are. You will make the right choices, and not fall into just being whoever, for whatever crowd that is there.

The purpose of this book is to help you find your direction, and your identity as a person. I pray that by reading this, the direction of your life is changed for the better.

Chapter 1.

Tell My Children They Belong

One of the great things about serving God is that you can find a real relationship with Him. Just like any relationship, you can walk and talk with Him. He can direct you by speaking to your heart. Before I write, I always pray and ask the Lord what it is He wants me to say. Then from chapter to chapter I pray. I can write what I want to and that is fine. But if I ask Him to speak to my heart what it is He wants to say, it will turn lives and hearts around. When I asked Him what He wanted to say in this book, His answer was quick, loud and clear. He told me, “Tell my children that they belong to me.” We all have a need to belong. We want to try to fit into a certain crowd to say that we belong with them. We want a special boy or girl friend to say we belong with them. We want to develop a special gift or talent or sport ability so we can say that this is what makes us belong in a certain crowd. We even become afraid that we aren’t cool enough, or good enough to belong. We compromise sometimes on who we are and what we believe so that we can fit in. Still, many times after we’ve done all those things, we feel empty and we still feel like we don’t belong. When young people are surveyed about their greatest fears and insecurities, across the country they answer loneliness. Why? Because they have forgotten Who they belong to.

You belong to God. Now that may at first make you want to react in a couple of ways. In one way we want to belong to ourselves and we don’t exactly want to belong to anything like God. Belonging to God to a lot of young people means having to live by a lot of strict rules and not getting to have any fun. Another way you might react when you hear you belong to God is fear. A lot of people see God as Someone Who sits in the heavens waiting to rain judgment on whoever isn’t perfect. Or, you might react this way, “Well there goes **my** life and **my** way.” All of these different reactions are a little mixed up. Let’s talk a while to get things straight. Your first reaction may be, “Well why would I want to belong to God. I belong to me.” When you think that way, I know you don’t have all of the facts.

Let's see if we can't present them.

First, to understand how all this works, we have to understand who God is and what He is really like. Then we can understand what it means to belong to Him. Then we can find out if it's a good thing or not to belong to Him. Fair enough? The best place to go to understand God is to His Word. John 3:16 tells us an important fact about what God is like. In all the verses that I'll use, I'll write them out, but it still would be a good idea to get out your Bible and read them. Then you can read the other verses next to the verse I give you so that you can get the bigger picture. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This tells you about God's nature. He loved you enough that He gave His only Son so that you could be forgiven and receive eternal life with Him. What a love! Nobody else would do that for you. He sent His Son to die for your sins, not for your best points, not because you were very smart, not because you were perfect, but He sent His Son to die because He knew you would mess up, and this was the way that forgiveness had to come.

Somebody had to die for your sins. Jesus was the only perfect one. He didn't have any sin. He died to take the punishment for yours. (That's why it's so important to get forgiveness for your sin, but never take it lightly, and never go back and purposefully do that sin again.) Here are some more verses that tell us what God is like. Jeremiah 31:3, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee." Romans 5:8, "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." I John 3:2, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God...." One of my favorite passages is Ephesians 3:17-19, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." This is another verse that talks about how big God's love is.

Ephesians 5:2, “ And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor.” I John 4:16, “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love and He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in Him.” So now we start to get the picture of what God is like. God is love.

Now there are two sides to that love. Think for a minute of some of the best teachers that you learned the most from. Was their class a free-for-all because they didn't have discipline, or they didn't have rules? Probably not. If those teachers really cared about teaching, they had discipline in their classroom. Even if love was the basis for that discipline, and they were fair, they still wanted the best for you. Having a free-for-all and getting to do whatever you wanted wasn't the best for you.

Love comes with rules and regulations. My parents always disciplined us when I was growing up. There were always rules and regulations. I can remember telling my mother, “I can't wait until I am 18 and out on my own and nobody can tell me what to do.” Well, when that time finally came, let me tell you it was the scariest time I have ever been through. It felt like nobody was there to direct me. I was out on my own. There was nobody to answer to, or so I thought. It was so scary. I started drinking and taking drugs to be able to cope. I meet many young people today who do the same thing. They call it partying, but it really means copping out on a reality that seems too hard to deal with. This is a rough world, and handling it on our own without guidelines is rough.

We may not admit it, but we need rules and regulations for our life. I work at a Christian school. I never will forget the time that I had two young people in my office. The girl thought her parents were too strict.. The boy was from a split family. He lived with his mother and she didn't know where he was half of the time. He had some major problems in his life, but she didn't know about them or care. The girl from the strict home was complaining about having too many rules. The boy let her have it. He told her in no uncertain terms that having love meant having rules and guidelines. He didn't have those rules and guidelines. He knew that his mother didn't care.

What am I trying to say with all this? God is a God of love. And yes, He has rules and guidelines for our life. If anyone tells you they love you, but don't care if you do things to mess up your life, get away from them, because they don't care about you. God loves you. He is perfect in His love. He's perfect in His knowledge and understanding. He knows tomorrow as well as He knows yesterday and today. He is definitely in the know. Nobody can know what is best for you better than He can. Not even you yourself. I don't know about you but I need that because I am human. I need a perfect God with perfect guidelines. He isn't there to mess up your life, but to keep it together. He isn't there to take away the fun, but to clean up the fun so that it doesn't destroy your life, so that it actually will be fun. He is not there to take away from who you are, but to help you be the best that you can be. Our life can get out of whack so easy. He gives us guidelines to help us to keep it straight. It's kind of like riding one of those bikes that don't have handlebars, a unicycle. It is really hard to balance one of those things. We need handle bars to keep our balance. We need something to hold on to when things get rough. We need something to get us going in the right direction when we feel so confused we don't know which way to go. And believe me, in life you will have a lot of those times.

I can remember when I was a teenager that I became convinced that being a Christian was for very boring people who didn't want a life. Who else would want God messing up their life? Boy, did I have things wrong. When I came back to the Lord after messing up my life completely in just a couple of years of what I called "having fun", I knew better. When I gave my heart and life completely to Him and accepted His will for my life, I asked Him to please give me an exciting life. Through my 25 years of serving Him, I can tell you that he definitely answered that prayer. I have gotten to do most all that I ever dreamed of doing and a lot more. I was able to do this by serving Him and obeying Him. In all those years, I have never regretted giving my life to Him. How did I get to have all this excitement? I found out Who I belonged to and gave my life to Him. Everything He led me to do I have done it with all my heart.

I loved Him for that wonderful love that He gives me.

I accepted His way and found out that it worked so much better than my own way. I often wonder what my life would have been if I had not found out Who I belonged to. I had gotten into so much junk that my life at one time didn't mean much to me at all. It was such a mess. After I switched sides, for 20 years my fun has not stopped. I never have a boring day. Honest! I just ask God what I can get into for the day. You know what the best part of all this is? This will last for forever. Do I have any regrets? Only one. I regret that I hadn't stayed with God when I was very young. I wish that I didn't have the scars of the life I lived before I gave my heart to Him for good. I wished I wouldn't have experienced the things I did while I was having fun my way.

We don't really know what it is best for us, even when we think we do. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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." We need to be like David who wrote Psalm 25:4-5, "Shew me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day."

Now that we know what God is like, and we've decided to take His way and not our own, how do we really find His way. The number one place to start is to find a real relationship with Him. He is real. To do this, first you have to ask Him to come into your heart for real. He will. That is one invitation that is never turned down. Then He is really in your heart. No, I don't understand how it happens, but I know it is real because it has happened to me, and millions of others down through time.

We won't always understand how the things of God work. We don't have to. I don't understand how a TV works exactly in all the details; just how a remote control works is awesome. I may not understand how a lot of things work, but that doesn't stop me from using them. As I said before, God's ways are above our ways. Our little finite brain can't understand it all. Even though we can't understand it, it still works. When He comes into our heart, He is real. We can feel Him there.

We have to learn to be able to tell His voice. We have to learn to listen to Him.

I can definitely say that in the 25 and more years of our friendship, He has been the best friend that I have ever had, and I have been privileged to have some great ones because God's people make some great friends. If I have needed Him in the middle of the night, He was there. He never considered His own desires and manipulated them over my needs. He never failed me. He never let me down. His love was there even when I didn't deserve it and it got me up and going when I didn't. He has been the perfect guide to light my path. Nobody else could have taken His place. Sometimes we don't want to serve God with all of our hearts because if we do, we might have to give up someone who prevents us from doing so. We usually wind up loosing twice. It costs us our relationships with that person eventually, because if it stands between God and us, it won't work. If you have to compromise on your relationship with God to keep a friend, it will eventually cost you your relationship with that person and with God. It is never worth it. Nobody is worth going to hell for.

Who do you belong to? Now that you know a little more about how things really are, do you want to belong to Him? He wants you to know that if you have accepted His salvation, you belong to Him. What greater thing can you belong to? You are His. If you haven't accepted His salvation, then you need to. It isn't hard to do. Pray. Confess your sins before Him. Let Him know that you are willing to belong to Him. Ask Jesus to come into your heart. Romans 10:9 tells us, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." It also says in verse 11, "For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed."

Maybe you have let a lot of things come between you and God. We can get carried away from Him in our life. He stops being a priority and serving Him takes second place. Our life can get all out of whack that way. We can forget His love and what He means to us. If that has happened to you, take time now to pray and ask Him to make things right. Confess your sins.

Accept His forgiveness. Be determined not to go that route again. Ask Him to give you the strength to be able not to. Make belonging to Him a number one thing in your life. Find His love.

Chapter 2. *We Belong To His House*

Not only do we belong to Him, but we also belong to everybody else who belongs to Him. Now I know that sounds like double talk, but it's true. If you love Jesus with all your heart, and you are doing your best to serve Him and do what He asks, then that makes you friends with His friends. His friends are the best. The great thing about this is that they are found the entire world over. You become part of God's House, part of His family. When I say His house, I don't really mean just one church or even a certain denomination. I find people from God's house in all kinds of beliefs and all kinds of denominations. What do they have in common? They all belong to God.

There is nothing more special than being a part of God's family. They are in love with Him and that makes them automatically love you, because He loves you. They are striving to do their best not to hurt Him, so you can trust them not to hurt you. If they do, He convicts them, and they have to come back and make it right with you. They may not always be perfect, but they will work things out with you. Sure, everywhere I go, I hear, too, about how Christians fail God, hurt the church, and hurt people. When I hear this, I know that the people who do this junk are saying that they belong to God, but they really don't. You can say anything. But possessing it for real is a different story. These people aren't a part of God's family. You can depend on God's family. God's family can even grow to be closer to you than your own family. You can depend on them to be there when you need them. The neat thing about it is even though they don't know you they are connected to you. I have been able to travel. I've been to several places where there were only a few people that spoke my language. But I could understand those that were my brothers and sisters in the Lord. They showed His love in their eyes. I could see Him in what they did.

I could see Him by how they reacted, how they reached out to others. They didn't need to tell me that they were God's kids. I already knew. I knew I was a part of them. Being a part of God's family is awesome. It stretches around the world. You can belong to a lot of things. You can belong to great clubs and organizations, but there is none greater than God's family, His true church.

When you read about the first church in the Bible, it tells how God's house should be like. They shared everything. That doesn't just mean what they had, but they also shared hearts. They shared good and bad times and became a part of one another. They got along in one Spirit in one accord. That means they were all following God's Spirit and being led by Him. They stayed in prayer. They started a revival that changed the world. In one meeting, over 3,000 souls were saved. They turned their world upside down. The book of Acts tells the story of the first church. Our churches should be like that today. If we make serving God a priority, we can do the same. Who knows what God could use you to do? I have seen turned on teenagers do a lot of world changing things.

One time Elijah, a prophet of God, went through a really hard time. He got scared because he thought that he was the only one who was serving God. Now that could have been a true fact because there was this really wicked queen, Jezebel, who was killing everybody who was serving God. She believed in the God Baal (he was a statue that they worshipped), and she was destroying anyone who didn't. Elijah's story is found in I Kings chapters 17-20. One day Elijah started belly aching to God that he was the only one that God had who was standing up for what he believed in. God told Him in chapter 19 verse 18 that there were 7,000 people in Israel who hadn't served the false god.

Sometimes it may seem like you are the only Christian in the world. It may seem that you are surrounded by people who persecute you for taking a stand, and that even if there are others who are, they are compromising in what they believe. One of the devil's greatest tricks is to make you think that it doesn't matter if you make a stand. He wants you to think that you are alone, and nobody cares if you are a witness for God. That's not true.

Don't let him convince you of this. It may be that you are like Elijah, and 7,000 people in your neighborhood are having the same battle that you are, but they aren't saying anything. Don't ever think that your stand won't make a difference. Read Elijah's story for more. Find out what a difference he made.

In chapter 19 verse 9 he even ran and hid in a cave, he was so afraid of standing. He talked to God there and when he came out, God came out with him. He stood boldly and changed his world. Don't think that you aren't making a difference. You have God inside of you, and He may be using to do things that you don't even see. You belong to Him and you belong to the greatest family on earth, the family of God. You are definitely not alone.

Chapter 3.

The Circle of God's Children

I used to look at different Christians, and I wondered why some seemed so close to God and some were very far away. I wondered why God used some while it seemed like so many were just used by the devil. I got afraid that I wouldn't be able to serve God the way that I wanted to. I was afraid that I would mess up, disappoint God, and fail the people around me. I wasn't alone in that. I have met many young people who are so afraid that they can't live a Christian life. They won't commit to serving God 100% because they are afraid they will fail. I was so afraid that I ran away from Him for several years until I got so tired of running that I came back. I wished that I wouldn't have done that. When I came back to serving God, I finally realized that what I was running from was a fear of my weaknesses and myself. I had not understood that when we accept Jesus in our heart and we commit our life to Him, He is there to make a difference from the inside of us to help us to overcome our weaknesses and even make them the strongest parts that we have. I learned that He loved me enough to help me to change in spite of my mistakes. I learned that His Word has the power to change us when we read it, take it into our heart, and apply it to our lives. It can get into our mind and heart and change us. I learned that the Holy Spirit gives us boldness to do right and it sanctifies, or cleans up our mind and heart. I learned that Jesus died to forgive us, not because we would be perfect, but because He knew we weren't. I also learned that He didn't leave us there just to fail again, but if we commit 100% He will work in us and even our biggest weakness will become our greatest strength. I also learned that I wished that I hadn't run before I found all this out.

Stick with God, and you can make it through whatever you have to face. It will become harder to fail than to be victorious. How can you lose when even your mistakes are turned out for your good. You don't have to have faith in yourself, just faith in God to overcome. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God

hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Another verse is Galatians 2:20 which says, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” We do what we do as Christians from the least to the greatest just because He is in us and we have faith in Him, not faith in ourselves.

So, if it is that easy, why do so many people mess up? Some even mess up after serving God for years. I asked God to explain that once. He explained by showing me a picture in my mind. Sometimes God will show you things to help you understand. He is a great teacher. The best. To teach me about this He put a picture in my mind. In this picture, there was a circle of children. (I talk a lot about being children of God. Hey, at my age it’s a great thing to be thought of as being a child. It’s not a put down to be considered a child when you are a child of God. When we are God’s kids, that doesn’t mean we are too immature to be out on our own. It means that God loves us and we are His children. I John 3 tells us, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God....” The Bible tells us a lot that we are children belonging to our heavenly Father. Jesus called God Abba, which means Daddy.)

Back to the picture, that God showed me. I saw a circle of children. Jesus was in the center of the circle. Some were gathered right around Him, as close as they could be. Around that circle was another circle of children. Then there was another circle behind that. Then another. I thought to myself why did He gather that one circle closer to Him while He left some of the others so far away. It seemed like He was partial to the little circle right around Him. Then God showed me the attitudes on the faces of the children. He didn’t at first show me the faces of the children who were closest to Him. He showed me the circle of children next to them. They were looking at Him and the ring of children that were closest to Him and you could tell they were longing to be in that circle. You could feel that they wanted to run to Him, but they were afraid to. They were afraid He might reject them. Maybe at one time other people had rejected them.

They were afraid to come any closer to Him. They stayed back. They were afraid that He wouldn't love them as much as He loved the ones closest to Him. Some were condemned from sins that they had done in the past and they were afraid they weren't forgiven. Some were beaten down by the devil that condemned them. Jesus would glance longingly at them, but you see, God loves us and draws us to Himself, but we are the ones that have to come forward. He cannot go against our free will. His love was as great and true for all the children there no matter how far away they were. He would have in a minute wrapped them all in His arms, but they wouldn't come closer. They wouldn't receive His love.

The next row of children further away from them looked at Jesus with longing, but more than that, they were looking at the other children. They wanted to be a part of the children more than being a part of Jesus' love. They wanted to do whatever they could to make the other children notice them, even if it was something that was wrong. They did this or that to get everyone's attention. The circle of children around Jesus didn't notice them because He was the center of their attention. Those in that outside circle couldn't get past paying attention to the other children to be able to focus on Jesus so that they could get closer to Him. You see they wanted to be the center of attention. To serve God, He has to be the center. They soon became jealous because they weren't being paid attention to, and because Jesus didn't come and pay attention to them like He did the others. He wasn't being fair to them, they would say. They wanted the gifts and love that Jesus was passing out to those who were closest to Him, but they wouldn't do what they needed to do to get them. They wouldn't get closer, reach out and receive. Some of them had weights in their hands that weighted them down so that they could hardly move closer. Some of these weights were there because they were tangled up in the world in things they shouldn't be in. They were also weights of sin, fear, and doubt because they weren't close enough to Jesus to feel His love. If they had been closer, they would have known that there is nothing to fear. If they had set the weights down, they would have been able to move closer. God can't take these things away from us.

We have to let them go, lay them down and give them to Him. Many of the children in this circle eventually gave up trying to move up and they would move back instead of forward.

The next ring of children further back was looking at what was all around them instead of looking at Jesus. They glanced at Him, but they were caught up in everything else and distracted from Him. They looked at the world and were eventually drawn by it so that they barely ever glanced at Jesus. They were too busy doing the things that the world was doing, and being a part of what everybody who wasn't close to Jesus was doing. They would then start to look at their circumstances and eventually, because they weren't close enough to feel God's love, they became wrapped in fear and doubt, condemnation and defeat. They would say why should I try any more because this just doesn't work. Some of the children in this circle wanted to be a part of Jesus love, but they didn't want to do what the others were doing to please Him. They wanted to do things their own way, so they just did their own little thing. This caused them to be pulled further away. Disobedience and self-will can cost us God's love.

Then last God showed me the circle of children closest to Jesus. They sat with their hearts and minds centered on every Word He said. They wanted to please Him in every detail because they loved Him so much. They were full of joy because He was happy with them. There was a glow coming out from Jesus. His love was so bright it glowed. Those children closest to Him were wrapped in this glow. Jesus was passing gifts to those around Him. Gifts like talents, anointing to serve Him, like spiritual and physical blessings. The children were anxiously receiving them. The last and most precious gift He gave them was eternal life with Him, the One Who they loved and desired to follow with all their heart.

Sometimes some of the children in the outside circles would break away and move up a ring. Sometimes they would get all the way to the circle closest to Jesus. Many never made it all the way, because something would get in their way that they wouldn't turn loose of. Those that were able to make it all the way were made welcome by the One Who loved them all along.

Jesus' love was the same for them all, but only those that pressed closest to Him received it in the fullest measure. Only those closest in the circle around Him received His gifts because they were reaching out to Him, trusting Him to give those gifts to them. We belong to the greatest circle ever—the circle of God's children. Where we wind up in that circle depends on us. Press on in close to Jesus He longs to love you. Don't let anyone or anything come between you and Him. Keep your eyes on Him. He will change you and grow you.

You belong in the circle of His love. How close you get to Jesus, and how much of His love that you receive will be up to you. If you make Him number one in your life, and you let go of all the things that can stop you and mess up your life, then you can stay in that circle that is close to Jesus. There fear and doubt will have to move out of your life. There you will know you are loved. How much of Jesus' love that you receive will be up to you and what you do with His love.

Chapter 4. *You Are Sheep*

If you look at the title of this chapter, you may think, great, now what is this crazy lady telling us? We are sheep. I can just hear what you're thinking now. But wait a minute. Hey, I am not just making this up. Here are some verses that prove it. Psalm 79:13 tells us, "So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give Thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth Thy praise to all generations." In Ezekiel 34:11-12 God says, "For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." King David in Psalm 23 wrote my favorite verses of all about sheep when he was a shepherd. Read it. There is a lot more references in the Bible that compare God's people with sheep.

Now these verses weren't just written by people. When people wrote the Bible, they didn't make up in their mind what to write on their own. They prayed and asked God what to write. God showed them what to put in His Words. That's why one verse said, "For thus saith the Lord God". God did say it. He just didn't hold the pen to write it down. He used one of His people who were paying attention to what He wanted to say. That is what makes the Bible one of the most special books in the world. No other book has been credited with changing lives all the way through time. It is a living book that speaks to our hearts today the same as it did to those thousands of years ago. It is God's Word and He says about it in Matthew 5:18, "For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle (which means every dot over the letter i and every cross on the letter t) shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Pretty important book, huh. Well we can definitely get the idea from His Word that God thought about people as being sheep. Let's look at why.

I think God wants us to know that we are His sheep. We are His sheep in His pastures. He is our Shepherd.

This is an example that paints something in our hearts. Sheep are protected by their Shepherd. There are also many verses that tell us that Jesus and God are our Shepherds. The Shepherd's job is to take care of the sheep day and night. He guards them against their enemies. He guides them out of harm and into the best places to be. He leads them even when they don't understand where they are going and why. Nobody will care for a particular flock of sheep like their very own Shepherd. Our Shepherd, Jesus, even gave His life for His sheep. We are His sheep. Read John 10:1-18. In that section in verse 14, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." We aren't just sheep of any pasture. We are the sheep of **His** pasture. He has the best pasture. He can provide for us and meet all our needs. He even gives us the desires of our heart if they are right ones. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." That means if you delight in being with Him and delight in serving Him, He will personally see to it that you get your heart's desires. His pastures are definitely the greenest around. They will also be the safest and the most protected.

When we serve God, it doesn't mean everything will be perfect. We still live in an imperfect world with imperfect people. Worse, of all we are not perfect ourselves and we are more prone to make a mess of life than to do well. Also, we have an enemy, the devil, who will try to destroy us and mess us up in every way that he can. He hates you because God loves you and he can't stand God. It is the devil's job to harass you until you turn your back on God and give up. Then he can swallow you whole. The Bible calls him a roaring lion. However, we don't have to fear him. If we don't listen to him and believe his lies and head in his direction, he can't hurt us. When we tell him to go away in the name of Jesus, the Bible says that he has to go.

Even with all the imperfection that is in the world and in us, and even with the devil who tries to destroy us, if we trust in our Shepherd He will keep us. Psalm 37:3 tells us, "Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." Psalm 37:5 says, Commit thy way unto the

Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” Psalm 31:19 tells us, “Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!” No, things may not be perfect, but with a Shepherd who protects and guides us, we can go through everything that we have to face. No matter what circumstances happen, we know that we can trust in His care. We can have peace in an upside down topsy-turvy world.

Many people get bitter and mad at God when something happens to them or to someone they love. When they do, it is because they don't understand what has happened, or they are looking at it all wrong. For one thing, God gets a lot of blame for stuff He doesn't do. I remember one girl whose sister was killed in a car wreck. This girl got so mad at God because that happened. Come to find out, the sister was at a party and got in a car with a drunk driver. When we make bad choices we have to face the consequences of what we do. That is not God's fault. Also, the devil and people that give into him cause bad circumstances to come into our lives. That isn't God's fault. That's life. Even then, He is there to give us strength and He promises to make good out of even the worse circumstances. Romans 8:28 tells us, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Sometimes things may happen that we just can't understand. When they do, don't run away from the Shepherd, run to Him and ask Him to show you.

The most important job of the sheep is to stay with the Shepherd. If a sheep doesn't follow his shepherd, and wanders away, the shepherd can neither lead nor protect him. If a sheep refuses to follow the leading of the shepherd and tries to graze in the rocks instead of in the green grass, he will starve. If the Shepherd is trying to lead the sheep away from something that can destroy them, and they don't go, then they may get eaten whole. If we don't listen to our Shepherd and we want to do our own thing our own way, it isn't His fault when we get into trouble. We need to find out where He is leading us and go there. Flow with Him in the same direction He is going in. After all, He knows us even better than we know ourselves.

Chapter 5. *One With Him*

One of my favorite sections of verses in the Bible is found in John 17. If you ever start to doubt Who you belong to, you need to read this chapter. It is in Jesus' own words. To really understand it, you have got to realize that Jesus wasn't just born as a baby at Christmas. Before He ever came to earth, He was in heaven and was with God and was even a part of God. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". Verse 14 says "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." He had a perfect life in a perfect world. He is very close to His Father, so much so that they are like one. He shared that perfect world with His Father. He gave it all up to come to earth, to be born as a little baby, to grow up just like you, to live and die. He did this so He could understand what you go through in life. He knows what it's like to be 10, 16, or 20 years old. He has been there. Most importantly, He came to die so that you could be forgiven and so that you could have eternal life.

Jesus wants us to be one with Him and His Father, just as they are one with one another. He wants us to be one with Him for forever. He has a lot of love for His Father. He wants us to share in that love and be a part of them. How do I know? Here it is in His own Words in John 17 verse 21, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. Verse 23, "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

The book of John is a great place to read about God's love. It tells about Jesus' life and what He is like. We can learn about His ways and what we can expect Him to be like by reading about how He was on earth. We need to spend time reading the Bible. Then we need to pray and ask God to explain to us what He is trying to say. He can show us what it means.

The Bible is the only book whose author can live inside us. The author can live inside our own heart and teach us about the book. Then it is important to live by what it says. Apply it to your life. If God instructs you to change something in your life, change it. If He instructs you to do something or not to do something any longer, then do what He says. If you don't, then His Word won't help you at all. You will be like the man who looked in the mirror and saw what a mess he was, but went away never changing the mess. What good did it do for him to look at all?

Another book of the Bible that talks a lot about God's love is what I call the little John's, I John, II John, and III John. The Disciple John wrote these too. Not only do these books talk about God's love but also about how we are to love one another. One of my favorite verses is I John 3:1. Another of my favorites is I John 3:16 and I John 4:7-19. Next time you feel all alone like no one is there and no one cares, get your Bible out and read these verses.

The Bible tells us that the devil is the accuser of the brethren day and night. He will sit on your shoulder and whisper that you are worthless, that you will never be able to serve God, that you are a failure, that you have no one that cares about you, and on and on he'll go. If you feel unloved and like you don't belong, he may be what is making you feel that way. Shake a little of God's Word in his face. Remind him who you are and remind him of God's love for you. Tell him to go away in the name of Jesus and leave you alone. It may take a while for him to get the idea that you mean business and that you aren't going to listen to his trash, but he eventually will go away. At least until he gets another idea. Each time you stand against him you grow stronger. You not only belong, you are loved as a Son of God. Revelations 21:7, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son."

Chapter 6. *The Prodigal Son*

The Prodigal Son story that Jesus told is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. It is a story that He told to describe His Father's love. It is found in Luke 15:11-32. Read it. The son in the story got like a lot of us do. He didn't want his dad around telling him what to do. He wanted to party, spend time with his friends, and find out what the world was all about. He begged for his inheritance money early and he set out down the road without looking back. He had what he thought was a good time. Until times got hard. Until he ran out of money. When he did, he ran out of friends too. Guess he found out they weren't really friends after all. Watch out who you call friends. Just because somebody is there in your life, it may not be that they are there for you or because they really care about you. It may be that they are there to take from you instead of to be friends. A lot of young people mess up their lives for people they think really care about them and when their life is a wreck they find out they weren't friends at all. Just users. Besides that, the devil knows just what friends to send your way to trick you, to destroy your life, and to keep you from serving God. Watch out for those people. They will always say stuff like, "Hey, this is cool to be this way. There's nothing wrong with it. You are just old fashioned, country, or red necked, or whatever name they call you." Don't fall for his tricks. Stand up for yourself. If you don't, everybody will use you.

Well, without money or friends this young man found himself one day feeding a farmer's pigs. There had been a famine in the land and this was the only job he could find. Sometimes he got so hungry that he actually ate the pig's food. The Bible says he came to himself. He finally got a little sense. He thought about how even the servants at his Father's house ate better than that. He thought that if he went home maybe his father would let him live there and be like a servant. He started home. He had a hard time the whole journey. He knew that he had messed up and he dreaded what his father's reaction would be.

As he got near to his house, he saw someone standing on the hill. As he got closer, he knew it was his Dad. His Dad had gone out everyday to look for him, hoping to see him come home. What a homecoming! He wasn't greeted as a servant, but as a long lost and looked for son. He was forgiven and restored.

I guess the main reason why I love that story is because at one time I was a Prodigal daughter. As a teenager, I tried to find my life in things other than God. I tried to find the place where I belonged and who I was, by looking in all the wrong places and with all the wrong people. I left God entirely and tried everybody else's way. It didn't take long for me to mess up my life by doing what we call having fun. By the time I made up my mind that I wanted to go back home to my heavenly Father's house, I had done all kinds of bad stuff. I needed forgiveness. I wasn't sure God would welcome me back. I wasn't sure He would forgive me. I was so afraid that He wouldn't that it took me a long time to go back home. Just like the Prodigal's Father God had waited for me all the time. He had been there loving me, watching over me, and leading me back to Him. He welcomed me back, forgave me, and I was still His child. His love is so great for His kids. I can't understand the people that go back to God after messing up their life, stay a while to serve Him, then when somebody comes along to follow, or when something is dangled in front of their nose to tempt them, they take off again. God's love is precious. His forgiveness is precious. Don't play games with it. He will help you to be strong enough to stand. You just have to make up your mind that is what you want for your life.

Since God is our Father, we need to remember that He cares about what we do. When we start off in a way that is wrong, He will convict us in our hearts and draw us away from what is bad. Thank God He does. When He does this, we have to be sure to listen. What good does it do for Him to direct us if we make every excuse in the book and go do it anyway.

If you have left God and have taken off down a road that has left you empty and lost, He is there waiting for you to turn around and come home. He will forgive you and welcome you back. He's waiting for you to make that decision. Run Home.

And if you are home? Home is such a wonderful place. I mean both kinds of home-your home with your family, and God's family. There are a lot of kids who would love to have a decent home and a family who cares. Appreciate yours. And if it isn't perfect? Find the best in it and hang onto it. Then ask God to change the rest.

When you are in trouble, your Father will be there. When you mess up completely and totally, your Father will be there. When you are 16, 40, and 60, your Father will be there. For how long, for forever. Go home and stay.

Chapter 7. ***For Whom I Died***

Sometimes when I was a young Christian, I would get on that nobody loves me trip. Sound familiar? Here's what it sounds like. "Nobody cares. I don't fit in anywhere. I am too young, too old, too fat, too skinny, my hair isn't straight, isn't curly, I can't do anything right, I'm ugly, and on and on and on." You know how it goes. Especially in this rat race world when everybody is busy doing everything other than spending time together, sometimes we feel isolated. Maybe we don't have anybody there to remind us that we are special. Maybe your family has been split up. That is always hard. That kind of comes with a ready-made guilt trip. When that happens it is easy to blame yourself, though you probably don't deserve it. That divorce stuff happens between parents, not between kids. I guess the first thing that we need to remember when we go through what I call the ugly times, is that nobody's perfect. We have to learn to see our good as well as our bad. We have to understand that sometimes in being a teenager (and older) those negative feelings are a part of what we go through. It is up to us whether or not we give into them. We need to realize too that they are part of the devil's plan to get us discouraged. We need to call his bluff, remember who we are and Who we belong to. The best way to fight these feelings is to remember how precious you are in the eyes of Jesus. Here is a song that the Lord gave me when I was having one of those blah times.

You Are Precious In His Eyes.

Verse 1

I had seen the pictures of the nail scars in His hands.

I had seen the crown of thorns they placed upon His head.

But I hadn't seen that look of love

He had for me as He looked down thru time.

I hadn't seen just how precious I was in His eyes.

Chorus

*You are precious in His eyes
For you He bled for you He died.
You are hidden in the palm of His hands.
He is the shepherd, you are His lamb
Rest secure in His command
You are precious, oh so precious in His eyes.*

Verse 2

*Don't you know how precious you are
Just how much He loves you.
Those nail scars in His hands, His feet
They were there for you.
The mocking that He suffered,
That crown of thorns on His head, too.
He would have hung there on that cross
If it had been for only you.*

Once when I was going through a time of condemnation and feeling worthless, Jesus spoke to my heart. The Bible says that He speaks to His kids (John 10:3). You can hear Him. It may not be a big booming voice that you hear, but a soft voice in your heart. Anyway, He spoke to me and showed me a picture in my mind of His hands reaching out for me. In His hands were the nail prints where He hung on the cross. He told me, "I did this for you. You are engraved in the palms of my hands." Wow, that changed my life. Anytime after that when the devil or my own foolish self tried to put a saddle of condemnation on me and ride me down, I pictured those precious hands and those nail scars. "For you", He said. I guess that I had known that Jesus died for the sins of the world, but until that moment, I didn't realize how personal it was.

Do you know now that if you had been the only one, He would have died just for you? Who do you belong to? You belong to One Who died for you. Who loves you as much as Jesus? What about those friends who laugh because you talk about Him? What about those friends who make fun of you

because you won't do the stupid things that they do? Are they really friends? What about those that call you a geek because you read the Bible? What about those friends who try to get you to go to parties where you know there will be junk going on that you don't want to be a part of? What about that boyfriend that says if you really love him you'll have sex with him, which could mess up both your lives for good? When you feel like you need to go along with whatever everybody else is doing because you want to belong, stop and think who do you really want to belong to. Did anyone else love you enough to die for you?

You are more precious than you will ever know. There are so few young people who are interested in serving Him. If you are, then you definitely have His notice. There are so few young people who are standing for Him. The Bible says in II Chronicles 16:9 "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." God's eyes are on you. He sees your battle to stand up for Him. He sees your lonely times when it seems like nobody else is going in the same direction. He hears you when you pray. Hold on. Things will get better. Whatever you are going through, there is joy in the morning. Hold on to Jesus. You are bought with a price and paid for with His precious blood. You'd better believe it. You belong.

This is sort of a P.S. I mentioned in the first part of this chapter some of the things that kids go through when their parents split up. In today's world, there are so many divorced parents. I think a lot of that is because people are caught up in worry and stress, and take it out on one another. I think too it's because they are focused on all the wrong things. For whatever reason, if your parents have divorced, you aren't alone. You aren't even in the minority. Divorce splits the children right down the middle. If this happens to you, you need to remember there is somebody to hold onto that you can count on that won't ever leave you, unless you turn your back on Him. There is Someone Whose love you can count on. I lost my own Dad several years ago and I really missed him. Loneliness and grief are hard to go through. You may go through grief when a parent leaves, and sometimes even though they haven't died.

Hey, at any age you need a Dad. When my Dad died I turned to God and He took the place of my Father. If either of your parents has left, or if you are split between the two, hold onto God. In a divorced family there may come situations that are hard. You may have to go back and forth between families and your world rocks. Just hang on. It can turn out to be OK. Just pray and ask God to work it out for the best. Give new step-parents a chance too. Sometimes if you give them a chance, they turn out OK after all.

In a divorced family, or in a family that is together, it is important to remember that we need to help our family. Sometimes we just take. We don't think about giving. We don't ever let our parents know we appreciate them for what they do for us; we just grumble when we don't get everything we want. We don't see when they are tired, or going through something, we just want them to be there for us. We don't think of them as being humans, just something put there to serve us. Hey, give a little. It's a two way street. You maybe can help them be better parents, by trying to be the best kid. When your relationship with God starts to grow, your relationship with them will grow, too. When you think of your relationship with God, you have to think of your relationship with your earthly parents as well. Some of God's greatest commandments have to do with honoring your Father and Mother. One verse even tells us that honoring your father and mother is the way to have a longer life. (Exodus 20:12, "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.") Hey, that means to honor them even if they aren't perfect. Most of all honor and stick close to your heavenly Father. He'll stick close to you.

Chapter 8. *Who Am I?*

If I were to ask you who you are, you might answer all kinds of things. If you had just had a good day you might tell me positive things about yourself. If you had just had one of those days that were just “the pits”, you might tell me all the things you hate about yourself. Either way you will be missing the most important part of who you are.

God created us with an empty spot inside. When we accept salvation, and we ask Jesus into our hearts then He really comes in--for real. He fills up that empty spot that we have inside by coming into our heart. That totally changes who we are. We can look in the mirror and see something we don't really like when we look on the outside of who we are. I wish that you had a mirror that would show you what is going on inside of you. Jesus Christ, Son of God, through the power of the Holy Ghost (the Spirit of God) lives in you. He is really there. Start to praise Him and thank Him for saving you and see if you don't start to feel His joy well up from inside you. Start loving Him for His wonderful love for you and see if He doesn't start loving you back. Jesus is in your heart.

This story I'm about to tell is kind of funny because it tells about a boy that didn't know anything about what it meant to be saved. He had some different ideas about salvation. He didn't know anything about the Bible. He had been in street gangs and had lived a really rough life. He had been through a lot and had done a lot. He had a lot of hurt stuffed down inside. That made him like a steam pressure about ready to go off. He would spew out a lot. He had a terrible temper. It didn't take much to set him off. He decided though that he wanted to change and moved out of his old hang out to a new state, which was smart.

Sometimes if you want to change, you have to move out of your old hangouts. You might not be able to move to a different state, but you might need to stay away from old places with old friends. You can't change and hold onto the old way of life. Eventually the old will get you down. This boy knew that.

This boy started hanging around the church. He was looking for something, but he didn't even know what it was. He hadn't been around church people before. We started witnessing to him about giving his heart and life to the Lord. God started dealing with his heart. When God deals with your heart, you'll know it. It is important not to put Him off when He does. This boy started to repent of the wrong he had done. We taught him that the only way to change is to ask Jesus in your heart, and the change will come from the inside out. I could tell he really wanted to be saved, but he kept putting it off. He finally told me what was wrong. He told me that he was scared because he was afraid it would hurt when Jesus came into His heart. Well, we almost laughed but didn't. We finally convinced him that it wouldn't hurt and he got wonderfully, and gloriously saved. He even looked different on the outside.

A couple of days after he was saved somebody did something that made him mad. Now when I said before that this guy had a temper, I really mean he had a temper. He had one of those shaking all over and losing control kinds of temper. I watched him start to clench his fists. Then I saw a look of pure surprise cross his face and he just walked away. Later he ran up to me all excited. He said, "Did you see that. Now I know Jesus is in me." He told me that he was ready to blow when all of the sudden there came a peace inside his heart. That was a peace that was beyond what he was capable of. It was the peace from God, the peace of the Savior that was inside. He allowed Jesus to take control in that situation and came out with the victory and faith to stand through whatever tests he'd have to face.

You have Jesus inside of you. Trust him to take care of those weaknesses and those things that you hate about yourself. He'll change you from the inside out. Now answer the question, "Who are you?" You are the vessel that carries Jesus Christ, the living Son of God. Treat yourself with respect. Respect Who is in you. On those days when you feel completely stupid, stop a minute and remember that the wisest One Who ever lived, lives in you. When you feel like you are the ugliest of the ugly, remember the Rose of Sharon who lives in you and let His light shine, when you don't feel like you have one of your own.

When you think you can't stand up to the pressure of making the stand of being a Christian at school if you are in a public school, let His boldness rise up. When the pressures of it all make you feel like you want to scream, let His peace that passes all understanding rise up and calm you. When all your weaknesses roll up and slam you in the face, wait a minute. His strength is on the rise. When the devil is sitting on your shoulder and accusing you and giving you down the road, get back in his face and tell him a thing or two. Tell him, "Hey, I am a child a God. I have Jesus in my heart. Through Him, I can overcome every battle I have to face. I can outlast any storm. I have the strength, peace, joy, faith, longsuffering, meekness, gentleness, and power that I need to overcome. Jesus is in me." Look on past the mirror. Look into your heart. Look out world. You have Somebody very special inside you. You have something to do for God.

Chapter 9.

You Are a Work in Progress

We are a work in progress. That means that from the day that you accept Jesus in your heart until the day that you see Him (either because of the rapture when we will all be changed to be like Him, or until the day you die) God will be at work in your hearts and lives. He knows how to work things out in you that you can't do yourselves. The problem is, sometimes we don't let Him work. Let me give you an example. In the Old Testament, in I Samuel starting at the beginning of the chapter there is one of the neatest stories in the Bible. It is the story mainly of two men who became kings and the prophet Samuel who was used by the Lord in both of their lives. The first king was a king named Saul. Saul wasn't much in his own eyes. In I Samuel 9:20 the prophet Samuel told him that he would be king. He answered in verse 21, "And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? And my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Wherefore then speakest thou so to me?" He had such a low opinion of himself that he couldn't comprehend that God would speak to him to use him. It is easy to do that.

There is nothing greater in life than to be used by the Lord and live a life of obedience. Most of the things in the world that people do that seems so exciting to them, sometimes I look at and I think how boring. That's the truth. For one thing they spend a lot of money, time, and risk, and in the end what have they gained. What do they have to show for it? Most people go to work, go home, watch TV, and do a little stuff different now and then to say that they are having fun. Their life is so empty. Their life is meaningless. They feel like Saul and say in their hearts, "Who am I?" Do you feel the same way about your life? Are you excited when you wake up in the morning because you can't wait to see where God will lead you today? Or do you think your life is meaningless? God can change that. Saul stopped one day being an ordinary sort of guy and God reached down and made him king.

Later on in the 17th chapter of I Samuel another guy comes to the scene. His name is David. You have probably heard of him. He first appears as a shepherd boy who trusts God and slays a giant called Goliath. David also became king. He let God have his way with him and he became one of the mightiest kings Israel ever had. These men had a lot in common. Both thought they were pretty ordinary until God got hold of their lives. Both turned around one day and found themselves king. But there was a huge difference between the two.

If you read about Saul you start early to figure out that there were many times when he didn't do what God wanted him to. He made up his mind what he wanted to do and he did it. One such time we read about in I Samuel 15. In this story God told him specifically what to do. He didn't do it. He did what he thought was best. We aren't always as smart as what we think. We can't wait to get out on our own and do our own thing. But most of the time we don't have the backbone to stand up and do our own thing to start with. I see a lot of young people finding their identity in one another. They see one of their friends who they think is cool to the max with purple hair and they die theirs purple and spike it straight up. They see somebody they think is the greatest with rings in their eyebrows and they do the same. Or they put 3 rings in their eyebrows and one in their tongue, and tattoos all over. When their parents raise their own eyebrows they say, "I'm just trying to be myself." Bull. Most young people haven't bothered to find their own identity. They are just copying. We want to be out on our own to do our own thing, but we can't even decide what that really is. Don't feel bad. That is definitely a teenage thing, even though we don't want to admit we may be going through something that our parents went through at our age. Everybody needs to find themselves. The only way that you really can do that is by committing your life to God.

I tried it on my own. I made a real mess. Until I found my identity in God and gave my heart and life to Him, I was only a shadow. God created us to walk with Him and be a part of Him. Only when you do that will you find out that the emptiness inside you will leave and that turmoil will turn to peace.

Saul never found that peace with God that can only come when we commit and submit to God and obey Him. He never got past wanting to do his own thing. God called him to do something great and gave him the opportunity. When he needed to make a decision, the last person he consulted was God. When he needed to go left, he thought that the greatest thing that he could do was to go right and he did. He failed his country as a king, failed himself as a Christian, and most of all he failed God. What happened to him? Read the story. He wound up committing suicide. A lot of Christians are like Saul. They get a surface relationship with God. They think they know what God is telling them to do, only because it is what they want to do. They excuse away their sin and the wrong things that they are doing by using God's love as an excuse. They will say, "God will forgive me." They continue to do their own little thing. God sends His Spirit to convict them. He uses the people around them and His Word to talk to them. They continue making excuses and doing their own thing. When God says to go left they happily go right. They get so caught in rebellion and sinning that they don't even know that it is rebellion and sin. They are so busy making excuses that they forget the truth. God tries to direct their life and warn them. They are so far away from Him that they don't hear. They can no longer hear His voice. Sometimes their end is just like Saul's. Whether it is or not, they face hell at judgment.

To be able to find our home in heaven we have to know God and have a real, obedient relationship with Him. He is a God of love who sent His son that we could be forgiven. He sends His Spirit to live in our hearts to change us from the inside out. He sends His Word with the power that it has to change and direct our lives. If we continue to do our own thing instead of submitting to God, we will face His judgment. God is not a cheap God and the things that He has done are the very best. Every one of them comes with a price that He had to pay. If we walk past it all and continue to do our own thing, we won't escape His judgment. To make it to heaven we must have a relationship with Him. To have a real relationship with someone we can't be spoiled and busy only at doing our own thing. We can't have a relationship with who we think they ought to be.

We can't have a relationship with what we think they want us to be. We have to have some submission enough to find out who they are and do what they want, not what we think. We have to let God break our will and then He can live inside of us and lead us to do and be what we need to do and be. We can't be full of ourselves and full of God. Saul was full of himself.

In the same books, I and II Samuel, there is also the story of David. What made David and Saul different? Read their stories and find clues as to what you think the difference was. As you read the story of what David did, you'll find him constantly asking God what to do. Constantly he asked God which direction to take. You'll find him making some pretty big mistakes and doing some pretty major sins, but you'll also find him on his face before God repenting with all his heart for his sin. You'll find him trying to serve God, not himself. You'll find him constantly talking to God in a relationship with Him. Matter of fact, most of the book of Psalms is songs that David wrote to God, or about His love and goodness. Many of them tell about the battles that he faced, and David had a lot of battles, but they also tell about how God helped him find the victory. He trusted in God and God never failed Him. A lot of the Psalms tell about how he wept and cried asking God to make him a better man and a better king. Which of these two kings would you rather be? David wasn't perfect, but he committed and submitted himself to God and allowed God to rise up in him and use him. You are a work in progress. How much work God can do in you is only up to you. You can either let God work, or you can stop His work because you fill yourself up instead with your own will or with the world.

Even though we look at the Word of God to find out who we are in Him, we also have to look in Its pages to find out who we need to be. A lot of people take the first step and look at God's love for them. They become content in this and become complacent. That means they settle just to have God's love and then they act like they have made it all the way with God because He loves them. Finding God's love is just the beginning. There are a lot of Christians that never grow up past that. They never see that they have a responsibility because of that love.

They never see that they need to become someone that God can use. They never see that that love is so great that it demands a kind of behavior from us. If we love someone, and they treat us any way they want to and do whatever they want to and say the reason why they can do that is because they love us, then won't we wonder about that love? Do you really think God is any different? Obey God. Find a relationship with Him that is real. Walk and talk with Him. That may mean you have to give up your way. Is that really so bad? After all you want to be a work in progress. Not your work, but a masterpiece of God.

Chapter 10.

Where Are You Going?

I love to study about the lives of people in the Bible. When you read the Bible, you have to realize that these were real people just like you and me. They had strengths and weaknesses, just like you. Some turned out good, some turned out bad. The ones that let God direct them and work in their lives are still remembered today for the things that they accomplished in their lives. For thousands of years their stories have changed lives. You might even say that they will be remembered eternally. When we read their stories we realize what God can do for and in us if we will only let Him. We also learn attitudes and actions that we should have and ones that we need to avoid.

Here are some people that had the whole direction of their life changed. At one time in their lives they may have hated what was happening to them, but they trusted God that He would work it out for the better. He definitely did. See what you think.

Abraham had it all. He had roots in the area where he lived. He was wealthy. He had lots of land, and lots of friends. God told him one day to leave everything he had except what he could take with him. God told him that He had a plan for him. I think that the hardest thing about all this is that God didn't even tell him where he was to go. He didn't even tell him at first what the plan was, and why he was supposed to leave everything. He was just supposed to leave everything and go somewhere and he didn't even know where. Wow. No wonder in the stories of faith that are found in Hebrews chapter 11, that Abraham had a lot of verses devoted to him. He trusted God. He committed to Him. He obeyed.

When he got to the place that God led him to, God took him to a high mountain. He told him in Genesis 17:4-8, "As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be called Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee

and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land where in thou are a stranger, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” What did Abraham gain for his submission and his obedience to God? Today the nation of Israel stands as one evidence of the promise that God gave Abraham. Out of his seed or his family, the nation of Israel was born. Today it is one of the richest and most powerful nations in the world. Did God keep His promise?

Joseph is another person that let God direct his life. Read his story in Genesis Chapter 37-50. All of this bad stuff kept happening to Joseph. He had no idea why. First his brothers got jealous and sold him to be a slave in Egypt. Then he was accused of something that he didn't do and he was put into prison. He still served God, submitted to Him, and trusted Him. Where did all of this get him? To Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt. Pharaoh appointed him to be in charge of storing food during 7 years of prosperity to use during the 7 years of famine that came later. He became second in command over Egypt. Only Pharaoh was over him. God used him to save not only Egypt from starving, but the most of that part of the world, including the part where his brothers and father lived. I know that while he was going through the rough stuff that there was bound to have been times when he felt like giving up on serving God. But he didn't. Read the whole story. It's found in Genesis 37 through 46. God had a plan for him. Tens of thousands of people were glad that He did.

Paul, in the New Testament, was another one whose life's direction was changed. He was a big person in his Jewish church. He was a leader. Now they didn't believe that Jesus was the son of God. Matter of fact they were taught that Jesus had come to destroy the church and even destroy the government. He was taught to hate Christians. Paul was trying to stop the Christians. He captured them and delivered them up to be tortured. One day as he was on his way to capture a group of Christians, something happened that changed his whole life. His story is found in the book of Acts. Acts is a great book to read.

It talks about the early Christians and the early church. The story of Saul is found in Acts 9 and then throughout the rest of Acts. In Acts 9:3 something happened to Saul. “And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven; and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Again, Jesus showed up on the scene and another life was changed. Saul went from being a Christian killer to being a church starter. You may know him better as Paul, which is what God changed his name to. Paul started churches all over that part of the world. What did he do to reach out to you? He wrote 14 of the 27 books of the New Testament. Pretty powerful, huh. Wonder if we would have even heard of him if he had refused to let God have his way with his life.

Some of my favorite people who had their lives changed were the disciples. A number of them were fishermen. They left their nets and followed Jesus. Would we even know about them if they hadn't? They would probably just have died fishermen.

Now a lot of people will read this kind of stuff that I have just written and get all excited. They will want to run away from home and become great missionaries, or evangelists. They will want to go somewhere where they can turn the world upside down. I have actually known people who went way out on a limb, left everything they owned to serve God. Matter of fact I was one of those people, and I have never regretted it. I did this over 20 years ago. But I have also known a lot of people who did the same thing, and fell on their faces, destroying their lives and those around them in the process. What is the difference? Those that didn't make it forgot that there is a scriptural formula to serving God. There is a right way to do things.

Here are some things to remember in serving God:

1. We have to have a real relationship with God every day before we can follow Him into the great unknown. Abraham walked and talked and obeyed God every day before he left everything he had to go where God led Him. He knew God in a relationship that was real. He trusted God every day in faith.

Through our day-to-day obedience God will get us ready to do the things for Him. The things that He leads us to do.

2. We have to remember to start where we are. In what we call the great commission, Jesus gave one of the last commandments that He gave while on earth. He gave this after He died and rose again. It is found in Acts 1:8, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” In this scripture there is a certain order of how to do things that at first glance you might miss. Notice that the first thing that Jesus said was go to Jerusalem. He was talking about their hometown. First we have to witness to those that are around us everyday, our hometown people. These will be the hardest to witness to. They are the ones that are around you all the time. But if you can’t witness to them, you can’t go around the world and talk to those folks. Then you have to go to Judea, which is the same as your general state or country. Then you have to go to Samaria, which is the same thing as saying, you have to go to your sworn enemies. Samaria was a natural born enemy to Israel. They were such an enemy that Israelites were forbidden to even set foot in Samaria. They were a people who were despised and rejected by the Jews. Before you are ready to leave everything and go evangelize the world, you have to go to your enemies, to the people that you despise and carry God’s love to them. Then you will be ready to change the world.
3. To be able to leave everything and work for the Lord you have to learn to be submitted to Him and obedient where you are. Obedience is not easy. If you can’t be obedient daily to God where you are, then you won’t be able to do so if you are around the world in another country. Set yourself aside daily and obey God.

Do it His way. The more you obey the more He will tell you to do. As you grow daily in obedience, the more you will be used. Obedience will change your life.

4. The most important thing to remember is something that our school administrator often says in our graduation ceremonies at our Christian School. He almost always reminds the graduates that they can serve God where they are. Some of us may be called to be great evangelists, missionaries, pastors, and singers. But just as important, some of us may be called to be good mechanics, dentists, doctors, construction workers, nurses, and secretaries. Where would the greatest pastor be without a construction worker to build his new church, without a secretary to keep up with the daily office worker, without computer specialist to take care of setting up his computers, without a copier technician to make sure that his copier works so that he can get out his newsletter, without the bookkeeper who keeps his books, without the printer that prints the Bibles that he uses. I could go on and on. Get the picture? Grow where God plants you. Let Him direct your path. If it is to be a mechanic, be the best mechanic you can be. Good workers in this world who are Christians, with the Lord's ethics and His Spirit to guide them are few and far between. When I get ready to take my car to a mechanic, I make sure it is a mechanic who is a Christian. If I need someone to do house repairs, I want a Christian that I can depend on to do a good job. When my furnace needed replacing, I got a Christian furnace man because I knew that I wouldn't get cheated. If all the Christians were all called to work in a ministry, what about all those jobs that wouldn't get done. Maybe you have a calling to be a mechanic. Maybe you have a calling to drive a truck, be a beautician, work in a nursing home, or be a nurse. Whatever you do, remember you are there because God put you there.

Remember daily to obey Him. Let Him lead you to find the place where you need to fit. Turn that part of the world upside down.

If you don't know what you are supposed to do, and where you are supposed to go, seek God. He can show you. We will be talking about this more in this book.

I can remember when I first went away to college. I did not want to go. My parents almost dragged me. I had no idea of what I wanted to be. I spent the first couple of years rebelling and messing up my life. Almost by accident, I chose to take teacher's training. At the time I wasn't serving the Lord, but He was there anyway, directing my life. Eventually I graduated with a degree in teaching. I gave my heart to the Lord and submitted to Him. I finally got around to doing things His way instead of my way. I became a teacher. Eventually after several years of teaching in the public school, God led me to teach in a Christian School. Believe it or not I lost that job because of how I believed, but even that was in God's plan. Long about then our ministry decided to start a Christian School. That was 14 years ago. Now we also have a Christian College. Both our school and college have gone international. Hundreds of young people's lives have been changed. Not long ago I was counseling one of our students who had recently been saved. God had delivered her from drug abuse and had changed her life through the school. She was trying to decide what direction to take with her life. I told her that the most important thing that she could do when trying to decide what she was going to do with her life was to work on her day to day relationship with God, submit and obey Him, and go where He directed her. I shared with her my testimony of how God had led me. I asked her, "Where would you have been if I hadn't obeyed God? Where would you have been if I would have chosen a different direction because it was what I wanted to do?" I never will forget her answer. She answered, "I would have been dead." It is so important to let God lead you.

It is important to let God lead you in the direction that your life takes, and in choosing the career that you plan.

Chapter 11.

Time to Get A Vision

One of my favorite verses to use with counseling young people about their future is this, Proverbs 29:28, “Where there is no vision, the people perish...” I have seen a lot of young people who had no vision for their life. They had no purpose, no reason to try. Their future seemed to be something that was so far off that they couldn’t reach out to it. The problems of today were so great that they couldn’t see past them to reach out and grab hold of tomorrow. For you to be able to last through the storms of today, you need to have a vision. This means something ahead of you to press toward, a goal. The best place to find this goal is on your knees, praying for God’s to guide you. He can give you a reason to fight and survive. When you do find a God given goal, grab hold of it and don’t let it go. When you get this goal, get single minded, focus on it. Leave alone everything that will mess up your life and the chance that you will meet that goal. Everything that will cause you to be better at it, or come toward it, go for it with all your heart (after you have double checked with God that it is the right thing to go for-sometimes the devil can set traps to destroy us that look pretty good at face value).

Matthew 6:22-24 says, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness. No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (the world).” This section of scriptures has several sermons in it. If your eye is single, and focused, and intent on the direction that you are going in, and if your mind is focused and your heart centered, then you will be full of light. If you waver, your mind is not focused and heart centered, and you are double minded in the direction that you are ready to take, you will find yourself full of darkness. You can’t be double minded and do well at anything. You can’t be halfway split into to be able to make it.

If you aren't focused, then you will be trying to serve more than one master. If you have tried to straddle fences, then you know that it doesn't work. It is a good way to tear the seat out of your britches. Be wise and weigh out the cost of your decisions before you make a step. I mean even everyday decisions like, "Where am I going tonight and with who? What am I going to do about this person that is putting pressure on me to do this certain thing that I know am wrong? What do I do about this attitude that I've gotten, and what will it cost me if I don't get rid of it? Am I really getting out of bed this morning and going to school?" It is sad to say, but I have seen too many young people who let one bad decision destroy their life. For example, I knew a young man who really didn't party a lot, but he hung around the crowd that did. One night he was at a party and a guy told him, come with me and I'll give you the ride of your life. They had a bad accident. The one driving was killed instantly. The other guy was paralyzed from the waist down. Sometimes regrets can last a lifetime. Be single minded, and your eye, and your life, will be filled with light.

Something else to remember is that God's plan for your life will not happen in a day. The best things happen over a period of time. God grooms us and gets us ready for what He wants us to do before He sets you down in the middle of it. He is smart. God's things happen little by little, bit-by-bit, and piece-by-piece. The best way to get from here to there in your life, from where you are now to where you want to go, is by taking one step at a time. God may not always show you the whole picture. He may only show you the next step to take. Obey Him as He leads you in the journey of life. You will go places and do things you never dreamed possible.

Get a vision for your life and go for it. Decide on God's plan for you and head in that direction with all your heart. Don't look at your weaknesses. Look at God in you who will help you get there. Concentrate on the One Who is shaping your future and changing your direction. The Master is at work and He is working on one of His greatest masterpieces. You. Ephesians 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should

walk in them.”

As an important footnote: take guidance from others. Never take the attitude that it's your life and you don't have to listen to anybody. Remember my story. Where would I have been if my parents hadn't taken me off to college? God really used them in my life. What about yours?

Chapter 12.

Even If You Are Just In The Ninth Grade

I hear so many kids say, “Who cares about my future. I am just in the ninth grade. I have plenty of time to goof off. Who wants to get serious yet.”? Then they start to goof off at school. Their grades start to get slack. They may even fail a grade. They start to hang around with the wrong crowd, which is easy to start doing if you aren’t taking things seriously. By the time they get in the tenth grade, things aren’t going so smooth. They have failed a grade and quit caring about whether or not they do anything in school. They have started to get in trouble and may get labeled by teachers as a troublemaker. They start getting what I call a loser’s attitude, which means a “who cares” kind of attitude. They may have started out to be good kids, but somehow it just kind of fell apart. The most important thing to remember about your life is that it is like a building. To build a building, any building, you have to start with a foundation. For a building to stand strong it has to have a good foundation. What you are laying now in your life is the foundation. You don’t start a building at the top. You have to start it at the bottom and that is where you are right now. If you mess up your foundation you will mess up your whole building. If you mess up today you will mess up your whole future. And it can happen easier than you think. Like an unplanned pregnancy. Or a sexually transmitted disease. Or a disease like hepatitis. Or a police record that ruins your future. Or an accident that can leave you permanently damaged. None of these things sound good, but believe me it is a good possibility that if you don’t get serious about your life and your future now, that one of these things can happen to you. How do I know? In my 20 some years of working with young people I have seen it all. And it all happens to the kids that say, “That can’t happen to me.”

Our church congregation built a church. When we dug down to lay the foundation, we found that we had chosen to build it on solid rock. When it was laid we knew that no matter what happened that church wasn’t going anywhere. It would stand.

If you want the building of your life to stand, start working **now** on your foundation. Build it on the rock, the solid foundation. Then when the storms of life come, no worries. Jesus is the rock. (Matthew 7:24-27, “Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, (said Jesus), I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

Chapter 13. I Am Afraid

This is probably one of the most important chapters of this book because it deals with one of the hardest issues that face young people. Fear. Fear drives a lot of young people into drugs and alcohol and into lifestyles that say I don't care. Fear, now more than any other time in history, is destroying the lives not only of young people but old. The Bible talks about some of the things Jesus said would come about in the last days right before He comes back in the rapture. In Luke 21:26 Jesus says that in the last days "Men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." Men's hearts today are failing with fear. Not just old but young people too. It used to be that heart attacks just happened to people who were old. Now I hear about people in their 20's having heart attacks. Fear is a bad thing. The markets are falling. The economy is failing. People are being destroyed by fear. Fear can destroy people. It can cause people not only to have physical problems but mental and emotional problems too. Living in too much fear can eventually cause people to become depressed and feel like they don't care. Fear takes away hope. What is the answer? Jesus.

I have a Strong's Concordance, which is a great help to studying the Bible. A concordance is a book with every verse in the Bible listed. You can find the verse if you know at least one word in it. For example I studied what the Bible has to say about fear. It lists all the verses that have that word. When I looked up fear, there were a lot of verses that said fear not. A lot of them were ones that Jesus said Himself. The Bible builds our faith. Faith attacks fear. The Bible is even called the sword of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:17, "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.") When you start to feel fear, fight back with God's Word. The devil is the one that causes fear. II Timothy 1:7 says, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." God says we don't have to be afraid. Refuse to go that route. Stand up and say, "I am a child of God. I put my trust in Him for what I will face today and for what I will face tomorrow.

I refuse to be afraid.” After all, fear is the same as doubt and doubt is a sin. After you refuse to be afraid, get out your sword and smack that fear a time or two. Get out your Bible and read some verses that drive fear right out of your mind. Here are some good ones:

Genesis 26:24, “And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee....”

Exodus 14:13, “And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever.”

Deuteronomy 1:21, “Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath said unto thee: fear not, neither be discouraged.”

Deuteronomy 20:3, “And shall say unto them, Hear, O Israel, ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them: for the Lord your god is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you.”

I Chronicles 28:20, “And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the Lord God, even my God, will be with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee....”

Isaiah 41:10, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee: yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

Luke 12:6-7, “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

Luke 12:32, “Fear not, little flock: for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Hebrews 13:6, “So that we may boldly say The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”

I John 4:18, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not

made perfect in love. We love Him, because He first loved us.”

God is faithful to keep His children and He is a mighty, mighty, mighty big God. He is the same God that went with the children of Israel in the desert and destroyed the Egyptians. He is the same God that went with Daniel into the lion’s den. He will protect you the same as He protected them. We just have to trust Him. And we have to obey Him. For Him to protect us we have to listen to Him and do what He says. I went several times to Russia and Romania on mission trips. I went just after a major civil war, and I went in the middle of another war just outside of the Ukraine where I stayed. These people had a habit of praying before they left their homes. If God told them not to go outside, or not to go down a certain street, they didn’t. If they did, sometimes they died. That was their way of life. If we ask God to protect us, but we never take time to let Him direct our lives, then if something happens to us, it is our problem, not His.

When I looked in the concordance under the word fear, I found zillions of times that God or Jesus said to fear not. But I also found zillions of times when they said to fear. Part of the time verses said to “Fear God”. What does it mean to fear God? Usually you want to run away from things you fear. Why do we need to fear God? This kind of fear means to have a great respect for. We need to fear God in the sense that we respect Him with a tremendous respect. We know that He has the power to deliver us into heaven or hell. We know that He can take our life at any time. We need to respect Him with an awesome respect because He is an awesome God. There are a lot of young people who don’t respect anything. TV, movies, and music teach us that we don’t have to respect anybody but ourselves. That would be OK if we were perfect. But we all need somebody or something to look to. We need to have people around us that we can respect. Respect is good. Too bad that there aren’t many people around that demand our respect. God does, and that is not a bad thing. We need to respect our parents too. That means respect them whether or not they are perfect. Who says? God says. (Deuteronomy 5:16, “Honor thy father and thy mother, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee....”)

That doesn't say, "Honor thy father and mother only if you think that they are perfect." That doesn't say, "Honor thy father and mother only if they do what you think they should". It doesn't even say to honor them if they do what you want them to do. It just says honor them. What will you get out of it if you do? A longer life. Good reason. Remember, respect is a good thing.

So in a world full of fear, if you fear God and obey Him, do you have to be afraid? **Absolutely, positively not!!!!** When you say no fear, you can mean it.

Jesus, My Best Friend

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2003

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Introduction

Jesus Is My Friend

I wanted to write this book because Jesus has been my best friend for most of my life. For part of my life I didn't realize it, but He was still there, being my friend. For a little while I did everything that I could to go against what He stood for. He still stayed as my friend and helped me pick up the pieces when that part of my life was over. He's been such a good friend, that like any good friend, I want to tell everybody who will listen how good he has been. I know what my life was like before I found His love. Because of that I want to help everyone I can to be able to find out what it means to have a friend like Jesus.

I learned when I was little that we were created to fellowship with God, but I forgot that when I became a teenager. I didn't think about why I felt so empty, meaningless, and afraid. I just tried to deal with it. I guess I did that in all the wrong ways: drugs, alcohol, sex. But all of that made the feeling worse. You see I know what its like to forget my best friend. That's why I hope you never do, or if you don't know Him, I hope this book will help you to find him.

I have heard a lot of young people say I can't be a Christian because I'm afraid of what my friends will say. Little do they know that Jesus is a friend worth losing all other friends for. What's sad is that they end up not serving Him when they know in their heart that they should. They then watch their friends go to hell without knowing God's love. Did they really care about their friends?

I can say that through my years of friendship with Jesus He has always (*and I mean always*) been there, when I needed Him. No matter what I did, He loved me. He never got tired of me and dropped me. He was my friend when I was 7,17,27, and 37. He always stayed the same, never up and down or in and out. I knew that no matter what happened, or what was going on, He would be there to help me. I could talk to Him and He understood me better than I understood myself. He not only listened but also He'd help me. He could do things to fix my problems that nobody else could do. He has the power to make a difference.

He was there to shield me and take care of me. He was my shepherd and a mighty tower.

He loves me more than any friend I will ever have. Nobody else would die so that I could be forgiven. You see He didn't die because you were good or you deserved it. He died because of your sin, and because you needed a Savior. Even though He died for the whole world, He would have died if you were the only person on earth. His love is personal. He wants to come in your heart and have a one on one relationship with you. When you find this you will know it is real. Jesus can be your best friend.

Chapter 1

Who Do Men Say That I Am?

Jesus was with his disciples one day. This story is told in Matthew 16:13-16. They had been with Him for a long time now. They had seen Him do many miracles; healing the sick, feeding 5,000 with 5 pieces of bread and 2 fishes. They were there because, in some way, He had touched their lives, enough so that they had left family, friends, everything around to watch Him reach out to those who the world didn't want. They didn't understand it all. They only saw the difference He had made in them. We know now, thousands and thousands of years later, how He would use them to change their world and ours.

Some of them were fishermen. In that day this wasn't exactly a prestigious job. Fishermen were mostly a smelly bunch. One was a tax collector. Now that was a low blow! Everybody hated them because they took the Roman taxes, no matter if you could afford them or not. Sometimes they doubled them and pocketed the rest. Most of the rest were uneducated. It was said years later that men marveled at their preaching. (Acts 4:13, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.")

As they talked with Jesus that day on the coast, He asked them "Who do men say I am?" Now that was a loaded question. One of the greatest wonders about Jesus is that He is the Son of God. I don't understand how the Holy Ghost of God became His father and Mary a little Jewish girl His mother, but I do know it is true. (Matthew 1:18, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as His mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.") I guess today we have become such thinkers that if we don't understand it, we don't believe it. Romans tells us about this kind of people in the first chapter, especially in verse 21 and 22, "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing

themselves to be wise, they became fools.” There are a lot of things that we use everyday that we may not understand how it works. I love to listen to the radio. I have no idea how that music gets into that little box and out to my ears, but I still love it. Even doctors admit it (if they are honest) that there is a lot about a person’s body and how it functions that they don’t understand. I sure don’t. But I’m still alive and functioning. When it comes to God and the things of God, though, it seems people want to say, “Now I don’t understand that so I can’t accept it. It can’t function that way.” I guess I’m a little different. I have had God in my heart for most of my life. He has protected me miraculously. He has healed me even from things that threatened my life. He has guided me, changing my whole life around for the good. Now if He were an ordinary type fellow, well, He wouldn’t have been able to help me much. I have always gotten into situations where I needed a miracle to help me to get out of them, or I’ve had physical things happened that I needed His touch. On and on, I have needed a miracle-working God in my life. It has taken a supernatural God to take care of me. I’ve been a handful. If we admit, we have to say that we all need God to be out of the ordinary. I am so glad He is. Isaiah 55:8-9 tells us, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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.”

Now if He is going to be somebody we can trust to take care of us, somebody in charge of our eternal soul, He needs to be somebody beyond our understanding. Yes, there is a lot I still don’t understand about Him, but I can still assure you He can be your best friend because He has been mine. You just need to take Him like He is.

I am glad that He is so great, that we can do just that, and trust Him to never let us down. I don’t know how God was his father and Mary His mother but I’m glad that He was born. Hebrews 2:16-17 tell us, “For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham (He became people like us). Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren (us), that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make

reconciliation for the sins of the people.” He didn’t come here like an angel. He came to earth to grow up just like us so that He could really understand us. He knows what its like to be 2 years old, 10,16,20. How could He understand us if He hadn’t lived around us as one of us? He understands you. He understands you even more so when you have accepted salvation and He comes into your heart.

How can we be saved? We believe, ask His forgiveness (which He gladly gives) and we ask Him to come into our heart. He really does. Then who can know us better than the One that is living inside our own heart? I remember a young man who was so afraid to give his heart to Jesus because he had been really rough and he was afraid he couldn’t do the things he needed to do to be a Christian. He hadn’t been around this way of life much and didn’t understand how any of it worked. I explained he just had to ask Jesus to come into his heart and when he did that, He would change him inside out. Well that boy asked Jesus into his heart. Now this boy had a really bad, knock somebody over the head, temper. Not too long after he asked Jesus into his heart and committed his heart and life to Him, another boy started giving the boy a really hard time. I watched his face and saw this young man fill with anger. Little by little it faded away and he walked away. He ran up to me later jumping up and down saying “I know God is in me now. Did you see that?” He had already started to learn how to let the Spirit of God that was in him, begin to help him do what was right. This changed his whole life. If I hadn’t known through experience that Jesus comes into our heart, that boy would have convinced me that day. He lives inside us. He knows us better than we know ourselves, and still loves us. He came to earth to be able to understand us and to be able to understand what we go through. He understands us from the inside of our heart. And He helps us from the inside out. What better friend can we have?

He also came to the earth to be born just like we are and to die just like we will one day. Why? We aren’t perfect. Matter of fact if we admit it, its easier to do bad than good. We can’t even really understand what good is. The Law of God says that if we sin we face eternal death. That means for forever in hell.

That means we are separated from God eternally, with our souls judged to spend eternity in hell. You see we were made in the image of God. Genesis 1:26 tells us, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion....” We were made like Him with an eternal soul. God will judge us righteously and we will spend eternity either with Him or away from Him in hell. There are no other options. Before Jesus came, we had no hope. He died on the cross to take the punishment for our sin. He didn’t have sin Himself, but He took your punishment so you wouldn’t have to. That is why He came. That shows how much He loves you. If you had been the only one, He would have died just for you. If you accept His precious gift and His love and friendship you will never be the same, just like the disciples who sat with Him that day.

When He asked in Matthew 16, 13-16, “Who do men say I am”, they had some strange answers. Some told Him that they had heard people say that He was John the Baptist come back from the dead. Others said that they had heard that He was Elijah, or Jeremiah, or another Old Testament prophet. Today when we ask people who don’t know Him we get even stranger answers. Several people not long ago committed suicide so that they could go in a UFO to be with God. How strange and sad. Everywhere I go I see people trying to find what they think is God. He is supernatural so they look in the occult to find Him. There are more psychics on TV these days than I can take. Getting caught up in witchcraft is very popular. In trying to find God many get caught in the devil’s lies and he destroys their lives. (There are only two spirits, God’s spirit and the devil’s spirit. God is good, the devil is bad. If it isn’t God then it’s bad. There is no such thing as white witchcraft or harmless psychics. This stuff comes from the devil and his sole purpose is to use it to destroy you.)

People try to find God in money and owning things hoping to buy a little security and peace. Elvis Presley, one of the wealthiest men in the world, died a broken down man without God. His money only bought him misery. People look everywhere to find God, someone to fill the emptiness in their heart and life. We were created to contain His Spirit inside us.

When we don't have it, we feel empty and our life's meaningless. He gives meaning to our lives and a purpose when we serve Him. People search for something to bring them security and peace. There is so much fear in today's world. Only God can help us and bring peace in a world of terror. We look for God everywhere except for where He is. He left us a book that tells us who He is and how to find Him, but I guess that is too simple. He sends people to tell us about Him, but we are too proud to listen or too afraid to trust enough to hear. He sends His Spirit to talk to our hearts but we shove Him away because we want things our way. When Jesus asked Peter who He was in verse 15, Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God". We need to find out all we can about Him and personally get to know Him. We need to run to him with all of our heart. Peter had his whole life changed because he believed and accepted the love Jesus poured out to him. Will you?

Chapter 2

Jesus the Teacher

One of the things Jesus spent a lot of time doing on earth was teaching. He knew that there would be a lot of things about God, His ways, and how He expects us to live that we would not understand. When we get saved, it's almost like we have walked into a whole new world. There is so much to learn. If we listen to Him, Jesus will be our teacher, just like He was when He sat with His disciples so many times when He was on earth. He will teach you. I have heard a lot of young people say that they were afraid that they might get caught in something that wasn't true, because they knew there are so many things out there that are wrong. That is a wise thought. There really are a lot of false doctrines and some of them, because they deal with your spirit and soul, can seriously damage you. The Bible itself tells us to beware of false prophets telling wrong things. I John 4:1-6 says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." Verse 6 says, "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."

We need to watch out for false teachings, but we don't need to be afraid. If we know God and we talk and walk with Him, He will keep us safe. He will show us what is wrong. He is our Shepherd and He will keep us. He also will teach us the right things that we need to know. He will do this through His Spirit. I John 2:27 tells us, "But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." The anointing is His Spirit that speaks in and to our hearts. If we are not living in sin which means that we are not willfully doing wrong, and we want to serve God with all our hearts, He will keep us in the right way. Psalm 119:105 tells us, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." People want to excuse their sin so that they can get by with it.

They want to find excuses for all the wrong things they are doing. Those people and those that don't love God with all their heart and don't obey Him are the ones that get in trouble falling for wrong doctrines. If you stay close to your Shepherd, He will keep you. If you listen to Him, and obey Him, He will teach you.

I hadn't been back to God for long when I got into a church that was wrong. They believed in a strange way and actually taught that the man who started their belief would one day come back from the dead. They would go every year and sit by his grave waiting. Now when I first went they seemed like normal people who believed in the right things. I didn't know better. They didn't tell you all this until they had tricked you into thinking like them. I had gone to church right much there and was playing the piano a lot for services. God started talking to my heart that this wasn't the place I needed to go to church. But they were such nice loving people and they had taken me right in and made me feel a part. I just hadn't seen any of the weird stuff. In my mind I thought how could they be wrong. God even sent a friend by to tell me to leave that church alone. I didn't listen. One day I went to the church by myself to practice the piano. I had a key to unlock the door. The door unlocked and partly opened, but no matter how hard I pushed I couldn't get it to open enough for me to get in. There wasn't anything against the door. It was like God held it closed. After that happened, I went back to that church only one more time, and that was to tell the people that what they believed was wrong. If we listen to God He can keep us from learning things that are false. He can teach us what is right. He can use His Spirit inside us. He can also use His Word. He can also send others to tell us.

It is important to read the Bible. It is our map of how to get where we are going. When I first started reading the Bible I was so confused by all the thee's and thou's and funny talk in the King James Version. I was confused by all the versions. I didn't know which was best. I asked God to show me, which I should learn. He led me to stay with the King James Version. Some versions may be OK, but some are all wrong. Some of the versions were made when only one man on his own decided to rewrite the Bible in the words he thought it should be.

Some were written when a group of men decided how it should be written. I have seen how dangerous that is. They just left out some things that they didn't know about or changed what they wanted to. It is good to stick with the King James Version unless you understand how the versions are written and what to look for to tell the difference in those that are wrong. The more you read the thee's and thou's, the less you'll notice them. The more you read the Bible, the easier it will become to understand it.

The more you listen to God's voice in your heart teaching you about His Word, the better you will understand It. It is important to hear what His voice tells you by the Spirit of God. I've read the Bible several times all the way through. I never get tired of it. I'll pick it up and just the exact verse that I need to hear to strengthen me or encourage me will pop right off the page into my heart. No matter how many times I read some passages, they always touch my heart. The Bible lines up our mind to think right. The things we listen to and read affect how we think. Think about that when you listen to the head banging music and other junk like that. The devil uses the world's music, magazines, books, etc. to condition our mind to be on his wavelength. All these kinds of things can pervert our mind so that we can't think straight. That will twist God's truths in our mind. It is so hard to sort through all that stuff to see God as He is. Star Track says He's an alien. In the movie Powder He was a blob of energy in the universe and we all get to die and be blobs with Him. Beetle-juice sure presents eternity in a warped way. If you listen to enough of the attitudes that are in TV and movies, you will be confused and even the perverted will seem laughable, when believe me, God says it isn't. The world teaches that there are good witches, that angels make mistakes just like people, and then they fly away as doves. No wonder after putting all that junk into our minds that it is hard to understand what God is like and what He expects of us. That is why it is so important to read the Bible. It is important not to depend on our own understanding, but to ask God to explain it to us. It is also important to go to a church that you know God has led you to where you can be taught.

Jesus is my favorite teacher. I've had lots of teachers.

For one thing He knows me from the inside out better than I know myself. He knew when I didn't understand before I even asked the question. He knew how to explain things to me in my heart in just the right way for me to understand. He delivered me, and set me free from things that bound me from being able to understand so that I could. I have worked with a lot of kids that had been in special classes. The learning problem that they had wasn't as hard on them as the feeling that they had that they were too stupid to learn because they were in special classes. When they overcame that feeling, got delivered and set free from it, they could learn a lot better. Sometimes we have things like this that keep us from learning about God. For example, we might be feeling really guilty and condemned for things we've done in the past even if we are trying to do right now. Jesus tries to teach us about His love, but because of that condemnation, we can't feel it. The Bible tells us that if we have repented from our sin and turned away from it, there is no condemnation. (Romans 8:1, There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.") If we are trying our best to walk in the ways of God, we don't need to feel guilty, if we have repented of our sin, and we are submitting to God to let Him change us. We need then to be so grateful for that forgiveness that we make up our mind and heart that we won't do that again, and we don't. We need to get forgiven, not condemned. Guilt is another thing that can stop us from learning about God. If we are doing wrong and we haven't gotten forgiveness, that can block everything that we receive from God.

God doesn't play games. He doesn't let "cons" by. He knows us from the inside out. He knows the real motives of our heart. It is very important that if we want Him to get real with us, that we get real with Him.

Another thing that can stop us from learning about God's ways and how to walk with Him is hate. If we hate anybody or hold anything against them, we can't learn about God, because God is love. When we don't forgive others, we ourselves can't be forgiven. When we hate somebody else, we can't even love God. (I John 4:20, If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen how

can he love God whom he hath not seen?") If someone has done something to hurt you, no matter how bad it is, you have to forgive them. If you don't, it will only damage you. Remember, when you can't forgive someone on your own, ask Jesus to help. He is in your heart and He can change your feelings from the inside out, if you seriously ask and believe that He will. He is the One that hung on the cross and forgave those that hung Him there. He knows all about forgiveness. The Bible says that God will be the judge of those who do wrong. Give that person to God, and let Him be their judge.

Jesus can teach us using others too. We need to let Him lead us to a church where we can be taught and where we can have a family of Christians to be a part of. We all need a body of believers, brothers and sisters in Christ, to lift us up and help us. However, if someone is telling you things that just don't seem right to you, that may be that Jesus is showing you that there is something wrong with what they are saying. We have to be careful when we listen to others that what they are saying matches what the Word of God says. The Bible is always right. But we can't be so afraid that we will get into something wrong that we don't find a church. Be a part of a church that God leads you to. Love the people, and let them love you. Let the preacher and teachers teach you. Learn from the congregation. Some of the saddest Christians that I know are ones who tell themselves that they don't need to go to church. Sometimes these people do this because they have been hurt by someone in a church. They become the losers. God created the church. He commands us not forsake assembling together. We need one another. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that no church is good enough for you. That will only lead to your down fall.

Chapter 3

Jesus the Shepherd

Jesus often spoke about Himself as being a shepherd. I never really understood what all that meant until I read a book about sheep and their shepherd. You see, sheep are very timid. They have no defense against their enemies. They are so round with such little legs they can't kick much. If they roll over they can't even roll themselves back up on their feet. They are not cunning animals, almost known as silly. They are almost helpless. Humans, especially in today's world, can relate to sheep. There were many times in my life before I came to God that I felt plain old helpless. I can remember when I was a senior in high school and even after that, I was scared of being out on my own. I would think about what career I wanted to get into and what my plans for my future were, and I would hyperventilate out of pure fear. I knew I wasn't ready to take on the world. I was too young to realize that nobody really is. I started drinking and doing drugs just to keep from having to face reality. That messed everything up worse. When I was younger, I had been saved. I had given my heart to Jesus. As I got older I guess you could say I took my heart back and gave it to other things. I was like the person in Proverbs 2:17, "which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God." When these things nearly destroyed me I came back to the God of my youth. I found my shepherd. I wasn't helpless anymore.

You see the shepherd is the protector of the sheep. If you learn about sheep and how the shepherd does his job you'll see why that is so important. Those that take care of sheep are different. The shepherd would never drive the sheep like the cowboys in the western days drove the cattle. They led them, going in front of them. They guided them, gently nudging them with staffs to help them from danger. The shepherds knew where the green valleys and cool streams were to make sure the sheep had all they need. They led them into all the right places and away from harm. I can say that Jesus has truly been my shepherd. He has provided day-to-day needs. He protects me. He leads me.

I remember when I first graduated from college. It was a scary time to me. It was in the middle of the school year. This was bad because I had taken teaching in college. All of the schools around had already hired all the teachers that they needed by November, which was when I graduated. Everybody said that I could forget finding a teaching job until next year. Out of the blue, without my having even put in an application there, a certain school called to see if I would come teach. It put me in just the right place for that time in my life. God knew I needed to be a teacher and guided me in that direction. He did that because He knew one day I would be director of a Christian school that would later help to turn the lives of young people around.

I'm glad my shepherd guided me. He's provided finances when I needed them. I remember a time when I was teaching for a Christian school for only \$200 a month as a service to help keep the school going. I had about \$500 worth of bills each month. For over a year I faithfully made each payment on time. God led me into those good green pastures. He has fed me in the green valley and led me by the streams of peace.

A girl I knew gave her heart to the Lord. She tried to describe how it made her feel but she didn't know how to say it. I knew she was describing peace. So many young people today don't know what peace is. They are full of fear and terror. Peace is such a precious thing to find. Psalm 37:4-5 says, "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and He shall bring it to pass." Verse 23-24 says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."

My faithful shepherd has also been my protector. One of the most hair-raising experiences I had came on a missionary trip to Russia and Romania. We had gone there to meet with some public school teachers who wanted to know how to put Christ in their classrooms instead of communism. (Wouldn't it be so wonderful if the schools here wanted Christ in that way?)

We also helped start Christian schools. We went during wartime and were just a little ways from the battle. It was a whole different world. To get there we had to travel across country in a van. I was praying about what to do because I had learned the hard way that before you make decisions you need to talk to God about the best way to go. He showed me that we needed to go by train instead of by van. He worked things out so that the only way we could travel was by train. When we arrived at our destination, we learned that terrorists were killing people with machine guns on the very stretch of highway we would have traveled. I really thought about my wonderful Shepherd especially when I got home. My grandmother was a prayer warrior. She later told me that on a certain date she had gotten a burden to pray for me. She knew that my life was in danger and had prayed. I knew that God had answered her prayers when she told me the day that she had prayed. It was the day we had traveled across country.

I can remember another time my wonderful Shepherd protected us. We were traveling out of town to a revival. There were 2 carloads of us. I was in the first car. We kept getting the impression that we needed to hurry. The car behind us was delayed. Later we stopped at a gas station, and the other car pulled in. They asked if we had seen the small plane that had crashed on the highway. It had crashed in between our cars, missing both. I know that our Shepherd is our protector. Here is a good example though of how important it is to obey God. What if we hadn't listened to that feeling that we needed to hurry?

Today everybody is afraid of everything. Even young people worry and have problems with stress and fear. We live in a fearful time. How many people do you know, young and old, that are so mixed up with fear that all they can talk about is their problems and everything that is going wrong in everybody's lives. They worry about things that probably won't even happen, fretting over everything. Jesus Himself said that one of the signs of the end times would be "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth..." (Luke 21:26). I remember when only old people had heart problems. Now it is young and old who have heart problems because of stress and fear. There is so much fear.

All kinds of people are on medication to help them to deal with things like depression, stress, etc. All these things come from fear. We all need a Shepherd. Jesus says in Luke 12:32, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." What does He say to us today in the middle of a world that seems has nearly gone mad from fear? He still says the same thing that He told His children thousands of years ago, "Fear Not."

How can Jesus be your Shepherd? First, accept His gift of salvation. Ask Him to forgive you and come into your heart. Then you need to let Him love you. His love is so great that it will turn you upside down. You need then to love Him back. You need to learn all about Him by reading His Word. Sometimes it will seem hard to understand. If you ask Him to, He will help you understand. Then you need to trust Him to take care of you and all the details of your life. Then instead of concentrating on all the bad and scary things that are around you, concentrate on the good. Isaiah 26:3 tells us how to have peace. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee." Keep you mind on Jesus, and not on things that make you afraid. Trust Him, and He will keep you in peace. Then most of all you need to listen to what He says and obey Him. If the Shepherd guides His sheep away from danger, but they don't listen and run on anyway, there is nothing the Shepherd can do.

If we don't obey God, and do the things He tells us in His Word to do, then even our Shepherd can't help us. A 16-year-old girl came into the office the other day telling me she was pregnant. She was afraid this would really mess up her life. I knew that it wouldn't make it any easier. She had moved in with her boyfriend months before. She told me that she really wished she hadn't. She wished that she had listened to the Shepherd.

God is not stupid and He loves you very much. He wants the best for you. His best is not boring. Young people often tell me, I want to get saved but I want to go have a good time first. We have a section of files in our school records, one for those who graduated, one for those who quit school, and one for those who died having a good time. That is sad, but it is true.

Don't die having your good time and spend eternity in hell wishing that you hadn't. Besides I want to know, is it really a good time? Is it really a good time when people are running from doing what God wants them to? I have been in the drinking and drugs. Really honestly, is it worth messing your life up for? We all need to listen to the Shepherd. We need to stop fooling ourselves.

We need to listen to God's Word and those that we know who are telling us things from the Lord. He'll use other people to speak to our hearts, preachers, teachers, even gospel singers, and friends who are His kids. He'll also speak to us from inside our hearts. I remember a time when God used something as silly as the floor mats out of my car to save my life. I was listening to Him, and knew how to hear His voice, so when it was important for Him to speak to me, I was ready and able to hear Him. I had washed my car and laid my floor mats out on the grass to dry. I was heading out in my car when the Lord spoke to me in that still small voice in my heart to stop and get my floor mats. I almost went on anyway thinking that was silly. I would do that later. Why would God tell me something like that anyway? But I stopped and got them. I had just gotten back in my car when I heard a crash so loud the ground shook. My street had a hairpin curve that narrowed down to one lane. A car had flown around that curve crashing into a tree right above my house. The car hit the tree so hard that the motor was wrapped around the tree. It would have hit me head-on if I hadn't listened. Listen to the Shepherd. If you don't obey, how can He guide you?

You have your own personal Shepherd if you are an obedient child of God. You may read my stories and think that God won't do these things for you. You may think that you are not that special. I am not telling the stories from my life to make you think that I am wonderful, because I am not. I am very needful. I need a Shepherd, just like you do. I am not telling these things to make myself seem special, but to let you know how special Jesus is, and to help you to see what He can do for you in your own life. If you are a child of God, you are very special, very important and very loved by the Shepherd. Proverbs 8:17, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find

me.” John 15:13-14, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down His life for His friends. Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.” Romans 8:35-39, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor power, nor things present nor things to come Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Isn’t it good to know, child of God, that you have a Shepherd like Jesus. Isn’t it good to know how much He cares for you? Isn’t it good to know how much Jesus loves you?

Chapter 4. *Jesus Our Family*

Luke chapter 8 verses 19-21 tells us a story of how one day Jesus was speaking to a huge crowd. His mother and His brothers came to see them, but they couldn't even get to Him for all the people. Someone told Him, "Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee." I love how Jesus answered them. He said in verse 21, "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the Word of God, and do it." His family was important to Him, but in this verse He told us that we are His family if we love and obey Him. It is important to have a family. I work with a lot of young people. Some of those who have the worst problems coping with life are those who do not have a strong family. I would like to say that most of the students that I have worked with in our school have had a strong family, but that wouldn't be true.

I remember the first time that I noticed that there were starting to be some divorced parents of the children that I taught. That was over 20 years ago. Now if I find parents who have the same last name as the child, I think how strange that seems. Most of the children in the school through the years have divorced single parents or they have parents who at one time were divorced but have gotten remarried. One of the things that the devil fights so hard is our families. Maybe it is because there are so many families who are not centered with Christ as the head, and they are not built on His Word. Families have focused on everything but Jesus, and all too often because they are not built on the solid rock, they come crashing down when the storms of life crush in. When this happens, it is always the hardest on the kids. If you have been in this type of situation, then you know what I mean even better than I do. I have also seen many kids today who are being raised by grandparents instead of parents. This is happening more and more. Or I have seen kids whose parents are not alive, one or both of them have died. Or worse, I have known kids whose parents abused them. This is even harder to go through. I think when any of these things happen, it is hard.

It leaves emptiness and a longing that will destroy people if they don't know how to deal with it. The only way to deal with these things is to take them to God and get His help.

When a family is broken, this leaves a void and a feeling that you are left out, that there is no one there who really cares, no one to look out for you. It can make you feel almost like you are afraid to trust those that are there for you because you are afraid that they will leave. It can make you feel alone and if you aren't careful you will do anything to get rid of that feeling. Sometimes young people kid themselves into feeling that sex is acceptance, and they wind up getting in trouble because they throw themselves at anyone who makes them feel "special and wanted". This can lead to all kinds of problems. For example, most girls, or guys, that get into abusive relationships, do so because of this void in their life. This someone that makes them feel special may abuse them, but they will put up with it because the one abusing them has a way to make them feel special. Don't put up with abuse from anyone. Don't let anyone make you feel special, then abuse you. That isn't reality, and that definitely isn't love. What is the answer to all these needs that a broken family can create?

Let's go back to the story the chapter starts with. Jesus Himself told us that if we love Him and obey Him, then we are His family. Here are some more times that God's word tells us the same thing. John 1:12 tells us, "But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." Second Corinthians chapter 6, verse 18 tells us, "And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Galatians 3:26 says, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Galatians 4:7 says, "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." (Girls, an important thing to remember here is this. The Bible uses the word "men" to refer to mankind, which means all of us, girls and guys. Everybody is included in that. So it calls us all sons, girls and guys.) I John 3:1 tells us "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God..." If you feel like you don't have a strong family, then you are very wrong. You have a great family you are part of.

One of the greatest families you can belong to is the one in which God is your Father and Jesus is your elder brother.

Another great thing about this family is that you have all kinds of brothers and sisters. The Bible tells us that all of God's children, now and the ones that have lived before us all down through time, are your family, your brothers and sisters in Him. If we are the children of God, then we are all brothers and sisters. If someone is in God's family for real, you will know it. They will love you because you are in His family, too. You will know that you are loved by a special love. You belong to the family of God.

If you do have a family then appreciate it. If you live with your parents appreciate them and love them. Don't give them a hard time. Sometimes being a parent is hard enough. Don't expect them to be perfect. Just love them like they are, and you will find that they will love you more in return. The greatest way to get love from someone is to give it. Appreciate them and what they do for you. Sometimes it is easy to see all that you want and not all that you are given. If you want respect too, the easiest way to get it is to respect others. If you don't, you won't be respected. That is how life is. Respect your parent's and treat their trust with respect. Then you will be respected, and you will be trusted.

If your family is a family that has been touched by divorce, then you may have to do some adjusting. If you really try, there is no reason that this new family can't work out and be as great as the other family that you had. Then you will have two great families. If you make it rough on everybody because you are having a hard time coping with divorce, then that won't help. It will only make things worse, and you may miss out on some great people, and some great times, and a great life. Divorces are hard on everybody, especially our parents. When they are going through something that rough, they won't be perfect people. We may not be the center of their attention during that time because there are problems and problems make people tense. We just have to hang on and not let our attitudes get wrong in the process. Our attitudes can cause our life to be a bummer if we aren't careful. Some people get chips on their shoulder, which makes everybody's life bad. Especially if the chip is on our own shoulder.

Don't let that happen to you. If you are living with grandparents, or another family member, you may have some hurt toward your parents or toward God for whatever circumstance happened that caused your family not to be there for you. Don't let hurt and don't let bitterness destroy your life. Forgive and go on. If you don't, you will be the one that will have to pay. Bitterness can cause us to have a miserable life with an attitude that won't quit. God tells us in His Word that we have to forgive for Him to forgive us. Whatever has been done to you is not worth that. Forgive, and God will help you to forgive. After all He forgives you.

It is important for you to be obedient to be a part of God's family. We have already talked about that. Obedience is also important to be a part of your earthly family. Ephesians 6:1-3 has a very interesting promise. It says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." In other words, God not only tells us to obey our parents, but He also tells us that if we do, we will have a long life. Sounds like good enough of a reason to me to listen to what our parents say and have an obedient attitude. Have you ever known anybody who didn't listen and obey, and their life was shortened because they didn't. The example that comes to my mind (though there have been many cases that I have seen this happen) is one of a young boy, about 10 who was told not to play with the families' gun. He did. He didn't live to talk about his disobedience. How many people do you know that didn't listen, and obey, and they paid for it by their lives, or by messing up their lives, or the lives of others. It is important to obey. Respect is something that is almost a lost art. When I see a young person with a respectful attitude to their parents and to others around them, I take notice. That really makes an impression on me. I know that it makes an impression on God as well. We can be rude, selfish, full of wanting our own way, refusing to listen, or we can be full of respect. Which way will lead to success? You answer that one for yourself.

Remember you belong. You belong to your family. You belong to God's family. You are His child. You belong.

You belong to Jesus' family. You are His little brother or sister-for real. You belong to the family of God. You belong. You are loved and you are special to a lot of people, many that you might not even know. You are part of the family of God. So next time when you get those teenage blues that make you feel like you are nothing going nowhere and nobody cares, shake yourself. Don't believe it. You are as special as it gets. Who says? God says. (Ephesians 3:17-21, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height: and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with the fullness of God. Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." Romans 8:35-39, "who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Verse 37, "Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that 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 creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Chapter 5

Jesus - Our Heritage

I think one of the most important and one of the most wonderful things a parent can pass down to their children is the knowledge of God and His Word. (Now hold on, I know I've mentioned parents, but wait a sec, I'll get to you.) This knowledge of God is so powerful that God's Word says in Proverbs 22:6, Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." I have worked with hundreds of young people for over 20 years. I have tried to tell some of them about God, salvation, His ways, and His Word, and they couldn't understand what I was saying at all. It was foreign to them. They had never been around anything like that. The only knowledge they had of spiritual things was what music and TV pumped into their head, perverting their understanding. When you have been raised around Christian people and church it is easier to accept the things of God as they are. You know what it is all about. When we've heard the Word of God it really makes a difference in how we see things. We may turn away from it, like I did when I was younger, but the things of God that we have been taught will never leave us. On the other hand, if we have been raised in church and around the things of God, it is easy at a certain age to start taking it all for granted. It becomes something we do because we have to, rather than a real relationship with God. Long about high school, if our relationship isn't real, then the relationships of our friends start to pull us away from God. Usually that doesn't happen to someone who hasn't been around it all their life. When they do find God for real, they are so grateful for the change that God has brought into their lives. They aren't easily talked out of it.

Having a Christian background and family is important for another reason as well. When you have Christian people in your family, you have people that are praying for you. You can't outrun the prayers of those that love you. I am so grateful that my praying mother, grandmother, aunt, others in my family didn't give up on praying for me. They prayed a lot for me.

They kept me constantly before the throne of God. These prayers are why I am alive and serving God today. You can do a lot for those that you love, but the greatest thing you can do is pray for them.

We can pass down a lot of things to our children, but the greatest heritage we can leave them is knowledge of the things of God. I work with a lot of young parents. Some of them are ready for the challenge of having a baby but many aren't. Some of the youngest young mothers that we have worked with at the school have been 14 years old. No matter how old the parents are that we've worked with, I always start counseling by telling them whatever you do, get in church and raise this child in the knowledge of the things of God. You can't do anything greater for them. One thing parents have to be careful of is to live the life before their children that they should. A lot of parents send their children to church and encourage them to live moral lives, when they themselves don't. That sends mixed signals. The children see one thing but hear another. To bring up your children in the way they should go, it is very important to live it yourself.

There is no greater heritage than the heritage God fearing parents leave their children. They may not be perfect but nobody is. If they love you enough to want the best for you and they want to raise you in the ways of God, be thankful. Make their job easier. Don't fight against it. Appreciate it. Thank God for them and pray for them. They need it. They have the job of raising you before God in a way that is right before Him. There may be times when we wish our parents were not strict, when we wish they would let us do more things that the rest of the world is doing. Admit it. Is that really what's best for you? I have had so many young people come to me crying because they knew their parents didn't love them enough to discipline them. They didn't have time to in their busy lives to even know where their children were, let alone time enough to know if they were doing what they should do. Thank God for parents who want to guide you, teach and shield you so that your life has a strong foundation that can't be shaken. If someone was building a building and they laid a weak foundation, I don't care how strong they made the walls, the building wouldn't last. It will fall down when storms come.

Right now is when the foundation of your life is being laid. Don't grumble and growl at the ones who are trying to help you lay that foundation. Thank God for Godly parents. They are few and far between. They are a gift from God.

If your parents aren't Godly, that makes your life a little harder. There is one thing that you can count on. Draw near to Jesus and He will be mother and father to you. He will be the perfect parent. He will be there to direct you, guide you, strengthen you to do right, teach you, and He will be there at all hours of the day and night. He will be there just for you, personally. Find a relationship with Him. II Corinthians 6:18 says, "And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons, and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

We can't really talk about families and a how important it is to give them a good foundation without mentioning this one thing. If you aren't ready to give your child a good foundation, don't have sex. God was wise when He created sex to be within marriage. Take it out of marriage and it loses the beauty that it has and becomes something that can destroy your life. Several years ago it became an unpopular thing to be a virgin. Sex became something like baseball, everybody played. Now we have aids, and the other diseases that run wild. Those who said it couldn't happen to them found out that it could. The teenage pregnancy and abortion rates are at all time highs. Something created by God to be beautiful has turned into something that has lost its meaning and destroys. It is not a game. A good answer to the old saying, "Why not, everybody else does it" is "That's why not, everybody else has". Stand up for yourself and respect yourself and your body. If you don't, nobody else will. Let God lead you in your relationships and friendships. How many times have you heard someone say, "I wish I had never fallen for that guy or girl. They really messed up my life." When God chooses your friends and your mates, they will be for life. Ask Him to help you find the friends that will add to your life, not take away from. The heritage you leave will be a solid rock foundation, not a shaky one bound for destruction.

One of the neatest examples of what a heritage means is found in my grandparents life. It shows what families can be.

My grandfathers' mother was a prayer warrior. She would not only pray for her children, but also her children's children, and their children. (My grandfather had 19 brothers and sisters. That in itself would take a lot of prayer.) Four generations have passed. My generation has had children of their own. Each generation was taught what was passed down from the one before. They knew about God, His Word, His ways and what it means to serve Him. I know that our children's children will be the same. When I meet some of my zillions of cousins, most all of them have happy and successful lives, founded on the same principles we had been passed down. They were given a strong heritage, something to keep them and guide them. And they walked in the prayers of their ancestors. Appreciate your parents, and give your own children a heritage that lasts. You can start today by building a foundation that will make your life strong. Build it on the rock, Jesus.

Chapter 6

Jesus The Healer

It is sad today to see the many Christians that can't accept the supernatural works of God. We want things to be on a comfortable level that doesn't threaten us. We talked about before in another chapter how that for God to be God He has to be supernatural. When we accept Him as He is, then we can accept what He can do for us. We will find Him to be everything we need Him to be.

One of the things He can be for us is a healer. (Isaiah 53:5, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." In I Peter 2:24, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed." Now I'm not one of those people who say that it is wrong to go to the doctor. But I am saying that even if we go to a doctor we have to trust in the Lord for our healing. There have been times when I have had to go to the doctor, even have surgery, but I knew who my healer was. I knew I had to put my faith in Him for my healing. God is the healer. Sometimes He will use doctors as instruments, but the one who made this body is the only one that can heal. He can heal without doctors too. He made our bodies out of dust. He can surely fix them. I remember a lady who had part of her stomach and intestines eaten away by cancer. The doctors in the hospital where she was were more or less waiting on her to die. People prayed for her. She started getting well soon after that. Imagine the doctor's surprise when they ran tests and found brand new organs in her body. God had recreated her organs. No surgeon had touched her.

I have been to many church services down through the years where God healed. He healed blind eyes, deaf ears, helped the lame to walk. These were not shams set up to fool people into believing, but these were known healings of people that I actually knew. God is a healer.

God can heal us in many ways. He is a great healer.

Not only can God heal our bodies, but He can also heal our hearts. When we are hurt, our heart is broken. So many things can hurt us: misunderstanding, physical and mental abuse, people that don't care. We can carry scars around that are left over from a life when we weren't serving God and doing wrong things that hurt us. We can even be hurt, sad to say, by Christians that make bad choices and let the devil use them. Hurt can separate us from being able to receive love, even receive God's love. Just like God made our physical body He made our heart. Just like He can heal our physical body when it is broken up, He can heal our broken hearts. He can even give us a new heart (Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.")

God can fix us up like new. We have to commit ourselves to Him, trust Him to, and He can change us to be brand new: body, soul, and mind.

Chapter 7
An Eternal Friend Who Will Keep Us Forever

Jesus is the same yesterday today and forever. What He was in Abraham's day is still how He is today. What He is today will be exactly what He will be when you are 60. He doesn't change. He stays the same. His ways and His Word does not change. I am glad. That means that I know exactly how things stand. There are no nasty surprises. I know what to expect. I know too that His laws, and what He expects of us, will never change. Now man will take His Word and switch it all around to make it say what he wants to hear. That is why it is important to find out for yourself what it says, and ask His Spirit to guide you into truth. That is why it is important to let God lead you into a church that is right, and when He does, stay there. Visiting around and getting into a lot of things that are not right messes up a lot of people.

When you find that relationship with Jesus, the most exciting thing about His friendship is that it will last forever. He will be there for you forever (unless you turn your back on Him. Even then, though, He will still be there. But you will be turned backwards, in the wrong direction, and you won't see that He is still there.) He will be there when you are 7, 17, 70, when you die, and past that. He will be there for eternity. Your relationship with Him will never end. He will always be your friend. So many young people today are afraid of death. I guess it has to be because you really live in a violent world with a lot to fear. I didn't have to be as afraid when I was your age. We didn't have kids bringing guns to school or bombs to blow everyone up with. I am sorry your world is violent. But I know that the peace that God brings to our hearts can hold you even when it seems there is nothing peaceful there.

I remember a time in the Bible that was a very violent time. Especially for the children of Israel. Their story is found in Exodus. They were in Egypt. You probably remember the story. It was such a violent time that their babies, (every baby boy under a certain age) was being slaughtered by the Pharaoh's army. And any one trying to protect a child was also killed.

These people (who we now call the nation of Israel) worked as Pharaoh's slaves. I am not sure, but I have always thought that they might have been the thousands of slaves used to build the pyramids and the great Egyptian cities. They had grown in number until Pharaoh was afraid that they might overthrow the Egyptians and take power. In order to stop that from happening he killed their babies. God had a plan of protection ready for one little baby boy. Moses' mother put him in a reed basket and floated him down the river. Pharaoh's own daughter found him. Now normally speaking that spelled disaster. Looked like it was all over for that little boy. God though put a special love in her heart for that baby. She brought him home and she really must have been her Dad's pet, because she kept him and raised him up in Pharaoh's own home. Later he was used to set the nation free from slavery and he led them back to their homeland. God can protect and keep you. When he says stay away from someone or certain situations, stay away. You'll know in your heart what you need to do. He will keep you and protect you if you will let Him and listen to Him. No matter what's happening around you, He is bigger than the circumstances. He will give you peace. You don't have to be afraid.

Here are a bunch of verses that tell us not to be afraid. Isaiah 41:13, "For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee." Matthew 14:27, "But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." Isaiah 41:10, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Isaiah 43:2, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God the Holy one of Israel, thy Savior..." Fear can be an awful thing. I talk to young people all the time who have to take medication because they are so afraid. The best way to fight against fear is by trusting God to take care of you. Sometimes we can let our minds run away with us thinking about things that are bad. That can lead to depressions and more.

We have to stop and learn to focus on the things that are good. When my mind wants to think about all the things that are fearful, I'll start to sing or I turn on Gospel music about God's power, His might, His love for me, and before long instead of being fearful I am praise full, full of praising Him for His goodness for me. What things do we need to fill our minds with? Philippians 4:8 tells us what to think about. "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

A lot of young people have a terrible fear of death. If you are God's child, you don't even have to be afraid of death. Death is crossing over to the place that you can spend eternity with Him in a perfect place that He has prepared for you. That doesn't mean that you purposefully can cut your life short to be with Him. To do that would be disobeying what plan He has for you. If you disobey Him by taking your life, you will run a very high risk of going to hell, not to heaven. We don't need to be obsessed by death but we need to be caught up in living a victorious life full of God's blessings. There isn't much in the Bible about heaven. I think that is because it is so wonderful of a place that our human words couldn't even describe it. There is a lot we don't know. We do know that it is God's best that He has made as a reward for our loving Him. We do know too that it is for forever. We know that it is full of God's best for us. That is good enough for me. I don't want to miss it for anyone or anything else, do you? The Bible tells us that it is like a precious pearl that someone sells everything to be able to buy. There isn't anything we can give away that isn't worth it. But we should never be a Christian just to keep from going to hell, or just because we want to get to go to heaven. We should be a Christian because we love God with all our heart. We should be a Christian because we have found that wonderful friend, Jesus. What is the greatest thing about heaven? Eternity to spend with our very, very best friend.

Chapter 8. Jesus Our Listener

Not long ago I went through a terrible time. It seemed like everywhere I turned things were falling apart. Right and left, things were going wrong. For example, the day after a tree fell on my house I found out that I needed surgery. That was only two of the things that happened. There were more. I was very stressed out. I had never had anything like panic attacks before, but I was so stressed out that I started having what I thought was panic attacks. That was really just so much stress that I couldn't physically, mentally, or spiritually handle it. I couldn't focus on anything, and I really needed to focus on to be able to make good sound decisions with what I was going through. All this really just made things worse.

To make things even worse, nobody was listening to me. Everybody was too busy in their own concerns to take time to hear what I was going through. I guess that they figured that there was nothing that they could do about it, so why should they worry about it with me. I was doing enough of that myself. So I had to bottle all that stress up in me. I was like a pressure cooker with a stopped up valve and I felt like I was ready to blow. I finally went to God. I found out that the best thing that had ever happened to me was the fact that no one else had listened. Sometimes we want to run and tell all our problems to everyone except the One Who can fix them. We want human ears to hear about what we are going through. Somehow we want human hands to fix the situations for us, even though most of the time human hands won't be able to. There is something about flesh and blood that we want to hang onto. We want to see the person that we are talking to, and if we can see them, we can have faith that they are there. It is much easier to talk to other people than it is to talk to God. We can't see God. We can't tell whether or not that He is listening. That takes faith. We have to believe that He is there. We have to believe that He is listening. We can't see His eyes full of love for us, so we doubt that He really cares about what is happening to us. We forget that He is perfect and His love for us is perfect. We forget that He is so in love with us that He sent His

Son to die for us. We forget that our well-being is His main concern with us. Not only our well being for now, but also our well being for eternity. So we run to everyone else and neglect the only One Who can really most of the time make a difference. So, in the middle of my hard time, after I got really depressed that no one would listen to me, I finally went to God. I poured out my tears to Him. I told Him what I was going through. I could feel His love and I knew that He heard me. I got a release from the burdens that I had carried. I transferred my load onto His shoulders, and it was nothing at all for Him to carry even though it had almost destroyed me. Then I realized that those things that I thought were so terrible (and they were pretty bad) were not near as bad as I thought. I began to gain a perspective on them. The stress left, and with it so did the panic attacks. Faith moved in over doubt and fear and I found joy in its place. I found the joy that comes from knowing that God was in control and everything was OK. I finally let God be in control of me. When I did, I could give control of the situation to Him. First though I had to trust Him to take it, then I could let it go. Oh what a relief it is!! I had found that the Greatest Listener of all is the One that I really need to talk to. What happened about all my situations? One by one they were all fixed by the One Who knew just how to fix them.

It is a fact that we all need someone to listen to us. Listening is a lost art. There aren't many people today who know how to listen to others. We all are too busy talking to listen. When we talk, we are full of ourselves. When we listen, we have to put ourselves in "neutral gear" and care about the person that we are listening too. As a whole, people are mostly too selfish and spoiled to listen. They don't want to forget themselves and concentrate on others. No matter what we are going through, it is easier to handle if we just have someone who listens to us. If we have someone who will listen, then our stress level goes way down. Studies even show that if we have someone who will listen to us, our stress level will be so much lower that we will have fewer physical problems. Stress can even cause physical problems. Having someone to listen can even make our health better. We all need someone to listen to us.

I wish that one of the prerequisites of being a parent were that people have to be good listeners before they can become parents. If that were true, a lot of kids would have it easier. But, sad to say, being a parent makes listening even harder. Being a parent comes with its own stresses and battles and those can make listening a lost art. If parents would learn that by listening they would cut out a lot of their kid's problems, the world would be a greater place for teenagers. You may have parents who have not figured out the art of listening. You may be one of those people who feel like I did, like you are about to explode because there is no one there who can hear you. You may feel trapped inside like there is no one to hear you, and you feel like you are about to explode, like I did. That is when you need to remember that you can go to the greatest listener of all time. His name is Jesus. Just like any best friend, He is there to hear you. But like no other best friend, He can actually do something about the situation, no matter how bad.

I was listening to a report the other day that was written for marriage counselors. It said that the number one reason that many people divorce is because their spouse didn't listen to them. Then someone else came along who paid attention to them and listened to them. This broke up their marriage. I see so many teenagers today that find themselves in bad situations because of friends, or because of boy friends and girl friends. I see a lot of teenagers that compromise on everything that they believe, and get into totally wrong things that they know better to get into, just because those people that they are with make them feel special. They get into these things just because this or that person makes them feel like they are important, or just because they listen to them. So when someone does these things, they pack up their common sense, they pack up their morals, they pack up their relationship with God, and they follow after the crowd that makes them feel special. Then on down the road, after it is too late and their problems are a whole lot worse than they were, they realize that they wished they had never went with the crowd, or went with that person who made them feel special. Problem is, by then, their life may be a wreck. Your life can be messed up. Some people may make you feel special by listening to you.

Even though they listen, that may not mean that they love you at all. For example, I have known many girls that have gotten into relationships that were dangerous and abusive. The kinds of men that thrive on these types of abusive relationships are masters at making girls feel special. They practice being a Romeo. They practice making girls feel like there is no one in the world like them. It is kind of like a spider and a web. They make things look really good, then they go in for the kill. Because they make these girls feel special, the girls actually fall for it. They put up with all kinds of abuse, because they think that this is the way it should be when someone loves them. This is not love. These guys know how to seduce. This type of relationship is like a trap. I have known girls who would tell me that they were being beaten. I would tell them that they needed to leave that “low life” that was beating them. They would say no, they couldn’t, because that person loved them. Reality leaves us when we get into that type of relationship. If you are in that type of relationship with someone, that is not love, and you do not have to put up with that. The person that is abusing you is not right and you don’t have to put up with their sickness.

Abusing someone is a sickness. They have the problem, not you. Don’t kid yourself into thinking that abuse is love, no matter how wonderful they make you feel when they are not beating you. They are using you, and they are sick. This is only one example that proves that everyone who makes you feel special may not really care about you at all. That, I admit, is an extreme example, but if you haven’t faced that type of relationship, then you may know someone who has. By the way, abuse is not always limited to guys being the abuser. Physical abuse is usually guys, but emotional abuse is more often girls. I have known guys whose girlfriends made them feel special. But it was only because they had a nice car, or they had a good job with a nice paycheck and they could buy them all kinds of things. There was no love involved. They were just using them. Having people use you for their own gain is another kind of abuse. I know that there are special people out there, and if you have found one, hang on to them.

I know that my husband loved me when we married.

He didn't have to buy my love. He already had it. Then because of that love he does things for me. If you feel like you have to buy someone's love, if you feel like if you don't give to them they won't love you as much, then they don't really love you at all. If they are making you feel special so that they can get things from you, they don't love you at all. This not only works for boyfriends or girlfriends, but this works with friends in general. I remember in my days of doing drugs and drinking. There would always be someone who would make me feel special by including me at the party, especially if I would pay for it. There was always someone who would make me feel special and get me to do things for them, especially if I was the one who got in trouble. There was always someone who would make me feel special so that they could use me. Problem was, I didn't see it until it was too late. I have known too many young people who walked out on their relationship with God and Jesus for people who listened to them and made them feel special. They walked headlong into trouble. Don't let this be you.

Who can really listen to us like God can? I used to think that prayer was something that I formally had to say. I thought I had to use thee's and thou's like they do in the Bible. I even studied types of prayers. There were books that I read that talked about the outline that we had to pray by to make our prayers happen. Now I know better. I just pour out my heart to God. I talk to Him all the time. The best thing about that is that I know that He is listening. I am just myself. I tell Him when I have had a bad day, and I feel the stress leave because I know that He is there for me and He loves me. I know that He not only hears, but I know too that He will answer my prayers. He may not give me everything that I want, like a million dollars instantly, but He gives me all I need, and He even gives me the desires of my heart if they are good for me. He is my best friend. No one can listen like He does. Don't give up your best friend for someone who makes you feel special. That person may not love you. No one can love you like Jesus.

Chapter 9. *Jesus My Savior*

Luke 19:10 tells us, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." John 3:16-17 tells us, "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him shall 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." We read in I Timothy 1:15, "This is the faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." If Jesus had not died on the cross, there would be no way for us to be saved. His love was so great that He died for us when we were sinners so that we could find salvation in Him. He took the punishment for our sins so that we would not have to. Nobody will ever love you that great. I John 3:16 tells us, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Hebrews 7:25 tells us, "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." Acts 4:12 tells us, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

If you have been saved, you have given your heart to the Lord and you have committed and submitted your life to Him, then you are saved. One of the devil's greatest tricks is to cause us to doubt whether or not we have been saved. When you read the scriptures that I have put for you, you will see that salvation has nothing to do with you. Matter of fact, these verses even point out the fact that you cannot deserve it, and that you can't earn it. It has to be by the grace of God. That means it is something that you can't deserve. We are saved because God is so good, not because we are. We are saved because of the Savior, Jesus, Who died for us. If you have been saved, believe in Him. You don't have to believe in yourself. You can't live the Christian life alone. You can't do it without His help.

That is why He comes inside of our heart to live. You have help. That help is available. Trust in Him. Then the next time that the devil comes around and tries to tell you that you are not saved, you read these scriptures to him. Give him God's Word for it. He will have to go away and leave you alone.

What is the price that Jesus paid so that you could be saved? Read this section of scripture in John. Start with chapter 17. This is a prayer that Jesus prayed for you and for all of us. In this prayer you find the reason why He went through everything that He did. He loves us enough, and He loves His Father so much, that He wants us to be one with them the way they are one with one another. Jesus wants us to love Him and His Father, God, that much. He died so that we could be one the way He is with His Father. That is a lot of love. Read on after that through John chapter 18 and 19. The story of the crucifixion carries on through chapter 19. Remember, when Jesus hung there on the cross, it was for you as much as it was for anyone. He died for your sins so that you could be forgiven, so that you could be saved. Everything that He went through was out of love. That is the kind of Savior that He is. He gave His life so that we could be saved.

So is salvation a cheap thing? No it isn't. It is very dear. Never treat it like it is something that can be trampled under your foot. I know a lot of young people who live like they are saved one week, go back to acting like the world the next week, then switch back again. They live like a yo-yo, up and down and up again. It seems like they really don't understand what salvation is all about. When you really are saved for real, you will know the Savior. You will know His great love for you. You will want to give your life to Him, because He gave His for you. I think that when young people live a yo-yo life, they don't really understand what salvation is all about. Don't be one of those people. Get to know your Savior. He is your very, very best friend. Do you have another friend who has died for you?

Chapter 10.

Jesus Our Redeemer

In Bible times, when someone was a slave, there was one way that they could be free. If someone paid the price that was needed to buy them back, that person could set them free. That person was called their redeemer. Life for slaves back in that day was really terrible. Many died because of the conditions of slavery. Can you imagine how a slave would feel when someone paid a price for them, and then instead of keeping them as their slave, they let them go free. I imagine that their redeemer had a friend and faithful servant for life. The Bible tells us that Jesus is our redeemer. Proverbs 23:11 says, “For their redeemer is mighty; He shall plead their cause with thee.” Isaiah 47:4 says, “As for our redeemer, the Lord of hosts is His name, the Holy One of Israel.” We have a redeemer, someone who has bought us back from sin and death. His name is Jesus.

So I imagine that you may be thinking by this time that you have never been a slave, so what does all this have to do with you. We are slaves to more things than we can even imagine. One of the things that we are slaves to is our own foolishness. How many times have you been mad at yourself for something stupid that you did, that you really didn’t mean to. But after it was done there was no taking it back? How many times have you wished that you could change but it seemed like there was no way that you could? How many times have you wanted to be better and do better than you did, but it seemed like every time that you did, you could only fail? We are slaves to ourselves. But when we ask Jesus into our heart, and we give our lives to God, we are not on our own. We have Someone inside of us that can help us overcome ourselves. Jesus redeems us from ourselves.

Jesus also redeems us from sin. We have a nature to want to sin. Nobody has to tell you that it is easier to do wrong than it is to do right. We talked about before how we inherited a nature to do wrong from our great, great, great, great ever so many great great, grandmother and grandfather, Adam and Eve. Because they sinned in the Garden of Eden, we inherited a nature to sin. Have you ever wanted so bad to stop sinning but it seemed

like you just couldn't. The Apostle Paul had the same problem in the book of Romans. Read this section of scripture in Romans 7:14-25 and Romans 8:1. In this section of scripture Paul talks about how that the harder he tried to do good, the worse he would mess up. In verse 24 he says, "Oh wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? In verse 24 he tells us who can deliver us from this predicament. Jesus Christ our Lord. We have talked in this book many times about how when Jesus come into our heart to live He helps us to be able to overcome sin. He gives us the strength that we need. We no longer have to be slaves to sin. Jesus has redeemed us from sin.

Jesus also redeems us from the world. The world is in a mess. It is in a mess because as a whole it ignores God, His ways, His Word, and His love. The world as a whole does not think the way that we need to. The world is full of people who are bound by all kinds of things. They are slaves to fear, depression, anger, hate, bitterness, greed, pride, and many many more things. All these things are destructive. They destroy not only your life, but also your eternal soul. One of the main attitudes that people in the world are bound in is the attitude of not caring. I run into so many teenagers that just flat out don't care about themselves or anyone else. They do all kinds of stupid things and make all kinds of choices because they don't care about the outcome. If you let yourselves be slaves to the world, that is the attitude that you will wind up with. Jesus died to redeem you from the world. He gives us a better way of thinking, and a better life. His love sets us free from all the things that bind the people in the world, and make them slaves. We are free.

Jesus is our great redeemer. He has paid the price to set us free. Since He has, stay free. Don't become a slave again. Jesus Himself says in John 8:34-36, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin...If the Son therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." I wonder how many of the slaves that were set free in Bible times went back to their cruel and destructive masters and asked them if they could become their slaves again. Stay free when Jesus frees you.

Chapter 11.

Jesus, Our Forgiveness

Have you ever done anything wrong and had to sit in it, worrying about who would find out and what your punishment would be? Did you have to sweat it out? Did you have to go through the pain of knowing that you had done wrong, and you knew that someone was going to be really hurt or disappointed when they found out? Then that someone found out. Sure it might have been rough sailing for a little while, but then they forgave you and everything was restored in your relationship with them. Then you know the great feeling that it is to be forgiven. I wish that I could say that when I was a teenager that I never did anything wrong. I wasn't that smart. I got into drugs, sex, and everything else that I could find that was destructive. I turned my back on God and church and family, and set off for the unknown wild side of life. It didn't take long for me to wreck my life. I found out the hard way that when the world says that it's OK to do it if it feels good is really a stupid way of thinking. When you do wrong, when you go against God's Word, then you know it. And it hurts. And it can destroy your life if you don't turn around.

I still have scars from those wild days. What you do, you pay for. There is a payday for the wrong that we do. Why did God make rules in the first place? Why did He tell us in His Word to stay out of bed with people that we weren't married to? Why did He tell us to stay away from strong drink (and anything else that is in that same category)? Why did He tell us not to steal? Why did He tell us to be honest? Why did He tell us to work hard, and if we don't we won't prosper? Why did He have rules in the first place? The answer to all the above is that we serve a God that is very smart. He has been around watching after His people for thousands of years. The rules have never changed. Wrong is wrong and right is right. Our business is to get to know Him, submit to His ways, read His Word, and find out what is right and what is wrong. Then our business is to avoid what is wrong. Run from it. If we don't, we will pay for it. I used to think that God was a God that sat in heaven with a big

stick ready to knock us in the head when we do wrong. He doesn't have to. When we do wrong, we will reap the pain that goes with it. And I reaped it. Then I returned to God's love. What a wonderful feeling when He forgave me! I was almost afraid that He wouldn't. I think that is something that a lot of young people go through. I was afraid because I didn't really know what He was like. I had forgotten that He was my forgiveness. That He died so that I could be forgiven. Now I know.

Another problem that comes with sin is that it separates us from God. When you do things that you know will hurt someone, then you have a breach between you and that person. Sin separates us from God's love. Your wrongdoing will be a wall between you and God's love, if you let it be. That is when we need to remember that Jesus is our forgiveness. We know that Jesus died to forgive us of our sin. He had no sin, and He took the punishment for yours. The wages of sin is death, eternal separation from God. That is how that is. When you sin, you automatically earn eternal separation from God. Our only hope is that when Jesus died, He took the punishment for all the wrong that you do. John 3:16 tells us, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Because He hung on the cross and died, you won't have to die that eternal death that separates you forever from God's love. Because He died, you can be forgiven. Jesus didn't die because you were perfect. He died because He knew that you would need to be forgiven.

So what do we need to do when we sin? The worst thing that we can do is pretend that it didn't happen. The worst thing that we can do is pretend that it wasn't sin at all. We can make all kinds of excuses for what we do, but God's Word tells us plainly what is sin. God's Spirit in our heart convicts us when we sin. We know when we do wrong. Never excuse it away. Repent. That means that you feel so bad in your heart because you let God down that you make up your mind you won't ever do that again. Then you ask His forgiveness. Then you accept it. Don't be like some people that I know. Don't ever ask Him to forgive you, then go do it again because you know that He loves you enough to do so. Love Him enough not to expect Him to.

The price that He paid to forgive you was His own life. Read the account of His death in the Bible in John chapter 18 and 19. Respect the suffering that He went through enough to never take it lightly.

Also, when you ask Him to forgive you, trust that He will. The Bible tells us that there is no condemnation from God after we have repented and we have been forgiven. The devil will make us feel condemned. He will whisper in our ear that we aren't good enough to deserve God's love because we have sinned. He will even tell us that we have blasphemed the Holy Spirit and that there is no forgiveness for that. That means that we have turned our back on God so many times that we can't hear His Spirit when it is dealing with us to repent. If you are feeling convicted when you do wrong then that hasn't happened to you. The devil will even make us feel like we are totally isolated from God and from His people because we aren't perfect and we have done wrong. That is a lie. The One Who died to forgive you will never turn His back on you because you aren't perfect. If He died to forgive you, won't He do so? Remember, Jesus is your forgiveness.

Chapter 12.

Jesus, A Righteous Judge

I think a lot of times even older people are a lot like kids in how they think. I remember when I taught elementary school, I was trying to teach some second graders about why we have rules to live by. I told them that for 30 minutes I was going outside the room. During that time there would be no rules. They could do anything they wanted to do during that time. There would be no punishment because without rules to go by they could do no wrong. I stepped outside the door where I could hear what they were doing and keep an eye on them, but they didn't know I was there. Well the whole school heard them when I walked out the door. They went wild. They were hanging from the rafters. Then I started to see a few little heads popping up over the glass in the door looking for me. In a little while the door opened, then shut. It wasn't long until a little delegation came to ask me to please come back in and straighten these kids out. Things had gotten so bad that they themselves couldn't stand it. Then they all came around. They realized that day that they did want rules and they needed somebody to make them obey them. Now that person that made those rules needed to be fair and right in their judgment. Human nature says, "I want to do my own thing without anyone telling me what to do." When things get out of hand in our life, we realize that chaos isn't what we need after all. Grown ups are just like kids in that respect.

I can remember telling my mother I couldn't wait until I was 18 and out on my own. Then nobody could tell me what to do. She asked me, "Do you plan on going to college?" I answered that I was. She then told me that in school the teachers would be telling me what to do and if I didn't, I would fail their class. She then asked me if I wanted to ever get a job. She told me my employers would expect certain things from me, and if I didn't do them I would not keep my job. She asked, "Do you plan on getting married and having a family?" She told me if I did that there would be times when they would want their way as well. We will never live all to ourselves in a little world where we will get our way all the time. We will always have to take the people

around us into account. We'll always have to listen to someone. Most of all, we have to learn to submit to God. I have seen a lot of people who said they were Christians but they never submitted to God enough to daily listen for His voice and obey Him. Their life stays in a mess. God would try to lead them in the right direction but they wanted to do their own thing, and did it. When their life fell apart because there was such confusion, just like the kids in my classroom, they would go to God to ask Him to fix the situation. God is a perfect God. He is righteous, He is right in His judgment. When He says leave something alone, not to do it, or to be with that person, or go there, He means it. It is for our own good. When He says don't go there, or go here, He does it for a reason, because He loves us and wants the best for us. The sooner you face it that you don't know what is best for you, the better off you'll be. I don't serve a God that is dumber than I am. What would be the point in that? We could then be our own gods. I need a God that is real, and a God that is God. One Who knows what is the best for me. I want a God that I can follow and He'll direct me in the right direction. Don't make God to be any less. Don't tell Him what you will or won't do because you think you know better. That will make Him to be an awfully little God in your life. I don't know about you but I need a mighty big God.

Not only is He a right judge of what we need to do, but of how we need to be in our hearts, inside of us where it really counts. Attitudes are so important. A bad attitude can cause us to sink faster than a hole in a big ship. Only Jesus can bring to our attention the attitudes that we have that need to be fixed so that we can be changed to be victorious people. Only He knows the ways that we think that get us trapped into being defeated. He is inside of our hearts and knows us from the inside out. He is a righteous judge that can judge us like no other person and we can trust that His judgment about us will be right.

The Bible says that God punishes those that love Him. Hebrews 12:6 tells us, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" He chastens or punishes those who are His kids. That isn't a bad thing, that is good.

I have heard the old saying about how God can whip sounder than any parent. He knows how to correct His children in the right way to get their attention, and to get them directed in the right path with their attitudes and actions. I am glad that He does. In my classroom, I knew how to come in and restore order and peace to the lives of the children. He does that when we let Him into our lives full of turmoil and chaos. He will come in and bring His peace and order. If we allow Him to, He will direct our lives out of harm and into an abundant life full of good things.

Then one day the Bible says that He will be the righteous judge of all men. Romans 14:10 tells us, “But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” After the judgment of Christ, some will go to hell; the rest will spend eternity with Him. I heard someone say once that God loves everyone. He won’t punish anyone by sending them to hell. They were partly right. Hell wasn’t made to punish people. The Bible says it is a place of punishment made for satan and all the angels that help him. Matthew 25:41 says, “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”. Hell wasn’t made for us. God doesn’t want anyone to go there. That’s why God sent His Son, Jesus, to die so that we would not have to go there. God doesn’t put us in hell for our sin. We put ourselves there if we choose to go. If we choose to turn our back on our relationship with Jesus and His great gift of salvation and we choose to live a life everyday ignoring God, disobeying Him, doing our own thing, then we will send ourselves to hell. Hell is an eternal lake of fire, a place of torment. It won’t be a party. Matthew 13:42 tells us, “and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” It is a place of torment.

Jesus is a righteous judge. If He let anything go, just like the class of kids we would be begging for guidelines, rules to keep us safe. Good disciplinarians that discipline their kids soundly and consistently and fairly have well brought up kids.

God is smarter than parents. He has set up for us guidelines in His Word to live by. He even set up laws that keep the earth and sun in orbit. His laws are just and His judgments are sound. We can trust Him to be a righteous judge. I am so glad He is. Aren't you?

Chapter 13.

Jesus Our Vision and Hope

Jesus is our hope for tomorrow. On the night before I wrote this chapter we had our fifteenth graduation ceremony for our Christian School. During the ceremony our school Administrator told of how he had grown up poor. He was very bashful. Then he told about how the Lord had not long before that very night of the graduation worked out a way for the ministry to buy the only radio station that was in the town where he had grown up. As he was going to pay for that station with the money that the Lord had miraculously given to be used for that, the Lord reminded him of how he had grown up. It was no accident that this station was located in the town where he had been so poor. In the graduation ceremony, Brother Goad told the seniors that if they give their life to God, if they live by the principles of His Word, and they obey Him, they can be and do anything, no matter what circumstances that they have to overcome. God would be their help. He will help us overcome our weaknesses and our battles and He will bless us. You may not have a radio station one day, but who knows what you will one day be if you put your hand in Jesus' hand. He can be the vision for your future that you need.

As I mentioned before, I am writing this at the end of the school year, and at a time when I am counseling a lot of Seniors who have graduated. I have had several that came into my office this year who told me that they were scared. I appreciate their honesty. It is a scary time when we graduate. It feels like the whole world, that used to rest so securely on the shoulders of our parents, is in the course of a week transferred onto ours. We think that in the course of a week we have to develop a plan for our future. We think that we have to become self-sufficient. There are two ways to look at all this. The first is that we need to start preparing for our future a long time before graduation. We need to have a vision and a plan for our life long before we walk through the line to pick up our diploma. Our future has to start with a relationship with God that is obedient. It has to start with gaining a trust with Him that we know that He will lead us.

(Psalm 119:105, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”) Then we will be ready to do what the next step is. Our future is a journey and it is made up of many steps. The first one does not start the day of graduation. We have to plan our future, get a vision for what we want to do with the leading of the Lord. We have to take the right classes in school and determine in our heart that school is important and we need to do our best. We need to care enough about our future that we stay away from the things that can mess up our lives, no matter who else is doing it. We need to find guidance from those around us that can direct us. We need to be looking ahead. Then when we graduate it will only be the next step on the road that we are already traveling.

Another way to look at all this is this. I remember that I was so scared up until the time that I graduated that I would nearly hyperventilate just thinking about it. But then the next day came, and the next. I took the next step in the journey and went step by step, and kept on walking. I found out that it wasn't nearly as bad as I thought. Life is a journey that has to happen one step at a time. When we look at it as being a whole trip, it can trip us out. We have to take one day and one step at a time. Don't look at your future as a whole picture. That can scare you. Just look at it as the next day, and know that God will be there to lead you just like He did today.

God gives us a vision for our future. He has a very special plan for your life. His plan for me was to be a teacher. Now we have students all over the world. What is His plan for you? Only you can find it. Talk to Him. He knows how to lead you. Make yourself available to Him. I did, and I have never regretted it. We serve an awesome God who is able to give us even the desires of our heart. I used to be afraid to ask Him what He wanted me to do, because I was afraid that He would tell me to do something that I didn't want to do. The Bible tells us though that He will give us the desires of our heart. It may be that the desire in your heart is a desire that he put there. Trust Him to be the guide of your life. You will have a wonderful future. Guaranteed.

Closing

I pray that these 2 books have been a help to you. Always remember that, if you have asked Jesus to come into your heart, and you are obeying Him, you are special to Him. You are a child of God. Obey Him. Listen to His voice. He will lead you like a good Shepherd into green pastures. You can find peace when you follow Him. He is and He will always be your best friend. No one else will stick by you like Jesus will. No one else can change your life like He can. Don't settle for second best. Don't forsake Him for things or people who will only in the long run do you more harm than good. Put your hand in His hand and hold on tight. He will guide you safe through the storms. He will keep you until that day when He gently leads you home. You can trust in Him.

Remember who you are in God, and that will help you to reach the right destination. God has a plan for your life. He will lead you into that plan if you follow Him. Read His Word. It is a map to a successful and complete life. It is also a guide to how you can find peace of mind.

I hope that both of these books can help you to be able to say, I know who I am, and I know that I am in God's hands, and He will lead me into my future. I hope that you can say that Jesus is your best friend.

May God guide you and keep you in the palm of His hand.

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