
HEALING THE FATHER WOUND

MY WIFE CYNTHIA'S TESTIMONY

I grew up in church, so I knew God existed. However, the impression I had gleaned was the image of a long, white-bearded Being, sitting on a throne way up high in Heaven. He was love and goodness and omnipotent (whatever that meant), and had little or nothing to do with my daily life. Then my 47 year old father dropped dead of heart disease. My mother, the youngest of seven children, was totally dependent on him. And we four children, ages 6 to 15, had the very rug of our existence pulled out from under us. And yes, the church people were helpful and loving and the pastor stopped by to console our grief. "We just can't understand why God does these things, but we will when we join our loved ones in Heaven some day." "The Lord giveth; the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." My brother at 14 was told, "You're the man of the house now. Take care of your mother and sisters." I could hear my mother cry herself to sleep at night for many months - even years later. And we were all left to define for ourselves, "What kind of God would do this to us? How could a 'loving Father' take our daddy? God is all powerful - and He would do THIS to us? What could we have done to deserve this horror?"

To this day, my brother is an atheist, and one sister never steps foot in a church. The youngest, though she has had trust issues, is searching for God. And I am married to a pastor!

Here's what happened. For probably twenty years, I had such mistrust and anger toward God. It's like you are floating on an air mattress through the sea of life and you never knew when God will suddenly sneak up and tip you over into the cold water. I had no use for God; "You leave me alone, I'll leave You alone." My husband was drawing closer and closer into ministry and knew this was no attitude

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for a minister's wife, but all debate and discussion would not dissuade me. One evening after a spirited discussion, when I had again shared with him my "God will come and unexpectedly tip you over" theology, he said, "I am going to pray that God will reveal Himself to you!" and left the room. "Humph!" I said, and sat down on the recliner to relax. I had closed my eyes only moments when a feeling of well-being rushed over me. In an image as plain as day, I saw a soft, firm bed mattress solidly resting on solid dry land, and a voice clearly spoke, "This is how I really am!"

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DON'S TESTIMONY

The windows of darkness were open to me. I felt as if I was the only person awake in this night of torment. The only sound I heard was a sound most people take for granted - the sound of my own body breathing. This night was another night of illness and it was a very dark night. With each tormenting breath, my chest would hurt and fear would tell me this next breath is the one. The one that will lead to a coughing spasm - relentless pain, strange fluids, fainting eyes, dizziness and the emotional darkness of "alone". My wife was wonderful, but when you're the victim of illness, though others hurt, you're the hurting one and you are alone in it. For me, nighttime was the worst. My lungs gurgled so loudly that I had to sleep alone. Having lost 40 lbs., the bed seemed much bigger - too much bigger.

The voice of isolation, "friends and co-workers don't call or come by anymore and soon family will be sick of your sickness also." Your doctor admits he's drawing blanks. The specialist called to say it's moderate to advanced lung sarcoidosis, something like emphysema. "Your lungs are producing 'gam...' cells (big dr. word), and your white blood cells are attacking these invader cells, and the battle causes scar tissue which is hard and prevents the lungs from doing their job - breathing. We can only give you cortisone, but after awhile, either the disease or the medication will kill you." "There is nothing we can do. Get your house in order!" my doctor had said. Over and over again I heard this conversation. It had dragged on for months. Now, I was out of options, out of time and running out of hope. Welcome to the 1980's - the decade that was to be my last.

My wife's father had died a premature, unexpected death around the age of 47. Her heart would break to lose me before the age of 35. People tell you "Be strong, fight

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on!” When the darkness is screaming at you, I don’t know what “fight on” means. Does it mean focus on living or struggle with death? Maybe both, but usually you’re just trying to get through the next wave of pain. Here I was 31 years young and I was dying. This was not the script I had written. I had a good career in music, but not a great career. I’d made good records, but not a great one. As a professional counselor, I had a BA and a master’s degree, work experience, respect, good jobs, but not a great one. A good home, good car, but, but, but. Maybe resentment got me sick? Maybe I worked too hard living a schizophrenic life - counselor by day, musician by night? Maybe I didn’t work hard enough? Maybe God was punishing me for not staying in the church? Maybe the devil was punishing me for only serving him half-heartedly? Maybe all or none of the above.

I was raised in the black Baptist Church and had a Pentecostal grandma. Most of my friends were “good Jewish folk”. I had belonged to a Presbyterian youth group and lived in a mixed neighborhood in New York City. I had dated Protestants and “good Catholic girls”, and after college married a Community Church Midwest darling whose dad was a Quaker. My Grandpa, several uncles and cousins were preachers and my dad was the best preacher of them all. I really had gotten God mad at me ’cause I knew better and still went “worldly”. Through my tears I thought, “God had all He could stand, so He kicked me to the curb and put a free for the taking sign on me, so death and the devil could cart me away.” In the prior 10 years, I had been such a sinner that God probably had forgotten which curb I was kicked to. God had run out of patience. Not only was I a sinner, but a “hypocrite” also, because I knew the Gospel message. Part of the message I had heard was “He’ll be with you in suffering”. I knew He’d be with you in suffering, if

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the suffering was for the sake of the Gospel. But would He be with me when I'm suffering due to my own sin? If I was reaping what I had sown, wouldn't Jesus just leave me out there? I pondered: does the Lord find joy in "I told you so!"? Dejected, I tried so hard to tell myself that I was the rejected, the undeserving, abandoned. When you are sick with a sickness that can kill, you seek to find the next sweet cure. That's a cure that requires no Faith, no sacrifice, no involvement. Take a pill and call me in the morning! The body does well at healing itself, but much better when we help. Somehow, the body's all connected as one self-contained unit. My inner man had been so out of control that over-driving my body was natural. Dignity and pride are powerful forces that can work for or against our health. They can set limits to what you will allow. Coming from a public heritage, I would never drink or drug to the point of embarrassing myself or killing myself. I would practice periods of abstinence from substances, but not from stress or overworking. Not knowing how to say "no" can say "yes" to sickness, resentment and escapism. I felt pressure from every arena in my life. On my day job, I had to excel. My race was counting on me. My parents were counting on me. My wife was counting on me. The band was counting on me (even if they were too high and distracted to notice). I was counting on me. I had so much to prove. "The music biz would recognize how talented I was," I thought. To white people, I was too black. To black people, I was too white. Too soulful for pop music, too polished for soul music. Too much control for Gospel music, not enough for jazz. I had too much or too little for everybody. My young wife had patiently waited 10 years before having any "crumb snatchers", and here I was, very ill with a pregnant wife. Back then I didn't think so, but now I can see that after touring with Harry Belafonte, I now knew how to do this

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profession, and had to build her a nest to get ready for kids and fatherhood without having accomplished a good record deal. Musicians are great to play with, but not live with. They are an unstable lot. They are loyal to the gig and creativity. When one or the other is threatened, they bail in search of the next gig or creativity. The phrase, “play music” is a negative description, but often true and reflects our lives. The pressure to provide gigs is tremendous on the band leaders; without a record deal it’s tough, and with one it’s worse. Now it’s much clearer that all of this had taken its toll. As I had gotten sick, the band members disappeared. Only Cynthia remained. My father was silent. My mom was in denial and remains so to this day some 25 years later. We were out of the church, so there was no one else to come or care. All medical hope exhausted, no job, no gig, no band, no future. I couldn’t even work on our newly-built home to justify my existence. My weight continued to dive while cortisone gave a false mask of improvement. Swollen glands and puffy cheeks changed the landscape of my face. None of my clothes fit so days were spent in bathrobes. One medical journal reported this disease may be due to pine tree pollen so even the joy of my woods where we lived was tainted. Who do counselors go to see? Usually no one. After all, we know how to ask ourselves the questions.

I had so many wrong questions, and therefore, wrong answers. God hadn’t punished me. God hadn’t run out of patience. God hadn’t kicked me to the curb and left me there! I wasn’t the unforgivable, forsaken or unusable. I was talented and gifted, but I was in the wrong arena playing the wrong music to the wrong people with the wrong plan. I was not “too little of” or “too much of” for Jesus. I didn’t fit anywhere but in the hole He had fitted me for. Because of the disease, I couldn’t sing anymore, yet I would still go to my recording studio and play finished and unfinished tracks.

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After playing a song that should have been a hit, I remembered my record company rejection letters. In the biz, you send out demo tapes and by formality, they send you back the tape un-played and say, thank you, but we don't bother to listen to unsolicited tapes. I had a box full of saved rejections. I planned to send copies back with an insulting letter after I made it. Something pulled in me to give up that idea, so grudgingly I burned them and closed that door of resentment. I don't remember when, but I began to realize there was no other help, but the God of my fathers. When I sang to the Lord or about Him, I didn't seem to care if the world, or the industry, noticed. Just the love of writing and creating was often enough of a reward by itself. When I felt justifiably rejected because of my hypocrisy, I also felt my music was therefore rejected. There was a sad returning thought - that so much that was in me would never get out. Self-pity and fear haunt those that feel forsaken. I wondered if I'd ever record or perform again.

After going to Presbyterian Hospital for more final tests, I did a strange thing. After dinner, I watched as the nurses took a break and checked records. I quietly put on shoes, no socks, pants, no shirt, just the hospital gown and put on my outer coat and like a thief, made for the elevator, pushing the wrist band higher up my arm and I escaped. There was just enough time. I hailed a N.Y.C. cab and gave the address. As I walked into the church, I noticed something was different - me. I felt as I did at 14 years of age in Schenectady, New York. The teenage boy sat in the back and heard the congregation sing "Just As I Am", and I knew it all was true - Jesus, the Cross, Heaven, hell, all of it. On this night as a young man, I was enveloped into that reality once again. I don't remember what was said or by whom or who was there. That Sunday night service came and went, but I was plugged back in again.

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Soon after, my wife and a girlfriend, Judy Knox, visited a church in Kingston while I was confined at home. Miracles do happen and prayers do get answered in strange ways. When she came home, something was quietly erupting in her as she shared her adventure. She sat with a prayer in her heart for me as the preacher directed them to a Scripture. She turned to the passage and the preacher began to read. "I will heal him!" are the words she heard. Stunned, she flipped the pages, ignoring the preacher's further words. This message was not in the passage he had chosen. She distinctly heard "I will heal him", but it wasn't in print or spoken by the preacher. Peace, sweet peace. "Surely," I thought, "I had been wrong and my self-counsel false." I was not forsaken, abandoned nor forgotten. Just as I had periodically checked in on God, He had periodically checked in on me. And now, He had sent this word crashing through my pain and lonely darkness. I don't remember asking her "how or when", but I had her tell me over again until I was sure that somehow it would come to pass. Now I smile to think Jesus had a plan the whole time, and He had sent the Holy Spirit to remind us. This was my wake-up call. I would have claimed my healing right then if I had known how to work by Faith. If I had known what the Bible really said, not "if it's God's will," or "He'll be with you in suffering," or "even God runs out of patience". Many Baptist folk major on salvation, not "total-complete-right-now salvation," just the "eternal-life-after-death" kind. I had learned that very well and though it sounds strange, I cannot remember feeling condemned to hell. I felt disqualified, unworthy, ignorant and without access to any healing power beyond begging, suffering and waiting for Heaven. Yet, a new thing was being birthed in me.

God is always there, but we seldom maintain a journal of contact points, interventions and divine

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appointments. In our suffering, it would do us real well to remember, relive those moments of earthly salvation. I had had one at the age of five. The white trash kid put a piece of glass into an apple and threw it at the little nigger kid playing in the trout stream. The glass embedded itself in my temple. I was bleeding profusely and dazed. My nine year old big brother swept me up and carried me home. Before I passed out, I recall my parents reassuring me that I would not die. "If it had been 1/16th deeper, we may have lost this child" was all that I remember about the doctor. As an adult I visited the sight of the incident and realized how blessed I had been that a nine year old was given the strength to carry a five year old ¼ of a mile to safety. Racism is surely the tool of the devil - that little children would be taught by bad fathers to hate other children they don't even know. I still have the scar, but my Heavenly Father healed my body and my heart.

And again when I was in college; we should have stayed in Ohio until the storm was over, but New York was calling and college winter break was only 10 days or so, hardly enough time to party. My close childhood friend, J.B., was driving. As I read a book on Roman mythology, I was interrupted. The voice had a totally calming affect upon me. "There will be an accident, but you'll be safe!" I conveyed this to J.B. as a semi truck pulled us into a skid. Out of control, we went into a 360 degree spin and crossed over into oncoming traffic. Then a 180 degree down into the divide, missing other cars and now backwards, stalled out between the eastbound and westbound lanes of the Ohio Turnpike. The calm of the message had not left me, though my buddy was rightly shaken. While he and good Samaritans watched, I easily drove back up onto the roadway, knowing that God's angel had been on duty.

As a rehabilitation counselor, you know quite a bit

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about disease and damage. This client has high blood sugar and all the matching symptoms - blurred vision, constant urination, etc. As he left my office, I pulled a book on diabetics off the shelves and told my 24-year-old body that it was in trouble. After accepting the frightening news concerning my symptoms, I called my mother to confirm if my family history contained any diabetics. She sweetly said, "I didn't want to tell you because I was afraid you'd get it! Your grandma and your father have it." My doctor gave me a tag and name card professing "I'm a diabetic," with a prescription to start right away and the expectation to go from pills to insulin eventually and a shortened, restricted life. I still don't remember the exact moment of knowing, but I knew down on the inside that if I fasted and prayed 10 days I'd be spared the malady. My doctor protested, but I told him I would be back in 10 days and my sugar would be down. As a counselor, I knew something about positive affirmation and had quite a bit of Bible begging (please God, please God) in me. So for 10 days I fasted and went after what was placed in my heart - "10 days and I'd be okay." After 10 days of fasting, I went back to the doctor. To his surprise, my blood sugar was in normal range. He didn't want to hear about the 'Jesus did it' stuff, but seemed happy for me in a quiet way. I asked him for a sensible diet and he complied. You see, I realized that I had received a blessing, but if I didn't change my life style and lose weight, I would be throwing away my healing. That was over 30 years ago. I am not now, nor will I ever be, a diabetic, amen.

These are only a few examples of God's quiet interventions. There are more, many more, some warnings, voices, dreams and I'm sure unknown secret blessings and protections. They are years apart and human nature forgets and rationalizes away the supernatural. If we acknowledge God's saving actions, we are acknowledging our obligation

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to praise and to serve the Savior. This I had not done - (praise and serve the Savior), but He still had not forsaken me.

As my wife had told me, "I'd be healed," I flashed back on "God's quiet interventions," like those that had brought me through in years past. I had expressed gratitude with each miracle, but after a few months, my thanks would grow stale and quiet. My testimony would be silenced by my return to living as I had before; living as the world does, living for self. Now sick with a lung disease, I realized I was also sick with a feeling of deserved abandonment. Believing in God can only help you if you have the right God, with the right understanding of who He is and what He does. I was afraid to go to God, for I didn't know Him in His forgiveness or His compassion. There seemed no way for *me* to forgive me, so how could *God* forgive me? Without divine intervention, I would have died back then. God, through my wife, got my attention. His voice was calling for me to accept that He was my only option. When one feels abandoned, they will often run from the One that can save them - the One they think has left them. Many people say, "When I get it together, then I'll go to God!" As if God requires us to clean ourselves before coming to Him. This feeling is so deceiving, as "*Christ died for us while we were yet sinners*" (Romans 5:8). When sickness, pain and death have us surrounded and pride has been squeezed out of the circle of our lives, we must look up for help from Heaven. I'm sure the Lord's heart is saddened that so often we make Him a last resort, when He should be first in all things. He is a soul-cleaning, flesh-washing, sin-removing, alteration center. More than we can understand, Jesus is hungrily waiting to wash and heal us. I didn't know this, but finally at the end of myself, I found my end was God's beginning.

The story of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18) flashed across

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my mind. I remembered how my Dad had turned to the wall after a severe stroke and had asked God for 15 more years. He passed away 15 years later, almost to the day - God was merciful to him. So I figured although I wasn't worthy, just maybe I wasn't totally forgotten and forsaken. I dragged myself to the basement of our home and stood with my hands on the cold, damp cement block wall. "Lord Jesus, my parents believe in Your love and compassion. I'm not gonna make a promise that I'll preach or anything 'cause I don't want to be a hypocrite, but because of Your compassion, heal me. I don't want to leave my wife a young widow and I want to live to see my children grow up. Forgive me and heal me, I pray." I climbed up the stairs and rested at the top - out of breath and out of options. I worked my way over to my TV chair and clicked on the tube wondering how my basement petition had gone. Before I could reach a conclusion, a commanding voice called to my attention through the TV. The white haired man was Ben Kinchlow, then of the 700 Club, and he pointed to my heart and said, "There's a young man watching with an incurable lung disease, and if you will raise your hands and stand to your feet, the Lord will heal you!" I did and He did!! As I stood, the power of God came upon me. He had not abandoned me! He still knew my name and was rescuing me. I was on high doses of cortisone, but I knew I was healed, so the only medication I took after that moment was the Word. At times, the symptoms tried to come back, but I only needed to assure myself that God had done His part and had showed up. I needed only to trust Him, and never leave meant "**never**". My doctor was puzzled as my 30 day visit showed a remarkable change. He tried to attribute it to medicine. Horror was the look on his face when I told him of the cold turkey termination and the pills, which went in the garbage. Always follow your doctor's advice, except

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when “real Faith is in manifestation.” Doctors shudder when you say, “the Lord healed me!” Yet, he saw the results and wrote that I was in remission, and that I stopped the medication due to fear of complications with a previous diabetic condition. Oh, well, now 25 years later, I’m sure my doctor has gone on to glory and Jesus explained the whole thing to him when he arrived up there! I have had no reoccurrences or problems with my lungs, and I’m now 60 years of age and I run, play basketball, play the saxophone and sing as loud as I want - **PRAISE GOD!** The greatest reward is that I have an assurance that my Father’s love is constant, inclusive and consuming. All of nature tells me of His love, and though I did fear once, I don’t now, for I know my Father does not forsake His children.

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The young girl sat in the sanctuary and for her, it was just that: a sanctuary, a safe place, for her home was terrorized by a father who had violence in his eyes, terror in his hands and no patience for a little girl who truly needed a daddy. So when he was at home, she had only two options available to her: to hide in the closet so that he couldn't find her, or stay away from home as much as she could; so she went to the sanctuary. She tried sitting in front of the Man hanging on the Cross, but His wretched condition and the torment of His situation reminded her too much of her own pain. She might have heard the words, Mighty God, Wonderful Counselor, Everlasting Father, but those words had no significance for her, and the word "father" meant run away and hide. Between her and her mother the wall of separation was well-established at a young age, for her mother took her beatings but failed to protect the child from the abuse and neglect of the father, so in her hideout she would sit before the kindly looking lady who peered down from the wall with a look of compassion. Her father's abuse and neglect would, over the years, translate into trust issues, so she would leave home as soon as possible, only to fall into the hands of other abusers and teachers of false religions. If the story ended here, it would surely be a sad biography, *but God*. She would experience God's delivering power in a potentially fatal accident, hear His voice and know that God is God. She would give part of her heart to the Lord and begin to learn of Him and to serve Him, but years would go by before she would know Him as Father.

The Holy Spirit is the Master of creating Jesus appointments. Many times we will be keeping an appointment for one purpose and God will turn it into an appointment for His purpose. The evangelist she met was world renowned, an extremely busy man. His staff and

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office people reflected the magnitude of the work he was doing for the Lord, and here she was, a nobody, being treated as somebody. Then somewhere in the afternoon, a father wound is healed. This evangelist reminds her of her loathsome, earthly father, and although the evangelist reminds her of her father he is different, so very different. He is trustworthy, he is loving, he is kind, he's a man of peace, not a man of violence. She could have missed the revelation, could have missed the connection, ***but God***. Father God is not like her earthly dad, as neither is this Rheinehard Bunke.

She gives her testimony now about how the Lord brought her through, and though she was rejected and was never claimed, she is now accepted and affirmed by her loving, Heavenly Father. And I think to myself, if only people knew the rest of the story, they too would shout, cry and rejoice to find out how important the Father's Love really is. Her mother was so disorganized, confused, worldly and incapable of raising her that, fortunately, other relatives stepped forward to do the mother's job. No one would speak of it except in whispered terms, as she was the child who had no father. No one would come forward to claim her or to even identify that it was his seed that brought forth this life. She was not the child of a divorce, a separation or even of a shotgun wedding. She was no one's child because she could have been anyone's child. Nowadays, you can take the two or three guys that were around at the time of the pregnancy and have them tested to locate the culprit; but back in that day it was impossible. They all denied the child and ignored her activities while she grew up stigmatized and empty, but the emptiness was filled by hurt and her righteous anger. Church was not an option, as her relatives were entwined in the Gospel life. So she grew up hearing the Gospel, singing the Gospel and wondering, 'what is a father and what is his

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love like?’ If one has a father, a definition as to his quality will come along and label the one that you have as “good”, “bad” or “indifferent”. The void is just that; an absence, a vacant space that could have been filled, but all declined. As life would have it, she would marry young and would choose a young man who didn’t know Father or how to be one. She joined our church and came for counseling, yet after a few years, I wondered if she would ever find peace, and then she said, “***But God has done something***, Pastor. I’ve been in church all my life, but I didn’t have any real teaching. I had pastors, but I really didn’t feel like I had many spiritual fathers. I had been rejected, neglected and disrespected, but God has shown me something. My husband is not my daddy. The man that birthed me is not my daddy, but God is my Father. That verse in the Bible that He is Father to the fatherless now makes sense to me. Pastor Don, this has set me free. That pain and that anger that was on the inside has been released, and I’m free!” Shortly after this revelation, new blessings began to roll in, for when God heals and we release the pain, we have a greater capacity to accept the Father’s benefits.

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HEALING THE WOUND

The Bible is the greatest self-help book in the world. It tells us how to solve any and all problems. It shows us the way to the Father and wholeness. To overcome a father wound, we begin with sincere prayer. We must pray to hear and open our hearts to receive what the Word of God says. The way through the emotional maze isn't easy or clearly marked out, for each individual's journey is different. The trip will include the same elements: 1) understanding the "why?", 2) repentance, 3) forgiveness, 4) reconciliation, 5) revelation, 6) fellowship, 7) adoption.

Why is a difficult word, but it should not be confused with "making up an excuse". Understanding means to know the reason and face it. The young man said, "Pastor, my daddy was a drunk all his life. He started drinking at 16 and never stopped until it almost killed him." The young lady said, "As a matter of fact, my dad was a heroin addict - years would go by, then we'd get a call, and then silence for years. He finally put two clean years together, but his body was shot, so he's never been a real dad, just a voice on the phone," she said with no tears, just a matter of fact! She understood why her parent was not a dad. Whatever the real reason, it must be faced. I remember one lady who had held an evil secret. Her dad was a well respected church deacon and businessman. Everyone loved him and thought well of him, but he was a daughter abuser. He terrorized the family and behind closed doors sexually oppressed and assaulted his daughter. She was unable to find anyone who would believe her, and her mother also failed her by keeping the secret. A search of the family tree revealed that her dad was also a sexually abused child. This doesn't excuse the sin he perpetrated upon her, but it does tell "why". Her healing began when she angrily shouted: "My father was a child abusing dog, a filthy rotten dog, a weak, evil man." She

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understood that “hurt people - hurt people!” She could admit that her earthly dad had made it hard for her to embrace a Heavenly Father. She understood why the word “Father” choked up in her throat. To say or think “Father” was to conjure up her earthly dad. To the best of our ability, we must tell ourselves and someone else the truth. Sharing the burden makes the pain and weight of it less. When dark hurts are brought to the light, demonic power is weakened. As a person reveals and is not rejected, shame is diminished. A prayer partner and friend helps on the road to wholeness. Someone else is needed so that as we pray, we are using the prayer of agreement - *“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there in the midst of them”* (Matt.18:19-20). Therefore, we pray in agreement to get clarity, strength and Jesus in our midst. This is an act of obedience and the path to wisdom.

It was sufficient for Jesus to understand that “the spirit was willing, but the flesh of His disciples was weak.” His disciples abandoning Him would not be changed, and so He was ready to face this fact: “I will be abandoned.” There is no need to make excuses and seek to justify peoples’ failure, but we must call forth and identify the “why” when possible. We are not responsible for why people do what they do, but we are responsible for what we do about that why. Why someone abandoned you is a reflection of their character, but it does not determine your character, or reflect your value.

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REPENTANCE

Repentance is needed when we have sinned in thought or deed. The victim usually sins as a retaliatory action. There may be a retaliatory act of violence or just the angry, hateful phone call. People may very well deserve to be hurt back, but God does much better at paying back. God says, "*Vengeance is Mine.*" Evildoers are often turned over to satan or left to "reap what they have sown". In any case, it is our job to repent for whatever we may have done that was mean or evil. Ask God to forgive you for your part in this painful adventure. Our repentance assures us that God must take our side and bring vengeance.

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FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is often the most difficult step. To clearly see the role of forgiveness, we need to understand that we are human and are not quite capable of forgetting. Forgiveness is removing the chains of bondage from our hearts. To hold unforgiveness is to harbor pain and evil in our thought life, and this is negative emotional work. Hatred is like love; the person is in your thoughts, these thoughts cause emotional responses and cost time and energy to maintain. Finally, the other person is controlling your freedom to do and feel as you wish. In love, this is pleasant and has a positive reward. Not so with unforgiveness and hatred, which have a negative reward.

Jesus tells us in Mark 11:24-25, *“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”* If we want something from God, then we must give something. I have often found that it’s necessary to forgive for selfish reasons. It’s wonderful when we can forgive, because we will feel better and be blessed. With deep hurts and father wounds, people think that maintaining our animosity and anger somehow helps us and hurts the perpetrator, but this is not so. Remember that forgiveness does not require re-engagement, for it is an act of the heart. I can forgive without falling back into a web of entanglement. Forgiveness is a choice and I make it because it’s best for me; I’m free to get blessed by God. I’m free not to feel negative emotions. I’m free to not fear punishment. I’m free to find my real, faithful, never forsaking Father. I’m free to be reconciled to my past life, earthly father, and my Heavenly Father.

Take action: get a pastor, parent, sibling, friend or

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mate and repent. Ask God to forgive you, and forgive yourself for holding unforgiveness. Then release the abuser to be punished or forgiven by God. Pledge to cancel all debts owed to you, and all curses spoken about or over you are broken. Declare that you will not dwell upon or permit bad memories to take up heart or brain space. Shout that you are now free and will stay free of old negative emotions. Hallelujah!

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RECONCILE

Webster's Dictionary - Reconcile: 1) to re-establish friendship between 2) to settle or resolve, as a dispute 3) to bring (oneself) to accept 4) to make consistent or compatible < reconcile their opposing views >. Any one of these four can greatly help on the road to wholeness. Number 1 is best, but some people will have to settle for number 3 - "to accept". Some bridges are too old and damaged to cross, yet it can be accepted as so, and we can be reconciled that that's okay. We accept that things were awful, terrible, damaging, but now that's over and done. We are reconciled that yesterday ends at today and will not enter tomorrow. Reconciliation on some level is achieved with our earth father, and then we seek to be reconciled to our Father God. *"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life"* (Romans 5:10). Sin and ignorance keep us from drawing close to God and knowing Him as Father, not because He abandoned us, but we abandoned Him. Christ took down the wall of separation between God and man by being the perfect sacrifice and showing us the way to the Father. *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23). So we see the role of sin is to destroy us, while the role of God is to sustain us, by the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

I believe everyone knew God at one time, in a simple, accepting, childlike manner. *"I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died"* (Romans 7:9). Little children have no sense of sin until they are taught the laws, so we hold them as innocent until they reach the age at which we hold them accountable for their actions. All children come into the world as innocent computers with nothing in their hard

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drives. Kids are open to God and have a sweet relationship with Him. Unfortunately, as they grow, we (adults) teach them fear, guilt, manipulation; all the ways of sin and the laws. Laws by their very existence condemn us. No one is speeding until someone puts up a speed zone sign. *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”* (Romans 8:1). This verse echoes that we must get back to that place of innocence before we were separated from God. To be reconciled to God as Father requires that our sins have been confessed, and we believe that Christ’s death has paid our sin debt. We then are not condemned (separated) from our Heavenly Father. We then can seek to accept that Father God, by the Holy Spirit, will lead us in all things. Especially that He will lead us to Himself. *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together”* (Romans 8:14,16-17). *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”* (John 14:26). This is ultimate reconciliation. We have moved from “earth wounded” to “Heavenly heirs”. The Father must be given the right to lead, teach and comfort. These duties can only be carried out in an atmosphere of trust. Trust is obtained by Faith and experience. We must mentally and emotionally yield ourselves to rely upon and believe the One who is offering Himself to us as Father, being reconciled to the fact that no one else can care for us as He will. We continue to commit ourselves to this reconciliation until we arrive at revelation. Make an effort to have peace, and express forgiveness to failed parents. Going back is not possible, but

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going forward is. Establish a new beachhead and define the new relationship. I told my father that there was no way to replace or make up for the neglect I had suffered. But now as grown men, we could be reconciled to be “friends”. So with the past behind us, we went bowling, to basketball games and wrote a book together. We reconciled to a new, deep relationship and never again mentioned “old wounds”. With this done, my heart opened to see Father God also as Friend.

You must try to find a peaceful place or be reconciled that the time is not yet, or the bridge is too far gone to repair. Find peace that as the earthly is gone, the Heavenly solution is to be reconciled with “Abba” God, for He is El Shaddai - the God that is more than enough! He will fix the bridge or show you it’s not needed. Reconciliation must be sought over and over again until our hearts agree with our heads that we did the best we could to establish peace.

Adoption - *“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’ ”* (Romans 8:15). Wow, God’s plan is perfect. When we accept adoption, all old earthly bonds are of little consequence, as we are heirs with Christ. Verse 18 tells us that whatever we suffered is not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed (uncovered) in us. Jesus Christ suffered as an Innocent One, mistreated by the earthly. This is the same for those of us with father wounds. As Jesus Christ has been glorified, so shall the wounded be, for they are adopted by the Father. *“Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of*

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His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Galatians 4:3-6). This adoption is now equal in status to that of being first born. Jesus gave us an illustration of the Father-Son relationship in Luke 15:11-32, the parable of the prodigal son. A young man squanders his inheritance and hopes to return home and get accepted as a hired servant, but the loving father restores the youth to his position as "son". In like manner, we adopted prodigals are taken in. The returning prodigals receive a warm welcome; the fattened calf will be sacrificed on our behalf. Daddy has our robe ready and He has ordered that our ring be placed on our hand. This gives us family membership with nothing lacking. The first born Son, Jesus, was not forsaken, and neither will we ever be. We may have been wounded by our earthly father or have a wound that we attribute to "ABBA" in Heaven. In either case, and in all cases, God wants us healed. God's love heals all wounds - especially the father wound. After we enter into fellowship, our joining is complete - **fear is gone**. We accept our adoption. The jury is dismissed. The judge has no robe. The clock has no hands. Our heart has no questions. Daddy wants to play.

Revelation - There is nothing so sweet as seeing someone reconciled to God as Father and getting the revelation of it as truth. I am reconciled to and at peace with the truth concerning my earthly father, but now, I am reconciled to my Heavenly Father and I know what it means to say "God is my Father". The main attributes of fatherhood are to create, to originate, to be responsible for and to express sincere affection and tenderness in a mature manner. God has done all of that and more, but that doesn't mean we know it. It is the divine will of God that we know Him as Father. This truth is hidden when His earthly representative (our parent) fails in fulfilling their God-given assignment. Man is made in the image of God; therefore, we

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should behave as God would. To fail in this regard with our children is to destroy the comparison that is supposed to help us find God as Father. It is as if a bad father hides the path that goes to God, and with it the revelation.

To reveal something is to uncover it. When we go to a play or watch a movie, there is much that is hidden as in real life. The writer, director, producer, set designers, other actors, stunt people, lights, camera and stage people are nowhere to be seen, but they are there. Without these hidden persons, the drama would be impossible. They define, control and make what you see possible. And so it is in life - the spiritual realm is real, but it is not revealed. From time to time, we get glimpses of the spirit realm, both the good and the evil. When we seek reconciliation, the hidden door to revelation begins to open, revealing the Father. It's His will to show Himself, and we see this in the Word. *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"* (Heb. 11:6). As we accept that our failed fathers did not reflect Father-God, we then pursue and long to know our true Father. This heart effort will be rewarded, and Father God begins to reveal Himself. Some people receive the revelation in a flash that God is their true Father Creator - Originator, Faithful One, and others grow into the revelation. Revelation may come in a dream, vision, teaching or counseling session. Often, certain lies must be addressed.

The big lie is formed in a question. "Where was God when I was being abused?" The role of caring for us was delegated to our parents, just as care and responsibility of the earth was also given to mankind, just as care over our own bodies was given to us. In all these cases, God will hold us to account for how we carry out these responsibilities. No one will escape judgment for hurting a child (Mt. 18:6; Lk.

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9:47,48; Lk. 18:10-14; Lk. 18:16). The Father, Son, Holy Spirit and angels take very seriously what happens to children. Hurtful, irresponsible fathers shall pay dearly for failing their children. The Heavenly Father does provide a way of recovery; an eternal reward to balance the scale for the victim that was a child. This is revealed to the victim who brings his pain to the One True Daddy. Herein is the beauty of God's power - anything He reveals, He also heals. So often I have heard, "my pain went away when I got the revelation that God was my Father." As the revelation comes, we can lose our negative fear of God. The idea of God watching us becomes reassuring. The picture of climbing up upon His lap begins to beckon. Our earthly parent experience begins to minimize, and with eyes Heavenward, Love is maximized. We begin to see that through it all God was there, and the host of other players were hiding God, but His faithfulness overcame the masquerade. When we open our heart to receive the Truth, the Father comes crashing through bad theology, wives' tales, the blame game and misplaced anger and hurt. We see clearly that God is the Healer, not the hurter.

Shakespeare said, "Life is a stage and we are 'merely players,'" and so it is. God is the Writer, Producer and Director, but not all the actors are following the script. When we see the Father, He turns on all the house lights, and we stand on stage viewing the set design, all the actors, the stage, and realize we were never alone or forsaken. We now boldly thank the Writer (Father God), the Producer (Jesus Christ), and the Director (Holy Spirit). We realize that there is more to the script, and that the Writer has written a happy ending for us. With the revelation of God as Father, we then enter into fellowship.

Relationship - When Adam and Eve were barred from the Garden, they lost fellowship with the Father. Jesus

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Christ has won that back for us. God is ever waiting to fellowship with us, His children. Our flesh can experience God through our emotions, but our inner man (spirit) can have deeper fellowship with the Father, who is a Spirit. The new revealed Father destroys the false images and wrong ideas we had, by letting us draw closer to Him. No longer at a distance, we realize that in His presence we can be ourselves and enjoy His company. In the past, we may have called upon God only in trouble or at church. The fellowship state is an ongoing conversation, a personal phone call, a quiet awareness that Daddy is near.

Religion, with its requirements and emphasis upon works, hinders the fellowship state. Relationship is so much more important than religion, as God made us so we can “hang out” with Him! Our Daddy knows we are weak, easily distracted and prone to error. The more that He reveals Himself to us, the more we understand His Love for us. There are thousands of saved folk who aren’t sure that they are loved. Their “earth daddy” stuff causes them to fear the fellowship, but as they heal, they return again and again until, *“that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God”* (Eph. 3:17). This “fullness of God” is a picture of us as a container being filled up. As we go from repentance to forgiveness to reconciliation to fellowship, we are being filled with more of our Father, and He is displacing our hurts and ignorance of Him. During fellowship, He pours in His history, character, will and Love. Our earthbound ideas, relationships and self-image flow out of our vessels, replaced by our Father’s definitions and views. No longer abandoned, fatherless and lonely, we are adopted.

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IT HAS BEEN SAID

““He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God’.” Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing. Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?””

Matthew 27:43-50

There are probably hundreds of commentaries which state that the Father looked away or turned His back, but with careful examination of Scripture this cannot be found. The Father does not say it, nor did He tell any prophets to say it. For sure, He didn't tell Isaiah to say it. Nowhere in Scripture do we find the abandoning of Jesus on the Cross as part of the plan of salvation. It is prophesied that the men closest to the Christ would abandon Him and that one specific traitor would set the trap for Him. But Scripture is silent concerning the Father abandoning Jesus. In Scripture, wherever we see the despair of men's souls, it is also followed by the assuring promise of God's faithfulness. We see that as Jesus agonizes or suffers, the Father faithfully answers. It has been said that Jesus, the Christ, would have to fulfill some three hundred prophecies that prove that He was the Messiah. But consider this thought: any prophecy that would demand that the Father abandon and forsake the Son on the Cross would also have to include an explanation of how God, who is faithful and has promised never to leave nor forsake, could abandon and forsake a righteous Man at His greatest time of self sacrifice. Only a godless man could turn his back on his child during that time of greatest suffering and need. Only a heartless parent could look upon the righteous act of their child and then abandon them.

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There must be, there has to be, another explanation. There has to be something we failed to understand. How could we possibly preach that “never leave you nor forsake you” is conditional and subject to change? The confusion of whether Jesus was forsaken or not must be answered in the heart of each believer, for that answer ultimately defines who our God is - forsaker or Faithful!

In my research, I could not find a historical beginning of this theology of the Father abandoning the Son; but I know the impact of it for myself and for others. It plants deep into our minds and in our hearts the thought, “if the Father turned His back on the Son because of sin, what chance do I have for forgiveness?” The outcome of this type of thinking is to feel somehow I must get good enough to win God’s approval. “Oh, Daddy, don’t leave, I’ll do better”. “I’ll work harder and you’ll come back!” This diminishes the mercy and grace of the Cross and distorts the Truth. If we accept that “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me” is a response to having been forsaken, then this question must be asked: “Is sin greater than God’s mercy and forgiveness?” People who are trying to earn Heaven by works seem to be acting as if sin is greater. If our sin could cause a separation of the bond of the Godhead - Trinity, then we must re-evaluate our theology of the power of God’s Love. I have heard many cute rationalizations and emotional explanations, such as that the Father turned His back on His Son so that He would never have to turn His back on us. If He had to turn His back on His Son because of our sin, then wouldn’t He also have to turn His back on us because of our sin, again and again and again?

The Father does not hate the Passover Lamb that provides salvation, so why should I believe that Christ, as the Passover Lamb, is rejected and abandoned? If I believe that Christ was rejected because of sin, I am left with a fearful

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expectation that my sin could cause me to be likewise rejected. If the Father is capable of being so repulsed by sin that He violates His own nature and turns away from someone He claims to love, then how could I, being a creature so much lower than the Messiah, stay in fellowship with Him? Without meaning to, this teaching causes us to fear separation from God and hope to work our way into a position where God would not abandon nor forsake us. Instead of perceiving the love of the Father as faithful, true, eternal, never yielding nor bending, we begin to see Him as capable of doing the most hurtful thing imaginable: forsaking us.

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As I was preparing my Easter Sunday sermon, I looked over the story in preparation for the most important day on the Christian calendar. With notes, I was prepared to deal with helping the Gentile audience understand the Jewish setting and the mindset of the Jewish Messiah who was going to meet His death. In my heart, I desired to have them focus on Truth, not tradition or culture. I felt I had a green light from the Holy Spirit to tell the people that the word “Easter” was taken from the pagan fertility goddess Eastre. Webster’s Dictionary states, “Easter, although the name of a Christian Festival, had its origins in pagan times...the name of a Germanic goddess who was worshipped at a festival at the Spring equinox. Also called Astarte, the Phoenician goddess of love and fertility. Called Ishtar by the Egyptians.” Historically, the roots of Easter and its practices are an abomination to the Jewish Messiah. It seemed fitting to debunk the fertility symbols of bunnies, painted eggs and little baby chickens and tell the truth that Rabbi Yeshua (Jesus) and His Jewish disciples would have none of it as part of the Passover celebration. Surely, the Body of Christ was prepared to see that the Gentile practice of eating pig on Resurrection Sunday would be offensive to a Jew who was serious about keeping the Law, since He was the fulfillment of the Law. I knew I’d have to be careful, because to debunk pagan practices that have become ingrained in Christianity can get you into big trouble. People love tradition and will fight to keep it, even when it’s a lie. I thought I would put just a little out there so that it would give the saints something to think about, but I would make my main focus the Jewish carpenter that became the Sacrificial Lamb who died on the Cross and rose from the grave.

It was a beautiful Easter Sunday and the parking lot was already full when I arrived. As I greeted the people, I

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noticed that there were visitors present and I thought, “great opportunity to give an altar call” and I believed that the Lord would save some. There were those who had been out of church a long time and had probably backslidden into sin and needed a proper dose of conviction and forgiveness in order to once again commit their lives to Christ. At the beginning of the sermon, I told a few jokes and loosened the people up and they got right with me, creating a beautiful moment. Then I gave them an old shocking statement to make sure that they were prepared for the meat of the Word. I declared “Jesus Christ was not crucified on Friday and He did not die on a Friday”. As it always worked in the past, their ears perked up, their faces brightened up and I had them on the edge of their seats. I then began to read from the Book of Moses concerning the exodus, the Law, the death of the pascal lamb at Passover and how the blood of the slain lamb would save the lives of the children of Israel. Christ, in the Passover, is probably the most moving illustration that we have in all of the Bible. Moses describes how the lamb was to be examined in the home for three days, then slain and its blood drained into the rain trough under the door. Its blood would then be placed on the lintel and the two doorposts (making the sign of the cross) and how that blood, when seen by the Angel of Death, would cause him (death) to pass over, thereby sparing the lives of all those who were under the protection of the blood. I went on to demonstrate from the Scriptures that early Sunday morning was the darkness of Saturday night and in that darkness the tomb was already empty. I joked with them that from now on all sunrise services would be held late Saturday night or super early Sunday morning from 3 a.m. to 4 a.m. The people laughed because they know that I am not an early morning type guy. But in it, they saw the truth of what the Word said, and we then began counting backward to determine the

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beginning of the three days and three nights that Jesus had declared. Though confusing, a careful reading of the Law as given to Moses, shows the sacrificial lamb would be taken on the tenth day (Sunday) of the first month and examined, and would have to be eaten in the early evening of the fourteenth day (Wednesday evening begins Thursday as Jewish days begin at sunset, not sunrise). Therefore, adding three more days and three more nights would place the Resurrection at Sunday in the early a.m. Wanting the congregation not to bog down in legalism, I quickly moved along, making the point that this detail is important only to demonstrate that Christ fulfilled every iota of the Old Testament Scriptures concerning Him as the Pascal Lamb. I then encouraged those who were interested in this type of thing to make sure that they came to our Seder service so that they could hear more about the Jewishness of Resurrection Time (formerly called Easter). The clock was ever advancing, and I realized I must chase the minutes now and proclaim the Gospel of the Crucifixion. I raised my voice and changed my tone as my heart's desire was to give them the pain of the scourging, but yet the power of the sacrificed Christ. In great detail I described the mournful and sorrowful picture of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane as He cried out not to go to the Cross. I spoke of His sorrowful and painful time in the Garden of Gethsemane, where even His pain caused drops of bloody sweat to pierce the ground. He agonized over going to the Cross, and I pounded the pulpit describing the failure of the disciples to empathize with Jesus Christ and encourage Him. I was preaching it just as I had heard it all of my life and I moved toward Christ's seven last words on the Cross. I had preached this journey to Calvary many times, but from the Garden on, I began to waiver and could not identify what I was experiencing. *"Daughters don't weep for Me,"...*

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“Father forgive them,”... “today you’ll be with Me in paradise”. I pulled Scriptures from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and surged on toward the last few words He spoke, *“woman behold thy Son”, “I thirst”, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”,* and then finally, *“It is finished”*. I reached back to Mark 15 verse 34, which is also Matthew 27 verse 46, *“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani”, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”* I felt that at any moment I would begin to cry and the hearts of those listening would also be touched, and many would shed real tears as we agonized over the sin that we had committed, which now was being placed upon the sinless Savior. All true believers have an image of this scene of pain and sorrow etched in our minds, as we see the Sacrificial Lamb who was without sin nailed to the Cross because of us, suffering a shameful death in all His glorious innocence. Can you see it, the picture of Love giving all that He can to the object of His affection, in spite of the cost of pain and misery? As darkness poured over the earth, so the darkness of sin poured across the Lord, the Christ, as the sins of the world draped around Him, clinging to Him, covering His purity with our shame. Hasn’t He done enough, I shouted? Isn’t it enough that He took the lash and was scourged and beaten and His flesh was torn in order that we might declare that *“by His stripes we were healed”*? (Isaiah 53:5). Isn’t it enough that He suffered the piercing of a crown of dejection for our sakes? Isn’t it enough that the Holy One of Israel, the King of the Jews, had to be spat upon, beaten and handled by sinful men? That He must now face the worst, most feared thing in His life, to be separated from the Father. “See the picture?” I asked them. The Son of God carrying the sins of the world as the world grows dark in rejection, as the very Father turns away from the Son because of our sin. The Son is now, for the first time ever, separated from God and the

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Holy Spirit, who has sustained Him and empowered Him throughout His ministry. Now He must face this moment of great pain, loneliness, abandonment and rejection, as He is now a forsaken One. So great is His pain that He doesn't see the darkness nor hear the lightning and the thunder nor feel the trembling of the earthquake, for all He experiences is separation from the Father. Because of what Christ suffered on the Cross, because He bore your sins and my sins, we now have an Advocate, a Mediator, a Savior who has made a way for us to be reconciled. I knew they would come. They always come when they hear the story of the Cross. But yet, as they came, there was something this particular Easter that lingered in my heart. I said all the things I had heard before and the things I had preached before, and I told all the new converts and those who were coming back to Christ that because Christ was forsaken on the Cross they would never be forsaken. I promised them that the Word of God was true. That God would never leave you nor forsake you, and that you can surrender all to Him for God is Faithful and Trustworthy. I told them I had bet my life on it and that they could trust that it was so.

My grandfather was a preacher and so was my dad. A couple of my uncles were preachers, as well as many of my cousins. I listened to Christian radio and television almost all of my life and I have heard this sermon preached many times. If you are a preacher reading this book, you know you preached it, too. There is no greater sermon to preach and no greater story to tell, but that day there was something about it that had changed for me. I was uncomfortable with the message. "After all", I told myself, "people got saved and born again." That, of course, is the bottom line. But on the inside, there was a nagging question that did not go away. Was Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God forsaken while on the Cross? The question

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reverberated in many forms. Did the Father turn His back on the Son while He was on the Cross? Did the Holy Spirit leave and reject the Son because of sin? Was Christ crying out as a forsaken One?

A few days later, the questions were still wandering around in my head. So I did what I always do. I prayed for awhile and then went to my desk and began reading my Bibles. My focus was the age old argument that Christ had with Pilate. Pilate was standing with the Truth (Jesus Christ) and asked the question, "What is truth?" I thought if the truth will set us free, then what truth can be found in ascertaining whether or not Christ was abandoned and forsaken by the Father? Almost immediately, it came to me. If the Father would forsake the Son because of sin, then what chance do I have of not being forsaken? For that matter, what chance does anyone else have? It would mean that our sin could cause the Father to turn His back on us also. Almost instantly it came back; well, the Son didn't have His own sin on Him and, therefore, the Father was not turning His back on the Son, but on our sin. That was no help, so I thought it out this way. The Son was forsaken only for a short time because of our sin, but was later reinstated. That didn't help either, because the Son was then forsaken at His greatest moment of need and pain. If Jesus was forsaken on the Cross, then how can any believer take the promise of faithfulness and security from God seriously? Hebrews chapter 7 tells us that Jesus is our High Priest and that the high priest would make sacrifice for himself and then sacrifice for the people's sins. Jesus, of course, had no sin, but did make a sacrifice of Himself as the perfect Lamb for our sins. During temple sacrifice, if the priest brought the sins via the lamb to the Lord, the priest himself was not rejected, abandoned nor forsaken, but was blessed by being allowed into the *Shekinah* Glory of God. There are no Old

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Testament or New Testament prophecies, spoken by the prophets or the Lord that say that at some point in the Garden or on the Cross, the Son of Man would be abandoned by the Father. Therefore, there must be something that we have missed or not understood that causes us to grapple with this contradiction. How can “the Father who is faithful and promises to never leave nor forsake” then turn His back upon the One that He sent to do His will and fulfill Scripture?

I humbly submit to you that from the time Jesus came to the earth, His mission was to fulfill everything that the prophets had spoken concerning Him; and during His last days, His last hours on the earth, His focus was singular: that of seeing to it that His living testimony, as well as His spoken testimony, would give a graphic picture pointing to the eternal reality that He was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that He was never forsaken!!

The New Testament is written by Jewish men under the unction of the Holy Spirit. They continually point out that what they are teaching and saying can be confirmed in the Old Testament prophets’ writings. When Peter is speaking in Acts chapter 2, we see that he quotes the prophets, Joel, David and Samuel. The deacon, Stephen, in Acts chapters 6 and 7, not only quotes Scripture, but recites the history of the prophets in order to make his point concerning Christ. It is clear throughout the New Testament that this is the way of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit speaks to the heart of the saints through Scripture. The saints use the Scripture to verify, identify and support arguments, especially the revelation of the person of Christ. God speaks by having the saints and prophets quote Scripture. This is how Jesus spoke, from the Scriptures, revealing God’s message and revealing Himself. When Jesus says, “*the words that I speak are from the Father,*” He meant this bold statement to be true. I believe that we can

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show from Scripture that Jesus was never alone and that the Father and Holy Spirit were in Him and with Him. He said, *“I and My Father are One”* (John 10:30), *“And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone, but I am with the Father who sent Me”* (John 8:16), *“And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him”* (John 8:29), *“Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me”* (John 16:32). Notice in John 8:29 Jesus states the criteria for perpetual fellowship, *“I do always those things that please Him”*. Surely, Jesus Christ pleased the Father by going to the Cross, so why would the Father abandon Him at the moment that Jesus glorified the Father and saved the world? In John 16:32, He points out that His disciples would abandon Him, but declares that even so *“the Father is with Me”*. The idea that Jesus Christ is forsaken clashes against the backdrop of Christ’s words. In John 11:41 and 42, Jesus Christ says that *“the Father always hears Him.”* I believe that it was so, even on the Cross at the darkest hour of His life. The Gethsemane experience can only be understood in the words of Christ Himself; and the unfortunate teaching that God is “sometimes silent” needs always to be prefaced with, “how are you listening?” All of Jesus’ words, especially after His trial, were fulfillment of prophetic Scripture and therefore, served to identify who He was and clarify for the people watching that they were seeing the Messiah as described in Scripture. Jesus’ seven last words were the words of God, spoken through the prophets of God to confirm the Son of God. Finally, some would say, what does it matter? Is this significant to us as the Body of Christ and to us as individual believers? I believe that if the contradiction of Christ’s forsakenness and God’s promise to never forsake us is

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resolved, the Church can move to the next level in these last days. That next level is moving with the confidence and assurance that we truly believe that God goes before us and is also our Rear Guard and, therefore, we can face these times that are coming without flinching, wavering or doubting. We can prepare for the coming of the Messiah, we can bring in the harvest that is determined for us and we can prove that *“the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church.”* *“My God, My God”* will never leave us nor forsake us. By knowing that, there is peace, strength and security over the human condition. Oh, just to embrace the idea of the faithfulness of God. Oh, the joy of preaching the Resurrection message and making a declaration that on the Cross the Christ was not forsaken and neither will we be forsaken.

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WHEN DOES GOD FORSAKE?

It has been my experience over the years that when people feel disconnected from God or abandoned by God, it is almost always because they have first abandoned Him. There are some thirty entries in the Old Testament that say God will forsake or has forsaken. An examination of these shows that God's action of abandoning or forsaking is always a response to what someone has done. God never initiates a break-up. In other words, if someone enters into a covenant agreement with God (specifying what they will and will not do), the Father remains faithful to it. When an individual is unfaithful to God, God often responds by acknowledging the rejection, and since they have separated from Him, He also may separate from them. God does not initiate these violations of covenant or dissolve them. God cannot be a covenant breaker. The Word of God tells us that God is faithful and though we are faithless, He must remain faithful. But if we dissolve the contract and break the covenant, then God is not under obligation to remain bound by the contract that we dissolved. This is the case with the nation of Israel over and over again. God, being the great Forgiver and Restorer, makes it possible always to re-establish the relationship as well as the covenant. There is a theme that runs throughout the Scriptures that God cannot lie. Hebrews 6 makes this clear in the 17th and 18th verses. In the Amplified....17 *"we, who were to inherit the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose and plan"* 18 *"this was so that, by two unchangeable things (His promise and His oath) in which it is impossible for God ever to prove false or deceive us, we who have fled (to Him) for refuge might have mighty indwelling strength and strong encouragement to grasp and hold fast the hope appointed for us and set before (us)"*. Therefore, when God has entered into a covenant and made a promise to us to not forsake us, He cannot initiate an

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action to forsake us until we have broken the contract. We must look at a few of these instances. In 1 Chronicles 28 verse 9 in the Amplified ...*“And you, Solomon, my son, know the God of your father (have personal knowledge of Him, be acquainted with and understand Him; appreciate, heed and cherish Him) and serve Him with a blameless heart and a willing mind. For the Lord searches all hearts and minds and understands all the wanderings of the thoughts. If you seek Him (inquiring for and of Him and requiring Him as your first and vital necessity) you will find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever!”* God’s response of reciprocal forsaking is also echoed in 2 Chronicles 15 in verse 2 in the Amplified...*“If you seek Him (inquiring for and of Him, craving Him as your soul’s first necessity), He will be found by you; but if you (become indifferent and) forsake Him, He will forsake you.”* 2 Chronicles 24 verse 20 ...*“Thus says God: Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, He also has forsaken you”.* Ezra 8 verse 22 shows God’s response to being forsaken. The second half of the verse shows *“the hand of our God is upon all them for good who seek Him, but His power and His wrath are against all those who forsake Him”.* The very nature and person of God responds strongly against being forsaken. To be a betrayer, an abandoner or covenant breaker is so foreign to who God is, that it brings punishment upon those who commit these types of acts. The intrinsic nature of God is to remain faithful, steadfast and trustworthy, so there are many more Scriptures where God states His faithfulness and declares that *‘I will never leave nor forsake’*. A few verses of interest are listed below:
Psalm 9:10; Psalm 27:9; Psalm 37:23 & 28; Psalm 94:14; Deut. 31:6 & 8; Joshua 1:5-9; 1 Samuel 12:22-25; 1 Kings 6:13; 1Kings 8:57; 1 Chron. 28:20; Neh. 9:31; Isaiah 41:17;

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Isaiah 42:16; Isaiah 54:6,7 & 8; Isaiah 62:4 & 12; Jer. 51:50.

If Jesus, the Christ, is forsaken on the Cross, then the Father's character and nature must be questioned; for He would have contradicted Himself, as there are many Scriptures like Psalm 37 verse 28 in Amplified: *"For the Lord delights in justice and forsakes not His saints; they are preserved forever, but the offspring of the wicked (in time) shall be cut off."* Surely the Sacrificial Lamb without spot, wrinkle or blemish is carrying none of His own sin, therefore, cannot be counted with the offspring of the wicked. Listen to what the Psalmist says in verse 37: *"Mark the blameless man and behold the upright, for there is a happy end for the man of peace."* 38: *"As for transgressors, they shall be destroyed together; in the end the wicked shall be cut off."* 39: *"But the salvation of the (consistently) righteous is of the Lord; He is their Refuge and secure Stronghold in time of trouble."* 40: *"And the Lord helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they trust and take refuge in Him."*

In the Book of Deuteronomy in the 31st chapter, the Father is giving a promise to Moses and Joshua concerning how to move into and take the Promised Land. This is surely a picture of Christ coming and leading the saints into the Promised Land (of the abundant life in the Holy Ghost). Are we to believe that Moses and Joshua are pictures of the coming Savior, but the coming Savior has a lesser promise than was given to Moses and Joshua? In verse 6 of chapter 31, the Lord God says, *"Be strong, courageous and firm; fear not nor be in terror before them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you; He will not fail you or forsake you."* In verse 8, the Lord echoes through Moses.... *"He will not fail you or let you go or forsake you; (let there be no cowardice or flinching, but) fear not, neither become broken (in spirit-depressed, dismayed, and unnerved with alarm)."*

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A little later, when we follow Christ's steps to Calvary, we will see that He set His face toward Jerusalem with marked determination and He faced death without cowardice. In 1 Samuel 12 verse 22, *"The Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake, for it has pleased Him to make you a people for Himself."* In this verse, we see that God is faithful in keeping His promise and covenants, not for our sake, but because of His name. God's name, character and actions must always line up and agree with each other.

In 1 Kings 6 verse 13 the Lord declares, *"And I will dwell among the Israelites and will not forsake My people Israel."* We see even though the Israelites had been punished and from time to time forsaken by God, His hand is always upon them, and even to this day He protects and blesses them. How else could such a tiny nation exist surrounded by so many enemies?

In 1 Chronicles 28 verse 20, David tells his son Solomon that the Lord God will be with him and will not forsake him, and he must finish all the work for the service of the house of the Lord.

In the Amplified Bible there is a footnote that directly relates to this theme I am stressing, and I quote, "God's promises to men and women invariably are dependent upon the other party to the covenant meeting His conditions, whether He says so at the time or not." David communicates this to Solomon only because of His knowledge of God, as well as the continuance of the historical record concerning the way that God operates. His name is Faithful. The Father considers the righteous man as His own inheritance and His eternal heritage. Therefore, in Psalm 94 verse 14, he declares *"For the Lord will not cast off nor spurn His people, neither will He abandon His heritage."**

A great verse of assurance is in Isaiah 41:17: *"The*
*Author underlined for emphasis

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poor and the needy are seeking water when there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. I the Lord will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.” Herein is a promise to those that are in need and desperation that God will not forsake them. In Isaiah 42:16 God continues His faithfulness as He declares, *“And I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known. I will make darkness into light before them and make uneven places into a plain. These things I have determined to do (for them); and I will not leave them forsaken.”*

Psalm 9 verse 10 clearly states God’s covenant with us, *“And they that know Your name (who have experience and acquaintance with Your mercy) will lean on and confidently put their trust in You, for You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek (inquire of and for) You (on the authority of God’s Word and the right of their necessity).”*

Even though the nation of Israel has fallen into a very low state during the times of Isaiah and Jeremiah, we see encouraging Scriptures even in the midst of their forsakenness. Jeremiah 51:5: *“For Israel has not been widowed and forsaken, nor has Judah, by his God, the Lord of hosts, though their land is full of guilt against the Holy One of Israel.”* God’s plan of faithfulness for those that He loves shines very brightly in Isaiah 62. In verse 1, *“For Zion’s sake will I (Isaiah) not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her imputed righteousness and vindication go forth as brightness, and her salvation radiates as does a burning torch.”* Verse 4: *“You (Judah) shall no more be termed Forsaken, nor shall your land be called Desolate any more. But you shall be called Hephzibah (My delight is in her), and your land be called Beulah (married;) for the Lord delights in you and your land shall be married (owned and protected by the Lord).”* We

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can see that God's faithfulness even to the unfaithful may have breaks in it, but His restorative character causes God to never leave or fully abandon those He has chosen. The righteous, however, that have not separated themselves from God by sin and rejection of the covenant, are never without His protection and are never out from under His provision and care. Isaiah 54:6,7&8 show once again the condition of those that have sinned against God, but are restored. 54:6, *"For the Lord has called you like a woman forsaken, grieved in spirit and heart sore - even a wife (wooed and won) in youth, when she is (later) refused and scorned, says your God."* 7, *"For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion and mercy I will gather you (to Me) again."* 8, *"In a little burst of wrath I hid My face from you for a moment, but with age-enduring love and kindness I will have compassion and mercy on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer."* This is a promise to a nation that has sinned against God, rejected God, broken covenant with God, turned their back on God and yet, still, He only briefly forsakes them and returns to them with great compassion and mercy. God makes a promise that as He was to Noah in the day of Noah, He shall be in the future. In verse 10 He declares, *"For though the mountains should depart and the hills be shaken or removed, yet My love and kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace and completeness be removed, say the Lord, Who has compassion on you."* He goes on to describe His promises to Israel and the wonderful things He will do for them because of His name and His faithfulness.

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ISAIAH 53: GOD'S PROMISED ONE

Isaiah 53 is truly a beautiful, Messianic passage. 1: *“Who has believed (trusted in, relied upon, and clung to) our message (of that which was revealed to us)? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been disclosed?”* 2: *“For (the Servant of God) grew up before Him like a tender plant, and like a root out of dry ground He has no form or comeliness (royal, kingly, pomp) that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him.”* 3: *“He was despised and rejected and forsaken by men, a Man of sorrows and pains, and acquainted with grief and sickness; and like One from Whom men hide their faces He was despised and we did not appreciate His worth or have any esteem for Him.”* Notice here in verse 3 that the Lord Jesus was truly forsaken, but not by God. He was forsaken by men. 4: *“Surely He has borne our griefs (sicknesses, weaknesses, and distresses) and carried our sorrows and pains (of punishment), yet we (ignorantly) considered Him stricken, smitten, and afflicted by God (as if with leprosy).”* Even here, there is no mention that He was abandoned by God, nor is there mention that part of His condition as our Sacrificed Lamb would include being abandoned by God. Verse 4 is trying to tell us that Christ is our sacrifice. He is providing a way of escape, but by our ignorance, we are attributing His condition to the actions of God, when it is our actions that are afflicting the Christ. The Father is permitting the Son to be sacrificed in our place. Christ is suffering to pay for our sin. He, Himself, has no sin, therefore, it is not necessary for Him to experience that which would pain Him the most: abandonment. If Christ were a sinner, then it would be fair punishment for Him to experience that which He would fear and hate the most. Now that I know the beauty and the power of communion with God, I feel safe to say that Jesus' worst punishment would have been to be separated from

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God. But Christ is not being punished for Christ. Christ's punishment is due to our guilt, iniquity and the curse of sin. 5: *"But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our guilt and iniquities, the chastisement (needful to obtain) peace and well-being for us was upon Him, and with the stripes (that wounded Him) we are healed and made whole."* 6: *"All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has made to light upon Him the guilt and iniquity of us all."* We have no Scripture that tells us that Jesus' necessary punishment would be to be separated from the Father. The punishment of separation from God not only punishes Jesus Christ, but also punishes the Father. Would not the horrible, painful, shameful, suffering, rejection and abandonment inflicted by man upon the Christ be enough? Separation from the Father would also punish the Father and the Holy Spirit. To decree, ordain, require the pain of the lash and the Cross and have to endure it, is hurtful to the Father. No parent can stand by and watch their child suffer without hurting. Let us be reminded that the Holy Spirit and the Father are also God. Where could God turn, to no longer know and feel His Son's pain? The spiritual pain of separation is nowhere mentioned as necessary to pay the sin debt. Nor is there need to have the Father suffer this great hurt, after all, Isaiah 53, verse 10 (below) is enough pain. There is no need to torture Jesus in the spiritual realm. Therefore, what profit or purpose is there in spiritual separation of Son, Father and Holy Spirit? We see this clearly in verse 7: *"He was oppressed (yet when) He was afflicted, He was submissive and opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth."* 8: *"By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who among them considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living (stricken to His death) for the*

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transgression of my (Isaiah's) people, to whom the stroke was due." 9: "And they assigned Him a grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth." 10: "Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise Him; has put Him to grief and made Him sick. When You and He make His life an offering for sin (and He had risen from the dead, in time to come) He shall see His (spiritual) offspring. He shall prolong His days, and the will and pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." There is no mention of being abandoned or forsaken. For the Messiah to go through the torture of the scourging, as well as the death on the Cross, that satisfies the Father's plan. 11: "He shall see (the fruit) of the travail of His soul and be satisfied; by His knowledge of Himself (which He possesses and imparts to others) shall My (uncompromisingly) righteous One, My Servant, justify many and make many righteous (upright and in right standing with God), for He shall bear their iniquities and their guilt (with the consequences, says the Lord)." 12: "Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great (kings and rulers), and He shall divide the spoil with the mighty, because He poured out His life unto death, and (He let Himself) be regarded as a criminal and be numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore (and took away) the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors (the rebellious)."

In verse 12, the final verse of this passage, we get a summary of what was accomplished, in that it says His life was poured out, He was regarded as a criminal and He was numbered with the transgressors, but He took away the sin of many and became an intercessor for us. There is no mention that Jesus had to suffer a punishment worse than death for Himself.

Thanks be to God that He accomplished the task of providing salvation for those who would look to the Cross.

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Isaiah 53 is used as a foundational Messianic passage; there is no support here for abandonment by the Father.

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CALVARY ON MY MIND: **THE JOURNEY TO THE CROSS**

In all that Jesus is about to suffer, there is no mention that He anticipates or expects to suffer separation from God. Let us look into the Word to see what He does have to say concerning His test, His trial and His Crucifixion.

In John, chapter 10 verse 18 He declares that no one takes His life away, that He voluntarily lays it down and that He has the power to lay it down and take it up (paraphrase). He concludes the verse by saying that He has received this charge or this program from the Father and He must fulfill this mandate. In John, chapter 11, verse 42, He gives a confirming statement that His Father always hears Him, *“I know You always hear and listen to Me.”* In addition to teachings of Christ being forsaken, I have also heard sermons that Christ was forsaken and that God did not hear Him through the Garden of Gethsemane experience. Obviously, Jesus does not believe God is silent when He calls. In John chapter 12, verse 27 Amplified, Jesus deals directly with the dilemma that He faces: *“Now My soul is troubled and distressed, and what shall I say? Father save Me from this hour (of trial and agony)? But it was for this very purpose that I have come to this hour (that I might undergo it).”* Obviously, agony is not a valid reason to even consider not going to the Cross. Remember this as we visit the Garden of Gethsemane. John 12 verse 28 puts a conclusion to the matter: *“(Rather, I will say,) Father, glorify (honor and extol) Your (own) name! Then there came a voice out of heaven saying, “I have already glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”* ” These verses show that Jesus, naturally, is troubled and is stressed in His soul (mind, will and emotions), yet His Spirit is steadfast as He is fully in agreement with the task set before Him. His assurance of the task and the purpose of it is clear because He has succeeded

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in always speaking what the Father tells Him to speak. This is clear in John 12 verse 49 where He says, *“I have never spoken on My own authority or My own accord.”* In verse 50 He says, *“I am saying (exactly) what My Father has told Me to say and in accordance with His instructions.”* There are other passages where He alludes to this (speaking what His Father has told Him to speak). This is very important to our discussion, as we will see that as Jesus gets closer and closer to the Cross, all of His words are from the Father pointing to the revelation that He is the sent One who is fulfilling the Father’s plan and Old Testament prophecies. In John chapter 13, verse 18, there is a phrase that we will hear again and again as Christ draws closer to the Cross, and that is, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.

It’s at this point we begin to wonder if Jesus is fearfully consumed by the ordeal of the Cross. We do have some indications of how He feels, because Jesus does speak of “a cup”. In the Garden, He will ask for this cup to be removed. What is this cup and what does it represent? In John chapter 12, verse 27, He was sorrowful and distressed and in John chapter 13 verses 18-19, He speaks of His betrayal. He points out that this betrayal will lead people to believe and identify Him as the Messiah. We realize from verse 21 that He is not sorrowful about the Cross, but He clearly states what is bothering Him. *“After Jesus had said these things, He was troubled (disturbed, agitated) in Spirit and said, I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, one of you will deliver Me up (one of you will be false to Me and betray Me).!”* The discourse in chapter 13 is concluded with Jesus declaring that Peter will deny Him three times. His concern in chapter 14 is that they not be distressed or agitated because of their coming failure and their longing to be with the Lord. He assures them of who He is and His relationship with the Father. In John chapter 14, verse 10, He questions

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them, “*Do you not believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in Me?*” Then in the next verse He goes on to assure them that He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. This would be a perfect time for Him to say, but Our fellowship will be broken at the Cross for some stated purpose - but we don’t find that. What we find by the 18th verse is His assuring them that He is like the Father and He will never leave nor forsake, and He seals it by promising the coming of the Holy Spirit as a result of His going to the Cross. He assures them that as the difficulty comes in His physical absence, He will still be spiritually present with them, for He declares in verse 27, “*Peace I leave with you; My (own) peace I now give and bequeath to you.*” Jesus promises all of this to them with full knowledge that the Scripture must be fulfilled that says, “*I will strike the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter*” (Mark 14:27, Matthew 26:31 and Zechariah 13:7). Christ deals with their mutual sorrow in John chapter 16, verses 20 and 21, and He uses a woman delivering a child as a picture of what He is about to experience. In verse 22 He says, “*So for the present you are also in sorrow (in distress and depressed); but I will see you again and (then) your hearts will rejoice, and no one can take from you your joy (gladness, delight).*” I believe that Christ is sorrowful about abandonment, separation and betrayal, not by the Father, but by His closest friends and comrades. He has poured out His life to these men. They have lived together on the road and have undergone great trials of victory and also of failure. It is in these passages that He changes their title from servant to friend, therefore giving them the closest relationship with Him possible as the Christ on earth. In Mark chapter 10, the sons of Zebedee, James and John, at the urging of their mother, request to sit at Jesus’ right and left hands in Glory. Jesus’ response is in verse 38, “*You do not know what you are asking. Are you*

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able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism (of affliction) with which I am baptized?" In verse 39, "And they replied to Him, "We are able." And Jesus told them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and you will be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized." We know that James and John were both martyred, but it does not appear that either was crucified. They do experience abandonment, betrayal and persecution. Though they do nothing but good, they are accused of doing evil, are hated and suffer for the Gospel as Christ did. I believe that Jesus in referring to "the cup" is talking about all of these things that He and they must suffer before death. We are assured that this cup contains the Cross, for in verse 45 He says, "and to give His life a ransom for many." Yet, this cup contains some other things as well. Let's look more closely at this "cup".

The cup is an idiom that is used in many places in Scripture. It usually refers to experiencing something distasteful or sad. In the last days, Israel is called "*a cup of trembling*", of "*reeling*", or of "*sorrow*" for the world (Zech. 12:2). We see this now being fulfilled as Israelites and the Arab world rattle sabers at each other and pose a threat to world peace. This idiom is also used in Isaiah 51:17: "...you who have drunk at the hand of the Lord, the cup of His fury; you have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling..." Jesus is using this idiom in the same way: He must drink this troubled cup.

Jesus is prepared and has been strengthened to drink His cup. Upon entering the Garden, His cup is full upon His lips, for He prays alone. His mission will depend upon weak vessels that cannot even pray through the hour. The disciples' problems began when they made a promise that they wouldn't keep at the Last Supper. In Mark 14:31, we see that they had all made a pledge none would keep, "I will

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not deny thee". The baptism in Mark 10:38 appears to be a reference to a further continuance of the cup of sorrow, but it culminates in a picture of death. Therefore, we see death, burial and resurrection used in a metaphor of "baptism". The apostle Paul renames this cup in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 16 as the "cup of blessing", which is the cup taken by the saints in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice. So Jesus' cup is the cup of sorrow containing all the soul must go through up to death, and the baptism is death, burial and resurrection. Jesus' attitude toward it is expressed in Luke chapter 12 verse 50, "*I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and how greatly and sorely I am urged on (impelled, constrained) until it is accomplished!*" Jesus is actually looking forward to being a ransom for many. Passing through Samaria, they discover that He has "*set His face like a flint*" to go to Jerusalem and drink the cup and undergo the baptism that is before Him. In the prophetic passage of Isaiah 50:5-7, "*The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed.*" We see that the suffering Messiah is determined to achieve the goal. This is echoed in the New Testament, Luke 9:51 (KJV), "*And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.*"

Before the baptism is complete, the cup of sorrow must be drunk, and it begins with what has been prophesied. This included His abandonment by His disciples. "*Strike the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered*" (Zech. 13:7). Jesus knew what He was facing and He described it in Matthew 20:17-19 (also Mark 10:33-34): "*Now Jesus, going*

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up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again."" In Mark 10:38 Jesus pointed to the dangerous and painful ordeal He would face. Yet, there is no mention that the Christ feels He is going to be forsaken or abandoned by the Father. Therefore, I conclude Jesus is confident of the Father's support and His personal victory is assured. Before He prays in the garden on the Mount of Olives, Jesus says, in Luke 22:37, *"For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.' For the things concerning Me have an end."* As He encouraged the disciples to pray not to fall into temptation, we know this temptation was to deny Christ and abandon the Faith; to lie, deceive, and blaspheme the Name of Jesus. Jesus knew all that they would do, but the option was available for them to be strong, or at least recover quickly after failing in the test. Even in this, Christ knew that neither He nor the Father would abandon nor forsake these men.

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BETROTHAL, COMMUNION AND COMMITMENT

In His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus Christ is living out not just the fulfillment of the Old Testament Pascal Lamb (Exodus 12), but also the betrothal and marriage of the Bride of Christ (Matt. 25). Jesus Christ is the worthy Groom paying the price for His Bride.

The Jewish wedding is a picture of great spiritual significance. In Matthew 25, Christ uses the wedding to tell us about the end times rapture and the wedding feast in Heaven. Of greater interest to our discussion is the time period of the Upper Room - Last Supper, where He acts out the first part of His wedding. In the Jewish tradition, there is a betrothal dinner, where the bridal price is agreed upon after the groom makes his choice. Jesus Christ states that He has chosen these men, except one, who is the betrayer. In John 13:31-36, He establishes the new covenant between Groom and Bride, in keeping with the Jewish marriage. Jesus Christ expresses His covenant with the Bride and His plan to go establish a place in the Father's home to complete the marriage. First, He makes it clear that He is acting with the full power and consent of His Father. *"So, when He had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, "Where I am going, you cannot come", so now I say to you, a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Simon Peter said to Him, 'Lord, where are You going?' Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.""* John 12:2-3: *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also*

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in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." He raises His glass and blesses the wine and bread, and offers it to His disciples. During the meal, the groom would make a toast, having explained his intentions and willingness to provide for the bride. She would accept by drinking or, if she were not accepting, she would leave the room. This would signify a rejection of the proposed covenant and a breaking of communion. This is what Judas did as he left the Upper Room to betray the Lord. Judas committed a blasphemous act. He ate the meal with evil intentions, dipped the bread with Jesus Christ, but planned not to be in covenant with Him, rejecting the Groom's proposal and His coming sacrifice. Matt. 26:23-24: "*He answered and said, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born."*" Also, notice verse 29: "*But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in My Father's kingdom.*" As in the Jewish wedding, the Groom goes to prepare a room at the Father's House for the consummation of the wedding to come, returns for His Bride (at the Rapture), and takes her to the Father's Kingdom. The apostles eat, drink and accept, but not Judas. Every time communion is taken, this scene is acted out - the Groom offers a covenant and we, as the Bride, accept His firm promise to never leave nor forsake and to return for us. Amen. Is not the Father's commitment to the Son as sure as the Groom's to His Bride?

We must not take communion unless we are in the Faith. 1 Cor. 11:28: "*Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man*

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examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” 2 Cor. 13:5: “*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you are disqualified.*” Believing, we trust and rely on Jesus Christ for full salvation (wholeness, deliverance, healing) and sanctification, or else we will be sick and die prematurely. 1Cor. 11:30: “*For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.*” Jesus Christ was in communion with the Father with no betrayal or thought of sin, even faithful to the horrible beating and death on the Cross. How then, would He be forsaken, and we are assured and secure? At this Last Supper, Jesus drinks and seals His commitment to uphold His responsibilities to the Bride. Yet, while their lips are wet with this wine of commitment, their hearts are too dry to fulfill it. Jesus later describes their main problem, “*the spirit truly is ready (willing), but the flesh is weak*” (paraphrase). Because of the strengthening of God, Jesus is ready in Spirit and flesh, but not the disciples. The Master encourages them to pray, but in this they fail also. The disciples have been betrothed, entered into communion, but as yet they are not committed to the Groom.

NOT FORSAKEN

NOT SHRINKING BACK

I'm sure the impending terror of certain death was heavy on His soul, but the Christ, fully Man as well as Deity, yielded to the task. Jesus knew the script and was now prepared to play His part and go all the way through to the Cross. His beloved disciples had been told, but did not discern what was about to happen. Their Master was about to be sacrificed, taken from them and they would all fail - all would abandon and forsake their Lord.

As the final hour approached, the realization of their abandonment began to cascade down on the Savior; the pain of knowing that those closest to Him would turn away. At the hour of His greatest need, one of His own would turn Him over to evil men, and those called "faithful" would fail.

This wonderful Savior was not looking for escape, for when Peter cuts off the ear of Malchus (the high priest's servant), Jesus says, "*Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?*" (John 18:11). He heals Malchus, and having begged that His disciples go free, Jesus is led away. The disciples flee in every direction, fearing the "cup of sorrow" that Christ is confident He is now drinking.

If Christ were seeking not to go to the Cross, then He would qualify as a coward who is shrinking back. On that basis, He would be violating His covenant and could be forsaken by the Father. This would also mean that Jesus was disqualified to be the Savior. Peter boldly rebuked Jesus for talking about going to the Cross. Jesus Christ's response is to identify that any plan not to go to the Cross is of satan. So how could Jesus Christ in the Garden be seeking another plan?? Could the Father commend, accept or even tolerate an alternate plan to spare the Lamb and crucify humanity? Cowardice and shrinking back result in abandonment, for they are violations of the covenant and reveal a distrust of

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God. Christ is not shrinking back from the baptism of death that He must undergo, but much of the sorrow is optional and could possibly be tempered or altered. Jesus takes the disciples into the Garden to pray. The ordeal before these men will be trying, painful, difficult; they will need strength to stay the course, and this has been shown to the Lord. Jesus Christ tells the men, “*pray that you enter not into temptation.*” Judas Iscariot has already entered into temptation and is ready to stage the betrayal in the Garden.

NOT FORSAKEN

THE GARDEN

We will follow the story in Matthew 26:37-46, Mark 14:33-42 and Luke 22:41-46 together, in order to more clearly demonstrate what is going on. Jesus says, *“My soul is exceedingly sorrowful unto death. Stay here and watch with Me.”* We see Jesus encouraging the men to pray, and He goes off a short distance away and prays, *““Abba, Father, all things are possible to Thee. If thou be willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done”.* Then there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him in Spirit. And being in an agony (of mind), He prayed (all the) more earnestly and intently, and His sweat became like great drops of blood dropping down upon the ground.” We see from this discourse, that He is encouraging the men to pray that they do not fall into temptation. The question is: what is Christ praying for? If He were praying for Himself for strength, then surely He would have ceased to pray anymore, because the Father answered from Heaven with an angel that did strengthen Him. The passage shows that He goes on, still in agony. I question whether this agony is about Himself and for Himself, as the strengthening by the angel would have removed His need to continue to pray. Yet Christ continues to pray. I believe He prays for His disciples, as they will soon undergo an agony and sorrow that they are unequipped to handle without prayer. Surely His agony remains, as they fail to pray. If He’s only praying for Himself, why go back to encourage the men? He cries further and then He goes to the disciples again, saying, *“Why couldest thou not watch with me one hour? Arise, watch ye, pray ye enter not into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* Once again, I doubt He is talking about Himself, for the angel answered from Heaven and strengthened Him. He goes on praying a second time and says, *“My Father, if this*

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cannot pass away, but that I drink it, Thy will be done.” He repeated this not just a second time, but a third time. It would seem that His prayer for Himself has strengthened Him. His resolve to drink the cup of sorrow, as well as undergo the baptism of death are not the problem. The disciples have failed to reach Heaven with their own request, therefore, when Jesus comes a third time, His response is matter of fact, accepting of the fact that their sorrow will be full: abandonment, betrayal, desertion. They will suffer no reprieve or lessening of the blow.

When they come to arrest Christ, Jesus boldly seeks to protect His followers from punishment, and He releases them to run away. He declares that He is the One they are seeking and that they should let His followers go free. Christ wanted at least His inner circle, Peter, James and John, to be praying for strength. But all twelve would fail. At the Last Supper, all had pledged faithfulness, but all became weak liars. How they would respond and act was now up to them. Had they prayed, they too would have been strengthened as Jesus was.

NOT FORSAKEN

“YOU’RE UNDER ARREST”

It is from this point on that the Father tells Christ what to say, and all of the weight of His conversation is to clarify His identity. His first salvo is fired by declaring that He is the “I AM” (God). As He declares it, Scripture says that the soldiers fell backward to the ground (this same power is released today as people are still falling down under the power of the Holy Spirit at the declaring of Who Jesus is). After Peter cuts off Malchus’ ear, Jesus heals him and says these powerful words, *“the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?”* *“Or thinkest thou that I cannot call upon My Father and He will even now send Me more than twelve legions of angels. How then should the Scriptures be fulfilled?”** Jesus’ resolve to go to the Cross is as strong as ever, and His determination that Scripture would be fulfilled is also well in place. It is interesting to note that Jesus cannot lie. He says that even in this moment He could send for twelve legions of angels if He chose. Surely, these are not the words of a man who is looking for a way of escape. He is still confident that things between Him and the Father are good. He is confident that He can call for backup and would receive it. Jesus uses His arrest to point to His identity by declaring, *“But all this hath come to pass that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.”** Immediately upon speaking this, His disciples all leave Him and flee, fulfilling Mark 14:27, which is a quote of Zechariah 13:7, *“Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, against the Man who is My Companion, says the Lord of hosts. Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; Then I will turn My hand against the little ones.”* Anyone watching this scene with knowledge of Scripture could begin to see a parallel.

In the first phase of Jesus’ trial, He is brought before
*author’s underline for emphasis

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Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the high priest. The Scripture tells us that the high priest (Caiaphas) had prophesied that one Man was to die for the people. Just another testimony to the identity of this Nazarene. Isaiah 53 is acted out with this trial; He finally responds with silence and answers them nothing, once again pointing to His identity. Jesus is dragged before the Sanhedrin and once again identifies who He is. For since He must always tell the truth, especially when the high priest asks Him, *“I adjure Thee, by the Living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, art Thou then the Son of God?”* Jesus gives him His identity, *“Ye say so: I am.”* Jesus was struck once in the first trial and now the beatings begin in earnest. The death sentence is declared over Him. As a backdrop, the prophecy concerning the betrayer, Judas Iscariot, is being fulfilled as he seeks to return the pieces of silver into the temple treasury, but is rejected. The temple treasury and the priest used the silver to buy a potter’s field. *“And I took 30 pieces of silver, the price of Him whom was priced, whom they, the sons of Israel, priced, and gave them for the potter’s field even as the Lord directed me”* (Zech. 11:12-13).

At Jesus’ first trial before Pilate, they receive another clue as to His identity as the governor asks Him, *“art Thou the King of the Jews?”* Jesus speaks further to fulfill and demonstrate who He is, for He declares that His Kingdom is not of this world. The priests have examined Jesus for three days in the temple and were unable to answer His questions or find Him guilty of Scriptural error or of sin. Now, as He stands before Pilate, the Gentile heathen, even he points out the identity of Christ, for he declares, *“I find no fault in this Man.”* The pagan has found a lamb without fault or blemish. The Sacrificed Lamb in Isaiah 53 answers nothing and is silent once again. Jesus is dragged to Herod, but He answers

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him nothing also. Then a return to the court of Pilate. Pilate states His identity once again: “*Should I release to you Barabas or Jesus, who is called Christ?*” Pilate’s wife even echoes His identity declaring, “*have thou nothing to do with that righteous Man.*” Pilate yells out to the Jews one more time, “*what then shall I do with Jesus, who is called Christ, whom ye call the King of the Jews?*” Throughout the scourging they declare His identity again and again, “*hail, King of the Jews.*” Pilate comes to the same conclusion as all men; he can find no fault in Him. The event is even more crystallized to the observer, for this is the time of the preparation of the Passover at about the sixth hour, when all the families in Israel are preparing to slay the sacrificial lamb and eat the Passover meal. And it is at this point, with this backdrop, the shout goes out, behold your King. Pilate, in his last pronouncement, declares that he is innocent of the Blood of this righteous Man. Jesus is now fully condemned to death and begins to carry His Cross. He is assisted by a Cyrenian, Simon by name, who is the father of Alexander and Rufus. These names are important, for though they are Africans, they become important in the Church of Jerusalem and are major players in the spreading of the Gospel and the establishing of the Church.

It is at this point that I make a bold statement. **Everything Jesus says is to fulfill Scripture and point to His identity.** There is no small talk or casual conversation, but everything He says is a signpost to His identity and a fulfillment of Old Testament Scriptures which He must fulfill, in order that He may be clearly identified as the Sacrificial Lamb, the Messiah, the Son of Man and the Son of God. On His way to Golgotha, Jesus turns to the women and the people who are following in the multitude, and declares, “*daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the*

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days are coming in which they shall say, 'happy are the barren and wombs that did not bear, and the breasts that gave not suck'. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, 'fall on us'; and to the hills, 'cover us'." Christ was giving us a prophecy for the future; for the end of Jerusalem would surely be a grievous event, and this event will bring that prophecy into fulfillment in AD 70, when the Romans lay siege to Jerusalem. But in addition to the prophecy, Jesus quotes Scripture where it says, "*fall on us, cover us.*" In the Book of Hosea, in the 10th chapter, the 8th verse, Hosea describes places of idolatry, the sin of Israel and He says, "*they shall say to the mountains, cover us and to the hills, fall on us.*" A careful examination of the content or the meaning of the 10th chapter begins in the 2nd verse, (Amplified) "*their heart is divided and deceitful; now shall they be found guilty and suffer punishment. The Lord will smite and break down (the horns of) their altars; He will destroy their (idolatrous) pillars.*" Verse 3, "*Surely now they shall say, 'We have **no (actual) king because we fear not the Lord; and as for the king, what can he do for us?**'"*" Verse 4 brings it fully into light for it declares, "*they have spoken mere words of the lips, swearing falsely in making covenants; therefore, judgment springs up like hemlock (or other poisonous plants) in the furrows of the field.*" In other words, Jesus quotes Hosea to point out that they have rejected Him as King, and, therefore, they have violated their covenant with God and declared themselves forsaken. Any Jew familiar with Scripture could have taken His quote, examined it in light of the Scripture, know that He was quoting in Hosea, and would know that He was their King and they rejected Him.

Upon arriving at Golgotha, the Scripture was fulfilled that said, "*He was reckoned with the lawless*" (Isaiah 53). Then Jesus said, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not*

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what they do.” Jesus forgives the people for what they are doing and for their ignorance. He is also further proving His claim to Deity, for Mark chapter 2 verse 7 describes the mindset of the people at that time, for they said, “*Who can forgive sins (remove guilt, remit the penalty, and bestow righteousness instead) except God alone?*” Jesus answered these people in the 10th verse, “*But that you may know positively and beyond a doubt that the Son of Man has right and authority and power on earth to forgive sins.*” He then told the paralyzed man to stand, pick up his mat and walk and as we know, the man was instantly healed, proving that Christ could not only have authority on earth to heal, but also had authority on earth to forgive sins. To our amazement, Jesus was dealing with Numbers chapter 15. God, in the passage of Hosea, dealt with those who knowingly rejected their king, but in Numbers chapter 15, there is a forgiveness for those who are sinning unknowingly. Numbers 15:28, “*And the priest shall make atonement before the Lord for the person who commits an error when he sins unknowingly or unintentionally, to make atonement for him; and he shall be forgiven.*” So, by saying, “*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,*” He is identifying Himself as a priest able to make an atonement, in this case, of Himself as a sin offering for the people who are sinning and are unaware of what they are doing. Wow!!

The sign over Jesus’ head on the Cross says, “This is Jesus, the Nazarene King of the Jews”.

Even a silent sign shouts as a testament to the identity of the Crucified One. After some time passes, Jesus looks down at His mother and His disciple, John, who are standing observing the scene and He declares, “*woman behold thy Son*”, and He says to the disciple, “*behold thy mother*”. Throughout His life, our Lord has complied with the obedience of the Ten Commandments, but He must fulfill all

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of the Commandments. The majority of them deal with specific acts of behavior that are satisfied by refraining from sin, but there is one Commandment that Jesus must fulfill to complete His mission as the Son of Man. This is the Commandment of honoring father and mother. If Jesus were to die on the Cross without making arrangements for His mother's survival, He would have been guilty by the sin of omission. He would have failed to provide for His mother. At this point, Jesus' younger brothers are not yet saved and probably have families of their own so Jesus, in honor to His mother, entrusts her to the care of His closest disciple to assure that her needs would be met, that even in old age, she would be honored and blessed.

The Lord is crucified with the two criminals. One of them shouts to Him, "*art not Thou the Christ? Save Thyself and us.*" It is the other criminal who points out that Jesus is not guilty as they are, but in his humbleness speaks those words that truly save his soul, "*Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.*" It is ironic that the first criminal asks Jesus to prove that He is the Christ by saving Himself, as well as saving them. Once again, Jesus' words clearly point to the fact that He is who He claimed to be. He declares Heaven as His home and He demonstrates His saving power by declaring to the other criminal that He will accompany him into the eternal realm. This criminal calls Jesus "Lord!", rather than "Yeshua", His given earthly name (Yeshua, translated means God saves and salvation). Calling Him Lord points to His revealed identity. Once again, the observers hear this conversation on the Cross, which points to the identity of this Man from Nazareth.

From the sixth hour to the ninth hour, the Bible says that darkness covered the whole land. Science tells us that no regularly scheduled darkness by eclipse was recorded. This could only have been accomplished by the hand of God.

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If the Father had abandoned the Son, why would He turn the world dark? Wouldn't the signs of an earthquake and supernatural darkness be the opposite of abandonment? Surely they are confirmation of support and God's presence. The Father is present and causes nature to mourn along with Him at the sight of what has been done to His Son. The scene verifies the identity of the Lord. The centurion testifies that this truly was the Son of God because of this display. I think the Father is making a statement concerning His personal grief and that He is feeling the darkness of the soul that comes from seeing a loved one suffer. I heard a T.V. preacher say, "The darkness is evil and God was not in it, as Jesus was abandoned." Strange, I thought, "God begins each day at sunset and tells us to rest in Him at the Sabbath." It is in the darkness of the soul that we find God present. It is in the blackness of our pain and sorrow that God comes to comfort. The darkness heralds in a new day, and because of comfort in the darkness, our joy comes in the morning. In the blackness of trials, we cannot work and must commit it all to the Father until He resurrects us.

Christ is bearing the sins of the world as in a cup, not as wearing them in His own skin. He is a sacrificial offering that is taking away sin for all those who attribute His death as symbolic of their remaining sin. The Father is well aware that down through the next few thousand years, people will attribute and apply the Blood from this moment to their sins and receive forgiveness. But can we say that the weight of sin can somehow overcome the power, glory and majesty of God?

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“ELI ELI”

When Jesus cries out at the ninth hour, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani, He is not saying that He is forsaken, but He is declaring His identity and is pointing out for all time to the passage of Scripture that most clearly identifies the scene. Jesus’ whole focus is to fulfill Scripture and identify who He is, so that those watching, as well as those reading thousands of years later, would know He is the Messiah. Quoting a short passage of Scripture is the Jewish way of sending a message to the listener. The prophets quote prophets. The kings quote prophets and the King of kings quotes His own prophets. Jesus, throughout His ministry, did this in order to make a point, to clarify a message or to encapsulate a thought. Quite often, only a few words would be used to identify a whole passage. This practice is still alive and well. Were I to say, “The Lord is my Shepherd,” one immediately gets the panoramic view of the relationship between the sheep and the Shepherd, the valley of death and heads being anointed with oil. That one line leads us through the 23rd Psalm. Peter stands up in the Book of Acts and quotes a few verses from the Book of Joel to identify to the listeners in Jerusalem that he was announcing the beginning of the last days and the fulfillment of Scripture concerning this new move of God they were seeing. If I were to say “Four score and twenty years ago,” it would cause your mind to flood through the most difficult time of the United States of America and the tremendous battle of Gettysburg. “Ask not what your country can do for you,” brings back the Kennedy days. “I have a dream” sends a picture of the great March on Washington and the dynamic, nation-changing speech given by a black Baptist preacher on the Washington Mall. Quoting one line to paint a panoramic scene or to identify a larger body of work is a valid and practical method of communication. This would especially be true if one were

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hanging on a cross in great pain, struggling to breathe.

Jesus is not stating that He is forsaken. He is calling their attention to observe that everything before their eyes was prophesied by David about a thousand years before. I am sure that there is a possibility that Christ may have recited more than the first question of the Psalm. Without a doubt, those that were standing there knew exactly what He was talking about, if they were familiar with this Messianic passage. Even in Bibles today we find a footnote stating that this is a quote referring to Psalm 22. It perfectly answers the dilemma of the Cross and lets us know if Christ was forsaken or not. Psalm 22: *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You answer not and by night I am not silent or find no rest. But You are holy, O You Who dwell (in the Holy place where) the praises of Israel (are offered). Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted (leaned on, relied on You and were confident) and **You delivered them.*** They cried to You and were delivered; they trusted in, leaned on and confidently relied on You, and were not ashamed or confounded or disappointed.”* Are these the words of a man who is assured of being forsaken? *“But I am a worm, and no man; I am the scorn of men, and despised by the people. All who see Me laugh at Me and mock Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted and rolled Himself on the Lord, that He would deliver Him. Let Him deliver Him, seeing that He delights in Him!* Yet You are He Who took Me out of the womb; You made Me hope and trust when I was on My mother’s breasts. I was cast upon You from My very birth; from My mother’s womb You have been My God.”*

“Be not far from Me, for trouble is near and there is none to

**author’s underline and bold for emphasis*

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*help. Many (foes like) bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have hedged Me in. Against Me they have opened their mouths wide, like a ravening and roaring lion. I am poured out like water and all My bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax; it is softened (with anguish) and melted down within Me. My strength is dried up like a fragment of clay pottery; (with thirst) My tongue cleaves to My jaw; and You have brought Me into the dust of death. For (like a pack of) dogs they have encompassed Me; a company of evildoers has encircled Me, they pierced My hands and My feet.”** It is astonishing to realize that the psalmist is describing a form of torture that was not yet invented or prevalent during his day; that of piercing of hands and feet. Assuredly, this helps us to identify who is hanging on the Cross. “*I can count all My bones; (the evildoers) gaze at Me. They part My clothing among them and cast lots for My raiment*” (a long, shirt like garment, a seamless under-tunic). (This scene was actually happening as Christ was on the Cross, for the Roman soldiers did gamble for His garment.) “*But be not far from Me, O Lord; O My Help, hasten to aid Me! Deliver My life from the sword, My dear life (My only one) from the power of the dog (the agent of execution).*” His prayer to be delivered from the sword is true, for He will give up the Ghost prior to being stabbed by the sword. The sword will not result in His death, but will only bring forth water and blood, separated, testifying to the fact that He is already deceased. “*Save Me from the lion’s mouth; **FOR YOU HAVE ANSWERED ME*** (kindly) from the horns of the wild oxen. I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise You.*” Well, He would have nothing to praise God for if God had abandoned Him and not delivered Him and not answered Him, but obviously, Christ is pointing us to Psalm 22 so that we can know that He was delivered, that He was not abandoned and

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that He continues to praise God. “*You who fear (revere and worship) the Lord, praise Him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify Him. Fear (revere and worship) Him, all you offspring of Israel. For He has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither has He hidden His face from Him, but when He cried to Him, He heard.*” (WOW!!!)

“*My praise shall be of You in the great congregation. I will pay to Him my vows (made in the time of trouble) before them who fear (revere and worship) Him. The poor and afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the Lord - they who (diligently) seek for, inquire of and for Him and require Him (as their greatest need). May your hearts be quickened now and forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall bow down and worship before You. For the kingship and the kingdom are the Lord’s, and He is the ruler over the nations. All the mighty ones upon earth shall eat (in thanksgiving) and worship; all they that go down to the dust shall bow before Him, even he who cannot keep himself alive. Prosperity shall serve Him; they shall tell of the Lord to the next generation. They shall come and shall declare His righteousness to a people yet to be born - that He has done it (that it is finished)!*” If the question was asked, then surely the question has been answered. My God has not forsaken My fathers, and My God has heard and not forsaken Me.

John chapter 16, verse 32 echoes back, “*The hour is coming, and it has arrived, when you will all be dispersed and scattered, every man to his own home, leaving Me alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.*” Isaiah 50:5 leaps off the page to come into agreement with Psalm 22 pointing the way to the identity of Christ for it reads, “*the Lord God has opened My ear, and I have not been rebellious or turned backward. I have given My back to the smiters*

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and My cheeks to those who plucked off the hair; I hid not My face from shame and spitting. For the Lord God helps Me; therefore have I not been ashamed or confounded. Therefore have I set My face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. He is near Who declares Me in the right. Who will contend with Me? Let us stand forth together! Who is My adversary? Let him come near to Me. Behold, the Lord God will help Me; who is he who will condemn Me? Behold, they all will wax old and be worn out as a garment; the moth will eat them up.”

It has come to pass as Jesus said in John 8:28...
“When you have lifted up the Son of Man (on the Cross), you will realize (know, understand) that I am He (for Whom you look) and that I do nothing of Myself (of My own accord or on My own authority), but I say (exactly) what My Father has taught Me.”

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UNDERSTANDING THE ARAMAIC

“*My God, My God, Why has Thou forsaken Me*” appears in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34. In Mark it is spelled Eloi, Eloi and in Matthew it is spelled Eli, Eli. Jesus, on the Cross, is speaking in Aramaic. In the Scripture it says, (which is being interpreted), “My God, My God”. It is interesting to note that after Jesus says this, there is some confusion at the foot of the Cross. As the people are standing by, they think He is calling for Elijah. Why would the people be confused? In Jerusalem at that time, Latin was spoken, as well as Greek, Aramaic and also Hebrew. I thought to myself, if the people were confused about what Jesus had said, maybe the translators of the Bible got confused also due to lack of familiarity with the Aramaic language. It blessed me to find that the Aramaic translation of this passage does have a different flavor to it, which reinforces the concept that Jesus was trying to give further clarity to His own identity.

Emit Russell of Gordon College of Theology and Missions in the pictorial Bible dictionary, Zondervan '76, tells us that Eli, Eli lama sabachthani is connected to an Aramaic verb meaning deliverer, therefore for this hast Thou spared me. Could this mean that Jesus was crying out “Deliverer, Deliverer, for this Thou hast spared Me”, or “Thou hast left Me in this predicament on the Cross, that this is My destiny”? In other words, I am on this Cross as part of My destiny. Vic Alexander, who speaks Aramaic as his native language and has translated the Gospels into Aramaic, seems to concur with this possibility as he notes in his translation of the Gospel of Matthew: “*I am*”, the original ancient Aramaic retained; “*I am, I am, wherefore have you left me*”. Idiomatically, “*wherefore*” implies destiny. He further states that “*sh'wik-thani*” is the only correct transliteration, and it means “*left me*” in the sense of the

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purpose for which Jesus was left on the Cross. It absolutely does not mean forsaken in this usage.” Also, we find it translated as “*My God, My God! To (what end) hast Thou forsaken Me?*” The footnote also identifies Psalms 22 for Matt. 27:46 and Mark 15:34 in the Emphasized Bible by Rotherham Kregel Pub. 1974. A footnote that points to Psalms 22 is quite common and a more accurate translation of the passage emphasizes the Christ’s identity and purpose, not the presumed failure of the Father. I don’t believe He is calling Elijah as some people at the scene think, but I believe He is pointing out ever more clearly that His purpose and identity are fulfilled.

The story continues as the Scripture reads, “*After this, Jesus, knowing that all things have now been finished, that the Scripture might be completely fulfilled, said, “I thirst.”*” Are there prophecies that point to the suffering Messiah that mention or imply thirst? We see that Psalm 22 verse 15 says, “*that My tongue cleaveth to My jaws,*” and there is another Psalm that is Messianic that mentions thirst. Jesus calls us very specifically to the events of the Cross as described in Psalm 69. Remember that the Gospels point out when Jesus says “I thirst.” a sponge on a stick is offered to Jesus filled with vinegar and it is given to Him to drink. “*After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, “I thirst!”*” (John 19:28). The apostle John knows what we need to know - Jesus is quoting a Messianic passage to point out, fulfill and complete the picture. Jesus is not thirsty for drink; He is in need of saying all that the Father has planned for Him to say and then proceed with the rest of the mission. After “I thirst”, He will give up the ghost, having fulfilled Scripture. Psalm 69 is a powerful description of the prayer and heart of Christ. Listen to the words of the Psalm 69 (KJV): “*Save me, O God; for the waters are come in onto*

NOT FORSAKEN

my soul. 2) *I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me.* 3) *I am weary of my crying; my throat is dried; mine eyes fail while I wait for my God.* 4) *They that hate me without cause are more than the hairs of mine head. They that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty; then I restore that which I took not away.* Notice, that at the end of verse 4, He is saying that He is making restoration for something that He had not taken Himself. Could this be that He is restoring and giving us reconciliation to God and making payment for sin which He did not commit? Isn't it beautiful? 5) *“O God, Thou knowest my foolishness and my sins are not hid from Thee.* 6) *Let not them that wait on Thee O Lord of hosts, be ashamed for my sake; let not those that seek Thee be confounded for my sake O Lord of Israel.* 7) *Because for Thy sake I have borne reproach, shame hath covered my face.* 8) *I am become a stranger unto my brethren and an alien to my mother's children.”* Isn't this so true; as Jesus was a stranger to His family, as at this time they did not yet believe in Him? 9) *“For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up and the reproaches of them that reproach Thee are fallen upon me.”* The New Testament prophet agrees with this, as he declares that the zeal for the Lord's house will be the undoing of the Messiah (John 2:17). 10) *“When I wept, I chastened my soul with fasting; that was my reproach.* 11) *I made sackcloth also my garments and I became a proverb to them.* 12) *They that sit in the gates speak against me; and I was a song to the drunkards.* 13) *But as for me, my prayer is unto Thee O Lord, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of Thy mercy, hear me in the truth of Thy salvation,* 14) *deliver me out of the mire and let me not sink; let me be delivered from them that hate me and out of the deep waters.* 15) *Let not the water flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up and*

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let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.” These verses point to Jesus’ words in John 10:17-18, that He lays down His life and no one takes it from Him; therefore, He, not death, will determine the moment of separation of Spirit from body. Also, this prophecy shows that Jesus will bear our sins into hell, but hell and the devil cannot hold Him there, for the sins He deposits there are not His. This is how Christ conquers “sin and death”. Jesus Christ conquered sin by fulfilling the Law with a sinless life. Paul put it thusly, “*So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor. 15:54-57). Psalm 69:16, “*Hear Me O Lord, for Thy loving kindness is good, and turn unto me according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies and 17) hide not Thy face from Thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear me speedily!*” Once again, we see the promise of not being forsaken. 18) “*Draw nigh unto my soul and redeem it. Deliver me because of mine enemies. 19) Thou hast known my reproach and my shame and my dishonor. Mine adversaries are all before Thee. 20) Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness; and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. 21) **THEY GAVE ME ALSO GALL FOR MY MEAT; AND IN MY THIRST THEY GAVE ME VINEGAR TO DRINK.***” The later verses read like Isaiah 53. In verse 26 of Psalm 69, “*For they persecute him whom Thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom Thou hast wounded. 27) Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into Thy righteousness. 28) Let them be blotted out of the book of the*

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living, and not be written with the righteous. 29) *But I am poor and sorrowful; let Thy salvation, O God, set me up on high.* 30) *I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving*". The concluding verse, verse 36, parallels Isaiah 53 as it has a final promise for the Messiah: "*The seed also of His servants shall inherit it; and they that love His name shall dwell therein*". Clearly, "*I thirst*" says a lot more than "give me drink!"

After receiving the vinegar, Jesus cries again with a loud voice and He says, "*It is finished!*" This "*it is finished*" is also prophetic, and is taken from Scripture. Jesus returns us to the end of Psalm 22: "*They shall come and shall declare His righteousness to a people yet to be born*" - that He had done it (that it is finished)! In John chapter 19, verse 30 we find the words, "*It is finished!*" spoken on the Cross. When we look this up in the Greek, we find the two phrases, "*it is finished*" in John 19:30 and "*He hath done this*" in Psalm 22:31 mean the same thing. Both "*He hath done this*" and "*it is finished*" mean to end, to complete, to conclude, to pay, perform, to accomplish. Strong's Concordance says, "to conclude as to discharge a debt". How beautiful it is that Jesus, just by saying "*it is finished,*" is describing the sacrifice as complete, and our debt of sin as paid and discharged.

Jesus' next words are also clearly delineated in Scripture. As He breathes His last, He declares, "*Father, into Thy hands I commit My Spirit*". All questions of Jesus being forsaken are thoroughly demolished when He quotes Psalm 31 verse 5, but let us listen from verse 1. "*In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in Thy righteousness.* 2) *Bow down Thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be Thou my strong rock, for an house of defense to save me.* 3) *For Thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for Thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.* 4) *Pull me out of*

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the net that they have laid privily for me; for Thou art my strength. 5) ***INTO THINE HAND I COMMIT MY SPIRIT: THOU HAST REDEEMED ME, O LORD GOD OF TRUTH***".

Jesus' suffering and pain would have been in vain if the devil and the spirit of death would have determined His time of departure from the earth. The victory over sin and death is that Jesus commits His life into the hands of the Father before the appointed time of physical death. Jesus of Nazareth was no weakling of a man, for He worked hard with His hands molding and shaping wood, stone, and heavy implements in the construction trade. Even though He had been brutally beaten, scourged and hung on a cross, those observing were surprised that He had passed from life so soon. He had to fulfill the prophecy He had spoken, that He lays down His life and no man takes it from Him. In this moment of difficulty there is great victory, for Jesus dismisses His own Spirit and places His life in the hand of the Father. It was not the lash, the thorny crown, the nails, nor our sin that dismissed His Spirit, but by the will of the Father. The Son truly demonstrated that the sting of death has no power or authority over the Son of Man. Death is a defeated foe, soon to be destroyed for all time; it has no sway over the Sacrificed Lamb. Jesus bowed His head and gave up His Spirit for the Father had said, 'that's enough My Son. You have proven Your identity and fulfilled the Scriptures'. As Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God, He was also the Son of Man. In the capacity of the Son of Man, He was teaching us to rely upon the Father and operate through the Holy Spirit. He spoke only the Father's words and He did what He saw the Father doing. He used none of His power as the Word of God. He relied solely upon the power of the Holy Spirit to operate every spiritual gift; and every miracle was performed at the unction of the Holy Spirit, even that of

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ending His physical life.

Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:26, that death is the last enemy that will be put under. If Christ was forsaken on the Cross, from where would He draw the power to put this great enemy under? If the Father had forsaken Him and turned away, then the Holy Spirit, the hand of God, would have been unable to help Him, for the Holy Spirit is God and cannot violate Himself. So Christ would have declared "*it is finished,*" but would not have had the ability to stop the physical heart and cease to breathe. The power and ability to give up life must be great enough to overcome the involuntary functions of bodily systems. These systems are designed to keep us alive, and will fight against any attempt to terminate them. Jesus' whole life is a testimony of doing the will and the work of the Holy Spirit. His life is a testament to what we can do by abiding in His Word and holding to the sweet communion of the Holy Spirit. It is because God cares for us and never leaves us or forsakes us that we can do what Psalm 91:16 says; we can live until we are satisfied. For verse 16 says, "*With long life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation.*" Jesus' life, in years, was not long, but He was thoroughly satisfied in that He had bravely accomplished His tasks. The purpose to which He was born was now fulfilled. A proud Father looked on and agreed. He was ever there, granting a reprieve, rescue and deliverance at the appointed time. Jesus had drunk the cup of sorrow and had drained the glass dry. He had undergone the first part of the baptism, and had to commit His Spirit and give up the ghost at the same time that the sacrificial lambs were slain throughout Israel. The criminal on the cross wasn't sure of His identity at first, but as he watched Him and listened to Him speak, he concluded this Man is both judge and jury. How powerfully reassuring it must have been to him to hear Jesus pronounce His own time of

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departure as He exercised His authority over death. Our Lord declared that He is not alone, but that the Father is with Him, and as He passed that time wracked in pain on the Cross, He was not alone; the Father was still with Him. (Hebrews 5:7-9: “*Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared; though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.*”) If we are obedient and hold to the covenants and contracts we make with God, we, like Christ, can declare that He is faithful and that when He promises to never leave us nor forsake us, He never will. We will be tested and tried by the adversary in many areas, and there will be times when we will feel that God is silent or He cannot be found; but He would have to deny Himself in order to abandon, desert or forsake one of His children.

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CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

I'm so glad to know that my God is faithful and that His nature will not permit Him to abandon me, even if and when I fail. If I make a mistake and fall down, He will not stand on the sidelines, but He will come out onto the track of life and lift me up and put me back in the race. It is very comforting to know that He not only comes to my track meets and final games, but He also attends my practices, and He has a watchful eye and tender hand. Because of this revelation, I am more comfortable about letting Him run my family and my job. I am much quicker to entrust my finances into His able hand, and I do not need to have all the answers anymore. My patience for those who err has increased, and I am always concerned about repentance from the heart and encouraging people to be quick to repent. I desire to have people make sure they have not forsaken God or broken their covenant with Him, and that they have kept all their promises to Him. I have rejected all of the excuses as to why God is silent or His gifts or miracles do not happen anymore. I am confident that He neither slumbers nor sleeps, and if there be a breakdown in communication or short circuit in power, the fault is not with my God, but it lies with me. I have come to believe God cannot lie or fail. You could say it leaves me with "it's my fault" theology (if things are not going right, it's not God's fault, but mine). The Word tells me I am being perfected day by day and that God leads me to good works He has prepared for me in advance, and also that He is faithful and He will do it (Eph. 2:10; Hebrews 13:21; 2 Tim. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:24). So I believe as long as I continue to trust and look to God and do not invent new ways to blame God for my weak Faith and failures, He'll bring me along the road of success.

Enemies do not rattle me as much, because I hear that still, small voice saying, "*what can man do to me?*" I am far

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from perfect, but I am realizing that ‘never leave you nor forsake you’ means **never leave you nor forsake you**. Therefore, if I wake up in a bad mood, feeling abandoned, I know that it is my feelings talking, not my Faith. Although it is a strain at times, this theology causes me to be more careful to what I commit myself and to whom I commit myself. For I know that if God is ever-faithful and unchanging, He keeps His Word and His commitments. I am His child. I must have the same committed faithfulness that He does with as much diligence as possible. I must make my word be my bond and see to it that my heart is under the scrutiny of my word, and that my word reflects the purity of my heart. There are so many hurting and lost people that feel they can never find their way back to God, that I will never again preach this sermon: that on Calvary, the Father turned His back on the Son. For within the human experience, there are too many of us who have had fathers and mothers who have turned their backs on us in difficult and desperate situations. People have fallen very short of their promise to never leave nor forsake. Christians divorce, leave their children, file for bankruptcy, don’t pay their debts, change pastors and churches like they change their clothes, and leave God on the suspicion that He might disappoint them. We live as if there were no spiritual realm. Like the old pop song, “If this is all there is, let’s go on dancing...” If there is nothing beyond the grave, then God should always satisfy us down here and answer every prayer the way we want it answered. Jesus drank His cup of sorrow as did all of the eleven disciples. This brand of sorrow was because of persecution due to the Gospel, not due to sin, error or the human condition. Faith in the Blood of Jesus Christ is the remedy for illness, sin and the human condition. Acts 10:38 is the solution, *“how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went*

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about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” If we waiver in our assurance that God was with Jesus Christ and that He’ll be with us in like manner, then sickness will have its way with us. There is always a Heavenly option beyond what we see - God may sovereignly intervene or resolve the issue beyond the earth. Yet, God’s best is that we act on His Word and fulfill His Will in the earth by using our Faith in the knowledge that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Even as martyrs, we win and are greatly rewarded in Heaven. As Faith victors, we also win. It’s all about trusting the Father enough to let Him exercise His will through us. If we’re trusting in our works and have no vision of Heaven, then we will be bound by earth and time. We will see God as a “do it for me now, God.” Our Faith and faithfulness will be based on our momentary feelings, not God’s eternal promises. Jesus Christ fulfills the Scriptures that bring momentary suffering, but ultimately bring eternal rewards and satisfaction. His faithfulness and His willingness to go to the Cross are what qualify Him for the highest position (Philippians 2:7-11). We must trust in the Lord and give Him the faithfulness we hope to receive.

When we go to God with a problem, we need to know that He not only hears us, but is directing His hand toward our solution. We need to understand that as the world races closer and closer to the end times and a one world government, that our dependence must be more upon the Lord than on political and social institutions and solutions. We must have the confidence to preach the Gospel, not just in the pulpit, but in our daily lives. We must have a sense of the Holy Spirit giving us backup, never being on vacation or forsaking us because of sin. Our sin must be committed unto the sacrifice of Christ and His Blood, which perpetually flows from Calvary to remove our iniquity. We

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need to remain humble and do a heart and soul check every day, but we need not check to see if God is still there, wondering if He loves us. When we pray for the sick, encourage the lost, or delve into the darkness to cast it out, we must always have the calm, secure, comforting voice reverberating throughout our very being that says, “*lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Mathew 28:20).

When we go to court, the lawyer comes as legal representation and speaks on our behalf. He functions as a mediator and a go-between for those who cannot effectively speak for themselves. When a lawyer stands in this role, he is not disdained nor rejected by the judge, nor does the judge or jury attribute to the lawyer the sin of the one that he represents. Hebrews 4:14 states that Christ is our High Priest, but He also is our Mediator. 1 Tim. 2:5: “*It is in this capacity that He bears the sins of the world, for He acts to make intercession for us.*” When the Bible says that He became sin for us, it means that He, as the Sacrificed Lamb, carried our sin to the Mercy Seat of God, and His Blood removes the sin for those who call on His name. In the eyes of the Father, this is a position of esteem and not rejection. There is absolutely no reason for the Father to forsake the Son. There is absolutely no reason we should forsake our attorney. We must not reject His counsel or disobey His instructions. We must overcome bad teaching and our own wounded hearts, and know the Mediator is our great help in time of need. Jesus Christ, our High Priest, is taking us before the Mercy Seat of the Father. This Father has never been unfaithful, untrustworthy, untruthful to anyone, ever.

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WE ARE NOT FORSAKEN **“CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?”**

I believe that some people want to believe that Jesus was forsaken on the Cross, for this provides an out for them in not trusting in the immutable, ever faithful nature of God. Even though throughout the Bible, God makes every effort for us to know Him and His nature, there are people who would prefer to have God be more humanlike, weak and unpredictable. This helps us to explain away our own failings when our prayers go unanswered, or healing does not manifest. Surely, if Christ was not heard on the Cross and was forsaken, then we can still feel good about ourselves when we have failed to fully trust and rely upon God. We so desperately want a “microwave” God that answers us as a cell phone operates, except when we have to shout, “Can you hear me now?” because of a bad connection. Our bad connections are usually a lack of willingness to stay on our face until we hear from God, or to fast and pray until we hear from God, or to learn what the Word says as to what frequency God is broadcasting from. Our most frequent problem in hearing from God and feeling forsaken is really in the area of, “Do we believe His Word or not?” God has spoken to us in the volume of the Book, and in it we can find the answer to any question that we would ask. So often, when we claim we haven’t heard from God, we are really saying we haven’t heard what we want to hear from God. What God has said “no” to 3,500 years ago, He is still saying “no” to today. He is not permitting today some sin that He disallowed years ago and overlooking unfaithfulness because we think He should lower the bar for us. I believe our flesh wants to believe that God has forsaken us and that Christ was abandoned because of our sin. We have often heard people say, “Well, I’ll come to church when I get it together” or, “I’d come to church, but it’s filled with hypocrites.” One of

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my favorites is, “it’s just too hard”. All of these are somehow reflected in ‘The Father turned His back on Christ and, therefore, how can we possibly hope to achieve Heaven?’

If God is faithful and He is bigger than sin, then His promise still holds. He will never leave you or forsake you. I believe that this is the message that Jesus was giving on the Cross: that Psalm 22 proves God’s faithfulness to man, clearly describes the scene, and identifies the Nazarene as the Sacrificed Lamb and Messiah.

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PROMISES

One of my favorite promises is John 10:29, “*no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.*” **Wow.** That means that neither the devil nor anyone else can cause me to be taken out of the love of the Lord. Many folks don’t want to believe this promise, but I gain no comfort in disbelieving the Lord. I believe “no one” includes me. Since God won’t give up on me, then I plan to meet the criminal that was saved on the cross. I know this may be hard for some folk to accept, for they see God the same way they see the parent, lover, or friend who abandoned them. Yet, if you’ll take God’s promise as that of a supernatural, Superior Being not capable of lying or being unfaithful, then you can change your heart’s view of your salvation. You can only embrace eternal salvation if you can embrace eternal faithfulness. I, or someone else, could mess things up if it weren’t for a Super God who does the supernatural. 1 Thess. 5:24: “*He who has called you is faithful and He will do it!*” The problem is in our thinking. To operate in right relationship and confidence, we must have the correct:

- 1) Fellowship (closeness)
- 2) Power in numbers (support)
- 3) Experience (confidence)

Our acceptance of God’s promise rests upon these three factors of assurance.

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THREE FACTORS OF ASSURANCE

We all have to face trials in various areas. I have noticed that the area in which we struggle most is the one in which we have the least confidence. God does not build our strength in areas where we are already strong. Our confidence is built by meeting challenges and tests. The level of confidence we have prior to a test is determined by many factors. A giver will not find it hard to give, but a financially tight saint will be challenged in his finances again and again until he rises victorious as a cheerful giver. Weak confidence will be targeted by our adversary. Whether our adversaries are natural or supernatural, they will look for weakness and avoid our areas of confidence. People tend to perform better in tasks that they are confident about. With confidence, we are less likely to quit, because we expect to accomplish our goal. A positive attitude and confidence are a reflection of God-like character. God is confident in all He does. In Him, there is no lack, fear or failure. This is because God's Faith is absolute - Romans 4:17: "*God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things that be not as though they were.*" Jesus says, "*you shall have what you say*" - Mark 11:23. This is the way of confidence. Confidence speaks what Faith believes. John 3:11, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.*"

True Faith manifests as confidence. The Bible tells us that "*Faith worketh through Love*" - Galatians 5:6. God is Love; therefore, God's Faith always works. If God has said or promised anything, it must be so and is immutably established. Our ability to believe and rest in this revelation depends on many factors, the foremost of which is our confidence in our knowledge of God and our confidence in Him.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit are One in continuous

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fellowship, absolute in Their power, as they outnumber all singular beings and have eternal experience. So, when God speaks, He has the confidence to know it **will** and **is** so. This is what God desires for His children.... **“Confident Faith”**. Let’s look at another example - David, before Goliath and before he becomes king. The shepherd boy had 1) **fellowship with God** - while in the hills and fields, he would sing and praise the majesty of God’s nature and power. He believed he was not acting alone, but had a mandate from God, support of the king and an army behind him, so he had 2) **power in numbers**. David declares how he defeated a lion and a bear. These two **experiences** gave him great confidence and freedom from paralyzing fear. Believing that God and the army was his backup made great power available. In 1 Sam. 17:26 he said, “...*for who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?*” The psalms he wrote showed he believed that God went before him and was his Rear Guard. Listen to the confident words of this boy: 1 Sam. 17:32, 34-37: “*Let no man’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.*” “*Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard and struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of the Philistine.*” These bold words are based upon **fellowship, power and experience**. In verse 39, David is given Saul’s armor, but David refused since “*he had not proved it*” (KJV), meaning David had not tried, tested or worn this armor before. He had no

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experience with it and could not feel confident in it.

So often, we try to talk or act as a saint we admire, not realizing that their confidence is based upon battles they won wearing their armor (words and Faith). We cannot fight in the armor of another, but must go out in the confidence of the experiences we've had with God. My father was a powerful minister of the Gospel, as was my mother's father. Years after these men of God had passed on, I remember my mother saying, "I have lived off the Faith of E.J., my father, then I relied upon the Faith of Ivor, my husband. Now, I'll have to get on in my own Faith, so I've been reading and growing on my own." She had made the David decision "to fight on in her own armor." We must all find our own confidence in the Lord. The old Gospel song says, "I gotta know Him for myself." Based upon this knowledge of "Him," David told Goliath in mid-verse 45 through 47: "*But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands.*" David's confidence is in the Lord. If the cause is just and God is going to get the glory, then we are confident of victory. In summary, our confidence is based on our 1) relationship - **fellowship**, 2) assurance of whose side we are on - **power in numbers**, and 3) our **experiences** that have prepared us for the battle we are facing.

Christ was confident that in going to the Cross, He was doing the Father's Will. His fellowship is so close that He declares that He is one with the Father (John 14:11).

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Verse 7 of John 12 shows He is troubled in His soul (mind, will and emotions), but confident in God's plan and Jesus' purpose - "*Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour*". In mid-verse 50, "*...therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.*" Therefore, while going to the Cross and while on the Cross, He speaks what the Father has said to Him! Before Pilate (John 19:11), He answers, "*You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given to you from above.*" In every challenge and test, Jesus' experiences with the Father demonstrate He was never alone, and at any moment He could summon countless legions of angels to His aid. During His first temptation, angels appear to strengthen Him (Mark 1:13). On two occasions, people tried to kill Him, first at Nazareth and later in Jerusalem at the temple, but He supernaturally walked away from them. Jesus walked upon water and faced other dangers with Faith and confidence, for He believed the promise, "***I will never leave you nor forsake you.***"

So often people want to come to God, but fear restrains them. This fear is sometimes fear of judgment or punishment. In a few cases, it's correct Bible fear - "awesome respect for a Holy God". Yet, in most cases, people fear further abandonment and disappointment. When people close to us continually fail us, especially parents or spiritual mentors, we become reluctant to trust God. During the recent exposure of pedophiles in the Catholic Church, I heard a person say, "How can I trust God again after this?" Though the sentiment is placed upon God in error, we understand the pain. Religious figures and parents stand, in the minds of many, as in the place of God. When people, by their unfaithfulness, abandon their proper role, their victims often blame and reject God. Because of this, people spend

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years running and hiding from the only One who can heal this hurt - Daddy God. Jesus Christ knows that when He suffers, it is being allowed by the Father for a greater goal. There is no anger, rejection or misplaced blame. He looks to Daddy for help and accomplishes His goal. The more we've been hurt, the more we fear further abandonment. Therefore, we must run to the One who will never forsake us.

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THE PRESENT STATE OF ABANDONMENT

During the late 1960's, I was completing my Master's Degree in counseling and discovered that the human being is wired to need love and fellowship. Man is a social being, and we need not go into scholarly works on the subject to know that there are times when we need a hug, when we need to belong and need the acceptance of a group or at least another individual. This deep need to belong and be a part of a close human interaction is present right from the moment of birth and continues to the grave. The research shows that if a human suffers rejection and abandonment, abnormal behavior is more prone to occur. Well over 70% of those incarcerated for violent crime come from broken homes, and are expressing the residual anger from the negative emotions of abandonment.

I was assigned to a chronic schizophrenic ward at a state institution for an internship. During this phase of my education, I was shockingly introduced to the pain of mental illness and the people who live in this war zone day to day. On my caseload, there was an underlying theme: hurt people hurt people. It was clear that at some time, these people had been abandoned, rejected or violated to the point that their psyche was not able to find rest. The 40-year-old housewife on my caseload mutilated herself repeatedly as a result of the pain that had come because her father had rejected and abused her and now her husband had just abandoned her. The 60-year-old man never recovered from the death of his parents when he was a teen, and then suffered rejection by the rest of the family. His parents died in a tragic car accident and neither grandparents, uncles nor any other relatives would take him, so he was bounced from foster home to foster home, and then released to the world as a supposedly adjusted young man. In a matter of months, his

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behavior became too bizarre for society and he landed in the psychiatric hospital. The stories went on and on, all painful and sad, with the underlying theme that at some point they had been abandoned and forsaken. Our newspapers are filled with stories of jilted lovers, rejected husbands or wives who respond quite violently to their situation. The sadness that lurks in the hallways of a nursing home is not sadness because bodies are wearing down, but in many cases, people are languishing in the loneliness of abandonment. Most juvenile delinquents are quick to say they act the way they do because nobody cares. They join gangs to find a sense of belonging and to escape the pain of rejection. It is just as common today to find single parent homes as two parent homes. The thinking of the 1960's heralded an era of individualism. The theme was, "do your own thing", but with it came a rejection of responsibility, for where there is great freedom and individualism, there must also be an equal measure of responsibility. When people divorce themselves from each other, they endanger the emotional stability of all involved. The essential promise of marriage is that "I won't abandon you!"... "I will be with you in sickness, health, rich, poor, until death do us part." They once reached out to each other in a desperate desire to find safety from abandonment. Now they are caught in its embrace and must watch as the ones they love look on wondering, "Will you leave me?" The wounds of divorce can be bandaged, but scars remain and children scar the deepest. My caseload was a repository of these scarred people, divorced and abandoned by broken commitments, now broken souls and minds.

During those early years in the 60's, I taught high school and also was a counselor in a social-educational program called Upward Bound. This program took promising inner-city kids and gave them an opportunity to attend college during the summers, in a hope of motivating

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them to be higher functioning, more well-adjusted and successful in society. The program was a great success, but a shift in the political climate destroyed the funding base for the program and, unfortunately, thousands of young people were unable to advance along this fast track to a college education. But as a counselor, I saw something. The children that suffered the most from rejection and fear of abandonment made the poorest adjustment to succeeding at higher levels. If a parent had abandoned the home and left his children in the lurch, they required many more hours of counseling and more encouragement. Young people who had been rejected or abandoned needed to establish a new support group that somehow paid for or replaced the damage done by the previous hurts. I believe that it is becoming more evident that the emphasis on “individualism” of the 60’s-70’s has created an increase in people suffering from abandonment. Increased divorce reflects this, but we see disturbing trends in childcare as well. Changes in the labor market show more mothers working 9-5, 8-4, 4-11, etc. Whether single moms or married, small children and school kids spend most of the day with strangers. These children are clingy, demanding and more aggressive than we have seen in former years. There are many factors that need to be researched; i.e., violent TV shows, cartoons, and parenting styles. But generally speaking, these kids of the 90’s are angry and needy. I believe they feel set-aside, pushed away, abandoned. Some recent research seems to support my thesis. *Psychology Today*, June 2005: “But the latest findings, from a huge, long-term government study are worrisome. They show that kids who spend long hours in daycare have behavior problems that persist well into elementary school...The 113 behaviors surveyed include frequent arguing, temper tantrums, lying, hitting, and unpredictable conduct”. *The wisdom of man has failed to*

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address the most basic needs of our species - "I will never leave you nor forsake you!" We need this promise to our souls, both young and old!

We can establish some general conclusions: 1) man has a need for secure, faithful relationships; 2) people who have been rejected, abandoned, or forsaken may suffer permanent damage; 3) a trustworthy substitute must be found so that damage is not permanent; 4) coping skills must be developed to make it possible for the person to go on with their life after abandonment. Even if a person is emotionally healthy, there are episodes of abandonment and rejection that are difficult to deal with and still must be overcome. Television talk shows of today reflect the sad state of faithfulness. Divorce Court shows are popular, along with reality shows that parade the sad reality that people can be bought and sold with little thought given to honor. Values of truth, honesty and altruism are not celebrated in TV land. There is a Star Trek episode where Capt. Kirk and Officer Spock grapple with the question of, "Is the value of the many more important than the value of the one?" The episode demonstrates that sometimes the value of the one is very important. This is true only if loyalty and friendship are held in value. Highly esteeming the value of the one is only valid if we also esteem the value of the many.

America's greatness is that the many will defend the right of the individual to speak, have freedom and to exercise his inalienable rights. This is the beauty of democracy in action; that ultimately we are bigger because we will defend, be loyal, and faithful to the individual for the sake of the group. The strength of the group is actually based on the brotherhood of individuals and their willingness not to abandon each other, to stand firm and secure against efforts to divide and conquer. Words like traitor, turncoat and deserter bring with them a dark picture of betrayal. The

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characters most despised in life and in literature are those who said they were faithful and proved to be despicable, deserters and traitors. There are codes of faithfulness, even among murderers and thieves, for they do come into agreement to do the evil that they do. We see that people of low character will turn on each other for the slightest of reasons. Vows and pledges are easily broken by people with low moral standards. Furthermore, evil people are not trustworthy and their word is easily broken. In the Garden of Eden, the serpent makes no effort to take the blame for having tricked Adam and Eve. And those who worship satan are soon turned upon and destroyed by his evil work. Even Anton Levay, who wrote the satanic bible, died of a horrible form of cancer and never reached beyond his 60th birthday. Since evil is the work of satan, we can clearly see that people who do evil die younger deaths, lose their minds, experience more poverty, death and disease than is the norm.

Unfortunately, many good people have fallen prey to the lie that satan does not exist. These people have failed to realize that one of the first masquerades of evil is to make you believe that evil does not exist. But as we look across the panoramic view of the condition and state of man in the world, we see that evil does exist; and where evil exists, there is a force behind it. his name is satan, the devil, demons and fallen angels. Even without attributing evil to satan, we see that man does do evil and we can identify the nature of this evil, as we see that it is selfish and has little care for others. It is focused on momentary pleasures and self-gratification. It is rebellious and disorderly. It is tricky, deceitful and untrustworthy. Evil will say one thing and do another. It will make a promise, only to break it. It will gain your confidence, only to crush it. This, of course, is not the nature of God as expressed in the Bible. Surely, we can see that the God of the Bible is not like the devil or fallen “TV

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land” man.

***The hard, cold reality is that most of us suffer with a
“Father Wound”.***

Divorce: Fifty (50%) percent of marriages end in divorce and most of these break-ups involve children. Most of these children are given into the control of their mothers, as the fathers are more likely to leave the home or are forced out. The child is forced to drink of the “cup of abandonment”. The bottom line is that “Dad left me”. There are many excuses for the break-up, but a child’s only wish is that grownups grow up, keep their word and fix what’s broke. “You promised not to leave Mommy and you’re leaving me too!” is the feeling. His/her cry is, “Stay, work it out, aren’t I worth it?” The hard reality is “No!”, so the child is told to believe everything is going to be okay, and it’s not. Helpless to change the situation, the child cries out and acts out. The parent with custody is going to receive the brunt of the negative reactions to abandonment. The child feels somehow to blame, and works to win back the abandoning parent (usually Dad). The custodial parent looks on in bewilderment at this shift in behavior, wondering why she gets abused and the “rat dad” gets comforted. Yet, this is not what’s really going on. The child is afraid to truly vent his/her real anger and disappointment for fear of more rejection and abandonment. Behavior and personality begin to change as insecurity, disappointment and fear find a new home and take root in the hearts of all involved. There are exceptions to the rule, but generally a part-time father who is out of the home will have to cross the abandonment bridge in order to heal a father wound, and the parent with custody will pay the cost of constructing that bridge.

The woman who divorces has usually made a poor choice of a mate due to a father wound. The little girl who wants Daddy back becomes the woman who picks immature,

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uncommitted men. She strives to bond with them to heal the “father wound”. In her desperation, she seeks to repair damaged goods in her own broken body shop. It’s as if she’s feeling, “I’ll prove I’m lovable by fixing this broken man who will make up for what Daddy did to me.” Two wrongs still don’t make one right.

This scenario is also played out in many cases where there is no divorce decree, but the father is emotionally divorced from the child even though he is present in the home. There are a million excuses, but the bottom line is the dad refuses to give the security and the attention the child needs. In some cases, he doesn’t know what or how to give. Often he grew up in the same void he’s recreated and has his own “father wound”. He can’t fathom or tolerate this whiny, crying need for attention. The child’s needs are not met and he/she feels emotionally abandoned.

A father wound can be unjustly created. A very needy, controlling or undisciplined child may decide he/she is neglected. It’s not that we should meet all the cries of a child, but we should mold, teach and define what’s normal and appropriate. We teach children proper eating habits by saying, “that’s healthy, you can have more” or, “that’s enough of that, it’s fattening!” A child untrained or undisciplined can develop a father wound that only God can heal. Unreasonable demands, if unchecked, can define a good dad as a bad one. Also, a critical mom or sibling can berate and paint such a negative picture of Dad, that a real wound occurs based on a biased, false impression.

Children and adults suffer if they are substituted for and are ignored. Substitution is when a person substitutes a thing or another person for the one in need. “Dad, you spend more time with the dog than with me,” says the child. “Daddy, let’s do something together,” says the boy. Dad answers, “Sure, let’s watch the news together!” “Daddy, talk

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to me.” “Okay, after I call these two people from work.” Ignored is, “Daddy, watch me stand on my head.” “Oh, that’s nice dear,” says the newspaper reading dad! “But I didn’t do anything yet,” she answers. “That’s okay, dear!” The dad ignored the whole call for attention and affirmation.

Years of being ignored cannot be overcome by hearing a few, “But I love you!” The wound runs deep into hidden cavities of the heart. The wound hides behind many excuses: “Well, I was a bad kid!”, “I expected too much”, “He had to work”, “Mom drove him away and I was no help”, “If only I had...” Poor self-image, lack of confidence and insecurity block the way to wholeness, while highways to unhappy, inappropriate behaviors spread across the horizons of life. Overachievement, depression, homosexuality and other emotional problems emerge. One Christian sister told me, “My father wound caused me to look for love in all the wrong places. If my Dad didn’t love me, then who could - I couldn’t stand myself! So I kept throwing me away.”

1) A father wound can be due to a tragic episode (divorce, separation, untimely death) or ongoing (unexplained absences, neglect, disinterest, boredom, criticism, disrespect, physical, mental or emotional abuse) or insidious forms of abandonment (betrayal, desertion, deceit).

2) Generalizations are not absolute; however, once a father wound is created, it must be dealt with if wholeness and peace are to be achieved.

It is ironic that the most damaging of these problems that emerge due to a father wound is difficulty in coming to Father God! Only God holds the answer to our hurts. Only God can deliver us from these deep wounds and self-destructive behaviors. Yet Heaven gets the blame for failures on earth. No doubt: bad dads give Father God a bad name.

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As a pastor-counselor, I have noticed that our churches are filled with people who have unresolved father wounds. Millions more stand outside the church looking in - longing for fellowship, but unable to cross the threshold marked Abba, Daddy, Father. Father's Day is the most tearful day on the holiday calendar because it pains so many. Mothers have been more faithful than dads, so Mother's Day is a day of reconciliation. But, how can you reconcile with someone you aren't sure you even know, on earth or in Heaven? If we see Father God as a "forsaker", then surely we won't come to Him for peace, power or fellowship. If our earthly dads were poor examples of fatherhood, then how can we come with open arms to Father God? Earthly dad left us or let us down, so we tend to expect the same from God. The process of discipleship must be approached through this problem of the father wound. **No one can obey and follow a God that is the image of a failed earthly dad. We will not pray to and have Faith in someone we think is capable of turning His back on us.**

There is a wound that occurs even if the earthly dad is present and does a good job as father. Children are told that God is Father - He hears and answers prayers and loves them. Yet, they are not usually told about free will, repentance, forgiveness, Faith and patience. Prayer without an understanding of the will and character of God is usually not successful. Children are encouraged to pray, and after years of failure they conclude that, "If there is a God, He doesn't hear me or care about me." Teaching against signs and wonders leaves children without hope for miracles or Godly-angelic interventions. Where there is no hope, there is no Faith, because "*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*" (Hebrews 11:1). "*Without faith it is impossible to please Him*" (Hebrews 11:6). Prayer then becomes equal to wishing on a star or

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praying to a fairy godmother. The child concludes God is ineffectual and neglectful as a father.

People arrive at the same negative void if a disaster conceives prayer then silence aborts the birth. They are left with double sorrow. “In my time of need, the Father left me alone.” God gets the blame for so many things. Disaster is called “an act of God,” and God is blamed for death, whether timely or not: “God took my mother.” How in the world can a child believe in a loving Father when people, who don’t know Him or His will, use language that denigrates His character and misinterprets His actions, or lack thereof? When something bad happens, “It’s God’s fault”; if something good happens, “We’re lucky or smart”! God has told us that trouble and pain would come to us all. He would not keep us from it, but would be with us in it, and by Faith He will deliver us from it. He does not promise to shield us from all accidents, human error, reaping of what we’ve sown or all demonic action. At funerals you hear some stuff like, “My dad wasn’t much on God or church and he could be real mean, but he was a good man. He smoked and drank all his life, but I don’t see why God took him with cancer before he was 60”; “She was such a sweet little angel that God needed her in Heaven.” Somehow we get mad and disappointed at God when our world is turned upside down. From Heaven our Father cries, “No fair, I’m not like that, I didn’t do that!”

There are so many wonderful stories of how God has released the pain caused by violent, alcoholic fathers. Young boys grow up under this influence afraid to talk about it and reluctant to get help. Quite often, the Spirit of God must go after them, root them out and jar them into a loving relationship with Father God.

One young pastor gave his testimony, that when he received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he could no longer

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be angry at his father, but found a compassion that enabled him to forgive, release and step into a new and deeper relationship with Father God. No matter how deep the wound, the Lord will always seek to resolve any dilemma or bring new revelation that can turn earthly sorrow into Heavenly bliss. God has spoken that whatever we bind on the earth will also be bound in Heaven. A father wound binds us to so many different negative emotions that it is difficult to have a blessed life on the earth. *“Honor thy father and thy mother so that it will be well with you”* poses another problem to us, for it is difficult to honor that which you hold in disdain, anger, bitterness and resentment. Even though we may have been the victim, justice does not excuse us, and love will compel us to accept God’s offering of healing of the father wound. Since God’s ultimate goal is fellowship with Him as Father, “earthly dad” baggage must be unpacked and moved out of the way.

When Jesus is confronted with the Pharisees and Scribes, He has to inform them that things in Heaven are different than they are on the earth. For example, Jesus states that, in Heaven, men and women are like the angels and are not given in marriage (Mark 12:25). The exclusive possessive nature of marriage cannot exist in Heaven, for all of the saints will be an expression of the “Bride of Christ”. Therefore, my wife will not wait upon me, depend upon me, or cleave only to me when she and I arrive in Heaven. Our status and condition in Heaven will be to wait upon, depend upon and serve Christ as Husband. If you think that’s weird, consider this additional revelation. When I die, I may be the same age or older than my father when he died, but in Heaven, what age will we be? Will my father who birthed me on the earth and raised me, be my father in Heaven? As timeless spirit beings, will we somehow be bound to earthly relationships while in the presence of Father God? I think

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not. Earthly age will be of no significance in eternity and, therefore, I will be the same spiritual age as my father, grandfather, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I will stand in the presence of God where all knowledge, wisdom and power are in manifestation. My earthly father will now be fellow co-worker, blessed saint, friend in Christ, Bride and a living stone in the Temple of God. Where my father succeeded, all glory will go to God and where he failed, all of his sins will be cast into the sea of forgetfulness and wiped out by the eternal Blood of the Lamb. There can be only one Father. So when I was born again and I embraced the Lord God as my “Abba,” what happened to me before is meaningless compared to what can happen through me. My real Father has never left me nor forsaken me. He has never abdicated His position or responsibility. I am His beloved and He is my Father.

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SALVATION AND THE CROSS

Every effort of man to disqualify people from salvation gets destroyed by God's amazing and awesome ability to forgive sin. 1John 1:9 amplified: *"If we (freely) admit that we have sinned and confess our sins, He is faithful and just (true to His own nature and promises) and will forgive our sins (dismiss our lawlessness) and (continuously) cleanse us from all unrighteousness (everything not in conformity to His will in purpose, thought and action)."* It's so powerful and broad that salvation can be had almost regardless of sin. Those who go to hell arrive there because they fully reject God, and that is the one sin they are guilty of, for all other sin, if confessed, can be forgiven. The work of the Holy Spirit is to convict of sin and point us to salvation through Christ. Christ then leads us into reconciliation with the Father. That is why Jesus said the only sin that will not be forgiven us is blaspheming the Holy Spirit. To reject the leading of the Holy Spirit is to reject Christ; to reject Christ is to reject the Father. To blaspheme is to think evil, speak evil or attribute evil to the Holy Spirit, and that is what we do if we reject His conviction, love and presence. This sin cannot be forgiven, for it is the rejection of "the Way, the Truth and the Life" as Jesus described Himself. No man comes to the Father except by Him. Specifically who, how and when is a matter that only the Lord knows. We are not given the opportunity to decide who gets to Heaven and who does not. Peter was thoroughly astonished (in Acts chapter 10) to discover that the Gentiles were acceptable to God, for it says in verses 34-35, *"And Peter opened his mouth and said: Most certainly and thoroughly I now perceive and understand that God shows no partiality and is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he who venerates and has a reverential fear for God, treating Him with worshipful obedience and living uprightly,*

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is acceptable to Him and sure of being received and welcomed (by Him)." This surely creates a real problem when we pull out our lists of behaviors, characteristics, actions and attitudes by which we judge others and try to figure out who is righteous, holy and saved. The keeping of our traditions and spiritual behaviors are not the criteria, for God looks beyond these. No matter how many rules, regulations and hoops we create for people to jump through, they all crumble at the Cross. Peter's Acts 10 revelation seems to be the loophole into Heaven for those who have not heard the Gospel of the Cross. Once the Gospel is heard, all else is secondary fluff.

The criminal on the cross has no good works and has run out of time (Luke 23). All he does to obtain salvation is call on the name of the Lord. The simplicity and the beauty of the salvation message is wonderful, because we cannot save ourselves. Our Faith in Christ's act on the Cross where He died as a Sacrificed Lamb is the work that we must do in order to please the Father. John 6:29 tells us that to do the work of God, we must believe on the One that He sent, Jesus the Christ. It doesn't mean that we are free to sin, but it means that we have a way of escaping the bondage of sin. We want desperately to go beyond the simple message of salvation, and have long lists of accompanying acts we can fulfill. This very simple mandate of just believing is all that is needed.

If you haven't committed your life to Christ yet, then why not now? "Holy Spirit, show me Jesus the Christ; Jesus, show me my Father."

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SEVEN LAST WORDS SUMMARY

Matthew 27:46

Mark 15:34

Luke 23:28-31

Luke 23:43 & 46

John 19:26 & 27, 28 & 30

*I don't believe I can ever be convinced
that the Godhead –
The Trinity
The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit
could ever be separated.*