

© Ellen Lebsock
all rights reserved worldwide

don't settle – use your imagination

“Everyone is blessed with an imagination. Some just know how to use it better than others. Developing your imagination takes some effort. Don't quench your creativity with thoughts of “I could never do that,” or “That's impossible,” or “Maybe some other day.” Let your mind dream big. Brainstorm...just letting your thoughts run rampant. You may even hit on something that will change the world!

Don't settle for premade, premeasured, prepackaged life. Keep your friends and family guessing what you'll do next. Make life an exciting adventure for you and for them!” _Luci Swindoll

April marks the beginning of a new quarter in 2010. A new quarter in any year means a review of my old goals. A new quarter means it's time to set some *new* goals.

Setting new goals is such a lofty idea compared to what I have done quarterly for many, many years. What this habit truly amounts to is setting aside some time with the Lord to honestly look over where I am, as opposed to where He wants me to be; writing down the vision, making it plain so I can read it as I run. Habakkuk 2:2

The above quote from my “*Women of Faith Study Bible*” pretty much states my life philosophy. “Don't settle!”

I am vehemently opposed to *leaving well enough alone!* In my world growth is a requirement. Any day I don't learn something new is a wasted day. Any day I don't approach every new situation with a bazillion ideas please check my pulse. Something is WRONG!



Today, one idea is writing an updated version of a Women's Growth Workshop and Bible Study I've used for years when I was invited to share with groups of Christian women. This project is going to take awhile, so I'll be posting it here in segments as the work progresses.

“Why goal setting and Workshops and imagination?” you may ask. Because one important session in the workshop is about setting goals, and another is about how women's imagination can be turned from a negative to a positive influence in not only their own lives, but also in the lives of everyone they come in contact with.

I'm going to write it all down, and I'm going to call it “don't settle,” and get started on it today.

who i am today

– day 1

By the grace of God, I am what I am... 1 Corinthians 15:10a

Today – I am a servant of the most high God, the God of heaven and earth, who holds my life in the palm of His hand. And, because of the price He paid to give me life, I am His slave. Yet I am free! For God did not give me spirit of fear, but of power and of love; a calm and well-balanced mind, a spirit of discipline and self-control. He brings to my life love, joy, peace, an even-temper, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-restraint.

Now that I have come to be acquainted with and understand the true God, or rather to be understood and known by God, how could I turn back again to the weak, worthless, elementary things that enslaved me before?

So overflowing is His kindness toward me that He took away all my sins through His Son. He showered down upon me the richness of His grace, for how well He understands me and knows what is best for me at all times. Oh, how kind my God is, for He has shown me how to trust Him and become full of the love of Jesus Christ.

Yesterday was a different story. Read it [HERE](#).

Yes, it's true! Before I knew Jesus Christ I was hungry, afraid and blinded by the blizzard of problems and strife that surrounded me every single day.

Today I am, first and foremost, a daughter of the King of Kings. But when my wonderful husband of thirty-plus years looks at me he sees a partner, a wife, a friend and lover. When our adult children, our God-children and their children look at me, they see mom, or Nana. My role is defined very differently by each one of them. Nurturing a large God given family is a huge part of what I DO.

Also, over the years, I've worn many hats; done many jobs. I think it would be safe to say 'I'm a jack-of-all-trades. Artist, writer, web site designer, administrative assistant (that's the politically correct buzzword for secretary, you know), insurance agent...and so on and so forth. One thing I can tell you without reservation: my jobs define what I DO. They do NOT define who I AM.

It is critically important for you see the separation here as we begin this study. Every relationship we have is completely and totally different. If you are a mother and have more than one child – or if you are a sister with more than one sibling – you already know that each person is uniquely and wonderfully different. And, if you're smart, you deal with each and every relationship on the basis of the unique needs therein.

But, understand this. It's important! The unique way you treat each and every person you love and nurture from deep within your innermost being does NOT determine who you ARE.

Who you are determines what you are able to give out of your innermost being!

1. THE WOMAN YOU ARE TODAY

- a. Please understand and acknowledge this fact. No one else knows exactly how you treat yourself. We are social creatures. Would you agree? We learn at a very early age what is socially acceptable

and what is NOT. We are not allowed to go around saying hurtful things to others. It's frowned on in the same way as hitting, pinching, kicking, and biting. It's a big NO NO! So...why is it...do you think, we often consider it an acceptable practice to treat the woman we are today like that in the privacy of our own hearts and minds?

b. If you always greet yourself in the morning, looking into your mirror over your toothbrush with, "Good Morning! I like you." If you always make yourself as attractive as possible and go out to greet your world with confidence, believing you have something special to offer everyone you will meet; confident they will see you as a lovely person with something special to give them – well... I'll just pause here for a moment. The rest of us will excuse you while you leave the room. Obviously, you have your stuff together. You even remember where you put it. And spending the next several weeks working hard to make improvements is a BIG waste of your time. Because the reason I'm here today is to help you find a way to change your life into something much, much more positive than anything you've ever known before today.

c. Okay. Now that we're all on the same page here...is there anyone here who looks into her mirror and greets herself with "if only..." You know what I mean. "If only I were thinner; taller, shorter, had more of this or less of that. Uh huh...Some of us. What about the ones who greet the day with a barrage of "what if's... "What if I can't do today's job perfectly; be the superwoman wife and mother and career woman who completes all the stuff I've penciled in and top it all off with a magnificent strawberry shortcake for dessert tonight?" Any of those in the room? Now don't get me wrong, those are not the only two if's the women I've worked with over the years burden themselves with. But they're two of the biggies.

So...let me ask you. How would you like to change your "if only" and "what if" thinking and get it in line with what God offers us? Yes? Wonderful. That means the next hour and the following six weeks are designed specifically for you. And, if you will make a prayerful commitment to stick with the program to the end it will change your life. Guaranteed!

Now before you get all excited and sign on...I need to explain the difference between dedication and commitment. Did anyone here ever eat the old-fashioned breakfast our grandmothers prepared for their family? Bacon and eggs?

Here's how it works. The hen makes a promise to lay an egg a day so the farmer and his family can have bacon and eggs for breakfast. That's dedication! Some of us have it. Some...not so much. Most of us are eager-beaver starters, but when the going gets rough, we go looking for a fat worm on the other side of the fence and let our sisters do the work for a day or two. The pig on the other hand... Well that's commitment! The farmer and his family can't have bacon with their breakfast without the total and absolute commitment of the pig. He's willing to give his life to fulfill the job he's being called upon to do.

So...before we go any further I'm going to ask you again for a commitment, with the promise that your life will never be the same again after today.

who i am today

– day 1, part 2

Charm can mislead and beauty soon fades.
The woman to be admired and praised
is the woman who lives in the Fear-of-God.
Give her everything she deserves!
Festoon her life with praises!

Proverbs 31:30-31 _The Message Bible

Welcome back! So...now that you've taken a little break and had some time to think about the things we talked about earlier I would like to have you think about this: Who are you? Really?

Do you ever make a face at the woman looking back from your mirror and tell her, "I could love you a lot more if only you'd lose those extra pounds you're carrying around?" Or, "You'd be a lot more loveable if you weren't such a _____ (your blank to fill in here)_____."

Let me ask you, would you tell your BFF (that's *best friend forever* for those of us who are over 50), "Well I suppose you're a nice enough person, but if you fail to live up to my expectations, we're over." How ridiculous! Everyone here is socially adept enough to know what a statement like that would do to the friendship. So...why, Oh WHY, do we treat ourselves that way?

Now are you ready to make a commitment to personal change? I'd guess, yes. Or you wouldn't have come back here. That's wonderful. Let's get started

I must be perfectly transparent with you now. Back in the early 80's, when I made the same commitment with the Lord I am going to ask of you, the seminars I presented, and the studies I wrote (for myself as much as anyone) were all about *self*-image. Today, I understand the truth. And the truth is:

2. Your God-image is a picture of Who and What you are IN CHRIST.

a. What we will be looking at today, and throughout our studies together is all about our **God-image**. Many Christian females have a pretty foggy picture of themselves, **in Him**. Mostly, we see ourselves as a conglomeration of various components held together by a framework of *shoulds*.

We spend our lives building a blueprint of who and what we are, based on information from every source imaginable except the *right* source. Our blueprint comes from parents, educators, bosses, friends, family, church and even the main-stream media. From this information we establish a set of plans or *shoulds* for ourselves that even the much touted *Proverbs 31 Woman* could never live up to. And just for the record...about 95% of our *shoulds* are totally unrealistic anyway!

So...with our self-imposed set of "blueprints" clutched firmly in hand we start our days with high expectations for ourselves, and others. We set ourselves up for failure by painting a scenario of how the day will go. What we should do. What they should do. And so on and so on it goes. And hardly a day goes by when we (*or* they) live up to our expectations. When we, or they, fall short in our own eyes we start with the "if onlys" and the "what ifs."



Can anyone identify with what I'm saying? Am I coming anywhere close to where you live?

b. Just so you and I are working on the same page here, I have a few questions I would like to have you consider. It is, basically, a self-examination or evaluation test. The test will take about 10 minutes. If you find yourself spending more than 15 minutes, you're over thinking it...big time.

Your answers are completely private. We won't be sharing them. We won't be talking about them. They are between you and the Lord. Period. I think, as you score this self evaluation, you will begin to see exactly how important the things we are going to be talking about will be to your growth and change. Your scores will be an indication of how you see yourself today – a picture of the woman you are today.

When you've finished scoring your answers, write the score down on a sticky note and put it inside the cover of your Bible. In a few weeks you'll be answering these same questions again. And, I can promise you the scores will be very, very different. I have never seen it fail...a few weeks of committed time every day with God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit will change *anyone!*

Don't get too serious about this test. Keep in mind the older lady who, during a visit to a local senior's home, asked the director how they determined whether or not a patient should be institutionalized.

"Well," said the director, "we fill up a bathtub, then we offer a teaspoon, a teacup, and a bucket to the patient and ask him or her to empty the bathtub."

"Oh, I understand," the woman said. "A normal person would use the bucket because it's bigger than the spoon or the teacup."

"No." said the director, "A normal person would pull the plug. Do you want a bed near the window or the hall door?"

So...Here are the questions. Score them as follows: “0” if not true. “1” if somewhat true. “2” if mostly true. “3” if true. (For the printer friendly version – click “who i am today – questions” in the “don’t settle” category.)

- _____ 1. I usually feel inferior to others.
- _____ 2. I normally feel warm and happy toward myself.
- _____ 3. I often feel inadequate to handle new situations.
- _____ 4. I usually feel warm and friendly toward people I contact.
- _____ 5. I habitually condemn myself for my mistakes and shortcomings.
- _____ 6. I am free of shame, blame, guilt and remorse.
- _____ 7. I have a driving need to prove my worth and excellence.
- _____ 8. I have great enjoyment and a zest for living.
- _____ 9. I am very concerned about what others think and say about me.
- _____ 10. I can let others be “wrong” without attempting to correct them.
- _____ 11. I have an intense need for recognition and approval.
- _____ 12. I am usually free of emotional turmoil, conflict and frustration.
- _____ 13. Losing normally causes me to feel resentful and “less than...”
- _____ 14. I usually anticipate new endeavors with quiet confidence.
- _____ 15. I am prone to condemn others and often wish to see them punished.
- _____ 16. I normally do my own thinking and make my own decisions.
- _____ 17. I often defer to others on account of their ability, wealth or prestige.
- _____ 18. I willingly take responsibility for the consequences of my actions.
- _____ 19. I am inclined to exaggerate and lie to maintain a desired image.
- _____ 20. I am free to give precedence to my own desires and needs.
- _____ 21. I tend to belittle my own talents, possessions and achievements.
- _____ 22. I normally speak up for my own opinions and convictions.
- _____ 23. I habitually deny, alibi, justify or rationalize my mistakes and defeats.
- _____ 24. I am usually poised and comfortable among strangers.
- _____ 25. I am very often critical and belittling of others.
- _____ 26. I am free to express love, anger, hostility, resentment, joy, etc.
- _____ 27. I feel very vulnerable to the opinions of others.
- _____ 28. I rarely experience jealousy, envy or suspicion.
- _____ 29. I am a professional “people pleaser.”
- _____ 30. I am not prejudiced toward racial, ethnic or religious groups.
- _____ 31. I am fearful of exposing my “real self.”

who i am today

– day 1, part 3

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ...

2 Corinthians 5:16-18 NIV

Welcome back. I hope you enjoyed your lunch and had a beautiful time of fellowship with each other. My prayer is that you did not spend one single minute looking at your evaluation scores and thinking...”If only...” But, if you did, you won’t be the first, and you probably won’t be the last to do so. Don’t beat yourself up over it. Just keep moving forward. Growth is a process you know.

Right here I’m going to do something I know is not very smart. I’m going to assume that since you’re here – *reading this, listening to me* – you came because Christ is a part of your life. I’m going to assume you are interested in what I’m telling you because you’ve already made some sort of a commitment to Him. If you’ll open your Bible to Matthew, chapter 22, and look at verses 36-40 you’ll find Christ explaining God’s expectations for His followers. I’m going to give you my personal translation here, but I think you’ll get the picture. Jesus said, “I want my people to love me with their whole being. Do this by loving others, and by loving yourself.” The Message Bible translates it this way:

Jesus said, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.’ This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ These two commands are pegs; everything in God’s Law and the Prophets hangs from them.”

So...if you’ve made a commitment to Christ, that commitment makes you a Christian. The word Christian literally means Christ like. If we’re going to be Christ like, we are going to have to operate in LOVE. If we’re going to show God’s love to others, we’ve got to be first in line to receive God’s love. We’ve got to be willing to let God love us. We’ve got to be willing to let our family and friends love us, too. And, we’ve got to love ourselves! “Love others *as well* as you love yourself!”

Too many of us don’t. Love ourselves, I mean.

Too many Christian women walk through life with a very negative view of who they really are. Too many of them think it’s alright to...hate is such a strong word, let’s say...dislike themselves, just so long as they wear a veneer to cover up those negative ideas. Dear Hearts, I’ve worked with women’s groups for decades, and in entirely too many of them I find good Christian women *acting* like loving mothers, loving daughters, loving wives, good friends and super saints. They put on a loving veneer, when underneath it all they are filled with emotions light-years removed from love when it comes to themselves.

“Well,” you might say, “that’s okay. Just as long as they aren’t hurting anyone else. Right?”

WRONG! I submit to you that unless you love yourself, it is impossible to honestly give love to anyone else. Anyone else at all.

Think about this... if you’ve been going through your days thinking along these lines, just let me set

you straight right here and now...the only person you're fooling with your ACT is you. Plus, behind the curtains of your act the stage is set with props that constantly tell you nobody else can really, deeply, love you either. The idea is this. "I'm unacceptable to myself because ____ (again, your blank to fill in) _____. Others must see the flaws I see. Because others are secretly aware of my flaws they can't really accept me. How could they? They're just too polite to tell me. Does this dress make me look fat?"

Let me ask you: do the people who love you know you have a self-defeating attitude when it comes to certain areas of your life? Do you think it is possible your self-defeating attitude negatively affects your relationships in any way?

Then, consider this: your ACT of "I don't like me, but I'm a loving mother, daughter, wife, sister... whatever... isn't working for you is it? I'll bet you've been thinking you were getting by with it! I'll bet you've been thinking *they* didn't notice. Or care!

Trust me when I tell you again...you're wrong!



Come with me, if you will, on a journey into my imagination.

Picture a white sand beach, rolling surf, a scattering of shells, a few little sea chickens running in and out with the waves; a gorgeous day in every sense of the word. Now, put a little girl on the beach. She's got a pail and shovel. She's wearing a cute hat to protect her from the sun. She's having a wonderful time.

As she laughs and plays, she is approached by someone she trusts. She proudly points out the small sand castle she's just finished and is told, "It's nothing. Just a heap of sand. If you can't do better than that, don't bother."

Her smile fades and tears start to well up in her eyes.

The voice continues, "You look ridiculous in that swim suit. You're really much too chubby to wear it. Your hair's all messed up and you have dirt on your face."

She brushes at her cheek and drags a toe, downcast eyes watching the little line she's making in the sand. All her joy is gone.

The day, that started out so beautifully is ruined and in her memory, it was all her fault.

Now fast-forward a decade or so. Place her on the beach again. This time with someone who loves her, and listen to her say, "I look ridiculous in this swim suit. I'm much too fat to wear it."

Suddenly, all the joy is gone. She is unhappy, the person who loves her is hurt because all they wanted to do was offer her a lovely day at the beach. Now their day is ruined.

Place the same woman in her dining room, serving a carefully prepared meal for her family. Hear her saying, "It's nothing really. I don't know why I bother. Nothing we ever have is as good as it should be. I'm just not a good cook like my mother."

Mothers, I have to tell you, some of the most damaging negatives in your daughter's life may come from your poor attitude about yourself.

Daughters, I have to also say, some of the most hurtful moments in your mother's life may come from your negative attitude about yourself.

Wives, nobody's is perfect! But try to keep in mind...he married you because he loved YOU. And it wasn't until after the wedding he found out you didn't like yourself at all and so don't believe he likes you much either.

There's an old joke about the bride who planned to walk down the aisle to the alter to the strains of a beautiful hymn...only to have her husband of six months tell her, "If I'd known you meant **I'll alter him** when you were planning the wedding, I might have thought about this marriage thing a while longer."

Nobody's perfect!

Are you following me here? What I'm trying to point out is the horrible negative impact we can have on ourselves, and those we love, when we allow ourselves to ACT like loving Christian women, but underneath are filled with hostility toward the woman we really are inside.

Did my little trip to the beach touch a nerve? Did you care about the emotional wounds being inflicted on an innocent child? How do you think our – “poor me” – I hate myself – if only I was different – attitude feels to those who love us. How do you think it feels to God, our Father, who sent His only Son to make a way for us to stop it?

Please believe me when I tell you...the people who love you notice when you put yourself down, tear yourself up, and are just hateful on general principle two weeks out of every month. Not only do they notice...they care! They just don't know how to get you to STOP! They want you to STOP. But you have to want to STOP too.

Do you? Are you willing to give up the negative picture of yourself that you carry around in your head? Are you willing to exchange it for the picture of a beautiful creation, designed by the creator of the universe to be uniquely and perfectly you? Are you willing to allow the Lord to free you from the hurts and disappointments; from the shrouds, that have formed your inner picture?

It really doesn't matter if you only have one or two areas where the negative side of your personality is evident; where you are held captive to hate (okay...dislike) rather than love. One or two areas are just one or two *too many*. God has provided a way for you to have total freedom from them. Are you willing to make the commitment to work through that process with Him?

Like I told you before...growth is a process. Your release from old attitudes and patterns won't happen over night. Imagine this...God takes a little worm, wraps it up in a silken cocoon, and hangs it up on a branch for a season. Over time it changes into something wonderfully beautiful and perfect. It breaks the threads that hold it and flies off into the sunlight to live out life as God planned.

Are you willing to wrap yourself in the Lord's silken cocoon for a season and allow His Words to change and refresh your thinking? I know that He will do it. He has done it for me. Today, by the grace of God, I am what I am.

Beginning on Monday, and once a week for the next six weeks I ask you to join me for a Bible Study. If you are willing, God's Word will transform your heart and mind In Christ Jesus, and you will be able to honestly say, “He is changing me to be Christ like.”

Amen.

where am i going

– part 1

My prayer for those who came back here today...

Lord Jesus, I bring you each of these, your children. I give you thanks and praise for what you have done in their lives. And for what you are going to be doing for the rest of this weekend.

Lord, I ask your protection over their choices, over their changes, and over the seeds that have been planted in their lives. Cause their hearts to be good ground, so that the seeds of your Words will produce much fruit, to God's glory.

I pray this believing and in agreement with these who hear me. I thank you for the answers to our prayers; answers that are already making themselves obvious in our lives. So be it.

(Galatians 5:22-23 AB) But the fruit of the [Holy] Spirit [the work which His presence within accomplishes] is love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper, forbearance), kindness, goodness (benevolence), faithfulness, gentleness (meekness, humility), self-control (self-restraint, continence). Against such things there is no law [that can bring a charge].

And those who belong to Christ Jesus (the Messiah) have crucified the flesh (the godless human nature) with its passions and appetites and desires.

If we live by the [Holy] Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. [If by the Holy Spirit we have our life in God, **let us go forward** walking in line, **our conduct controlled by the Spirit.**]

Today we are starting a journey...a journey toward change; a journey toward love, joy, peace, and self-control. We are starting a journey toward walking through life, led by the Holy Spirit.

When I decide to go somewhere there are several things to take into consideration. I'm a list maker. So...once the decision is made to go, I make a list. If I'm going to the grocery store, it's a grocery list. If I'm going to the coast for a few days...well, quite honestly it may take more than one list to get all my stuff together, packed in the pickup and headed down the road. The point is going somewhere is a process. It's like growth.

I have found, over the years, many women have a strong desire to be somewhere – anywhere – other than where they are today? In general, I think it's safe to say lots of women, women I've met, women you know, are unhappy. Their marriages are nothing spectacular; certainly not what they dreamed of as they walked down the aisle. Their husbands aren't as understanding, as loving, as...something as they expected. Their children are...just children, not exactly a nuisance, but not exactly the JOY they anticipated either. Lots of them have jobs they go to several days a week. Few of them have the glamorous career they dreamed of as girls. And so on and on it goes.

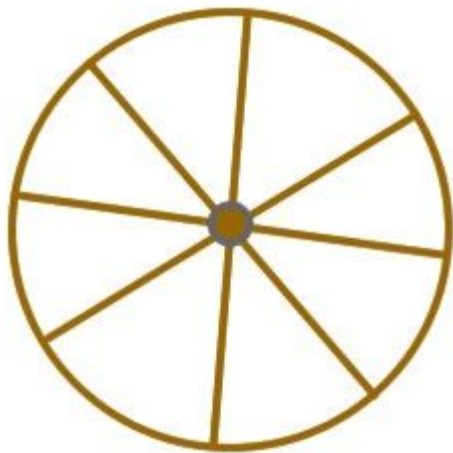
If you ask these women where they're going, they tend to shrug and ask, "Where can I go. I have a family and/or a job to consider." If you ask them, "Are you enjoying your life... your family... your job?" They'll likely tell you, "It's okay...."

At that point I usually ask them, “Would you like to change your life into something more joyful, more exciting, more fulfilling?” Often the answer is something like, “Of course, but I haven’t the foggiest idea how I’d do that.”

So...back to today’s trip. This is a trip that’s going to be very exciting! I can promise you we’re going to have a wonderful time. Believe me when I tell you this trip is going to have a positive impact on your life, not only today but for all of your future as well. Are you ready to get started?

First we have to decide where we’re going; when we’re going to leave, how we’ll travel.

Play a little game with me here for a few minutes. Make-believe we’ll be traveling in a beautiful carriage...picture horse-drawn NYC Central Park carriage, vintage 1950 something. You’ve seen those old movies. I know you have! Before we leave we’re going to find out just how smoothly your carriage will travel.



Picture one wheel. In the center of the wheel is a hub. This represents the center of your life. Everything else in your life revolves around the hub.

Around the hub are the spokes. They give the wheel strength. They represent areas in your life that propel you forward.

Humor me here... I’d like to have you copy this wheel on a page of your journal or notebook. But leave off the rim, or outer circle of the wheel.

Here’s what your drawing should look like.

First I want you to write the name of the person or thing your life revolves around in the hub of your

wheel.

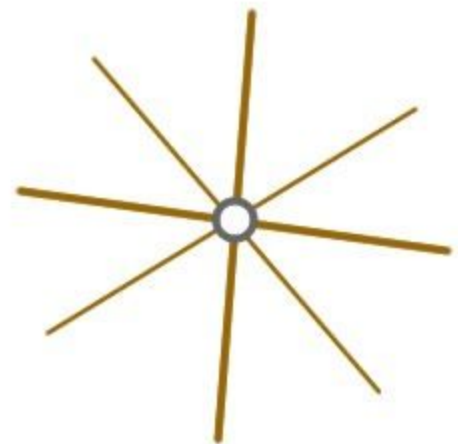
Now...please label each supporting spoke of the wheel with an area you consider to be the most important guiding force in your life. Mine are labeled: spiritual, physical, professional, and emotional. Next label the driving spokes (that’s the thin ones) with names that represent the most important relationships in your life. You may have more, or less, driving spokes. Make it work for you.

Now the fun begins!

We have a hub and we have spokes for one wheel of the carriage your life is traveling in. Next we’re going to see how smoothly your life is running. And why.

Imagine if you will a zero at the point where each spoke touches the hub. Where the spokes touch the rim represents 100% perfection. Take a few minutes here and make a dot on each spoke where you feel you are between zero and perfect in that area. So...if you’re at about 80% of where you’d like to be in your marriage, put a dot out close to perfect on your husband’s spoke. Do the same for your other relationships and on the guiding spokes. When you’ve finished draw dot to dot around your wheel.

Do you have a perfect circle? No! Are you telling yourself the wheels on your life’s carriage could use a little rounding out? Does the shape your wheels are in tell you why your life may not be running as smoothly as you’d like.



Are you thinking to yourself, “Fine, lady! That’s just fine. Now what do you expect me to do about it?”

Here’s news! If you haven’t arrived at perfection, and if you don’t yet realize that God has a perfect plan for your life it’s time make some lists to help you arrive at God’s perfect plan. Remember His Word tells us, “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” Jeremiah 29:11 NLT

Over the years I’ve met many, many women who did not realize God has a special plan for their life. They were drifting along through the days just taking life as it comes. They weren’t particularly joyful; they weren’t particularly contented; they weren’t particularly anything positive. They were anxious, about everything from the extra pounds they kept promising to lose, to the vague dissatisfaction they felt whenever someone or something pointed up a flaw in their framework of ‘shoulds’. Most were not in control of their own lives, and what’s worse, they were not willing to accept the responsibility for what was happening. They were going around placing blame on every outside influence imaginable... when the fact of the matter is they simply had not grasped the reality that what goes on in life is largely a matter of our own choices.

God said, “This **day I** call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that **I have set before** you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live...” Deuteronomy 30:19

During the break, please, take some time to consider the choices you’ve made recently and whether or not they brought blessings or curses into your life.

where am i going

– part 2

My child, hear my voice. When I call upon you...come to me; listen to me. Follow me. Move into the path I have laid before you and I will give you peace and rest.

These are the words of the Lord to my heart today. I found them in the

B – basic

I – instructions

B – before

L – leaving

E – earth

Welcome back! I pray you are well rested, willing and ready to begin work. Once again, I choose to believe you came back here because you are interested in making some positive changes in your life.

The Bible tells me, “we may plan the way we will go, but the Lord directs our steps and makes them sure.” Proverbs 16:9

By looking at the wheel (or graph, if that makes more sense to you) we drew earlier you can get a picture of the way you see your life today. By making some plans for each area (spoke of your wheel) you can begin to move toward the 100% perfection point. I believe any positive change is good. I also know, from years and years of personal experience, making plans – setting goals – with God in the mix causes positive change. I can absolutely, positively guarantee it!

Even the tiniest bit of positive progress and growth will begin to round out your life. My Father, God, tells me that if I take delight in the Lord, He will give me the desires of my heart. Psalm 37:4 He also says if I will commit my works to Him, He will establish my plans and they will succeed. Proverbs 16:3

Back in the late 70’s I was the center of my life...the hub around which everything and everyone revolved. Many of us are extremely self-centered you know. We live in a society that carefully teaches us to worship the trinity of me, myself, and I. We grow up firmly believing if I want something I should have it. And what’s more, I should get *what* I want *when* I want it.

I believed in God. No wait! Let me put that another way...I believe there was a God...out there... somewhere. But God was not the center of my life. Far from it. And, at that time I didn’t understand much about God at all. I didn’t know He wanted to be my Abba, Father...literally Papa – Daddy. I didn’t know He wanted me to be blessed in every way, satisfied with life and at peace in Him.

My wonderful husband, of just over a year, was a believer and he was working hard to live for the Lord Jesus, but I was centering my life around ME. My wants. My needs. My emotional highs and lows. And my husband was being victimized as only a loving, giving man can be victimized by a self-centered female.

Oh, by the way, if you think that just because you don’t really like yourself much you aren’t self-centered, I’ve got a news flash for you. A negative attitude about yourself is ever so much more powerful than vanity. Because it is negative. Because it is destructive! Because it feeds on making the people who love you the most pay for your self-pity and play your hate games constantly.

You KNOW what I mean.

So...we reached a point of crisis. Even while saying we had the Lord in our life, we came to the place every relationship eventually reaches when God is not THE center. And we started looking for help.

From there to here has been a long process. It has covered more than thirty years, and God is still working on the process. But...back then, through a series of events, God showed me, without question what I needed was to get my life centered IN, and revolving around HIM. God also helped me understand that where I'm going is up to me. I plot the course. I make the lists. And by my choices I determine what affect my plans have on my life and the lives of those I love. He proved to me, without question, He understands me perfectly, and knows what is best for me at all times. Ephesians 1:8 LB

My trip began at a Christian women's retreat, with the wheel I've shared with you here. I looked at my life picture and realized that by setting some short-term goals and some long-term goals, and by prayerfully reviewing my goals every few weeks, with the Lord guiding my steps, my life picture could change. My first set of goals were for six months. I had been instructed to work on those areas where I saw myself as the weakest. The point...just round out the wheel and get things running a bit smoother.

I set some spiritual goals: to spend at least 30 minutes every day with God...praying, journaling (we'll talk about that later) and getting to know Him, by reading His Word – to grow closer to the Lord as a couple – to go to church.

I set some physical goals: to stop smoking – lose some weight – learn about make-up and wardrobe – develop my *style*...

I set some emotional goals: to learn how to like myself the way I am, to overcome my fear of failure, to overcome my fear that the people I loved couldn't really love me.

Just a quick FYI here – Something I didn't know back then, but understand now - I set spiritual goals, because I AM a spirit being; physical goals because I live in a body, and emotional goals because I have a soul (my mind, my will and my emotions). St. Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica “May God himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make you holy and whole, put you together – spirit, soul, and body – and keep you fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who called you is completely dependable. If he said it, he'll do it!” 1 Thessalonians 5:23-34 The Message Bible

When I returned to those first shaky attempts at goal setting about 8 months later...remember my 6 month commitment?... I was amazed! God had honored my efforts. I was filled with wonder and delight by what I was discovering in God's Word. Everything I read seemed to be just for me. We were attending church regularly as a couple. I wasn't smoking anymore. I liked myself...a little better. I was a little less fearful of failure and of other people. So I prayed, “Lord you remembered my goals, even when I forgot. You have given me growth, even when I was an eager beaver starter and a no show at the finish line. I would like to try again. And this time, I would like to work with you.”

So... I set up goals for another six months. And then another... Today I can tell you, without question, God will direct your steps, give you the desires of your heart, and make His plans for you succeed.

Some tips for you to use in setting your own goals are:

1. Remember, all you're doing is praying about the difference between where you are now and where you want to be. Do NOT worry about where you've been!
2. Start with God. Shut your eyes to the mess, or go for a walk. Humbly surrender your heart to His control. If you haven't before, let Jesus Christ, His only son, totally forgive you and wash away all your inner mess. The outer mess is just a reflection of the inner mess you know. Get washed clean, holy and pure, as only Christ can make you. Invite Him to live at the very center of your being. The

control center. The hub. Don't struggle intellectually over the process. Trust!

3. Write your goals. Make notes in a journal or a notebook so you can look back and see where you've come from. Writing crystallizes thought and crystallized thought makes for success. Try writing your daily prayers, too.

4. Make your goals BIG enough for God to get involved. Don't limit Him, or yourself, with small thinking. How much of God's planning will you accept? We have a powerful God. His ambitions for you are enormous. Your ambitions for yourself can't be bigger than what He wants to give you.

5. Play fair. If you don't reach your goal by the target date, regroup and put what you've learned into action. Do NOT give up the goal. Goal setting can become a life-long habit. So can procrastination, mediocrity and frustration.

Today, I leave you with this challenge: Make a quality decision to be GOING SOMEWHERE; to accept responsibility for your choices and your actions. Remember, no one else has final authority over what you will say or what you will do. Make a commitment to plan your steps, from here forward, allowing God to direct your path.

“All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits – the thoughts and intents of the heart. Roll your works upon the Lord [commit and trust them wholly to Him; He will cause your thoughts to become agreeable to His will, and] so shall your plans be established and succeed.” Proverbs 16:2-3 AB

where do i start

Your life is hid with Christ in God.
Colossians 3:3

In the most literal sense we live and move and have our being in the realm of spiritual forces. Our “life is hid with Christ in God.” This is not some pie-in-the-sky mystical phrase, but a plain and direct statement of fact; an absolute spiritual truth. Our real life, all our significant actions, are in the invisible realm. What goes on around us in the physical sphere is simply as a result of God’s hand guiding and directing from the ethereal world.

So...as we come back to our study today I know some of you are thinking, “Okay! I DO want more peace; more joy; less anxiety and misgiving in my life. But, where do I start?”

Start with God!

I’ve said this before: Shut our eyes to the mess. Go for a walk. Get on your knees. Do whatever brings YOU closer to HIM. Humbly surrender your heart to His control.

If your life is in crisis...don’t over-think it! God’s order is first crisis, then process. Surrender to His crisis. Anxiety and misgivings over your crisis proceed solely from a self-centered motive. The love of God accomplishes all things quietly and completely; it is NOT anxious or uncertain. The Spirit of God rests continually in quietness. Perfect love casts out fear. It is in forgetfulness of fear that we find peace.

How much of God’s planning are you willing to accept? God is all powerful, and all knowing, and your expectations for what He has planned for you should be enormous! Look as the price He paid to give us life.

Let me tell you a story to illustrate the difference high expectations can make in your life:

Have you ever read about the widow in Second Kings, chapter 4 who was deeply in crisis and expecting to lose everything she had? Her husband, a seminary student, was a man who loved God, but he had owed some money when he died, and now the creditor was demanding it back. The foreclosure notice was laying on the counter in her kitchen along with a list of possible buyers for her two sons. You see back in those days when someone got into debt over their heads they not only ended up homeless, living on the streets, their creditors could also legally take away their children, selling them into slavery where they would work until the debt was satisfied. Now as you can imagine, the poor woman was beside herself with worry.

But from what we’re told she must have had a little hope left. She ran to tell her troubles to Elisha, the prophet. Word around the neighborhood was, “He is a man of God.”

I seriously doubt the prophet’s first response gave her a lot more hope. “What shall I do for you?” he asked.

Her face fell. She may have thought to herself, “Well, so much for *that* idea.”

We aren’t told that the prophet stopped to pray, but I’m willing to gamble he did. Then Elisha asked, “What have you got in the house?” In other words, “what’s left?”

“Nothing at all except all except a bottle of olive oil,” she replied.

“Then go and borrow as many pots and pans and jars from your friends and neighbors as you can find.

Really go out there and round them up. Don't settle for just a few. Take them, and your sons, go into your house and shut the door behind you. Then pour olive oil from your bottle into the pots and pans and jars. As you fill them, set them aside."

I'm pretty sure she questioned the wisdom of borrowing to pay a debt, at least a little, in her anxiety. I would have. I HAVE, actually. But she did as he told her. Her sons brought her the pans, the pots, the jars...and she began to pour from the scanty little bottle of oil. She poured, and she poured, and she poured. And when all the containers she had borrowed were full she said, "Come on, where are some more?"

"That's all we got," the boys told her. And with that the oil from the bottle stopped flowing.

So...long story short...when all of the containers of olive oil were sold there was enough money to pay her debt. There was also enough money for she and her sons to live on. It doesn't say how long they lived on the money, but I expect by that time they had all learned the lesson God had for them:

"When a crisis comes,
Come to God."

I believe that prayer, in all its many and varied forms is simply activity on the spiritual side, and because of this it is the motor of life in the natural. Prayer is the key to that intense form of energy that is the divine life, and its highest development is reached when the souls asks only for one thing – the one that includes all others – that of union with God.

It was up to the woman how literally she took the words of the man of God. His directions to get a lot of containers meant she could borrow as many as she wanted to. I wonder if she had taken his words more seriously, tramped around town, even out into the countryside and rounded up thousands of pots, would God's supply have reached a certain number and then stopped? I don't think so. I believe the oil would have continued to flow until she filled them ALL. And with God's supply she could have spent the rest of her life feeding the poor, donating huge sums of money to the temple (church), lived in a nicer house, given her sons every educational advantage...

I truly believe this woman's expectation level of God's mercy, grace and abundance determined her lifestyle forever after.

Lift up your eyes. Your heavenly Father waits to bless you in unimaginable ways; to make your life what you never dreamed it could be. How many containers will you set out for Him to fill?

Over the years God has taught us (D & me) to hold fast to this principle. By doing so you will always have every need met. You will always be pleasing to the Father. He desires every detail of your life, no matter how trivial it seems to you. Every atom of this universe was His design. See the details? See the intricacy and the perfection? Do you suppose He is any less interested in the tiny details of your life? He numbers the hairs on your head. Surely he is no less interested in your dwelling place, or your family, or your life. Seek Him! Allow Him to do everything for you. He is ABLE. He IS!

where do i start – epilogue

Before we take our break, there are ten questions I want to ask you.

The rules are: if your first impulse is to answer “most of the time,” “sometimes,” “once in awhile,” – anything except absolutely, “YES” – you are to answer NO.

On the other hand, any answer except absolutely “NO” means you are to answer “YES.”

These are the questions:

1. Are you a Christian?
2. Are you afraid of death?
3. Do you believe the Bible is the Word of God and therefore absolutely true?
4. Are you afraid of illness?
5. Are you afraid of accidents?
6. Are you afraid of financial reversals?
7. Are you afraid of failure?
8. Is there an area of major disappointment or betrayal in your life that you can't get beyond?
9. Are you willing...really willing...to change?
10. Do you believe God really cares about your fears, disappointments and hurts?

Asked and answered...the above questions have been a part of my seminars over the years, seminars that have always been conducted in a “Christian” venue. Here’s the big surprise.

Where 100% of the camp goers or seminar participants answered “YES” to question number one...on average
20% were afraid of death,
10% did not believe the Bible to be true,
54% were afraid of illness
60% were afraid of accidents
48% were afraid of financial reversals
58% were afraid of failure
65% admitted to having been disappointed or betrayed,
and they felt it was unforgivable
13% admitted they were not really willing to work toward change

AND only 96% of those in attendance believed God truly cared for their fears, disappointments and betrayals. That leave a whopping 4% of the Christian women polled who claim to be followers of Christ, yet aren’t ready, or willing to accept His love!

A wise woman once told me...”Discover where your mind goes in the quiet moments. That will tell you who you love.”

Answer the questions yourself. Be brutally honest. Where do your answers put YOU? You say you ARE a Christian, but are you a BELIEVER?

where i started

The Word Became Flesh...

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. John 1:1-5 NIV

Earlier I asked you to answer ten simple questions. And to be brutally honest with your answers. Unless experience is a faulty teacher, I'm going to hazard a guess that your answers surprised you a little. It's not so surprising, really.

If we're honest everyone of us is weak and fearful in certain areas. I was. I am, still. Does that mean we are unsuccessful at being Christian? No! What it means is we are human...our perfect, Christ-like spirits are still encumbered by our earth suits.

Do you ever watch NASA Television? Around my house we watch every launch and EVA (that's space walk for the un-initiated or the un-interested). The astronauts put on a cumbersome space suit and exit the controlled environment of the space station to make repairs or construct a new module while free-floating in space. Oh, they're tethered to the station alright, but it's still a clumsy business out there. Put on a pair of heavy gloves and try threading together a small bolt with a nut if you have any doubts.

That is the best analogy I can think of for us. We are spirit beings, fumbling around wearing a body (our earth suits), trying to accomplish tasks specifically laid out in our flight manual (the Bible), while tethered to our home (Heaven) by a life-line (Christ).

For the astronauts, every motion is monitored. Their lives depend on it! Believe me when I tell you it can get pretty boring listening to those guys as they place 45 bolts in a module, counting every turn of the wrench. One...two...three.... Well, you get the picture. But their life depends on doing the job exactly as the manual lays it out.

Somewhere, back when I was a believer in training, things were not going as I had been lead to believe things would go after I turned my life over to Jesus. My job was going through one of those miserable, "take this job and..." phases. My brand new marriage had hit a rough patch, too. In fact, my new husband, who I adored, had just finished telling me, "You are the MOST self-centered woman I've ever met!" Not at all what I expected. So...I took myself up the hill to commiserate with one of my new Christian friends.

"I'm not happy," I wailed. "I should be happy! I have everything to be happy about, but I'm just not happy. Not really!"

To be perfectly honest with you, I don't recall exactly what she *said*. What she did was send me home with her Bible and a tape entitled "Putting God's Word FIRST." Right now I can't even say for sure who the speaker was. But I went home, locked myself in my office and listened to the tape. Twice! Then twice again!

That tape changed my life! From it I learned:

The Bible is God breathed, Holy Spirit inspired and infallible.

God's Word is alive!

God's Word is a sword!
God's Word is a lamp and a light.
God's Word always accomplishes the thing He meant for it to do.
God's Words are TRUE. Always!

God's Words are my owner's manual...just like NASA's manual for every EVA...it will tell me precisely what to do in every situation. It will tell me how many times to turn each and every bolt, where to put my feet, where to rest my hands, when to lean in and when to lean out. I can absolutely depend on God's Word for every detail of my life. You can too!

If your answers to my questions left you with more questions; or if you just plain are not happy, may I joyfully offer you the same things I was offered. First a bit of advice..."Put God's Word FIRST in your life." Next, find out what He has to say about the things that are troubling you.

Back in the dark ages, before absolutely everything was available online, I used a borrowed Bible with an abbreviated concordance and a [gasp] notebook. Today I just go to [Bible Gateway](#), click on the Keyword Look Up Link, select a modern translation of the Word [The New International Version or The New Living Translation will do, although I personally love the Amplified Bible] and type in words related to my questions.

For example, if your biggest fear for yourself or your loved ones is illness, type in heals or healed and see what God's Word has to say about it. It does not matter what questions you have...your answers are in the Word.

I promise your life will be changed:

2 Timothy 3:16 (New Living Translation)

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right

Proverbs 3:13 (Amplified Bible)

Happy (blessed, fortunate, enviable) is the man who finds skillful and godly Wisdom, and the man who gets understanding [drawing it forth from God's Word and life's experiences].

how do i get there

– part 1

God, teach me lessons for living
so I can stay the course.

Give me insight so I can do what you tell me –
my whole life one long, obedient response.

Psalm 119:34 (The Message Bible)

Give me understanding and I will obey your instructions;
I will put them into practice with all my heart.

Psalm 119:34 (The New Living Translation)

Welcome back! I hope you are well rested and looking forward to our final session together in this series. I pray that the eyes of your heart have been enlightened in these meetings, and that you are beginning to see exactly how wide, how high, and how deep God’s love is for you. For YOU personally.

I thank God that He has given me the wonderful privilege of telling you about His plans for you, and that He has given me the desire and the ability to do it well. I thank God that He was willing to make a home in His courts for me, [a simple sparrow!](#) And that He wants to do the same, exactly the same, for you. Dear hearts, it does not matter to your heavenly Father whether you are a sparrow, a dove, a swallow or a crow. He has a perfect plan and a perfect place for you.

When I invited you to spend this time together the greatest desire of my heart was to share what real LOVE [the Love of Christ] has done in my life. And what His Love can do in your life. We’ve talked about the way we see ourselves – not our self-image, but our God-image. We’ve looked at where we’re going and at how we’ll be getting there. But the primary reason for all of this weekend [series / seminar] is to expedite the way we travel through life every day.

I love that word – expedite. It is a verb meaning to “Speed up the progress of; facilitate” or to “Process fast and efficiently.” In today’s world we want to speed up everything! We are all about multi-tasking and efficient processing. We all GO as fast as possible in order to DO as much as possible. But, as we’ve discovered this weekend we aren’t all enjoying the process as much as we’d really like to. Look at it like this; which mode of travel would you prefer, an Economy-class flight from New York to London, with one carry-on bag, or a First-class suite aboard a luxury liner?

Let’s look at it another way; take it to another realm so to speak.

Once upon a time, in an ancient city, far, far away; there ruled a generous, wise and loving king. His days were spent watching over an extraordinarily vast and powerful kingdom. The magnitude of his kingdom went beyond the imagination of most common men.

The beauty of his realm was unsurpassed. Cool green forests dotted with crystal lakes and rushing rivers; deep sheer canyons, warm deserts, snow capped mountains and lush fertile plains gave untold pleasure to all who resided within the kingdom.

The king encouraged his subjects to come to him with their problems and cares. He always answered their petitions, no matter how small, with wisdom, grace and mercy. Never, in all of history had there

been, nor has there been since, a more wondrous kingdom or a more loving king.

Privately the king's peace and joy were marred with a great sadness. He had no children of his own, though children were his constant and greatest desire. One day, the king struck upon a plan. He would dispatch heralds throughout the realm, in search of homeless children. Any child found in his vast kingdom to be living without love or a proper home would be invited to live in his palace and given a new life. The king's palace was great, with many, many rooms – rooms enough for every lonely, hungry, homeless child in the kingdom. At last the king would have his own children!

The heralds searched far and wide, and soon children began arriving at the palace. It was easy to see that each child was in great need. They came from vastly different backgrounds; although not one of them knew their real name. They were of all ages, and all personalities. In fact, the only thing these children had in common was absolute poverty, their lack of possessions and their need of love.

The children's lives were dramatically changed upon arrival at the palace. Each one was adopted as a son or a daughter of the King and given access to all the wealth of the kingdom. Each was immediately given the King's own name; bathed, and dressed in fine soft robes of snow white. The children only need mention their needs and desires and the king, in his love and wisdom, would attend to their wishes. Every child carried a signed letter making the limitless wealth of the kingdom available to its bearer.

Thousands of children excitedly accepted all that their new father bestowed upon them. They enjoyed the new life to its fullest, often using their position to help others in the towns and villages they came from.

The king, in his wisdom, knew how each child was responding to a new name, wealth and love. It pleased the good king that so many of his children were compassionate and loving toward others. As the children gave away the king's gifts, more was added to their rations each day.

A few children, despite accepting the king's invitation to live in his palace, continued to wear the tattered, dirty rags of their former life. In spite of the bountiful table the king provided, they ate only crusts of bread and leftover bits from the plates of others. Instead of sleeping in the soft, clean beds in their rooms; these children slept outside on beds of leaves or straw. They too carried the letter of authorization from the king, granting them access to the entire kingdom's wealth, but they continued to live as though homeless, helping neither themselves nor others. Some of these unfortunate children simply did not believe the words of the king, or the tales of his goodwill told by the other adopted children. Some refused to believe in their own worth as children of the king. Others were fearful of making mistakes with the wealth of the kingdom, so they preferred to do nothing.

A few of the children had been told what to think, what to say, what to decide and believe all of their lives. Older homeless children had made every daily decision for these little ones – so they kept asking the king what to do, what to say, what to think. They were afraid to believe! When they asked, his answer was always loving and gentle.

“Now that you are my child, you have all of the answers you need for your life within. Trust my spirit!” But they could not.

Though the good king loved each child equally, it grieved him to see so many unable or unwilling to accept their new life as his sons and daughters. True, they lived at the palace, but it always seemed they were not really a part of the life within. The wise and gentle king made no effort to force these sad children to receive his gifts. Freedom, acceptance and unconditional love reigned in the king's house, no matter what a child received or refused from his offerings.

Some children remained outside the palace, camping beyond the gates, because they thought a great

deal would be demanded by the king if they entered. These children believed they would be given responsibilities beyond their abilities. Afraid to risk leaving their familiar poverty, despite its limitations, they refused to acknowledge the king's promises. They were too comfortable in their misery to step into the home the king offered them.

So the years sped by. The children grew and new children were often adopted. But throughout all of the years, there was always room in the palace for more.

Some of the king's adopted children lived richly rewarding lives and freely helped many, many others. Some lived lives of doubt and fear. They rationed out the kingdom's wealth carefully, always fearful it might run short, yet they were a blessing to a few others.

To the king's great sadness, there are always a few children who choose to reject what is rightfully theirs, and live as they did before he found them. When these sad children venture outside the palace grounds, you will know them. For while they'll tell you they belong to the household of a king, no one recognizes them as one of the King's own children.

Are you are still wearing the tattered dirty rags of your old lifestyle? Is there some reason you have been unwilling to accept your new position as the child of a King? Are you claiming to live in the palace but in reality only camp out in the courtyard? A life filled with constant strife, pain and struggles with one problem after another says you haven't accepted your place as His adopted child.

Do you spend your time comparing yourself unfavorably with others; judging others unfavorably because they respond to the King differently than you do? Do you go about thinking this one or that one is closer to the King than I could ever be? Believe me when I tell you 'even the sparrow finds a home' in the courts of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

You are uniquely and wonderfully made, exactly as God planned. Psalm 139 tells me:

I could ask the darkness to hide me
and the light around me to become night --
but even in darkness I cannot hide from you [God].

To you the night shines as bright as day.
Darkness and light are the same to you.

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.
Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous
-- how well I know it.

You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.

You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed.

How precious are your thoughts about me, O God.
They cannot be numbered!

I can't even count them;
they outnumber the grains of sand!
And when I wake up,
you are still with me!

Psalm 139:11-18 The New Living Translation

“So don't you see that we don't owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent. There's nothing in it for us, nothing at all. The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life. God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go!

“This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike “What's next, Papa?” God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what's coming to us – an unbelievable inheritance! We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him!” Romans 8:14-17 The Message Bible

And so, just as a loving earthly parent would not give one of their children beautiful gifts and every desire of the heart; and leave another child in the family without life's necessities, so your heavenly Father will not give one of His children wonderful gifts of peace, love and beauty, while leaving another in suffering and strife.

Think about these things as you go for a break. God is so rich in mercy, he loved us so much, that even though we were spiritually dead and doomed by our old lifestyle, he gave us back our lives again when he raised Christ from the dead – only by his undeserved favor have we ever been saved – and lifted us up from death into glory along with Christ – all because of what Christ did.

Don't settle for less!

how do i get there

– part 2

...it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him. Hebrews 11:6 NLT

Before the break we were talking about God's adopted children...that would be us...you and me. We read a [beautiful story](#) illustrating God's willingness to give us the good gifts of His Kingdom, including the deepest desires of our hearts.

To be perfectly honest with you, I have to tell you there is a qualification to this story, just in case you didn't pick up on it earlier. In order for your heavenly Father to give you the good gifts of His Kingdom YOU MUST BELIEVE. First, you must believe that God exists, and second you must believe that God rewards us when we seek him with a sincere heart and a certain amount of diligence.

Many of the modern Bible translations don't bother with the word diligently in Hebrews 11:6, but in the Greek text the word [Etymology](#) that the King James Bible translates *diligently* is used. The word implies we must seek God out for ourselves; learn about God, investigate God. Crave God!

If you have not believed so far in your life I must ask: are you willing, really willing, to change?

In the fourth chapter of Mark's Gospel and in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, Jesus teaches His followers that the Word of God is like a seed. And He says, "the whole Kingdom of God works as if a seed is planted."

Now I'm guessing most of you have grown flowers or something else from seeds at one time or another in your life so you won't have any trouble with this concept. If you plant seeds and then a day or so later start digging around where they're planted to see if they've sprouted yet, you've pretty much killed any chance for getting a crop.

Do you also understand that throughout this time we've been spending together every positive, uplifting thing you've heard has been like a seed, planted in your soul? Do you get that what we've been planting here are seeds of encouragement, renewal and restoration from God's Word? And I've got to caution you...the seeds are going to germinate slowly, over time. You may not see even the tiniest shoots of green right away. And, if you get discouraged and start digging around where they're planted to see if they're growing yet, you're in danger of damaging your crop. Also, watering the seeds with the same old negatives, doubts and fears won't do them any good either.

Please understand...NOTHING you've heard [read / seen] in these sessions is intended to add more "shoulds" to your life. The goal is, and always has been, to set you free, completely free, from those things that hold you captive and limit your life in Christ.

Remember the old jokes from back in the day..."Well, I've got some good news, and I've got some bad news. Which do you want first?"

Today, I have some good news and some bad news for you.

You get the bad news first. It is this – if you choose to go on living in anything less than the very best your heavenly Father has to offer you after today, it will not only be extremely painful for you, it will be a shame. And, it may very well be a sin.

How thrilled were your *earthly* parents when you simply refused, through rebellion or um... stupidity...?, to accept the counsel and opportunities they offered you? We only hold a child responsible for their actions in areas where they've been taught to know better. No parent expects to tell a child "NO" once and never have to say it again. But sooner or later we expect that kid to learn the lessons and act on the knowledge.

God told the children of Israel, "Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! Deuteronomy 30:19 God is still giving His children the same choice every day!

The good news is Christ has purchased freedom for us. His death on the cross completely liberated us from our old way of life with all of the mess that it involved. Freedom is a gift...a gift of God's grace. You can't earn it. You can't buy it. But you CAN choose to accept it.

Freedom begins with being free from ourselves. If you've been walking around in the tattered, dirty rags of the woman you used to be...you really need to consider a change of clothes!

I've met Christian women who were walking through life wearing some of the ugliest outfits! Sometimes it's the too small hand-me-downs from the family they grew up in. Sometimes it's the ratty sweats left over from a relationship with an abusive non-believer. Sometimes it's the miss-matched, faded bathrobe and bunny slippers worn on Sunday's when they chose to veg on the couch rather than dragging themselves to listen to another sermon holding the form of religion but denying God's power. None of these outfits are suitable for the daughters of the King!

God, through His Son, has made provision for us to be free from ourselves. This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun – the old moral and spiritual condition has passed away. Thank God, the fresh and new has come!

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "Strip yourselves of your former nature, put off and discard your old un-renewed self, which characterized your previous manner of life and becomes corrupt through lusts and desires that spring from delusion; and be constantly renewed in the spirit of your mind [having a fresh mental and spiritual attitude], and put on the new nature (the regenerate self) created in God's image, [Godlike] in true righteousness and holiness. Ephesians 4:22-24 AB

Dear Hearts, your freedom from yourself is a result of salvation by grace and it is secured to all believers in and through Christ. To be free is to operate in the Spirit of God with an assurance and a knowledge of His power and His principles. To be truly free is to know he is able to provide and protect you. To be truly free is to trust His Spirit and His Word in all things – to look to Him in all things, to seek His way in all things. Freedom comes from knowing and understanding who you serve, who your source is, and who you are in Christ. The result of being truly free is a peace which passes all human understanding.

Thanks be to God, I have that peace in my life. For this reason the goal of my life today is to share with as many women as God will allow, at every opportunity, this truth. "There is nothing in the world or in any firmly established world doctrine or tradition which will come anywhere near the wonderful, and totally fulfilling peace of placing Christ at the PERSONAL CENTER of your life."

"How do I get that peace?" some may ask. I've told you already. You must believe that God is alive; that He is willing and able to give you the good gifts of His Kingdom. Then you must begin to establish new ways of looking at yourself and those around you. You must accept responsibility for where you are allowing your life to go. The whole flow of the world we live in today is negative. To gain the peace of Christ, you must begin to swim against that negative current. Remember the widow who borrowed enough containers that God could change her life and her circumstances? To gain the

peace of Christ in your life you must change the way you think, the way you talk and the way you act, but you can't do it alone, and God doesn't expect you to do it alone.

If you want God to change your life establish some priorities... plant some seeds... borrow some vessels for oil and expect God to fill them.

As you go, I leave you with a follow-up Bible Study, and ask you to prayerfully consider spending the next six weeks strengthening your relationship with Christ through these pages. I know it will work toward changing your life. I know because it worked for me. God's Word promises it will work for "who-so-ever." And God is faithful. He will never leave you, nor forsake you. He holds *your* life in the palm of His hand.

As we part I pray that the Spirit of the Living God will convince you to place Him at the center of your lives. I pray that He will work the miracle of faith in His Word in your hearts, and that by putting Christ and His Word first in your lives you will be filled with His perfect peace. Don't settle for less.

It is finished!

change me – week 1

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and [mammon](#).

Matthew 6:24 KJV

“That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life -- whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

“And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

“So don't worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

“So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.”

Matthew 6:25-34 NLT

Bible Study – Week One

In the above verses the Apostle Matthew is quoting Jesus. Here Christ is telling His followers exactly what their first priority needs to be. “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else.” As a follower of Christ I believe whole-heartedly this must be my first priority today, exactly as it was when Jesus spoke these words in 33 AD. If you have decided to follow Jesus, you must follow His instructions to seek the Kingdom of God above all else...FIRST...before *everything* else. We are told once we get this priority in order He will give us everything else we need.

Figuring out how to follow these instructions often becomes a sticking point for busy Christian women. How *can* they do it? Where will they find the *time*? Where *is* the Kingdom of God, anyway?

Here's what Jesus told the religious leaders of His time about it...”The kingdom of God does not come with signs to be observed or with visible display, nor will people say, Look! Here [it is]! or, See, [it is] there! For behold, the kingdom of God is within you [in your hearts] and among you [surrounding you]. Luke 17:21 AB

Christ was clarifying for these religious zealots that the Kingdom of God, which is a spiritual Kingdom, is already a *spiritual* reality within the hearts of every human being. He was trying to open their

understanding, making them see that any external evidence of God's Kingdom flows from the actions of those who have received Christ within themselves.

So...if the Kingdom of God we are to seek first is in our spiritual being, within our hearts, and surrounding us; and if any external evidence of God's Kingdom is revealed through the actions of God's kids...doesn't it sort of follow that our actions must be hugely important?

Every one of us knows what the actions and words associated with a negative self image are. There's no point in taking time to re-hash those negatives here. Instead were going to move quickly to the really important stuff. How do we change our negative *self*-image into a positive God-image? How is it possible to get out of the fast lane, racing through a negative world, and change the direction it has been taking us? How can we move toward a life that will give external evidence we are God's own children to those who know and love us?

I firmly believe the answer is found "within."

Let's look at a couple of scriptures and you'll see what I mean. In Matthew chapter 12 Jesus says,

³⁰ "Anyone who isn't with me opposes me, and anyone who isn't working with me is actually working against me.

³¹ "So I tell you, every sin and blasphemy can be forgiven – except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will never be forgiven. ³² Anyone who speaks against the Son of Man can be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come.

³³ "A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad. ³⁴ You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? **For whatever is in your heart determines what you say.** ³⁵ A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. ³⁶ And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. ³⁷ The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you."

The critical thing I want you to get from this quote would be found in verse 34 - "whatever is in your heart determines what you say." The old King James translation puts it this way. "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? **for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.**"

Dear ones, if our hearts are abundantly filled with negatives; self-pity, self-loathing, fear, bitterness and anger...our mouths speak those things. If, on the other hand, our hearts are filled with the things of God; love, joy, peace, forgiveness, grace and abundance, our mouths will speak those things. And, by the words we speak, our lives are either blessed or cursed – acquitted or condemned.

Paul wrote to his beloved children in the church at Ephesus, saying:

"Assuming that you have really heard Him and been taught by Him, as [all] Truth is in Jesus [embodied and personified in Him], strip yourselves of your former nature [put off and discard your old un-renewed self] which characterized your previous manner of life and becomes corrupt through lusts and desires that spring from delusion; and be constantly renewed in the spirit of your mind [having a fresh mental and spiritual attitude], And put on the new nature (the regenerate self) created in God's image, in true righteousness and holiness." Ephesians 4:21-24 AB

The human mind is much like a computer. Back in the day the catch phrase was “Garbage in / Garbage out.” In today’s world we are bombarded with garbage! Everywhere I look I see opportunities to fill my mind, my heart and soul with trash.

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

It just makes sense to me that in order for my actions to reflect having God adopt me as one of [His Kingdom Kids](#) I’m going to need to get some new thoughts, ideals and attitudes going on in my life. Does that make sense to you, too?

Christ’s instructions are to seek FIRST His kingdom. Let me ask you...where do you think most of the information available to us about God and His Kingdom can be found?

In God’s Word. Right?

So...it follows...in order to seek first His Kingdom and His way of doing and being right I am going to have to go to the Word. I am going to have to find a Bible, dust it off, open it up and find out what God has to say about the stuff that going on in my life.

Assignment:

For the next week, let’s work on God’s first priority.

I strongly suggest you start a journal. A journal will allow you to *see* the progress you are making; record the changes God is making in you.

(Years ago when I started to get acquainted with God I used a notebook, but as you can see here my journal is now an e-journal. I have a whole [stack of Bibles](#), but now I use many of the extraordinary [online resources](#) to study and compare scriptures.) No matter how you choose to study, here is the assignment for this week’s Bible Study.

Set aside a quite time with Jesus **every day**. Make it a time when your mind is alert, your heart is open to the Lord, and you won’t be distracted every two seconds. It’s called *quiet time* for a reason. Turn off the cell phone and the email. Nothing is as important as these few minutes alone with the Lord. Even if it IS important, it will keep for 30 minutes. I promise! Thirty minutes with God will smooth out any crisis you may be experiencing!

Before you begin read Psalm 119:18 as a prayer.

“Open my eyes to see
the wonderful truths in your instructions.”

Look up – write down – and read out loud these scriptures. You can spread them out over the week or read them all each day. The important thing is to plant them (like seeds) firmly in your heart.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Galatians 3:26

Galatians 4:7

Galatians 5:1

Galatians 5:16-17

Galatians 5:22-24

Galatians 2:20-21

Also, personalize the prayer from Ephesians 1:16-23 and 3:14-21. Word these verses as a single prayer and work it out so you are asking God to accomplish these things in your own life. Speak this prayer aloud to the Lord every day during your quiet time.

Next, start thanking God for what He's going to do in your life through His Word, keeping in mind the Word always accomplishes God's purpose. It never returns to Him empty. Isaiah 55:11

By the time you've spent a week working with these scriptures every day, allowing the Lord to show you the enormity of their meaning for you personally, a growth process will have begun. You will start to recognize who you are in Christ. You will start to develop a positive God-image of yourself to replace the negative world-image or self-image that has been holding you back; keeping you down.

I also recommend you take a few minutes as you end each day to examine the small wonders God has blessed you with during the day. Every day holds many tiny miracles and great moments of beauty. Learn to see them. Learn to thank God for them. Then before you close your eyes to sleep pray the prayer Jesus taught His followers:

“Our Father Who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us daily our bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us [who has offended us or done us wrong]. And bring us not into temptation but rescue us from evil. For yours is the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

See you next week!

change me

– week 2

...what happens when we live God’s way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard – things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.

Legalism [religion] is helpless in bringing this about; it only gets in the way. Among those who belong to Christ, everything connected with getting our own way and mindlessly responding to what everyone else calls necessities is killed off for good – crucified.

Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives. That means we will not compare ourselves with each other as if one of us were better and another worse. We have far more interesting things to do with our lives. Each of us is an original.

Galatians 5:22-25 (The Message)

Bible Study – Week 2

I love the way *The Message Bible* translates this portion of Paul’s letter to the Galatians. He’s telling them how their actions and words will change if they belong to Christ and are lead by the Holy Spirit, and it’s an amazing transformation.

In the Amplified Bible translation of this same passage we find what I like to think of as God’s “ingredient” label for His kids.

“But the fruit of the [Holy] Spirit [the work which His presence within accomplishes] is love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper, forbearance), kindness, goodness (benevolence), faithfulness, gentleness (meekness, humility), self-control (self-restraint, continence). Galatians 5:22-23 AB

If you pick up a jar of fruit preserves in any market you’ll always find a list of ingredients on the label: fruit, sugar, pectin, and usually a bunch of stuff no one can pronounce, listed in order of the quantity used. The ingredient used in the largest quantity is always listed first. If you follow that analogy, it would seem God intended His kids to be filled, first and foremost, with LOVE. That falls right in line with your Bible study for the past week.

I pray that you have been spending a “quiet time” with Jesus every day. I pray that through reading and hearing the Word [as you spoke it out loud] your heart has been touched and expanded. And, I continue to ask God to renew your heart, that you may be rooted deep in God’s love for you.

We’ve talked about establishing where you are with accepting God’s love for you. And about accepting yourself. We have to love ourselves before we can honestly love anyone else. Remember Jesus taught: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first

and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.’ Matthew 22:37-40

LOVE! It is the most critical ingredient when it comes to making changes in the negative attitudes and self-images that keep us from experiencing the very best God wants for each and every one of us.

Life changing LOVE has to be established in small steps.

- ♥ First – Recognize God’s love for you...personally.
- ♥ Second – Develop Your love for yourself...because He loves you.
- ♥ And as a result – Give away your love to others...as you love yourself.

We can learn a lot about LOVE from John in his first recorded letter to the Christians he loved and served. He calls them “my little children” and “beloved.” His tone is warm and intimate as he shares his concerns for them. He fears they are being led astray by false teaching so he calmly and deliberately recalls the fundamentals of the Christian faith for them. This letter is a love letter! A letter written by John, yes but, a letter dictated by the Holy Spirit, which means it is as alive and as relevant today as it was in the first century AD.

Most of you will be able to pick out some highlights from the letter as memory verses you’ve always heard quoted, or quoted yourself. This week please read First John again, this time looking at it a little differently than ever before.

Assignment:

For the coming week we’re going to pretend First John is the only book in your Bible. Not the Gospel of John which is toward the front of the New Testament grouped together with Matthew, Mark and Luke...the first of the three *letters* of John, back toward Revelation at the end of the New Testament.

Read it every day...like a love letter.

Have you ever received a love letter? I know. I know! Snail mail is an old fashioned idea. But let’s just pretend you’re an old fashioned girl, and you’ve received a very special love letter in the mail. As an old fashioned girl, you’ve carried the letter around in the pocket of your apron, like a character out of a sappy old-time movie; taking it out and re-reading it every time you got the chance. You’ve read it so often because in your heart you’re fitting the words into your dreams and plans for the future.

This week, try to remember as you read this letter; the first letter of John, it was written to **you** by the Holy Spirit and he said, “I am writing this so that **your joy** may be complete.”

Read the letter through today for the first time, as if you just received it. As with any love letter, savor every word. It is wonderfully exciting and full of promise.

On day two, when you read the letter again, ask God to reveal His love to you personally in every verse. In Chapter 2, verse 20 He says, “you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you know all the truth.” Search out the truth. Make a list of verses that say “God loves ME.”

The third day ask God to give you His suggestions for ways to love yourself more. Place a picture of yourself in the verses throughout the letter. Paraphrase verses like 4:19-21, inserting personal pronouns. In place of “his brother” or “he” say “me, myself or I.” As followers of Christ, we are commanded to LOVE. We are *commanded* to love ourselves and take that love to others.

On day four of this week read the letter again and look for ways you can show God how much you love Him. Ask him to show you those things that are pleasing to Him...not more things you can DO to stay busy; but quiet, gentle, loving things that will make your personal relationship with Him more intimate.

Read the letter again on day five with an eye toward ways you can LOVE others as you learn to love yourself more.

On the sixth day, read your Love Letter again. By now it will be creased and wrinkled from your lovingly opening and handling it. Eventually you will have a beautiful packet of love letters, tied with a ribbon and kept where you can enjoy them often. By now the love of God will be growing toward perfection in your heart and mind, and your relationship with God the Father, his Son Jesus, and his Holy Spirit will be a sweet assurance for your future.

Don't hesitate to read different translations – every day if you chose. Look up cross-references and read footnotes as you feel led. Read the entire letter out loud at least once, so that more than one of your senses gets involved. If there are phrases you don't understand, use a Bible Dictionary and look up the underlying meanings.

During this coming week you are going to get this “love letter” so deeply ingrained in your spirit you'll never again have to wonder “if” God loves you. This letter was written “so **your** joy could be complete.”

Knowing, without a doubt, God loves ME, brings peace and amazing joy.

Oh...don't forget to continue praying “your” prayer from Ephesians every day, too.

See you next week.

change me

– week 3

“If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers – most of which are never even seen – don’t you think he’ll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I’m trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with *getting*, so you can respond to God’s *giving*. People who don’t know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don’t worry about missing out. You’ll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

“Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don’t get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes. Matthew 6:32-34 (The Message)

Bible Study – Week 3

This week the first thing we’re going to do is look at Matthew 6:33 a little more closely. You’ll remember this verse was quoted from Jesus’ teaching. It lays out Christ’s first priority for the life of His followers. In the Amplified translation we see: “But seek (aim at and strive after) first of all His kingdom and His righteousness (His way of doing and being right), and then all these things taken together will be given you besides.”

This tells me I need to spend some time searching out what *His way of doing and being right* is all about. I’ve been working on this for about three decades now and here’s what I’ve come up with:

The first thing to do when seeking God’s way of doing and being right is to dump all of our pre-conceived notions on the subject of *righteousness*!

Dear heart, righteousness is a word foreign to our modern way of life. It is an old-fashioned word, often associated with religion! And, what we are doing here is NOT about studying religion. What we are working toward in these studies is a personal relationship with God – as Father, Jesus – as savior, and the Holy Spirit – as comforter, counselor and friend.

Religion, just as it did in Jesus’ day, will cause your God-image to drop like a rock. Religion kills Christians!

It is impossible for true followers of Christ to live up to all of religion’s demands. We can’t continually be righteous, live our lives God’s way, while trying to live up to all the “thou shalt” and “thou shalt nots” imposed upon us by the world’s legalist view of who or what we should be. It won’t work! At all. Period. When we try, we fall short. When we fall short we feel guilty. When we start feeling guilty, we receive the condemnation that has been feeding our negative thinking all along. When we start thinking in negatives again – we’re right back to the defeated mindset we’re trying to change. And so...like some dizzying amusement park ride, around and around we go.

So... this week we’re going to plant God’s Word in our hearts that will show us what His way of doing and being “right” is really all about.

Jesus' life on earth was the perfect example for us. He was human and so He can sympathize with us because He was tempted in every way, as we are. ^{Hebrews 4:15} Yet, we know he lived His life God's way, doing right and pleasing the Father in all things.

The Assignment:

During the coming week, your goal is to read through John's Gospel twice. The book contains twenty-one chapters, so that works out to reading six chapters each day for seven days. I know. That sounds like a lot. But really it isn't. And I know...you've read it before. You may even have verses from John committed to memory. The thing is...I want you to approach it a little differently this week.

We've already talked about being God's kids; heirs to God's Kingdom. We've talked about being set free from the things in our past, our old ideas and attitudes, and our "poor-me" way of thinking.

This week, reading the Gospel of John, we're looking for some new ideas. Remember, you are God's child. The things Jesus did – He did for you. The things He taught are to benefit you, personally. His victory over death, hell and the grave are YOUR victory.

In chapter 8, verses 31-32, John quotes Jesus telling His followers, "If you abide in my Word (hold fast to my teachings and live according to them), you are truly my disciples. And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." And in chapter 10, verse 10 He said, "I came so that you may have life and have it more abundantly."

As you read through this week's study the first time please keep in mind that the Lord was not always speaking to believers. Many times He was talking to His enemies. Watch closely for those verses where He spoke love, comfort and encouragement to His followers. Those verses are your promises! Also, watch for and make note of the verses that are commands He wanted His followers to incorporate into their daily lives.

By seeking out the promises and the commands in the Lord's teachings we can begin to understand how much we have been offered, and how little God expects in return. God's LOVE is patient and kind. God's love is not demanding. God's love never fails! God's love will never fail YOU. God loved you enough to send His one and only Son to purchase your salvation; purchase it by dying on a Roman cross. Last week, as we studied First John, we learned God IS love.

The second time you read John's Gospel, take it chapter by chapter, or section by section, and ask yourself these questions at the end of every one:

1. Is anything here speaking to ME, right now?
2. Is there anything here that will help me do things differently...
do things God's way?
3. What is being said here about MY personal relationship with Christ?

At the end of the week you will have completed an outline of the promises, the commands and your personal insights into Christ's example for your life. I suggest you review this outline carefully, and often. You will gain amazing strength and power from your findings. You might want to read it out loud, listening to every promise to internalize it further – then, if you're comfortable with the idea, share what you've learned with someone else.

Don't forget to keep praying "your" prayer from Ephesians every day, too.

See you next week.

change me

– week 4

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “So I tell you to stop worrying about what you will eat or wear. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothes. Consider the crows. They don’t plant or harvest. They don’t even have a storeroom or a barn. Yet, God feeds them. You are worth much more than birds.

“Can any of you add an hour to your life by worrying? If you can’t do a small thing like that, why worry about other things? Consider how the flowers grow. They never work or spin yarn for clothes. But I say that not even Solomon in all his majesty was dressed like one of these flowers. That’s the way God clothes the grass in the field. Today it’s alive, and tomorrow it’s thrown into an incinerator. So how much more will he clothe you people who have so little faith?

“Don’t concern yourself about what you will eat or drink, and quit worrying about these things. Everyone in the world is concerned about these things, but your Father knows you need them. Rather, be concerned about his kingdom. Then these things will be provided for you. Don’t be afraid, little flock. Your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom. “

Luke 12:22-32 [GW](#)

Bible Study – Week 4

Your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom! Don’t settle for a tent in the castle courtyard.

Did you notice the similarities in this passage from the Gospel of Luke to the passage we studied a couple of weeks back from the Gospel of Matthew? This gives us an example of the similarities and differences in eye-witness accounts to a single incident. The point I want you to get...God’s Word is alive and active. God’s Word will meet *you* at the point of *your* need every time you go to the Word for instructions or comfort. Every time!

In this day and age, unless you live your life without TV...not an all bad idea, I might add...Crime Scene Investigation is part of our culture. Television offers us CSI drama from three cities and NCIS from two. So...it’s not a big stretch of the imagination to ask you to understand the differences in the eye-witness accounts of any event.

If you’ve been told the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John contradict each other and because of these contradictions the Bible cannot be truth, I ask you to consider the Gospels as the eye-witness accounts of four different individuals. Don’t think of the differences and similarities as contradicting each other, but rather as enhancing each other; giving a bigger picture of the whole event.

TV’s CSI also makes it possible for you to understand there are several different way to investigate an incident or a situation.

Let's leave behind the crime scene analogy. After five shows a week it can get pretty boring. Instead let's move our imagination toward a visit to the mountains; certainly a more pleasant way to spend a day, and a better way to show you where I'm going with this week's study.

Did you ever consider the different ways of looking at a mountain? Believe it or not, there are several. You can stand way off, viewing it from a distance, studying the outline – the shape of the whole. You can stroll along the slopes, looking at the trees and flowers, glimpsing the wildlife; sensing it with eyes and ears, smelling and touching, making yourself one with the environment. You can also get down on your hands and knees to examine one square foot of the surface under a magnifying glass, hunting out every tiny detail available.

This week I'm going to ask you to put one tiny portion of the "kingdom of God" under a spiritual magnifying glass. By the way, the Greek word used in Matthew 6:33 implies to "hunt eagerly"; to seek [in order to find out] by thinking, meditating, reasoning, to enquire into. The phrase "kingdom of God" is used five times in the Gospel of Matthew. "Kingdom of Heaven" is used 30 times; as in Matthew 4:17 where Jesus said, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near." The "kingdom of God" is an earthly counterpart of the "kingdom of Heaven," and points to His kingdom on earth in this age.

Let me ask you a question here. Have you considered the fact that life as you knew it ended the moment you made Jesus the Lord of your life? When you answered Jesus' call, "follow me" your eternal spirit did all the dying it will ever do. If you are a committed follower of Jesus Christ, a believer in His work on the cross *for you*, the kingdom of God is your rightful dwelling place right here – right now.

The parables of the kingdom apply to this age. Now. Today! In the fourth chapter of Mark's Gospel Jesus taught his disciples, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you." In John's Gospel we saw Jesus telling believers, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine." John 8:31 NIV Do to the math...if you continue in His word you are truly His disciple (follower), and the secret of the kingdom of God has been given to YOU.

The Assignment

Your assignment for the coming week then is to read the 4th Chapter of Mark's Gospel **every day**.

Before you begin reading, ask the Lord to reveal the secrets of the kingdom of God to you in a fresh and useful way.

As with your study in week two, read the chapter in different translations of the Bible. Use a Bible Dictionary and a Concordance. (Check out [The Blue Letter Bible](#) online if these resources aren't already in your library.) Use all of the cross references and footnotes available to you. Get as much information as you can. And remember, we are also told in John 8:31 if we *continue* in the Words of Christ, we will know the truth, and the truth will make us free.

Here are some of the kingdom secrets you can expect to find this week:

1. The seeds of the kingdom are in the WORD.
2. The soil of the kingdom, is the heart of the hearer.
3. The WHOLE kingdom of God is compared to planting and harvesting.

Over the past few weeks the Word has begun to change the direction of your thinking, from negative to positive. By now you will be seeing yourself in a new light if you have been faithfully giving Christ your attention during a quite time each day.

One more kingdom secret is this – putting on the image of Christ is like putting on a lovely new garment. He changes the way we see ourselves. Please...I beg you...continue to renew your negative

self-image by putting on the image of Christ; by continuing in the Word and in prayer until His image fits you perfectly. Remember, God did not call your imitation of someone else. He called *you* to become his adopted child.

What he has for you will never be exactly the same as what He has prepared for anyone else, because you are uniquely different from everyone else.

Every day, from now on, I hope you will add to your partial list of scripture verses that say, “God loves ME.” I believe as you continue to study and read God’s Word you will hear Him saying, “I love YOU,” in some new way each and every day.

At the end of every day, from now on, I hope you will take the time to examine the small wonders God has blessed you with during the day. Every day holds many tiny miracles and great moments of beauty. Remember to look for them. Remember to thank God for them. Then before you close your eyes to sleep pray the prayer Jesus taught His followers:

“Our Father Who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us daily our bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us [who has offended us or done us wrong]. And bring us not into temptation but rescue us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

See you next week!

change me

– week 5

Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith-life is forced into the open and shows its true colors. So don't try to get out of anything prematurely. Let it do its work so you become mature and well-developed, not deficient in any way.

If you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father. He loves to help. You'll get his help, and won't be condescended to when you ask for it. Ask boldly, believingly, without a second thought. James 1:2-7 The Message

Bible Study – Week 5

During the past few weeks, if you have faithfully gone to the Father and to the Word for a quiet time each day, the direction of your life has begun to change. I know, from years of experience, the changes may seem trivial compared to the challenges you're facing every day. I wish I could tell you this is unexpected. It is not!

The thing is...life's challenges and tests, after you become a child of the king, come to develop your faith. We are advised to consider them as gifts – one Bible translation says, “when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.” James 1:3-4 NIV

Over the past month, you have established a partial list of Bible verses that say “God loves ME.” Here's good news – as you continue in the Word you will be able to add to this list every day for the rest of your life. Also, you have, perhaps without knowing you were doing it, developed a method of studying the Bible that will allow you to always receive the best of God's love for you. You are his beloved child.

Each of the books in your Bible will lend itself to study as you studied John's Gospel and his first Letter. The magnifying glass you used last week to study the 4th chapter of Mark's Gospel will reveal equally amazing treasures hidden in any portion of the Word that interests you. We've only scratched the surface of the kingdom principle of planting and harvesting truth through the Word. You can plant seeds for anything you need and harvest bountifully, according to God's Word. Just remember – don't dig up your seeds with negative thoughts and words.

God's Word is likened to a mirror in several Bible verses. By using the Word as a mirror – seeing yourself as clothed in Christ – you can create a new Christ-like image of yourself, and continue to dramatically change your future. But, I can also tell you from my personal experience, you will only be able to retain your new image by looking often into the Word. If you go back to looking at yourself through the mirror the rest of the world uses it won't take very long until you'll see the old negative image looking back at you. Just as you frequently take time to refresh your make-up and check the appearance of your hair, remember to continually renew your spiritual image by looking into the Word.

There are few things that are as pleasing to God the Father as the faith of His children. We show our faith when we do our best to live His higher life as He gives us understanding. It is from God's Word that we gain a better understanding of how God wants to bless us...how He wants us to live. The best God has to offer is available to His children. All they have to do is understand how to operate in the principles of His Kingdom.

1 Peter 5:6-7 is the first principle. We are told to be content with who we are, and not to put on airs. The Message says, "God's strong hand is on you; he'll promote you at the right time. Live carefree before God; he is most careful with you." This means we are to cast all care, anxiety, and worry on God; carrying none of it ourselves. We are to count it all joy; thanking God for the gift of a strong faith being built in us.

Matthew 9:23 gives us the second principle. "Everything is possible for him who believes." A strong faith, developed by getting to know Christ through the Word, allows us to believe that all things are possible to us if we trust in and rely on God. I firmly believe God has, for all time, sought a people who would be His children; who would have trusting, childlike faith in Him as a Father, believing unconditionally in His ability to be everything for them. I know, by experience, if you will seek God as a trusting child seeks a loving earthly Father – expecting to receive His blessings in absolute trust, and love – all that we desire will be made possible for us. He will give you the desires of your heart. Psalms 37:4

Jesus was an obedient and trusting human child of God. During His ministry on earth He taught His followers about love, joy, peace, hope and victory. He is the same today as He was yesterday, and He will be the same tomorrow and forever. He offers us the exact same gifts today as He offered the apostles and disciples who followed in His footsteps. We, however, must reach out and accept His gifts. He will not force them on us, but He is pleased when we accept them with thanksgiving.

The Assignment

Your assignment for the coming week is to study the Psalms each day, using the methods you have learned so far in these studies:

day 1 – read Psalm 19

day 2 – read Psalm 23

day 3 – read Psalm 34

day 4 – read Psalm 46 & 47

day 5 – read Psalm 51 & 55

day 6 – read Psalm 84

day 7 – read Psalm 103

I suggest, in the weeks to come you add a Psalm to your daily quiet time whenever possible. There are great riches to be found in the Psalms. They will help you to accept your adoption and rightful position as a daughter of the King. They will help you learn to live your life as a blessing to others; to love others as you love yourself.

Continue in prayer and thanksgiving, and allow the love of Christ to shine through you to a darkened world. That's what's expected of a King's Daughter. Don't settle for anything less.

See you next week.

change me

– week 6

Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups. You need firsthand evidence, not mere hearsay, that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it.

I hope the test won't show that we have failed. But if it comes to that, we'd rather the test showed our failure than yours. We're rooting for the truth to win out in you. We couldn't possibly do otherwise.

We don't just put up with our limitations; we celebrate them, and then go on to celebrate every strength, every triumph of the truth in you. We pray hard that it will all come together in your lives. 2 Corinthians 13:5-9 The Message

Bible Study – Week 6

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; the old has gone, the **new** has come!* 2 Corinthians 5:17
NIV

Let's begin this week's lesson with a look at your new and improved image of who you are *in* Christ.

A few weeks ago, during one of my seminar sessions, you established a self-evaluation based on my questionnaire. After answering my questions you had some idea of which areas you needed to work on, with God's help, to change your negative outlook into a more positive attitude; a more Christ-like image.

Today, you'll have the opportunity to re-evaluate some things, based on a similar set of questions. Please be as honest with yourself as you possibly can.

Okay... Here goes:

Answer the questions using this scale: 0 = not true; 1 = somewhat true;
2 = largely true; 3 = true

- _____ 1. I usually feel inferior to others.
- _____ 2. I normally feel warm and happy toward myself.
- _____ 3. I often feel inadequate to handle new situations.
- _____ 4. I usually feel warm and friendly toward people I contact.
- _____ 5. I habitually condemn myself for my mistakes and shortcomings.
- _____ 6. I am free of shame, blame, guilt and remorse.
- _____ 7. I have a driving need to prove my worth and excellence.

- _____ 8. I have great enjoyment and a zest for living.
- _____ 9. I am very concerned about what others think and say about me.
- _____ 10. I can let others be “wrong” without attempting to correct them.
- _____ 11. I have an intense need for recognition and approval.
- _____ 12. I am usually free of emotional turmoil, conflict and frustration.
- _____ 13. Losing normally causes me to feel resentful and “less than...”
- _____ 14. I usually anticipate new endeavors with quiet confidence.
- _____ 15. I am prone to condemn others and often wish to see them punished.
- _____ 16. I normally do my own thinking and make my own decisions.
- _____ 17. I often defer to others on account of their ability, wealth or prestige.
- _____ 18. I willingly take responsibility for the consequences of my actions.
- _____ 19. I am inclined to exaggerate and lie to maintain a desired image.
- _____ 20. I am free to give precedence to my own desires and needs.
- _____ 21. I tend to belittle my own talents, possessions and achievements.
- _____ 22. I normally speak up for my own opinions and convictions.
- _____ 23. I habitually deny, alibi, justify or rationalize my mistakes and defeats.
- _____ 24. I am usually poised and comfortable among strangers.
- _____ 25. I am very often critical and belittling of others.
- _____ 26. I am free to express love, anger, hostility, resentment, joy, etc.
- _____ 27. I feel very vulnerable to the opinions of others.
- _____ 28. I rarely experience jealousy, envy or suspicion.
- _____ 29. I am a professional “people pleaser.”
- _____ 30. I am not prejudiced toward racial, ethnic or religious groups.
- _____ 31. I am fearful of exposing my “real self.”
- _____ 32. I am normally friendly, considerate and generous with others.
- _____ 33. I often blame others for my handicaps, problems and mistakes.
- _____ 34. I rarely feel uncomfortable, lonely and isolated when alone.
- _____ 35. I am a compulsive “perfectionist.”
- _____ 36. I accept compliments and gifts without embarrassment or obligation.
- _____ 37. I am often compulsive about eating, talking, drinking, smoking, etc.
- _____ 38. I am appreciative of others achievements and ideas.
- _____ 39. I often shun new endeavors because of fear of mistakes or failure.
- _____ 40. I make and keep friends without exerting myself.
- _____ 41. I am often embarrassed by the actions of my family or friends.

14. Philippians 4:6-9
15. Romans 6:16 & Ephesians 6:6-8
16. 1 Corinthians 3:16 & 2 Corinthians 5:17
17. Ephesians 4:29, 5:1
18. Job 38:4-5 & Proverbs 3:5-6
19. 1 Corinthians 6:12, 19
20. 1 Peter 5:7 & Proverbs 16:3, 9
21. 1 Corinthians 13:4-13
22. Colossians 1:21-23
23. Mark 11:22-24 & John 14:27
24. Romans 3:21-26
25. 1 Corinthians 1:30-31 & 2 Corinthians 10:17-18

The Apostle Paul, writing to the believers in Corinth, says, “examine, test and evaluate yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it.” He goes on to remind his readers they are not testing or proving Christ, but themselves so that by an ever increasing experience of Jesus their faith will grow and their lives improve.

As believers, we can chart our growth with occasional self-examination, measuring our growth against the yardstick of God’s Word. As we grow up into the beautiful children He desires we will begin to comprehend the width and length, the height and depth of His love, and we will know and understand the LOVE of Christ which surpasses all human knowledge.

Up to this point we’ve spent a good deal of time looking at ourselves in the mirror of God’s Word, building a new and more Christ-like image; an improved picture of who we are individually in Him.

By now, you know what your number one priority, as a daughter of the king is to be...”seek first His Kingdom.”

Next week we’ll look at the second Kingdom priority. See you then.

use me

– week 7

Their purpose is to prepare God's people to serve and to build up the body of Christ. This is to continue until all of us are united in our faith and in our knowledge about God's Son, until we become mature, until we measure up to Christ, who is the standard. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed and carried about by all kinds of teachings that change like the wind. We will no longer be influenced by people who use cunning and clever strategies to lead us astray. Instead, as we lovingly speak the truth, we will grow up completely in our relationship to Christ, who is the head.

He makes the whole body fit together and unites it through the support of every joint. As each and every part does its job, he makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Ephesians 4:12-16

Bible Study – Week 7

Over the past six weeks you've been growing up in your relationship with Christ. You've been studying and allowing God's Word to give you an attitude adjustment. And – whether you knew it or not – you've been preparing yourself for service to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

As you've prayed daily for understanding and enlightenment you've gained new knowledge of the eternal hope you have in Christ. Today, if you've faithfully followed the Holy Spirit through these weekly Bible studies, you have a better comprehension of the deep things of God and Christ's love for you.

The Apostle Paul told the believers at Ephesus they [we / the church] are part of the body of Christ. He tells them, "as each and every part does its job, he [Christ] makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4-6; 4:12-16

In Romans we find these words, "For as in one physical body we have many parts (organs, members) and all of these parts do not have the same function or use, so we, numerous as we are, are one body in Christ and individually we are parts one of another [mutually dependent on one another]."

The writer of Romans goes on to say, "Having gifts (faculties, talents, qualities) that differ according to the grace given us, **let us use them**..." Romans 12:4-5; 12:6a AB

I truly believe, just as our first priority must be to seek God's kingdom, as children of the kingdom, our second priority must be finding out what our part is; what faculty, talent or quality we are to use to build up the kingdom.

Dear heart, you and I must come to the realization that as a part of the Body of Christ **everything** we do affects the entire body! That sounds like an awesome responsibility doesn't it? But you are growing up and it's time to accept some responsibility. Even if your part of the body is the skin on the bottom of the littlest toe – you have an affect. Think back to the last time you stubbed your toe – walked into a chair leg in the dark. Did your whole body sit right up and notice the pain? Of course. No matter how small a part we are, everything that goes on in our lives has an emotional or cognitive impact upon the whole body.

Your home, your job, the social gatherings you attend all represent *where* your part of the Body of Christ has an impact. The way you see yourself...your Christ-like image dictates *how* your part of the Body of Christ impacts everyone you meet, every day. But you need to know what part, what faculties, talents and qualities, God has called you to use – given you His grace to use – before you can impact [build up] the kingdom with the LOVE of Christ.

The Assignment

Your assignment for the coming week is a comprehensive study of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. Read the entire letter every day. Study as you have during the past few weeks. Use all of the tools available to you; footnotes, cross-references, different Bible translations...you know how. Ask the Lord to show you the part you have been called to play in the Body of Christ, and how your part can affect the whole body.

Remember as you study, a large portion of what you learn will have to do with your family. A large part of Paul's letter speaks to the affect each member has on the Christian home.

I have to tell you, this study of your part of the Body of Christ will take a very long time. It can't be completed in any one week or any one year! But, as you study this week, the Lord will reveal the many facets of your particular part, and you will grow with each revelation. As you grow and learn you will become more proficient at doing what God has called you to do for His kingdom.

There is no place to stop this study of your second priority, just as there is no place to stop seeking His kingdom. You will always, and forever more, be a part of the Body of Christ. And, now that you are truly developing a Christ-like self image through the Word and the counseling of the Holy Spirit you will *always* desire more and more knowledge of God's kingdom and God's way of doing and being right. As a child of the king your spirit, soul and body were designed by the creator to seek Him first. Your trip has only begun.

I have frequently compared my trip through life, with Christ, to a dump truck flying down the road with its tail-gate down. When I look back to where He's brought me from, the road is strewn with junk. Behind me lies the trash of a life littered with pain, sorrow, anger and worse. But it is behind me now! I am not so weighed down with my past or bound by emotion to carry it forward with me. Working on my Heavenly Father's priorities for my life has freed me from myself – and from my past.

I can wholeheartedly promise you – if He'll do this for me – He'll do it for YOU too!

God's blessing upon you. See you next week.

use me

– week 8

The LORD’S loving kindnesses indeed never cease,
For His compassions never fail.

They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.

“The LORD is my portion,” says my soul,
“Therefore I have hope in Him.”

Lamentations 3:22-24 (New American Standard Bible)

Bible Study – Week 8

With today’s study we come to a point of ending and one of beginning. You’ve spent the past eight weeks working toward a more Christ-like self image and attitude; learning who you are *in* Him. It is my fervent prayer you have developed Bible study skills that will serve you well throughout the rest of your life. With this week’s study we come to the end of our time together, but your life in Christ is new every morning. He has promised He will never leave you, or forsake you. Deuteronomy 31:7-9

As you review the past few weeks you will see that you are indeed being made new. The old ideas, images and patterns are passing away. A new, fresh, mental and spiritual attitude is growing within you.

Last week as you studied Ephesians you were taught to be **renewed** in the spirit of your mind and to *put on* a new nature.

The Greek word for *renewed* is [ananeoō](#) “*to be renewed, to be renovated by inward reformation*” suggesting the whole course of life now flows in a different direction.

The Greek word translated *put on* is [endyō](#) – literally, to be clothed in. If you are clothed in a beautiful garment, you *are* beautiful, because you are covered by the garment. Nothing can be seen of you except your smile, and if the garment is truly beautiful, you will be smiling. When you put on Christ, you are clothed in Him. Your new nature says you are clothed in Christ – to see you is to see Jesus.

Paul also told his readers in Ephesus to be **filled** with the spirit. The Greek word has its root in [plērēs](#), and where it speaks of the soul, it implies to be thoroughly permeated with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:17-19

All believers are sealed by the Holy Spirit when they become followers of Christ and are spiritually reborn into God’s kingdom. But, just as a new born baby is not fully mature, thoroughly permeated with wisdom and understanding, neither are believers fully mature at the moment of their rebirth. Believers are not to remain in a carnal state where life is marked by the appetites and passions of their old nature. God’s kids are not meant to live a defeated life. We are to grow up – into Christ.

If we would become useful members of God’s Kingdom we must have a renewed spirit, we must be clothed in Christ, and we must be walk by the Spirit.

The Assignment

Paul wrote to the church in Galatia, telling them to bear one another's burdens.

“Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day's out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived.

“Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that. Don't be impressed with yourself. Don't compare yourself with others. Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life.

”Be very sure now, you who have been trained to a self-sufficient maturity, that you enter into a generous common life with those who have trained you, sharing all the good things that you have and experience.

“Don't be misled: No one makes a fool of God. What a person plants, he will harvest. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of other – ignoring God! – harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life.” Galatians 6:1-8 The Message

These verses set the goal for a useful Christian life: Restore your brothers and sisters in Christ. Love your neighbors as well as you love yourself.

This week...study Paul's letter to the Galatians. Use the skills you have learned to dig out every kernel of truth, all the promises, all the personal commands and every shred of Good News. Then...in the weeks and months to come...reach out to those who are not doing so well in their Christian walk. Lift them up and where possible, restore them. Don't be misled...what you plant, you *will* harvest.

Today, my final challenge to you is this – always work to become a more effective follower of the Lord Jesus by *putting on* all He offers you. Don't settle for anything less.

My precious Lord Jesus, may the words written here and the meditations of each heart who reads them, be acceptable in your sight. Open our eyes and ears to your Word and by your Spirit convince every soul as you purpose. We receive these blessings in Your Holy Name.

AMEN