A close-up of a crying person

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*The Crying of Rachel: A Call To Repentance/*Beth M. Jones -- 1st ed.

Dedication

Dedicated to our 3 beautiful daughters Heather, Eden, and Leah, and to our beautiful grandchildren Annabelle, Violet, Jacob, Piper, Willow, and Asher. Next to my salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, you are God’s most precious gifts to me. I love you so much and I pray every day for all of you--for God to protect, guide, and bless you, that you will know the LORD Jesus Christ as your Savior, and walk in obedience to Him all the days of your lives. He has a great plan and purpose and a holy calling for your lives – Jeremiah 29:11. Follow Him faithfully and He will exceedingly bless you.

“It’s a fine line between Saturday night and Sunday morning.” -- Jimmy Buffet

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● Introduction ●

Repentance

**“From that time on Jesus began to preach,  
“Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven has come near.”   
(Matthew 4:17)**

*Repentance: to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one’s life; to feel regret or contrition; to change one’s mind; to feel sorrow. (Merriam Webster online dictionary)*

Don’t you just love a fresh start? Before the beginning of each new year, I spend time alone with God to pray about the coming year, pregnant with possibilities and big new dreams! I ask for His presence, wisdom, direction, and protection for me and my family and other loved ones. I seek Him for a “one word” and at least one Scripture verse that will carry and anchor me throughout the entire year.

I also pray about exactly what to do regarding speaking, writing, and coaching for my online business at [www.BethJones.net](http://www.BethJones.net). At the start of 2023, I wasn’t hearing anything clearly, other than my one word was “Light” and my two Scripture verses were Daniel 12:3, ESV, and John 1:5.

“And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” (Daniel 12:3, ESV)

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:5, NIV)

Other than that, I wasn’t hearing anything else. I didn’t have any speaking events lined up, other than an online one where I spoke by Zoom, pre-recorded for a Creativity Symposium. I wasn’t writing, other than journaling. Nor did I have any paying clients at the moment. (I help aspiring speakers and writers to share their heart’s unique, powerful messages.)

Last year, I started visiting my friend Frances Lawrence again at her senior housing in the small, rural town where I live, Butler, Missouri. Years ago, she held a ladies’ Bible study once a week in her home and I was part of it with three other Butler ladies. We were all in different walks of life: Frances in her senior years and battling fires on her home front with prodigal grandchildren, two of us struggling with troubled marriages, and one woman just wanting to be married! We all enjoyed and needed the Bible study. Frances has a lot of wisdom to impart to others from her daily, intimate relationship with Jesus.

When cold, snowy winter hit the Kansas City, Missouri area, and Ray, I, and our youngest daughter Leah moved (simply across town to the house that we bought here ), somehow Frances and I lost contact with each other.

But God sovereignly arranged for our paths to cross again in 2022. She found my little book on prayer, *Walking With God*, and she re-read it. She later told me that she often wondered what happened to me and thought that Ray and I had moved to another city or state. My book is available for sale on Amazon, at the link below:

<https://www.amazon.com/Walking-God-Beth-M-Jones-ebook/dp/B004JXVYPO/>

Frances’ friend did some sleuthing and located me online and she asked me to please call Frances, giving me Frances’ phone number. I did call her and now Frances has me over to her house sometimes to chat, read the Bible together, and pray for each other, our families, and our nation. Frances also occasionally sends me letters to read with encouraging verses and words. It’s so nice to get something in the mail other than bills!

One day when I was at Frances’ house, she suddenly prophesied to me, “I believe God said that you’re going to write another book this year.” I nodded in agreement because God recently had been impressing upon my heart exactly that! She was confirming what I was sensing from the LORD.

I replied, “Yes, I think so, too. But I don’t know yet what it’s going to be about. I don’t know the topic or the title of the book.”

She smiled knowingly, and said, “He will show you.” Some time after that, God gave me the name of THREE book titles for me to start writing again – and this is the 3rd one! (The other two books, also for sale on Amazon, are *Walking With God: In The Prophetic Lifestyle* and *Miracles: God’s Extraordinary Work In Our Everyday Lives*.) Frances had heard correctly from the LORD that I would write another book – and then some!

I don’t really *want* to write a book about repentance. Why? Because every speaking presentation I make (whether an in-person event, on my YouTube Channel, for my podcast, or during an online event) and every book I write, God TESTS me on the subject! I must *live it out* before I speak and write about it and teach it. And let’s face it, repentance isn’t FUN!

Yet it is *vital* in our lives as Christian believers. Last year I was walking in the parking lot at Walmart here in Butler to buy a few groceries, and I was passing by an elderly lady putting her plastic bags into the back of her SUV. She suddenly stopped me and began talking to me about random things. She asked, “Do you know why you and I are here on Earth?”

I was surprised, first because she was a stranger talking to me and especially because lately, I had been questioning why we often go through such hard, bad things in our lives. I said, “No, why?” She said, “Because we’re in school here on Earth. God has us here to learn new things. Life is our school.”

She then asked me, “And do you know what the *goal* of the school is?” She had my full attention now and I was curious about the answer. “No, what?” I asked. She smiled big at me and said, “To help you and me to become more like Jesus.” I smiled back and agreed. We talked for a few more minutes, and then I went inside Walmart to shop. I have no doubt that this was a Divine appointment for me that day!

The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18: “Now the LORD is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the LORD is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the LORD, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the LORD.”

God is transforming you and me, changing us daily from the inside out into the holy, perfect image of Jesus, as we follow and obey Him, humbly and earnestly search our hearts, and repent daily of our sins.

I want to be more like Jesus until I see Him one day in Heaven. Don’t you? *To do that, we must have a lifestyle of repentance.* We must learn to weep and lament (cry, mourn, be deeply sad) over our sins that separate us from God and repent (regret, ask His forgiveness, and change). Here are the theme verses for this book:

**“This is what the LORD says: “A voice was heard in Ramah [a place from which God’s people were deported into exile] of painful crying [lamentation] and deep sadness [bitter weeping]: Rachel crying for her children [the Israelites]. She refused to be comforted, because her children are dead [no more]!” (Jeremiah 31:15, EXB)**

**“A voice was heard in Ramah, Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.” (Matthew 2:18, NKJV)**

Why was Rachel weeping? Because Herod realized that he had been deceived by the three wise men who came to see the King Jesus (a child then), and he ordered that all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, who were two years old and under, be put to death. How tragic!

There is so much evil going on in today’s society. The news headlines read like a horror story: abortions, murders, rapes, active shooters, burglaries, kidnappings, human trafficking, the Coronavirus pandemic and other diseases, natural disasters, rebellion to God, perversion, the wars in Ukraine and in Israel, and more. I believe that God weeps over what is happening now, and He desires that we as Christian believers weep, too – like Rachel, crying and lamenting over her dead children.

As you and I pray for our children, our grandchildren, and our nation, God will hear us and will answer. And He will move and intervene in their lives for His glory and purpose.

“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7:14, NKJV)

“He will call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.” (Psalm 91:15, NASB)

It all begins with your and my repentance.

● Chapter 1 ●

Sorry like Esau

**“Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau, who traded his birthright as the firstborn son for a single meal. You know that afterward, when he wanted his father’s blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears.”  
(Hebrews 12:16-17, NLT)**

Have you ever done something wrong and were sorry that you got caught at it, but you didn’t admit your sin and ask God for forgiveness – and make amends when needed and possible?

Such was the case with Esau, one of the twin boys born to Isaac, the son of Abraham, and his wife Rebecca. After 20 years of marriage, they were blessed with Jacob and Esau. Esau emerged from her womb first, but Jacob’s hand grasped Esau’s heel, as if to delay his birth.

In Biblical times, the firstborn son was given certain unique rights, responsibilities, and privileges. He was given priority and preeminence in the family, and the best of the inheritance – the primary heir of the family. The firstborn’s birthright involved a double portion of the household estate and the leadership of the family if his father became incapacitated or was absent for some reason. After his father’s death, the oldest son usually cared for his mother until her death and provided for his unmarried sisters. In the Old Testament, firstborn humans—and animals—were considered sacred to God.[[1]](#endnote-1)

In Genesis 25, Esau had just come in from the field and was famished. He asked his brother Jacob for some stew that Jacob was cooking, and Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.” Esau, esteeming it lightly, agreed to sell it for a single meal. This speaks to the importance of not being a slave to food. Later, Esau wanted his blessing from his father, but the Bible says, “even afterwards, when he [Esau] desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.” (Hebrews 12:17, LSB)

The Bible distinguishes worldly sorrow from repentance: “For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.” (2 Corinthians 7:10, NASB)

“Worldly sorrow does not lead to true repentance because it is not a mourning over one’s sin, but simply a mourning over one’s loss.” (*Esau’s Worldly Sorrow*, Peter M. Dietsch, The Aquila Report, August 28, 2017) Esau displayed a worldly sorrow instead of repentance. He wasn’t sorry for his sin and how it had hurt God (or his family), but sorry for himself and what he had lost – his birthright and all the blessings and privileges with it.

Let’s not just be sorry like Esau. When you and I sin, we need to sincerely repent, seek God’s forgiveness, and ask Him to help us to not do that sin again. Jesus didn’t condemn or reject the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11, but said:

“Then Jesus stood up again, and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?” “No, Lord,” she said. And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”

As human beings and due to our inherent Adamic sin nature, sometimes we’ll struggle with the temptation to repeat certain sins. But as we cry out to God humbly and repent, He will give us the strength and the grace to overcome that sin over time.

“The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, He will show you a way out so that you can endure.” (1 Corinthians 10:13, NLT)

## Times have changed, but God has not!

Today I met with my friend Frances, and we talked about how times and society have changed so much from when we were younger (she’s 92 years old, so she has seen changes!), and how the enemy Satan is being much more blatant now in his evil. I believe this is because he knows how short his time is, and he’s trying to wreak as much havoc and destruction as possible in God’s people’s lives before Jesus returns.

Sometimes when you and I read or watch the news, we are shocked at the horrific, evil headlines. But the Bible says it’s nothing new:

“History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new.” (Ecclesiastes 1:9, NLT)

Nothing is new today (although it may seem that way), but Satan is just being bolder and more “in-your-face” with sin and evil, due to us being so close now to Jesus’ return. The enemy knows that his days are numbered, and things are wrapping up quickly so he’s viciously releasing all his arsenal to take out God’s children prematurely and to take as many people as possible to Hell.

If he can’t kill someone (due to being a believer and thus protected by God), Satan will do all he can to discourage them, to make them feel weary, or to cause them to have unbelief and doubt (the same old lie he told Eve and Adam in the garden of Eden – “Did God really say?” Genesis 3:1, NIV).

I find the words “too late for repentance” in Hebrews 12:16-17, NLT, incredibly sad, just tragic. We serve a God who is so good, loving, merciful, and gracious, offering us the precious gift of eternity in Heaven with Him. Yet some will choose to reject this gift and thus will be damned to the horrible pain, torment, and sorrow of Hell forever.

May you and I daily search our hearts daily for any sin which grieves God, and ask His forgiveness, and be cleansed, so that we can stay in right, intimate relationship with Him.

## Are you tired and weary? Do you want to just give up?

As parents in today’s modern society, it’s so hard to keep our faith in Jesus sometimes and to not get weary from praying, especially for our children or our grandchildren. Sometimes it seems like your prayers are just bouncing off the ceiling and that God isn’t hearing or answering you. The enemy’s flaming arrows seem to just keep coming relentlessly, with no end in sight of the battle. This is especially true if you’re praying for a prodigal to return home.

You may wonder, “Can God hear me? Why isn’t He answering? Why is this taking so long? Does God even care? Can’t He see my broken heart and my tears over my spouse/child/grandchild and how worried that I am over him/her?”

Oh, sweet friend, may I offer you a fresh cup of encouragement right now? I’m right there on the front lines of the battles with you! Yes, God does hear you and me and He cares. In fact, He loves your and my child (or spouse, grandchild, relative, or another loved one) even more than you or I do. Don’t give up. Never stop praying!

God has given us precious promises in the Bible that He hears, and He will answer you and me as we pray and intercede on behalf of another!

“The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.” (James 5:16, NLT)

“If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.” (John 14:14, NKJV)

“Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (John 14:13, NKJV)

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7, NKJV)

“Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be full.” (John 16:24, NASB)

“And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.” (1 John 5:15, NASB)

“And He said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.” (Matthew 17:20, NASB 1995)

“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.” (Ephesians 3:20, NASB)

Satan will do everything he can to discourage and/or to stop you and me from praying, because he knows how powerful it is for us to have faith in the LORD Jesus Christ, to repent, and to intercede.

You and I have great spiritual authority in prayer. I encourage you to read the book, *Spiritual Authority* by Watchman Nee, available for sale on Amazon. You can find it by clicking on the link below:

<https://amzn.to/45IX404>

As you and I pray and intercede for our precious families, repenting of sins on their behalf, El Roi (the God who sees us) hears us. Our prayers are a sweet, pleasing, fragrant aroma to Him. He will answer, and with His holy fire!

“Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.” (Revelation 8:3-5, NKJV)

Wow! Our prayers are mixed with holy FIRE from the altar at God’s throne in Heaven, and God answers with noises, thunder, lightning, and an earthquake! That’s some powerful stuff. Keep praying, sweet friend. God hears you and me, and He will answer in His perfect timing.

![A heart with swirls and dots

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## Challenge:

Who can you pray and intercede for today who needs prayer?

● Chapter 2 ●

Repentance isn’t a bad thing

**“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out,   
that times of refreshing may come from the LORD.”   
(Acts 3:19, NIV)**

We don’t hear the word “repentance” often in today’s postmodern society. In fact, I don’t even recall a recent sermon at church on it! But Jesus spoke a lot about repentance and its necessity in our lives as Christian believers.

Each day, we are to be transformed into the perfect image of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18), becoming more like Him each day until we see His holy face.

Repentance isn’t a bad thing; it’s a great thing, as it brings our hearts closer to God and sets us free from the bondage to sin!

The meaning of repentance is “the act of leaving what God has prohibited and returning to what He has commanded.” (Source: Google)

Our Adamic sin nature that we inherited when we were born naturally leans us toward sin and *away from God*. Only through the transforming power of Jesus Christ, His resurrection, and His shed blood are we able to turn away from sin (return to God). We’re not able to change in our own power and strength. In fact, the Apostle Paul, one of the greatest men who ever lived, said he did the very thing he hated!

“I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So, I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I

can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.” (Romans 7:15-19, NLT)

I relate so much to this, don’t you? I don’t want to eat the Casey’s chocolate glazed doughnut, but I do anyway sometimes! I do things that I don’t want to do, which I know displease God.

For example, me getting mad at people who are driving on my car’s tail on the highway. I understand how easily people can develop road rage! Driving on someone’s tail, though, is dangerous and it causes me fear and stresses me out. It can cause an accident, and I’ve had too many already! But what good, really, does it do for me to get so angry at the driver about it?

Jesus said instead, “Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.” (Luke 6:28-30, NKJV) Instead of getting upset and mad, I can pray for the driver who’s obviously in such a hurry or so impatient that he or she isn’t driving safely. And I can repent to God for unrighteous anger in my heart and mind.

Using Google’s definition of repentance, “the act of leaving what God has prohibited and returning to what He has commanded,” what has God commanded me to do in this specific situation? To love that driver with God’s unconditional agape love.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” (John 13:34)

## Love is hard!

This isn’t easy for any of us. Our natural bent is toward sin, and even toward hate or murder! This is nothing new. It’s happened since the beginning of time. Despite the perfect environment that God created out of His love and delight for Adam and Eve, their firstborn son Cain murdered their second child, Abel.

Cain was angry and jealous that God was pleased with and accepted Abel’s offering of the fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock, but God rejected Cain’s offering of the fruit of the ground. (Genesis 4:2-5) Cain became so angry at this that he killed his brother Abel, even after God warned him that sin was at the door of his heart. (v. 7)

“Cain lost his temper and went into a sulk. God spoke to Cain: “Why this tantrum? Why the sulking? If you do well, won’t you be accepted? And if you don’t do well, sin is lying in wait for you, ready to pounce; it’s out to get you, you’ve got to master it.” Cain had words with his brother. They were out in the field; Cain came at Abel his brother and killed him.” (Genesis 5:8, The Message)

This is sobering. God already knew the sin that was darkening Cain’s heart and warned him ahead of time to *master it.* Are you and I mastering sin in our lives?

The visual picture of sin that The Message version gives here is powerful; it’s like a vicious, hungry lion or a tiger, ready to pounce on us and to tear us to pieces. The enemy is out to get us, to cause our downfall, and to destroy ours and others’ lives. Oh, dear friend, the high cost we pay for sin!

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

This is why it’s so important for us to repent, and to do it quickly.

One thing I love about King David is that he was fast to repent to God of his sin. While he’s known as the man “after God’s own heart,” David also did some pretty bad things:

* cheated with another man Uriah the Hittite’s wife, Bathsheba, while Uriah was out bravely fighting with other soldiers against the people of Ammon;
* sending for Uriah from the battlefield and trying to get Uriah drunk, then urged him to go home to have sex with Bathsheba (after David found out that Bathsheba had become pregnant by David);
* and finally, ordering Joab to put Uriah in one of the most dangerous places to be killed, when Uriah refused to go home to sleep with his wife. (2 Samuel Chapter 11)

However, God wasn’t fooled. He sent Nathan the prophet to confront David about his sin by telling the story of a rich man with many flocks and herds and a poor man. The poor man only had a little, beloved ewe lamb that grew up with him and his children, and it was like a daughter to him. It lay in his arms and drank from his cup. A traveler came to the rich man and the rich man was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for his guest, so he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the traveler. (2 Samuel Chapter 12)

David was furious with the rich man and said, “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.” Nathan then said, “You are the man.” (2 Samuel, 12:1-15, ESV)

Whoops, caught in the act! David couldn’t hide what he had done from God. God is El Roi, the God who sees everything – including our sins. However, David confessed his sin immediately and God forgave him (v. 13, ESV)

But there would still be consequences to David’s sin. “Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.” (v. 10, ESV)

Evil would be raised up against David out of his own house, his wives would be taken from him, and God would do this publicly, instead of secretly like David did with Bathsheba and Uriah. (v. 10-12, ESV) David paid dearly for his sin.

David also repented quickly after he had numbered the men of Israel and Judah, and God allowed him to choose one of three judgments for this sin of pride. David chose a disease to kill the people through the land of Israel. There were 70,000 men of Israel who died! As God was about to send the angel to destroy Jerusalem, He was sorry and said, “It is enough; now restrain your hand.” (1 Chronicles 21:1-15, NKJV)

David saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and Heaven, with his sword in his hand, held out over Jerusalem. David and his leaders fell on their faces. David said to God, “Was it not who I who said that the people must be numbered? I am the one who has sinned and done a very bad thing. But what have these sheep done? O Lord my God, I beg You, let Your hand be against me and my father’s house. But do not let the trouble be upon Your people.” (1 Chronicles 21:16-17, NKJV)

First, David was seeing in the Spirit. We don’t normally go around seeing angels and demons. This is the spiritual gift of discernment. (1 Corinthians 12:10) God was opening David’s spiritual eyes to see the angel standing there and to know what was happening. God wants to open your eyes and mine, too, so that we will see and understand the intense, real spiritual war that’s going on around us every day, between good and evil.

Second, David and his leaders fell on their faces before God. This is the position we must take every day, also. “But He gives more grace. Therefore He says, “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6, NKJV)

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.” (1 Peter 5:6, NKJV)

Third, you can hear the heartbreak in David’s words and God was heartbroken, too. David was confessing that he had sinned, not anyone else, yet they were being punished and killed for *his sin.* Can you imagine the guilt that David felt for this?

David wasn’t blaming anyone else in this situation. He owned up to his sin and took responsibility for it. This is the sign of a mature believer in Christ. David cried out to God for mercy and begged Him to stop the plague. God responded in lovingkindness and stopped the angel from killing anyone else. It is tragic that anyone had to die to begin with, due to David.

He told David to go build an altar to the LORD on the grain-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. David paid him 600 pieces of gold for it, and David gave burnt gifts and peace gifts and called to the LORD. God answered him with fire from heaven on the altar and told the angel to return his sword to its holder. (1 Chronicles 21: 18-27) I wonder, who was the holder of the sword? Aren’t you glad that God is so kind and merciful to us, too? May we never cause such consequences in our lives with sin!

Throughout the Psalms, we see David’s prayers and cries to God in humility and repentance for his sins. He acknowledges God’s goodness and forgiveness, despite himself. The Psalms are wonderful verses to often meditate on. I usually read a Psalm and a Proverb each day, along with other books of the Bible from the Old or New Testament in my quiet time.

We can see from David’s example that even when we do repent, there still may be serious consequences in ours and others’ lives. That’s why it’s so important to guard against sin in the first place. But if we do fall, then let’s aim to be a people who are quick to repent and humbly admit our sins before God our King. This pleases God. He will help us to become stronger against the wiles of the devil and to resist him, so that we may become more like Jesus every day.

I’m not the same sinful woman who I was years ago. Like the Samaritan woman at the well who had five husbands and was living with a man, I have a history of living an extremely sinful lifestyle. That is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. (John Chapter 4)

Jesus intentionally came to Samaria to encounter that woman and to save her. “But He needed to go through Samaria.” (v. 4, NKJV) After talking with Jesus and He revealed to her that He was the Messiah that she, the Jews, and others were waiting for, the woman then went back and led the people of her village to Christ. Many were saved because of her faith and testimony – a woman with a sinful past! It is a glorious story.

God has done this in my life, too. He can do this with you, too! He can use anyone who repents, receives Him as LORD and Savior, and is willing and available to do God’s work! That is the beauty and the power of repentance.

What about you? Are you ready to repent of your sin, anything that separates you from God today? He’s waiting right now for you.

He loves you so much that He sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross over 2,000 years ago, to save you and for you to spend eternity with Him in Heaven forever. You have an open invitation, dear friend. Will you open the door to your heart and let Jesus in, ask Him to forgive you of your sins (any sin!), and accept Him right now as your Messiah and LORD?

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” (Revelation 3:20, NKJV)



## Challenge:

Is there something that you need to repent of today? We don’t have to think of everything bad that we’ve ever done in our lives. God won’t overwhelm you. Ask Him now to speak to your heart and reveal anything that He desires you to work on and change. He is faithful to do that, and He will help you by His grace and His Spirit.

● Chapter 3 ●

A Deep Cleaning

**“Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper,   
But the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”  
(Proverbs 28:13)**

I don’t think anyone likes going to the dentist. Even my dentist’s hygienist says that she doesn’t, and she’s been doing her job for 40 years! But like taxes, unfortunately, it’s a necessary part of our lives—or it should be! When I was a child, my dentist literally yelled at me at one of my annual visits, because I had a bunch of cavities. A steady diet of sodas and chocolate candy bars over the summer had wreaked havoc in my mouth, causing my perfect pearly white, straight teeth to decay.

While I’d never enjoyed annual dentist visits and it always made me nervous to go to any type of doctor, now I was traumatized and even more terrified to go from being yelled at by my dentist! Add on top of that the drills’ shrill noises (I don’t like loud noises); my anxiety went sky high (and still does to this day!). It just stresses me out!

As an adult, I’ve had regular doctor and dental check-ups to stay on top of my health. But when my husband Ray got a new job a few years ago as the fire chief of a fire department in a nearby town (a small department with lots of responsibilities!), initially he didn’t have me on his work’s insurance plan due to the exorbitant monthly cost.

I didn’t believe that Ray and I could afford for me to get annual check-ups, X-rays, and any dental work that was needed, so for over two years I didn’t go to the dentist. I did my best to carefully brush and floss. This was a huge mistake! Combined with my ongoing battle (since childhood!) with sodas and a sugar addiction, once again, my teeth developed cavities and I had even worse problems than a couple of small cavities.

My dentist Dr. Chad Wassink (a wonderful Christian man and his staff are all Christians, and they make sure I’m not in pain when getting treatment!) told me that I needed a deep laser cleaning, and more expensive treatment. I cried in his office when the front desk clerk showed me on paper the total cost of everything and cried as I drove home! My dental benefits for this year were already exhausted, so Ray and I would have to pay for everything out of pocket--and we simply didn’t have it! But I desperately needed these things done, starting with the deep laser cleaning, which my dentist said was the priority in my treatment plan.

This terrible dental report also upset me because within the last three years, I had radically changed my diet to eat healthier (such as salads and fresh fruits & veggies, began walking for exercise, and had stopped drinking sodas, which I’d been addicted to since childhood –it was a miracle from God! But it was too late; the damage had been done! This shows me that sin still has consequences in our lives.

A laser deep cleaning involves a less invasive way to perform a deep cleaning. Tartar and plaque build-up on teeth can lead to issues like tooth decay and even gum disease. Dentists recommend getting your teeth professionally cleaned at least twice a year to get tartar off teeth before this happens.[[2]](#endnote-2) Obviously, I was way overdue! I thought I couldn’t afford to go the dentist; the truth is, I couldn’t afford *not* to go. (No one else can, either. Please go!)

Plaque is a sticky film caused by bacteria that coat the teeth. It *can* be removed by daily brushing and flossing. However, tartar is hardened plaque and doesn’t come off as easily. A metal tool called a scaler is traditionally used to remove it during teeth cleanings.[[3]](#endnote-3) Let’s face it, just the sight of those sharp metal tools on the tray can make you and me feel anxious, right?

The conventional way of deep cleaning is known as scaling and root planning, using metal dental tools to carefully remove plaque and tartar from the teeth’s surfaces, below and above the gum line. Cleaning beneath the gum line is important because plaque and tartar getting into gum pockets can cause gum disease.[[4]](#endnote-4)

This speaks to me about what’s underneath the surface – i.e., what sins are we needing to deal with in our minds and hearts—and confess to God to be forgiven? Sin is a spiritual disease, and only the atoning blood of Jesus can heal it and deal completely with it!

The process of laser deep cleaning can be used instead of dental tools to break down plaque and bacteria on teeth and inside gum pockets. The heat of the laser does this. The laser can penetrate through soft and hard tissues, allowing the dentist or hygienist to clean beneath the gumline without having to pull back gum tissues to expose teeth roots.[[5]](#endnote-5)

It’s a lot gentler, leads to less swelling, bleeding and discomfort, as well as a shorter recovery period. Many patients can get back to their regular diet a few days after the deep cleaning treatment.[[6]](#endnote-6) This is a relief since most people love to eat! (Me, too!)

Last week and this week, I had the deep laser cleaning done. While normally, I don’t use medication for anything, I was so thankful that the hygienist gave me gas (nitrous oxide) and shots, on top of the oral numbing medicine, prior to the deep cleaning. I have an extremely low tolerance to any kind of pain (I’m just a baby about it!), plus I get extremely anxious before going to the dentist, as previously explained.

Thankfully, I didn’t feel *any* pain during these two visits for the deep laser cleaning, other than the pinch from the shots! They also polished my teeth after the deep cleaning. The hygienist was so gentle and comforting to me as she worked. My dentist and his staff make sure of this pain-free experience whenever I, or other patients, come there. Praise God!

God provided for me to get all the fillings I needed! We’ll go from here for the rest of my needed dental work (crowns, which are very expensive). I’m praying that God miraculously provides for me to get all this work done as quickly as possible. He is a miracle-working God!

In January 2024, my dental benefits will kick back in, and I’m praying that it will cover at least some of the costs for my needed work. (Please keep me in your prayers!)

## The deep cleaning of repentance

No, it’s not fun at all to go the dentist. But it’s necessary for the sake of my health. Likewise, repentance is necessary for your and my *spiritual health.* **It helps us to grow closer to God and to become more in character like Jesus.**

**Repentance is like deep laser cleaning at the dentist. It goes beneath the surface. And God’s Spirit is like a laser, effective and powerful but gentle.**

When I was driving home from the dentist after they gave me the terrible report about my teeth, I cried. But I also took the opportunity then and later that night to repent to God. I asked Him to forgive me for not going to the dentist for annual check-ups, even though I felt that we couldn’t financially afford it.

For drinking sodas and eating sugar, not taking care of my body and my teeth. For not being a wise and good steward of my body, which the Bible says is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

“Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, NKJV)

I asked God to please have mercy on me and to provide for Ray and me to get all my needed dental work done--even to miraculously provide.

“And my God will supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19, NKJV)

“Give, and it will be given to you. You will have more than enough. It can be pushed down and shaken together and it will still run over as it is given to you. The way you give to others is the way you will receive in return.” (Luke 6:38, NLV)

And I also asked God to heal me.

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.” (James 5:16, NIV)

## Confess your sin and ask God for His help

Confession is an important part of repentance. How can we be saved, delivered, healed, or helped by God in any way if we don’t acknowledge that we desperately need Him every day in our lives?

We can’t do this life alone. And I for one don’t want to try. I’ve been there and done that, got the t-shirt, and I discovered how badly off I was apart from God!

Jesus had two disciples who sinned against Him, Peter and Judas. Peter denied even knowing Him three times when Jesus was arrested!

Judas secretly negotiated and plotted with the Chief Priests to betray Jesus for just 30 pieces of silver. This wasn’t a lot of money back then and was the exact price to be paid to the master of a slave if and when his slave was gored by an ox. (Exodus 21:32)[[7]](#endnote-7)

There are different interpretations of how much silver was worth in Jesus’ time or how much 30 pieces would be worth in today’s economy. But to betray Jesus, Judas could have been paid anywhere between $90 to $3,000 in today’s value.[[8]](#endnote-8) Of course, Jesus’ life (and our lives, also) is priceless.

In Zechariah 11:4-14, God had the prophet Zechariah play the part of a shepherd and care for a flock that was doomed to be slaughtered. God wanted his life as an illustration of what judgment would look like against Israel when they crucified their Savior.[[9]](#endnote-9)

## Can you walk closely with Jesus and still betray Him?

Both these men had walked closely with Jesus for years. They looked into His beautiful, loving eyes each day. They heard His voice and His wise teachings. They ate with Him and took communion with Him. They slept near the fire with Him. They may have even watched Jesus brush His teeth and hair. They saw Him multiply loaves of bread and fish, heal the sick, raise the dead, and save the lost sheep. They heard the music of Jesus’ laugh and saw Him cry.

Yet the Bible says that of the two of these disciples, only Peter asked God for forgiveness after he sinned, denying knowing Jesus three times. He went on to become the recognized leader of the 12 disciples and to even die for his faith in Christ, by being crucified, allegedly upside down as he didn’t feel worthy to die in the same manner as his Master.

Jesus said to him, “Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’) and upon this rock I will build My church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it.” (Matthew 16:18, NLT)

One disciple, Peter, repented and asked God for forgiveness; the other disciple, Judas, didn’t repent and committed suicide in despair.

“Judas saw that they had decided to kill Jesus. He was the one who had handed him over. When he saw what happened, he was very sorry for what he had done. So he took the 30 silver coins back to the priests and the older leaders. Judas said, “I sinned. I handed him over to you an innocent man to be killed.” The Jewish leaders answered, “We don’t care! That’s a problem for you, not us.” So Judas threw the money into the Temple. Then he went out from there and hanged himself.” (Matthew 27:3-5, ERV)

This version (ERV) reads that Judas was “very sorry.” The God’s Word Translation uses the word “regretted.” The Amplified version of this Scripture says that Judas was “gripped with remorse.”

Like Esau being sorry that he sold his birthright to his brother Jacob, Judas was sorry for what he had done to Jesus. Maybe he didn’t think that the leaders and the authorities would kill Jesus and was horrified when they ordered his crucifixion. But the Bible doesn’t indicate that Judas repented before killing himself. (Only God knows.)

May we take heed to this sobering lesson: not repenting of our sins can and does lead to spiritual death and even physical death like Judas’ hanging!

I have often wondered if Judas had repented and asked God to forgive him for such a heinous crime against Jesus and humanity, would God have forgiven him? Yet haven’t we all in some way betrayed our LORD and Savior, Jesus Christ, with our sins? That is why Jesus came – to save and forgive us, to set us free, and to give us abundant life through faith in Him.

I don’t believe that we must dig deeply to search for personal sin. I don’t think that God wants us to sit around all day long every day, making a long list of all the sins we have committed against Him and others. God is good and kind. He knows that we are but clay (Isaiah 64:8) and He also knows how evil that Satan is with his temptations and his plans to derail and destroy us.

## Live freely: Recover your life through God’s grace

God is full of lovingkindness, patience, and mercy. He will show us by His Spirit the area of our lives that He wants us to address with Him, not everything all at once. God knows that otherwise, we would become overwhelmed and even give up in despair, thinking we’re just too much of a mess for God to fix--not repenting and staying enslaved to our sins forever. God does this sanctifying work in our hearts, one step at a time, by His grace.

One of my favorite verses about God’s grace and rest is from The Message version in Matthew 28:28-30: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

As we come to God in prayer, asking Him to search our hearts for any sin, He will lovingly and gently show us so that we may repent and get our relationship right again with Him. His Spirit will convict us. Like our pastor’s wife and Bible study leader Amy Fagerland said to us in class recently, ask God for His spotlight on our hearts for any area out of alignment with Him and His word. He will show us the truth.

Conviction is a wonderful, freeing thing. It’s different from the hateful voice of the enemy’s condemnation that would leave us hopeless. A beautiful example of the hope and grace that God gives us when we sin is the story of the woman caught in adultery.

“Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but early the next morning He was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and He sat down and taught them. As He was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.” (John 8:1-3, NLT)

Okay, now hold on a minute here! Instead of gathering with the rest of the people listening to Jesus, the Son of God, teach, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees are out hunting down someone to accuse. I truly believe that they weren’t after the woman, but Jesus Himself. They wanted to see if He’d say something about this sinful situation that was contrary to the Law, which called for stoning the woman to death. They would then have something with which to accuse Jesus!

Yet Jesus said in Matthew 22:36-40 that the greatest commandment was to love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. And that the second was to love your neighbor as yourself. How were these religious leaders doing either in this situation?

I’ve also always wondered: what about the man committing adultery with this woman? Where is he in this picture? Why didn’t they drag him to Jesus, too?

Is he sitting back at the house, smoking a cigarette and drinking a cup of strong coffee? Why wasn’t he running after them, to protect this woman from harm? Had he just used her up and then thrown her away when the religious leaders dragged her out of the adulterous bed? Was he hiding in fear to protect himself from being hurt or also stoned?

This passage also reveals what kind of hearts these religious leaders had. When Joseph thought that Mary had sinned becoming pregnant before they consummated their marriage (she was pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit), he decided to treat her with love and dignity.

“Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.” (Matthew 1:19, NKJV)

These religious teachers and Pharisees had no concern for the woman caught in adultery. They didn’t care about publicly humiliating her nor had regard for her physical (or spiritual) life to be saved. They just wanted to make a public spectacle and example out of her and to trap Jesus with the “Law.”

Let’s go on. They bring the adulterous woman before Jesus. “Teacher,” they said to Jesus (was He really their teacher?), “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses said to stone her. What do You say?” (John 8:4-5, NLT) By this time Jesus was standing up.

I can imagine Jesus there, just shaking His head. “They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against Him, but Jesus stooped downed and wrote in the dust with His finger.” (John 8:6, NLT) Many people have wondered and conjectured on what Jesus could possibly have written in the dirt. I wonder, too.

At first, Jesus was silent and didn’t answer them. (John 8:7, NLT) Have you ever been to a church service or somewhere and suddenly, things got quiet? It can be uncomfortable, can’t it?

A pause can be such a dynamic thing. God uses pauses. The quiet can speak loudly! Even in Heaven, it’s going to be quiet for 30 minutes before the seven trumpet judgments begin. (Revelation 8:1) Can you imagine how powerful that will be after the four Living Creatures and the 24 elders have been singing the New Song continually, worshipping and praising God?

What on Earth was everyone in the crowd thinking, while the adulterous woman lay before them in fear and shame and Jesus isn’t saying anything at all, just writing in the dirt which HE made? Perhaps it was a pointed reminder to them and all of us that we simply come from the dust and to dust we will return one day. (Genesis 3:19)

The religious leaders and the Pharisees weren’t having it, though. They demanded an answer from Jesus. (John 8:7, NLT) They were going to have their way. (Cue in Frank Sinatra’s song, *My Way*.)

Jesus then stands up (a picture of His spiritual authority), and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” Then He stooped down again and wrote in the dust.” (John 8:7-8, NLT)

As a writer, I appreciate this so much. Just let me get back to my writing now, ha-ha! (I still wonder what He wrote and can’t wait to ask Jesus about this one day!)

## Conviction versus condemnation

Notice what happens next. Not one of them stays. They know in their hearts that they don’t have any room to judge this woman. They have sinned, too. We *all* have sinned and fallen short of God’s holy standards. (Romans 3:23, NLT) It is why we need Jesus and the reason He came—to save us.

“When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?” “No, Lord,” she said. And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.” (John 8:9-11, NLT)

The definition of conviction is “to convince of error or sinfulness; to fine or prove to be guilty.” (Source: Merriam-Webster online dictionary)

But in John 8:9-11, NLT, that word “condemn” in the original language is *katakrino,* which means “to judge against, condemn, damn.”[[10]](#endnote-10) Jesus didn’t condemn her, but forgave her.

How precious and beautiful! I relate so much to this adulterous woman and to the Samaritan woman at the well, who Jesus stopped for and asked for a drink from the well. A woman with a past. A sinful woman. A woman upon whom God poured out His grace, mercy, and forgiveness, and gave to her abundant life! A woman whom God chose to use in a powerful way, regardless of what she’d done in her past. How thankful I am that God did this for me!

## A fresh new start every morning

Jesus didn’t tell this woman caught in adultery that she had done nothing wrong. In fact, He says out loud that she has sinned by saying “Go and sin *no more*.” But He sets her free from that sin.

God gives us new life, a new start – even each day! “Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I hope in Him.” (Lamentations 3:22-24, NKJV)

God’s Spirit convicts us; He doesn’t condemn (damn) us in our sin and leave us there in the muck. Jesus told her that He didn’t condemn her for what she had just done. But He didn’t leave it at just that. He tells her to “Go and sin no more.” In other words, go, woman, and walk in the freedom that I am going to die on the Cross for soon, just for you.

He gives you and me that same life-giving message. We begin walking in that freedom when we repent and acknowledge our sin before Jesus at His feet, seeking His forgiveness.



## Challenge:

Ask God if there’s any area of your life where you feel condemned, rather than convicted by the Holy Spirit. This is especially true if you’ve already asked God to forgive you for a certain sin. Satan loves to remind us of our past sins (sometimes people do, too!), but he is a liar and the accuser of the brethren. (Revelation 12:10) God will set you free as you share this struggle of condemnation with Him. You might need the prayers of a loved one or prayer partner or even an experienced deliverance minister to help you overcome persistent, tormenting thoughts of condemnation and accusation. Remember that you are a beloved child of God. You are forgiven because of the blood of Jesus and His redemptive work on the Cross! Jesus said on the Cross that it is finished! Amen!

● Chapter 4 ●

Unworthy

**“But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying,   
“Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”   
(Luke 5:8, NASB 1995)**

Repentance is such a beautiful gift from God, although we may not always view it that way. Who likes to admit that he or she is wrong and needs to radically change?

So is God’s forgiveness a beautiful gift. It reminds me of the pure, sparkling white snow that often falls softly to the ground during winter here in the Kansas City, Missouri area – so peaceful to look at from the warmth of our home, under a soft blanket and drinking a cup of hot coffee or cocoa (with marshmallows!), with my black cat Natalya purring in my lap. (Now I have two cats; I took in a stray male tabby cat, Silas, this year. He sometimes gets there.)

My husband Ray and our daughters Heather and Leah have to drive in the snow and ice to and from work five or more days a week, and it’s not so fun and peaceful for them. (And I pray daily for them for God’s protection, with the blood of Jesus covering them and all my loved ones!)

God gives us His believing children such a reassuring promise regarding forgiveness, using the vivid picture of winter snow:

“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.” (Isaiah 1:18, NKJV)

Recently I was encouraging a friend at church to step out in faith and do volunteer work with a local ministry that is making a powerful difference in people’s lives. I thought that it’d be a great fit for him. He told me that first he needed to deal with his bad habit of swearing. I responded that in moments of anger, I struggle with that, and many people (yes, Christian believers!) do, too, but that I quickly repent when I do this. (And I’m asking God to change this in me!)

He looked surprised when I admitted that I struggle at times with cussing. My friend then said that he had some other things in his past which were a possible hindrance to him serving in this ministry. I told him that whatever sin that he can think of ---and I do mean *whatever!---*I had probably done it in my past, but God has forgiven me by the power of Jesus’ blood. (Read my powerful story in my memoir at Amazon, *Promises In The Dark*.)

I said that Jesus has nailed our past to the Cross, forgiving us of it all. I then smiled at him and said, “Okay, I’ll stop preaching now, but no more excuses!”

Later I texted his wife this Scripture for him:

“So I said, “Woe is me, for I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of Hosts.” Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, and Your sin purged.” Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.” (Isaiah 6:5-8, NKJV)

I don’t know if my friend will serve in this specific ministry or not, but I encouraged him to pray about it. God may not be calling him to it, but time will tell. I hope he does! What I do know is that no one is perfect, and we all have fallen short of God’s glorious standard (Romans 3:23-24. NLT).

Jesus Christ is the only perfect, sinless One. That is why we all need Him and His forgiveness. God isn’t asking you and me to be perfect, only to be available and willing to say “Yes” to Him for His glory and purposes.

“Many people know Christ as their Savior, but the woman who says yes to God longs to know Him as Lord.” (Lysa TerKeurst, Proverbs 31 Ministries President, American speaker and writer)

## Do you feel unworthy?

So many people, even Christian believers, feel “unworthy” to serve God or to do anything for Him (like my friend above possibly feels). As a result, they hide in the dark shadows, never coming out to shine Jesus’ light which is already there, deep inside of them.

When you and I were saved and received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, His Holy Spirit came to live inside of us as a deposit (a guarantee) of our eternal inheritance and of our names being written in the Lamb’s book of life. We aren’t worthy by ourselves, but because of our faith in Jesus Christ and His Spirit residing in us, we are worthy to receive all God’s goodness, blessings, and abundant life--and to share that good news and eternal hope with others!

“But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.” (Revelation 21:27, NKJV)

“Now He who has made us and prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the [Holy] Spirit as a pledge [a guarantee, a down payment on the fulfillment of His promise].” (2 Corinthians 5:5, AMP)

“…and He has identified us as His own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment that guarantees everything He has promised us.” (2 Corinthians 1:22, NLT)

I’m certainly glad that it’s not up to me or whatever I do (or don’t do!) for God’s promises to come to pass in my life; I’d mess that up in the next second! My sinful history certainly proves that. I’m so thankful for all that Jesus has done for me and my loved ones, is doing, and will do! God is so good, a good Father! Hallelujah and all praise, glory, and honor be to the name of Jesus!

## Peter feeling unworthy

One of my favorite disciples in the Bible is Peter. I do love Thomas’ very real, human struggle with doubt and unbelief (John 11:16; John 10:25), John (“the disciple whom Jesus loved”, John 21:24) laying on His chest, and the disciples arguing about which one is the greatest (Luke 22:24) amuses me so much. Haha! I wonder if Jesus wanted to laugh at that, too.

But Peter is special and someone to whom I relate very much, storm-tossed in his heart with both fear and faith. This Scripture below is one that God has given me several times:

“O afflicted one, storm-tossed and not comforted, behold, I will set your stones in antimony, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles of agate, your gates of carbuncles, and all your wall of precious stones. All your children shall be taught by the LORD, and great shall be the peace of your children. In righteousness you shall be established; you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear, and from terror, for it shall not come near you.” (Isaiah 54:11-14, ESV)

Peter, proclaiming Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God one second (Matthew 16:16) and then rebuking Jesus the next for saying He was going to die for mankind (Matthew 16:22).

Peter saying, “I’m going fishing!” after Jesus’ death (can’t you feel his frustration and grief?), and then telling the other disciples, “It is the LORD!” when they caught so many fish that they couldn’t even pull in the net, after Jesus told them to throw their nets over the side of the boat. Jesus was on the beach waiting for them--with a pan of fish that He had cooked for them for breakfast. (John 21:3-19)

Peter, loud and brash about Jesus being the long-awaited Messiah and God’s only Son and how he’d never forsake Jesus, but then denying Jesus three times when He was arrested (Luke 22:54-62).

Yet Peter was ultimately faithful as Jesus had prophesied about him. Tradition says that Peter was crucified upside down for his Master and LORD, not feeling worthy to die the same way that his Lord did. (Jesus prophesied Peter’s death in John 21:18-19.)

Yes, I love Peter!

How we’re so often like Peter. A little prideful one minute (“I’ll never deny You, Jesus!”) and the next thing you know, we’re knee-deep in sin. Whether it’s sinning with an unkind thought, with relaying some juicy gossip or spewing something hateful out of our mouth, or with an action (adultery, pornography, stealing, idolatry, not honoring the Sabbath), we’re guilty as Peter. How we desperately need God’s forgiveness and mercy—like Peter did!

The good news is that Peter repented and asked God’s forgiveness. And He gave it to him—and then commissioned him.

## Jesus’ and Peter’s fish fry on the beach

I love this precious moment that Jesus has alone with Peter over the fire on the beach, enjoying some good fish. (Fried catfish, cole slaw, French fries, and hush puppies come to mind, too! I was born and raised in south Georgia and I miss my dad’s great-tasting fish fry meals!) I can picture Jesus and Peter there, eating the blackened fish and hush puppies, when suddenly Jesus starts talking to Peter about His Divine purpose for him, even after he had majorly messed up!

“So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep.” (John 21:15-19, NKJV)

I’m sure it was distressing for Peter that Jesus was questioning Peter’s love for Him. Wouldn’t you or I feel upset if someone we loved doubted our love for him or her? Of course, Jesus knew that Peter loved Him—despite him denying Jesus when He was arrested. God knows everything about us, good and bad. And He loves us unconditionally anyway!

How awesome Jesus was letting him know that He still wanted to use him, despite his denials! Jesus then tells Peter how Peter will die and tells him to follow Him. (v. 19) Peter saw the disciple who Jesus loved following them and asked Jesus who would betray Him. Jesus answered, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.” (v. 20-22, NKJV)

Jesus is basically saying, ‘Don’t worry about it, Peter! You just do the right thing!”

What about you and me? Will we follow Jesus, no matter what? No matter who follows Him or who doesn’t? (Even if people in our own family walk away from Him?) We must follow and obey Jesus always, until our death or until He comes again. Let’s you and I be faithful to the very end.

Peter’s sin of denying Jesus wasn’t the unforgiveable sin. God cleansed him of this sin, and then used Peter in great and powerful ways. He will do the same for you and me as we sincerely repent before Him and make ourselves available to Him.

Will you and I say “Yes” to God today?



## Challenge:

In what area of your life have you denied Jesus Christ, like Simon Peter did? Spend time alone with God today and sincerely repent, asking for His forgiveness. He will not only forgive you but restore you –and then He may even surprise you and use that area of shame for His glory and purpose, as He did with Peter!

● Chapter 5 ●

God is holy

**“There is none holy like the Lord:  
for there is none besides You;  
there is no rock like our God.”  
(1 Samuel 2:2)**

Recently the pastor Chad Fagerland of the new church that I’m now a member of, Hope City Church in Harrisonville, Missouri, is teaching a series on the different names of God. He said something that I wasn’t aware of: when Jewish scribes (called a “Sofer”) wrote the name of God (“Yahweh” or “Jehovah”) on scrolls, they used a different quill than the one they had been writing with, because God and His name are holy. Pastor Chad called this their “God pen.”

As an author, I loved this visual picture so much! May we as Christian writers use “God’s holy pen” each time we write, dedicating our words to Him and for Jesus Christ’s glory and to encourage others. My writing coach, CJ Hitz, entitled his speaking presentation *Priestly Pens* for his and his wife Shelley’s writers’ conference, Kingdom Writers. How powerful! I desire that each word I write be sacred, uplifting, and to build and advance the Kingdom of God—"a priestly pen,” as CJ said.

“I am a little pencil in God’s hands. He does the thinking. He does the writing. The pencil has nothing to do with it. The pencil has only to be allowed to be used.” (Mother Teresa, TIME interview*)*

According to Halakha law (the laws of Jewish life), when it comes to writing the name of God, it must be abbreviated if there is a chance that the article where the name is written will be deleted, destroyed, scratched, or defaced, or accidentally done so by one who doesn’t know any better. (YHWY)[[11]](#endnote-11)

There is an exception of the latest law, where it may be written on computer, providing the article won’t be printed. This is why we see the name of God written incomplete (G-d).[[12]](#endnote-12)

Once the Sofer (Scribe) starts writing the name, he may not stop until it is finished and if he makes a mistake he may not change what he has written. He has to write a Hebrew Scroll without error – copying the 304,805 letters of the Torah and having the same letters Moses used 3,500 years ago. [[13]](#endnote-13) This is a huge, sobering task!

“When it comes to God’s name the pressure increases. At the point of writing HaShem, The Name, the Scribe or Sofer will want to be sure he is ritualistic clean by using the Mikvah.” [[14]](#endnote-14)

A Mikvah is a body of water deep enough for an average size adult to be covered with water, not for bodily cleanliness, but it’s a ceremonial picture of spiritual cleanliness.” [[15]](#endnote-15) The Jewish people needed to consider themselves spiritually clean to write the Torah or other articles of Scrolls, Tfillin, and Mezuzah.[[16]](#endnote-16)

Whoa, talk about pressure! Aren’t you thankful that you and I aren’t under this kind of legalistic law every time that we say or write God’s name?

However, I do believe that the Jews’ belief and attitude that God and His Name are holy are great and admirable. If only everyone revered God like this today! May we as writers and speakers revere God and His Name, never using it lightly and being serious about our responsibility before God as His messengers of truth and hope. God IS holy. And He expects us as believers in Jesus Christ to be like Him.

“You shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.” (Leviticus 20:26, ESV)

## Repentance and holiness

As Christians, repentance should be a habitual part of our lives, just as obedience, reading the Bible, prayer, worship/praise, generous giving, and fellowship with other believers should be. When we are saved through faith in Jesus Christ, we are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ Spirit comes to live inside of us, and this is God’s “deposit” (guarantee) of eternal life with Him. (Acts 1:8; Acts 2:38; Ephesians 4:30; Ephesians 1:14)

Our spirit man is saved forever when we receive Jesus as LORD and Messiah. But our souls – our mind, our wills, our emotions, and our bodies – must be crucified daily and sanctified. It is a lifelong process and an everyday battle. This is why Paul instructs us to “put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5) and “Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Galatians 5:24)

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.” (Matthew 16:24)

We can’t just live however sinful way that we want, and expect God to be okay with this, because He is holy. He desires that you and I be holy, also. God wants you and me to look and act like Jesus, to be formed into His perfect image.

## Sanctification and crucifying the flesh are a lifelong process

We are human beings, and when we are born, we inherited the Adamic sin nature. But when we become saved through faith in Jesus (not through our good works!), we become a new creation.

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

But *it’s a daily choice* to crucify our flesh for our mind, will, and emotions to become sanctified until we see Jesus face to face one day. God is the Potter, and we are the clay. (Isaiah 64:8, ESV) He is transforming us into the perfect image of Jesus Christ as we walk in obedience to God day by day.

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the LORD, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the LORD.” (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Repentance is vital to accomplish this sanctification, crucifying (daily) process. I believe that if we are truly saved, God’s Spirit will convict us of sin in our hearts and we will repent. Unless we have hardened our hearts and conscience, we don’t have to dig and dig to find out what sins we have committed. God will show you and me by His Spirit what He desires us to change. His voice is loving, gentle, and good, never condemning, critical, and harsh. (That’s the enemy Satan’s voice!) God’s voice can be strong and firm at times, but it’s always spoken with agape (unconditional) love.

As we sit quietly before God in prayer and humbly ask Him to search our hearts for any sin which might be there, God will show you and me. He will shine His spotlight on that specific area. For example, let’s say that you have a family member, a friend, a co-worker, or someone at church who easily irritates you. You might snap at that person or even just think hateful, unkind thoughts about him or her.

God will reveal to you that He desires for you to love that “sandpaper” person who gets on your last nerve so often. Is it easy? No. But the Bible says in 1 John 4:7-8, NKJV:

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

God won’t overwhelm you by telling you every single one of your sins all at once. I love how the Message version of Matthew 11:28-30 defines His grace to help us in our weaknesses:

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me – watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

The wonderful thing about repentance is how relieved and at peace you and I immediately feel when we do it. Our relationship with God has been made right again. I also love how God gives us a fresh start each new morning with Him:

“Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22-23, NKJV)

## Is it too late?

One of the enemy Satan’s most powerful tools is hopelessness. Maybe you are under his condemnation and accusation, and you feel that it’s just too late for you to receive God’s forgiveness. You believe that whatever sin you’ve committed--whether it was 13 years ago or yesterday or today--is just too bad for God to forgive. I want to encourage you, friend, that the ONLY unforgiveable sin is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. These are Jesus’ own words:

“Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.” (Matthew 12:31-32, ESV)

“But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.” (Mark 3:29, ESV)

I’m so thankful that God has forgiven me of my many sins in the past. You can read my powerful story in my memoir, *Promises In The Dark: One Woman’s Search for Authentic Love,* available for sale at Amazon at this link below:

<https://www.amazon.com/Promises-Dark-Beth-M-Jones/dp/0692230211/>

It’s not too late for you, no matter what you’ve done, or you are doing right now. God will forgive you if you repent (turn away, change) of your sin(s), ask Jesus Christ to be your LORD and Savior, and walk in obedience to Him. The good news is that salvation and forgiveness aren’t based on our own good (or bad) works, but on the redemptive work that Jesus did over 2,000 years ago on the Cross for your sins and mine. It’s God’s beautiful gift to you and me. If you have never done this before, I encourage you to stop right now and pray a simple prayer of faith:

“God, I am a sinner. I have sinned against You, others, and even myself at times. I ask You to forgive me of ALL my sins. In childlike faith, I now accept Jesus Christ as my LORD and Savior, and I give my life to Him. Please wash away all my sins with the power of Jesus’ blood and His name, so that I may spend eternity with You, Father God. Thank You for hearing me right now and setting me free from my sins forever. Help me to live my purpose that You designed for me when You created me and to live a life pleasing to You from now on. Amen.”

If you prayed this prayer, I’d love to hear from you and celebrate with you! Your name is now written in the Lamb’s book of life. You belong to God’s family now and one day I’ll see you in Heaven! Contact me at my website at <https://www.BethJones.net> to let me know that you prayed this salvation prayer to rejoice with you!



## Challenge:

Do you feel hopeless about being able to change in a sin area in your life? As my speaker/author friend Sheryl Griffin says, “There is always hope with Christ!”[[17]](#endnote-17) I encourage you to just sit quietly with God today and surrender this area to God. Ask Him to help you overcome it by the power of Jesus’ Name and Blood. God is faithful to complete what He started in you, dear friend! (Philippians 1:6) Ask your family and your friends and other Christian believers to pray for you to help you live victoriously each day, through faith in Jesus. Find someone who is a mature believer to be accountable to and to pray with him or her as you walk out this faith. We can’t be an island unto ourselves. We need God and other Christian brothers and sisters to help us on this journey.

● Chapter 6 ●

God’s mercy

**“And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!”   
(Luke 18:13, NKJV)**

The gift of mercy is one of the most powerful spiritual gifts. (Romans 12:6-8) My husband Ray and my sister Maria both have this wonderful gift. (They *ooze* mercy--sometimes I think to their own *detriment*!) But the Bible says in Matthew 5:7, NLT, “God blesses those who are merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.” The Amplified version says, “Blessed [content, sheltered by God’s promises] are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.” The Passion Translation reads, “How blessed you are when you demonstrate tender mercy! For tender mercy will be demonstrated to you.”

Tender mercy. What a beautiful picture of God’s love. Mercy is not one of my strongest gifts! In fact, Ray calls me “la belle dame sans merci” (the beautiful lady without mercy). He has a copy of the painting in his office at work. I’m fairly sure that it gets some raised eyebrows, after anyone asks what the painting is about, and he explains.

This is the title of a painting by Frank Bernard Dicksee, hung in the Bristol Museum & Art Gallery in Clifton, Bristol, in the United Kingdom. The painting is of a beautiful lady on a horse in the idyllic setting of the English countryside, with a knight standing beside the horse, looking up and smitten with her. The mood is one of enchantment and is a cautionary note of the “femme fatale.” (Think of the terrifying 1987 *Fatal Attraction* movie with Glenn Close and Michael Douglas!) This painting is taken from Keats’ 1819 poem, where the knight is left haggard and woe-begone after his encounter with “la belle dame sans merci.”[[18]](#endnote-18)

I actually do have some mercy in my heart—especially for my children, my grandchildren, my sister Maria and her kids—and stray cats! (Currently I’ve have three indoor cats and am feeding two other strays around our house. I worry that I might be becoming one of those “crazy cat ladies,” LOL!) Mercy is something that we as Christian believers should all desire to have and to cultivate more of in our live—especially with people. As our example, God our Heavenly Father is incredibly merciful to us every day. Through the gift of mercy (compassion), Jesus saved, fed, and healed the multitudes.

The shortest sentence in the Bible is, “Jesus wept” (John 11:35, NKJV), when He saw Mary, Martha, and others at the tomb, crying over Lazarus’ death – then He raised him from the dead! Jesus also raised other dead people. Mercy is a beautiful gift, which meets people’s needs, builds their faith in Jesus, and empowers them for successful, fruitful living.

The Bible also tells us in James 2:13, NASB, “For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.” This is a sobering, even a scary verse, and I remind myself of it whenever I struggle with not showing mercy to others! My former pastor, Lawrence Wilson, told Ray and me once that he’d rather err on the side of mercy than judgment. Wise advice that we should heed.

## Comparing sins

Jesus warned His disciples about self-righteousness and judging and despising others. He told a parable to them of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14, NLT:

“Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’” (Luke 18:9-12, NLT)

The nerve! Can you believe that he’s praying this way? It’s bloated with pride. Yet how often we can be like this, thinking that we’re doing so much good in the world and aren’t as “sinful” as other people. We compare ourselves to others, thinking that their sins are “worse” than our sins. Yet even an unkind thought is sin to God, who is holy and pure.

Jesus shows His disciples an example of true humility. “But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Luke 18:13-14, NLT)

Tax collectors in Jesus’ day were well know for their corruption and greed. The Jews hated them. They were regarded with the same contempt as murderers and robbers. Tax collectors were a disgrace to their own family, an outcast in society, excommunicated from the synagogue by the rabbis, and disqualified in court. They weren’t allowed to exchange their money at the Temple. The rabbis even considered it lawful to lie in almost any way to avoid paying tax collectors![[19]](#endnote-19)

By contrast, the Pharisees (teachers of the law) were highly respected and regarded. For Jesus to commend a tax collector, and elevate him above the Pharisee, was almost unfathomable. The disciples must have been shocked at what He was saying. It must have rocked their world that Jesus was telling them that a tax collector would be accepted by God, saved by faith, and have an eternal part of His Heavenly Kingdom!

## What is your posture before God?

Notice the tax collector’s humble, broken posture before God. He was beating his chest with repentance and sorrow—a godly sorrow, not one like Esau, who was only sorry that he had traded his birthright for his brother Jacob’s stew. (Genesis 25:29-34) This tax collector was grieved over his heart’s sins. Are you and I grieved over our sins or do we justify them?

Jesus was deeply hurt and angry at the lack of mercy in the religious leaders of His day and He rebuked them: “What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.” (Matthew 22:23, NLT)

Notice that Jesus said to still tithe. He wasn’t giving people an out to do other good, obedient things. But He emphasized *the more important things.* It sounds like what Jesus told Martha, who was busy and frazzled preparing the food for Jesus and His disciples visiting them. She asked Jesus to tell her sister Mary to help her (who was sitting at Jesus’ feet, listening to Him).

“But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, “Lord, don’t You care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38-42, NIV) Stressed out Martha sounds like me!

Jesus wasn’t saying that getting the house clean and in order and preparing the meal didn’t matter. In fact, Martha was doing an important thing: cooking for Jesus, the Son of God! Such an honor but talk about pressure! What on Earth does God like to eat?

When our kids still lived at home, they knew that anytime that I went into a house cleaning frenzy that company was coming. Back then I was a “clean freak” anyway, so I often did have cleaning sprees. If they asked, “Who’s coming over?”, it would annoy me. I just wanted the house clean, and they needed to stop making such messes! (I cleaned extra for company!)

I also made them take responsibility to help me clean, which they despised. I hated it, too, when my dad used to make me and my siblings clean and do chores around the house, especially on Saturday mornings--our only time to sleep in and not have to go to school. I’d have to wash dishes and do laundry, my brother Greg had to rake the leaves, and he, I, and my sister Maria all had to help daddy wash the big, wrap-around porch. I’m sure that he made our younger brother Herbert do some chores! (Herbert now lives with my dad and helps my sister Maria to take care of him, bless their hearts!)

My dad was the son of a southern farmer, who came from a long line of farmers. Laziness was regarded as the cardinal sin. And as a farmer, you can’t be lazy, or your crops will fail! Back then, I didn’t appreciate daddy’s seeming hysteria that my siblings and I were still sleeping in bed at 9 o’clock on a Saturday morning.

“What are you all still doing in bed?” he’d say, coming into our bedrooms at lightning speed. “Get UP! We have work to do!” We’d all groan and sleepily put on our clothes to work almost the entire day, whatever chores daddy would find for us to do. They seemed endless. He did believe in celebrating after a good, hard day’s work. He’d grill steaks, cut a fresh, red watermelon, make homemade peach ice cream, boil peanuts in salt, and we’d all watch *Hee Haw* or *The Flip Wilson Show* (a comedy) on the tv in the living room, sprawled out on the floor in our pajamas.

Daddy would eat the salty peanuts and drink Budweiser beer and laugh at Flip Wilson playing the sassy female “Geraldine Jones,” about the only time I’d ever see daddy relaxing and laughing. Usually, he was working in his home office as a CPA, burning the midnight oil. In fact, he didn’t officially retire until he was 80 years old! I think he must be pretty bored now. Daddy was the first college graduate in his family and had a successful business as a CPA. He loved his work. He expected us kids and others to love work, too! I hated the chores then, but today I appreciate the strong work ethic that daddy taught me and my siblings.

God doesn’t mind work, either. In fact, He set the example for us. He worked for six days to create the world, everything in it, and mankind, and rested on the seventh Sabbath day, calling it holy and commanding us to honor it and rest, too. So, Martha’s work wasn’t the problem; it was her being frustrated, stressed out and distracted by it. Mary had chosen the best part, to sit at Jesus’ feet and to be discipled by Him.

The Jews were being distracted by their hatred of the tax collectors, but more importantly, they lacked the gifts of mercy and agape (unconditional) love for others. They were derailed in their walk with God by being self-righteous and judgmental. God desires that we humble ourselves before Him and worship Him.

Ephesians 4:2, NIV, says, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”

Jesus demonstrated that humility and power, by dying on the Cross over 2,000 years ago for our sins so that we would be forgiven and could live forever with God in Heaven. James 4:6 says that God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. I desire His favor, don’t you?

Let’s not be like the Pharisee, thinking that we are better than others and judging them, but be as the tax collector who wanted to be sure that he was in right standing with God, and crying out for His mercy and forgiveness.

## A beautiful gift

Although we may not like to admit we’re wrong and to change, repentance isn’t a bad curse word, LOL! Let’s look at repentance as the precious, beautiful gift that it is which God has given us, so that we might draw closer to Him and become more like Jesus every day, transforming into His perfect, radiant likeness:

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (James 4:8, NKJV)

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Romans 12:2, NKJV)

## Clean from the inside out

The NLT version says, “but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.” We must learn to develop God thoughts and a heart like God’s (which is holy).

I love how The Message version puts this verse: “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out.”

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and the scribes for their religious spirit—who looked good on the outside, but inside was great spiritual darkness, even death. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.” (Matthew 23:27-28, NKJV) These are strong words!

Yes, let’s fix our gaze and full attention on Jesus Christ and He will change us from the inside out. Like the metamorphosis from a larva (caterpillar) to a pupa to a beautiful butterfly, Jesus will set you and me free, transforming us day by day into His beautiful, perfect image until that wonderful day (soon, I think!) when we see Him face to face. Butterflies are happy and free!

(Check out my non-fiction, three-book Metamorphosis series about butterflies and our faith walk at my Amazon Author Page at <https://www.amazon.com/author/bethmjones>.)

The late world-wide evangelist and preacher Billy Graham (who reportedly preached to live audiences of 210 million people in more than 185 countries and territories)[[20]](#endnote-20) said, “The wonderful news is that our Lord is a God of mercy, and He responds to repentance.”

Amen!

No matter what you or I have done, dear friend, if we come before God in brokenness and humility and repent of our sins, God will forgive us. He longs to show you and me His unconditional love, mercy, and goodness. He is drawn to the broken-hearted.

“The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18, NASB)

Are you brokenhearted? Are you under the weight of shame from your sin(s)? If you acknowledge them before God (not hiding them, not justifying or excusing them, nor comparing yourself to “worst sinners,” like the Pharisee did), if you seek His forgiveness through faith in Jesus, His redemptive work on the Cross, and the power of His blood that He shed for us, God will wash you clean and immediately, completely forgive you.

“Come, let’s talk this over, says the Lord; no matter how deep the stain of your sins, I can take it out and make you as clean as freshly fallen snow. Even if you are stained as red as crimson, I can make you white as wool.” (Isaiah 1:18, TLB)

I love that picture of beautiful, pure, freshly fallen snow. Just give me a cup of hot coffee or cocoa, a warm, soft blanket, and my cat Natalya purring on my lap to complete it!

Jesus gave His disciples and us today the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector to teach us what God values and loves: our humility and sincere repentance. And when we come before Him this way, He will answer and take away our sin(s) and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

He’s a good Father, and He loves you and me so much!

## Radiate God’s love

“When you know how much God is in love with you, then you can only live your life radiating that love.” (Mother Teresa)

Let’s radiate (spread, emit, send out) God’s love in our ordinary, everyday lives, shining Jesus’ light in the darkness, being carriers of His unconditional love and glory.

“And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above, and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” (Daniel 12:3, ESV)

I want to be a shiny girl, filled to overflowing with God’s beautiful light, exposing the darkness of this world, and igniting others with His holy fire, hope, love, and goodness.

What about you? Shine on!



## Challenge:

Have you ever met someone who is self-righteous and prideful, excusing his or her sin(s) and comparing it to others’ sins? Do you struggle with this? Today invite the Holy Spirit to shine His spotlight on your heart and ask Him to reveal any area of self-righteousness or pride there. Sometimes we can have a room in our house that has a closed door, because it’s a big mess in there and we don’t want any company coming over to see it! We can also have a closed door in our hearts. Invite Jesus into every room of your heart today. Ask Him to help you clean it out for good! (Decluttering feels so good and can set you and me free!) Let’s be broken and humble before God in repentance. It truly is a beautiful, precious gift from Him because He loves us so much!

Final Thoughts

This book was born out of the trenches of prayer in my life.

I believe that God gave me the idea for the book. He knows that for literally years, I’ve been praying for loved ones who are either not saved (yet!) or who haven’t been walking closely with God and are in habitual sin.

I, like Rachel, have wept rivers of tears, begging God to intervene. God has promised me that one day, my loved ones will return to Him and has reassured me that He loves them even more than I do. I’ll pray until my dying breath, and even then, my prayers will outlive me, because God isn’t bound by human time or space. I didn’t get saved just for my family to serve the devil! God is greater, Amen!

If you’ve been praying for your spouse, your children, your grandchildren, another relative, a neighbor, a friend, a coworker, or someone else you know, if you have a prodigal in your life, remember the beautiful redemptive story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32, NKJV. This prodigal child asked his father for his inheritance, left home, and wasted his possessions with worldly (sinful, carnal) living.

The son began to be in great need and finally came to his senses, realizing that his father’s hired servants had enough to eat and to spare, yet he was starving, taking care of the pigs, longing to even eat the pigs’ pods that they ate. He left and went back home to beg his father to make him a hired servant, so he’d be able to have enough to eat and not be hungry anymore.

Instead, the father, who had been looking faithfully for his son’s return every day, ran to him when he saw him a long way off, kissed him, and put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. He then joyfully threw a celebration party for him. What a powerful story of God’s agape love, forgiveness, and restoration!

So it is in Heaven with God and the angels every time a sinner repents and comes home. (Luke 15:10, NKJV)

I have great faith in Jesus that the prodigals whom I love and pray daily for will return one day and be reconciled with Jesus, and that those who don’t know Him yet as Lord and Savior will be delivered from Satan’s evil and be eternally saved. The devil is a liar and a defeated foe!

“So they said, “Believe on the LORD Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” (Acts 16:31-34, NKJV)

## Tears as liquid prayers

Did you know that your tears are liquid prayers, yes, liquid gold? God does hear you and I when we pray. He has seen our many tears and heard our weeping. He collects our tears in His bottle. (Psalm 56:8, NKJV) I joke with people that my tear bottle in Heaven is enormous, LOL!

But God’s heart breaks with ours. He cares about everything that concerns and worries us. (1 Peter 5:6-7)

He will answer your prayers and mine. His timetable isn’t like our own. Sometimes God seems slow to answer. (I feel that He’s turtle-slow, like my husband Ray!) But His timing is always perfect.

## It’s a spiritual battle

The Bible says to be sober-minded and alert, because the adversary, Satan, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8, NKJV) He wants to kill you, your spouse, your children, your grandchildren, and all believers. If he can’t kill us, he wants to do everything he can to cause destruction in our lives and to derail us from our God-designed purpose.

Remember every day to put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18, NKJV), apply the blood of Jesus over you, your family, and your house’s doorposts (Exodus 12:23-28), and use the Word of God, the Bible, as your weapon against him. I do these things every morning when I get up, because I know how evil Satan is and he doesn’t play fair.

The Bible is the weapon that Jesus chose to use when He was tempted in the wilderness by the devil. How much more should you and I use it as ours! (Matthew 4:5-11, NKJV)

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12, NKJV)

In the meantime, God is building trust and faith into your heart and mine as we pray, repent on behalf of ourselves, our children, our grandchildren, and our nation, and ask Him for forgiveness of our many sins. We can stand in the gap to intercede for others and for our nation, America, Israel, and other nations, too.

## Keep praying for yourself, those you love, and others! Don’t stop!

Keep praying and don’t ever quit! God hears you and me when we pray, and He will answer. He is a mighty, miracle-working, prayer-answering God! It is faith that pleases God. (Hebrews 11:6)

You might feel like you don’t have enough faith for God to hear and answer you. The Bible says in Matthew 17:20-21, NKJV, that even if you have faith the size of a mustard seed (a tiny seed!), you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will! Your prayers can move mountains in yours and your loved ones’ and others’ lives. Believe Jesus!

God will teach you how to pray as you seek His face humbly before Him. His Holy Spirit will guide you. Read the Bible and connect with other Christian believers to pray, too. I’ve learned about HOW to pray as I prayed and read the Bible.

God has also taught me how to pray from my spiritual mothers and other prayer warriors. He’ll bring those people into your life to help you pray and to learn more about prayer. There are also many good books by Christian authors on prayer.

Sometimes the most powerful prayer is a simple but earnest, “Lord God, help!” God hears you.

“I look up to the mountains—does my help come from there? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” (Psalm 121:1-2, NLT)

A great book that I’d like to recommend is *Intercessory Prayer* by Dutch Sheets. You can get it available for sale on Amazon.

<https://www.amazon.com/Intercessory-Prayer-Publisher-Dutch-Sheets/dp/B004V3S2K2/>

Will we keep our eyes on Jesus and trust and believe and obey Him?

Let’s passionately follow and obey Jesus, looking to the Author and the Finisher of our Faith. (Hebrews 12:2)

Let’s be faithful women (and men) of God, praying for our beautiful, precious children, grandchildren, other loved ones, and nation. A praying, believing people whose gaze remains steadfastly on Jesus. To whom be all the glory and honor forever, Amen.

I believe, Lord. Please hear me when I pray. I put all into Your loving, powerful hands and I trust You to answer, even now. Help me to walk with You in sincere repentance each day.

END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Beth M. Jones is an International Speaker, Author, and Coach, wife to fire chief-paramedic Ray, and mom of 3 beautiful daughters, Heather, Eden, and Leah. She also has two cute, funny cats, Natalya and Silas (and feeds more stray cats every day outside!). Beth’s mission is encouraging others to use their gifts for God’s glory, fulfilling their great purpose, and living a life they love. Beth also helps beginner, aspiring speakers and authors to share their hearts’ unique, powerful messages.

You can find out more about Beth’s speaking for women’s conferences, retreats, and online events at her website and blog at <https://www.BethJones.net>.

Beth’s Amazon Author Page where you’ll find the books that Beth has written is at <https://www.amazon.com/author/bethmjones>.

Watch Beth’s videos and vlogs and subscribe to her YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/c/BethJones-International-Speaker>.

Beth’s podcast is at <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/bethmjones>.

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