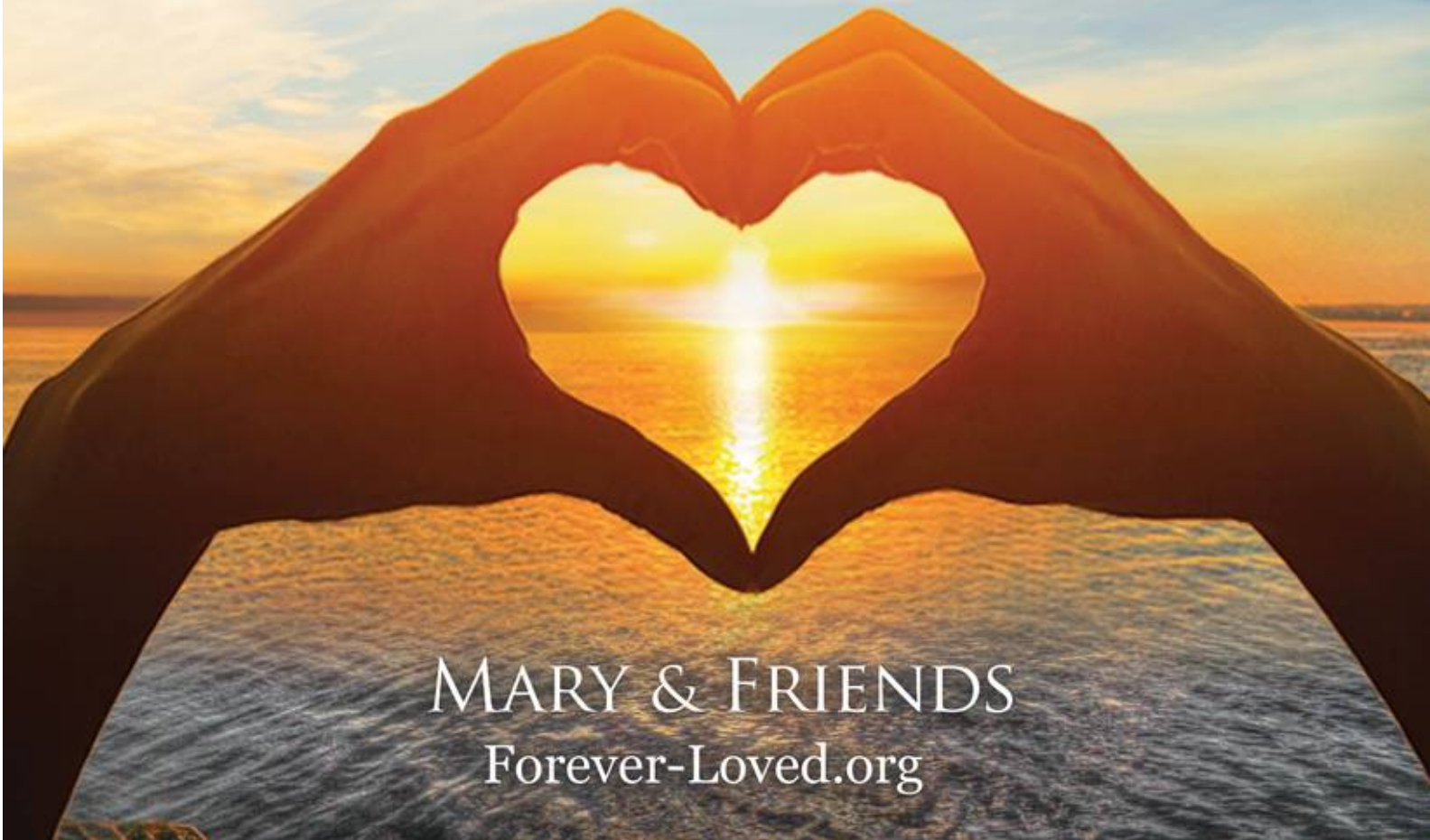


God's Heart and Desire for You

Timeless
LOVE
Transforming
LOVE



MARY & FRIENDS
Forever-Loved.org

Timeless Love, Transforming Love
Mary and Friends

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“Mary, You Don't Love”

It was a hot, August day in 2004. Eighty-two-year-old Edna sat in her living room sipping an iced tea. I sat facing her holding a glass of cold water. The 40-year age difference between us didn't bother Edna or me; we'd known each other for years. She was my spiritual mother. Each week we studied the Bible, talked and prayed.

That morning I remember Edna putting her drink down on the low table between us and leaning forward. Her intense, blue eyes looked into mine. “Mary, I want to tell you something.” She needed my agreement to go on.

“Okay,” I said.

Slowly and deliberately Edna spoke, “Mary, you don't love.”

It was Edna's voice, but it was God addressing me. The raw truth of those words pierced my heart. *I didn't love.*

Verses from the great love chapter in the New Testament flashed through my mind: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith ... but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1–2).

Like a flood my life passed before me. I had gone to Stanford and then earned a Ph. D. in Developmental Psychology with the intent of aiding children in need. My husband was a pediatrician and together we had planned to help in orphanages around the world. However, these ideas had changed when, early in my thirties, I had developed Multiple Sclerosis. I'd stayed home and dedicated myself to raising our four children. We went to church faithfully as a family and, as the kids grew older, I began working part-time as a volunteer for a mission organization.

But somehow in that moment with Edna, I understood that in doing all these “good” things, I was nothing but “a clanging cymbal.” I slid out of my chair and lay face down on Edna's floor. I'd gotten the most important thing in life wrong. Even though I'd grown up in a Christian home singing “Jesus loves me this I know,” even though I'd “asked Jesus into my heart” when I was 16, even though my family was active in a Bible-believing church, even though I was doing many “good” things, *I didn't really love.*

Something was horribly wrong. I knew I was going to heaven when I died, but I wasn't living life on earth as God intended. I wasn't loving. And I didn't know why.

So there on the floor, with Edna looking on, I prayed, “God, I don’t know what is wrong, but I trust You to fix it. I want to love. Whatever it takes.”

Within six months of praying that prayer, my life was in shambles. The shiny ornaments I had used to decorate my life so that I looked “good,” like I thought a Christian should, lay broken to bits. My marriage of 22 years began a decline into divorce. My oldest son, a freshman on Harvard’s crew team, fell into alcohol abuse, dropped out of school and ended up as a patient in a psychiatric hospital. My “good” Christian life had been exposed for what it was—a shiny cover up for the real life God intended for me.

But through understanding who God really was, and by seeing how mankind was created to abide with Him in a loving relationship, God was about to transform the framework of my life.

Reflection Questions:

- What one idea expressed in this chapter grabbed your attention?
- Recall a time when you did something “good,” but did not do it in love. What did you do and why did you do it?
- What is Mary’s struggle? In what ways can relate to her crisis of faith?
- In what ways are you currently expressing your love for God? for others?
- Based on what you have read here, can you identify any ways you may need to have your thoughts and actions challenged when it comes to God’s love?



In the Image of God

In order to fix my broken life, God had to change the way I thought about Him and the way I thought about myself and others. He had to reintroduce Himself to me as a *God of love*. First John 4:16 tells us, “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” The trials in my life pushed me to Him; it was there I began to understand and accept His love for me. And as I accepted His love, I began to understand Scripture differently.

In the Garden of Eden, when God created man, He said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him” (Genesis 1:26–27).

God made us like Him because He wanted someone to love and to share Himself with. Mankind is God’s most treasured of all creation. We are uniquely designed to appreciate the fullness of God. He put Adam in the Garden to tend and care for the rivers, trees, birds and animals. Through Adam, He gave us dominion over the earth because He wanted us to share with Him in caring for the world He had made. God created man, and man only—not animals, not angels—in His image.

God is Three in One. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And mankind also is three in one: we are spirit, soul and body. First Thessalonians 5:23 says, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole *spirit*, *soul*, and *body* be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

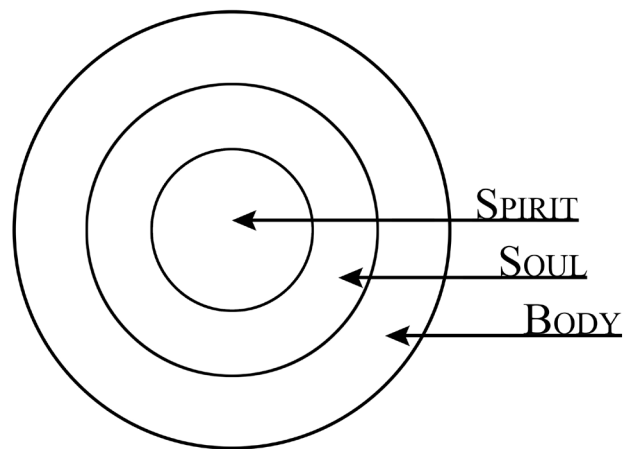
Scripture tells us of God creating man: “And the LORD God formed man [1] of the dust of the ground, and [2] breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man [3] became a living being [soul]” (Genesis 2:7). God shaped Adam’s (1) *body* from the dust of the ground. Then He breathed into that body His Spirit-breath of life so that Adam’s (2) *spirit* came alive. And with that Spirit-breath from God, man became a living (3) *soul*. In God’s design, the soul receives life through the Spirit.

God gave us a *body* so we could live on earth. Our body is made up of our bones, muscle and organs. We interact with the physical world through our body. We see, smell, hear, touch and taste. Our body is like a house for the hidden parts of spirit and soul. “Your *body* is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

After God shaped Adam's body, He breathed into it His breath of life. Our *spirit* comes alive when God's Spirit gives it life. When we believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died for our sins and rose from the dead, the Holy Spirit comes and lives in our spirit. By "accepting Jesus into our heart," we let God have a home on earth—in our spirit. Our spirit connects us with God and is a resting place for His Spirit. Just as our body connects us to the physical world, our spirit connects us to God. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our *spirit* that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16).

Upon receiving the breath of God's Spirit into his body, Adam became a living *soul*. He became a living being with thoughts and feelings. The soul is the place of our mind, will and emotions. It is like a bridge between the spirit and the body. Our mind, will and emotions—not our spirit directly—determine the actions of our body. Our behaviors, speech and feelings are expression of our soul. The world sees the contents of our soul expressed out through our body.

The diagram below illustrates how God made us three in one.



Spirit and soul together form the hidden core of man—the heart. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to *the division of soul and spirit*, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the *heart*." God knows the heart. He knows what is of the Spirit (originating from Him) and what is of the soul (originating from us).

In God's design, the soul is meant to be like the steering wheel of a car. How the wheel is turned determines the direction the car takes. But a wheel is not made to steer itself and our soul is not meant to steer us. God, in our spirit, is meant to be the driver. With His hand upon the wheel, all is well. His love directs us.

Each one of us is meant to receive God's love in our spirit, know the reality of that love in our soul and then let that love flood out of our body to the world. In His great design, God planned that we would have dominion over the earth as guided by our love-relationship with Him.

But Satan had other plans.

Reflection Questions:

- What do you think it means to be made “in the image of God”?
- What does it mean to you to receive God in your spirit?
- In what ways are you experiencing the reality of God’s love in your soul?
- In what ways is God’s love expressing itself through your body to the world?
- How do all three parts (spirit, soul and body) work together to express God’s love on earth?

3



Adam and the Fall

Before the fall, Adam and Eve had a Spirit-to-spirit connection *with* God. God did not *live in* them, but He *walked with* them. In the Garden of Eden, everything for Adam and Eve’s full life—their perfect relationship with God, self, others and the world—came through their relationship with God. Adam and Eve’s spirit, soul and body were in perfect agreement with God. God gave; they received. God loved; they trusted.

Satan hated Adam and his relationship with God. He hated that God had created humanity in His image to have dominion over the earth. He hated that Adam had been given authority “over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Genesis 1:26)—for Satan was that creeping thing. So he plotted to destroy God’s most treasured creation. In the Garden of Eden, he tempted Eve to fall in the same way he had fallen—by relying on his own soul (his own mind, will and emotions).

Long ago, Satan had tried to become like God apart from God. By his own efforts—his own *I will*—Satan had tried to make himself like God. He had said, “*I will* ascend into heaven, *I will* exalt my throne above the stars of God; *I will* also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; *I will* ascend above the heights of the clouds; *I will* be like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:13–14). Satan fell because of pride; he was going to do it himself—by his own, independent *I will*. So he tempted Eve to act apart from her relationship with God, to rely on her independent soul and to express her own *I will*.

In the center of the Garden of Eden, God had planted two trees: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God warned Adam about the second tree, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:16–17).

The fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was not good for humanity. So, like a loving father warning his child not to eat something poisonous, God warned Adam.

However, Satan reassured Eve that everything would be fine—even better than before. He told her, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:4–5). “Don’t listen to God,” the serpent said. “You won’t really die; you’ll be like God.” The idea Satan planted in her mind was, “God doesn’t have your best interests at heart. If He really loved you, He wouldn’t withhold this good from you. So go ahead. Choose what is best for yourself.”

The fruit of tree seemed good to her, so Eve ate it. She gave some to Adam and he ate it too. In so doing, Adam made his own decision and acted apart from God. His *soul*—his mind, will and emotions—chose its own *will* over God's. Thus, Adam broke his Spirit-to-spirit connection with God; he cut off the life-giving relationship. Now the soul had to make its own decisions using its new-found knowledge of good and evil.

When Adam ate the forbidden fruit, the effect rippled throughout the entire human race. When we are born into this world, we inherit Adam's disconnection from God—the sin nature. Satan's evil plot destroyed the perfect way God had created us to live—in Spirit-to-spirit connection with Him. Now the independent soul—cut off from continual intimate relationship with God—was in control.

After the fall, Adam and Eve's minds became clouded by the knowledge of good and evil. When their "eyes were opened" they no longer saw God's loving nature, but increasingly viewed Him as a harsh father demanding good and punishing evil. The couple's image of God, self and others was darkened by lies.

These lies changed their behavior. When God came to walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the Garden, they were not there. The two had dressed themselves in fig leaves to cover their nakedness and were hiding from God.

But God searched out Adam, calling for the one he loved, "Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9).

Adam answered, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself" (Genesis 3:10). Fear ("I was afraid") is the first emotion expressed by Adam after the fall. The *I will* brought fear into their lives. There was no fear in Adam or Eve before the fall. Before the fall there was nothing to be afraid of; they knew the loving nature of God. The New Testament says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18).

Adam and Eve had lost their connection with God. Their Spirit-to-spirit relationship was severed. Through people's independent souls, Satan could now work evil in humanity and in the world God had designed for them to rule.

Reflection Questions:

- Consider for a moment what it must have been like for Adam and Eve to "walk with God." What do you think that perfect relationship may have been like?
- In what ways were Adam and Eve's experience of God's love changed after the fall?
- In what ways might you have bought into Satan's lie, "God doesn't have your best interests at heart"?
- How is the soul (will) central to Satan's scheme?
- How is the soul (will) central to God's full redemptive plan?

4



Moses and the Law: “You Shall Love”

After the fall, God could no longer express His love and care for Adam and Eve as He had in the beginning. All of humanity was living in a broken relationship with God. Now people were living with their eyes opened to the knowledge of good and evil. Because people had no connection with God on the inside, the rules had to come from the outside. Therefore, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments as guidelines for the independent soul.

God knew what was best for man. He wrote the commandments like a loving father making rules to keep his children safe and happy. Just as a father might tell his child, “Don’t stick your finger in fire,” God gave these laws to protect His people.

The Ten Commandments, along with other laws in the Old Testament, clearly defined what people should and should not do. However, even when people wanted to, they just couldn’t obey all the rules. The soul, cut off from God and clouded by lies and fear, couldn’t follow His instructions. Before Moses received the Ten Commandments, the people had said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do” (Exodus 19:8). And yet, soon after those same people had given up on the Lord and worshiped a golden calf.

Even David, God’s chosen king of Israel, failed to keep the law. He wrote sincerely, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Psalm 42:1–2). Yet David’s soul was fickle. He had an affair with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his loyal army officers. Then to cover it up, he had the man sent to his death in battle. God’s chosen king disobeyed four of the Ten Commandments; he coveted, committed adultery, lied and murdered.

Nothing was wrong with the law God gave His people; it was just that it couldn’t be followed. The law was not designed to be kept by the efforts of mankind. It was designed to show us God’s standard that, apart from relationship with Him, can never be kept. The purpose of the law was not to make people good; the purpose of the law was to show people that life guided by the soul can never be good. Despite having the knowledge of good and evil, the soul can’t live rightly on its own.

In the New Testament, Jesus summarized the Old Covenant law—that couldn’t be obeyed. When He was asked by a Pharisee about “the great commandment *in the law*,” Jesus replied, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all *the Law and the Prophets*” (Matthew 22:37–40).

These two greatest commandments in the Law summarize what is best for us. “God is love” (1 John 4:16) and He created us in His image to reflect His love-nature to the world. But, these two commands are Old Covenant commands and therefore impossible to obey. Think of trying to love God with *all* your heart, *all* your soul and *all* your mind. How could you possibly do that? And even if you could, how could you then, having given all your love to God, have some left over for your neighbor? And how could you love your neighbor as yourself if you didn’t really love yourself, because you didn’t know God loved you?

Even though the law couldn’t be obeyed, the Pharisees were deceived into thinking they were obedient. But Jesus called out their true condition, “Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:26–27).

Following rules can make a person look good by their own definition—from the outside. But it cannot make a person good by God’s definition—from the inside. Our true goodness comes from an inner relationship with our heavenly Father that flows through us to others. In God’s design, right living flows from right being. We were created as human *beings*, not as human *doings*. Being in relationship with God allows us to know his love for us and to naturally follow His rules. Paul summarizes this clearly when he says, “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the Law” (Romans 13:10).

God doesn’t define right living as obedience to any set of rules—not even His own. Neither does He define sin as disobedience to the law. Sin, in God’s view, is not just doing evil as defined by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is also doing “good” under that same tree. Both the good and the evil are equally death producing—because they come, not from the Spirit, but from the independent soul. Sin is doing your own thing—no matter how “good” that thing appears. Sin is missing the true goal and purpose of life; it is living apart from God and being led by the independent soul. Again, Paul makes this clear: “Whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

By showing the total failure of the law to make us good, God planned that we would come to know our desperate need for a Savior. Paul says, “The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ” (Galatians 3:24).

Our old, soul-guided nature always wants to live by rules. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil has deep roots. Every religion of the world caters to the desires of the Adam-nature to do something “good” to please their god(s) and earn their favor. Jews try to obey the Law of Moses. Muslims try to follow the Koran. Hindus try to appease many different gods and goddesses with a variety of sacrifices. Christians too can be easily deceived into trying to gain God’s favor through “good” deeds generated by the independent soul such as going to church, witnessing ...

or even loving others.

We cannot please God apart from our relationship with Him. God wants us to let His life and love flow through us.

In my own life, I had completely missed this point. When I did good deeds, I believed those deeds put me in right standing with God. Adam's clouded mindset had darkened my thoughts. I believed the lie that if you do good things, God will love you, but if you don't, He won't.

That lie so warped the framework of my life that I tried desperately to do "good" things. In high school I got straight As. I earned the position of number one on the tennis team. I was president of the Girl's League, the California Scholarship Federation and the church youth group. Pushed by the lie, I earned two separate undergraduate degrees in four years, attended graduate school, wrote numerous publications focused on helping sick and disabled children, aided starving children in Kenya, raised four kids and worked as a volunteer for a mission organization. But ... nothing was enough. Life was a constant struggle to accomplish the impossible and be "good enough" to earn love from others ... and God.

Trying to love as commanded in the Old Covenant was the root of my problem. My independent soul couldn't generate the love.

But Edna had seen past the whitewashed walls and the shiny ornaments that decorated my good Christian life. On that hot August day, she had spoken the truth, "Mary, you don't love."

She had identified the problem. But what was the solution?

Reflection Questions:

- In what ways is the law currently hindering you and/or helping you to live as God designed?
- In what ways might you be living by rules and regulations?
- In what ways might you currently be trying to earn God's love and approval?
- In this chapter the author says: "Sin is doing your own thing—no matter how 'good' that thing appears. Sin is missing the true goal and purpose of life; it is living apart from God and being led by the independent soul." How might your independent soul be causing you to miss your true goal and purpose in life?
- Imagine and describe what a growing relationship with God might look like for you.



God's Solution: "This Is My Beloved Son"

Tragic as it was, God used the fall, and the struggles of the people in the Old Testament, to display His sacrificial love. Without the fall, love would not have been able to express itself in complete, grand form. God's love reached down to us when Jesus became a man and took our place by dying on the cross for our sins.

In the Old Testament, God had promised to restore humanity by making a way for us to come back into a relationship with Him. He spoke to Abraham about being the father of a new people who lived by faith. Then through the prophet Jeremiah, God promised a New Covenant to replace the Old. The Old had come to us from the outside—from the Ten Commandments written on stone tablets. The New would come to us from the inside—from God's Word written on peoples' minds and hearts. The Old Covenant was based upon the *will of man*, but the New Covenant is based upon the *will of God*. Jeremiah wrote, "But this is the covenant that *I will* make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: *I will* put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and *I will* be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

To usher in the New Covenant, Jesus came to earth as a human being. As a man, Jesus remained 100 percent God, but He voluntarily laid aside all of His divine power. In this sense, Jesus was like us. He was tempted and tested in all things and was not given any extra amount of grace, strength or power to overcome Satan's attacks. Rather, He humbled Himself and depended (like we are designed to) on the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's will through Him. As a man, Jesus showed us how God made us to live as full, complete human beings. He modeled life the way we were created to live it.

At the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River. At this time, the Father spoke from heaven directly to Him, "This is My *beloved* Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). On the Mount of Transfiguration, the Father addressed Him again, "This is My *beloved* Son" (Matthew 17:5). Deep in the core of His being, Jesus knew His Father loved Him. God's love provided the foundation and framework for Jesus' life ... and death.

Because Jesus trusted in His Father's unfailing goodness, He gave up everything of Himself (His soul) and embraced all His Father had to give. Trusting in God's love for Him allowed Jesus to live a life of complete surrender (obedience) to His Father's will. Knowing God's all-encompass-

ing love allowed Jesus to live a life of love.

In His life on earth, Jesus lived in Spirit-to-spirit relationship with His Father. In this way His life was like a channel through which His Father's loving nature flowed from heaven to earth. As His Father lead, Jesus told stories of a caring shepherd looking for a lost sheep and of a father loving a disobedient son. Under the Spirit's direction, He shared His life with tax collectors, prostitutes and others shunned by the cultural traditions in which He lived. With the Father's compassion, He healed the sick—even on the Sabbath, the law-given day of rest.

In unbroken relationship—in perfect unity of action, thought and character—Jesus took the *will of God* as His own. He said, "I have come down from heaven, not to do *My own will*, but the *will of Him* who sent Me" (John 6:38). He also said, "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does" (John 5:19–20). In this way, Jesus' life on earth was a reflection of the Father's will—the Father's loving nature.

The final test of Jesus' love-relationship with His Father came in the Garden of Gethsemane. On the night before He was betrayed, Jesus was greatly distressed. He cried out, "My *soul* is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death ... O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, *not as I will, but as You will*" (Matthew 26:38–39). Three times Jesus prayed, giving up *His will* and asking for the *Father's will* to be done. Although it required death—although it didn't seem good—He surrendered the desires of His *soul* and trusted in His Father's love.

The all-knowing, all-powerful, infinite love Jesus knew in His Spirit-to-spirit relationship with His Father thus defined and filled His entire soul and poured out of His broken body to the world. In this way, the Son of Man surrendered His soul-life and became a spirit-soul-body channel carrying God's will—God's love—to the world. Truly we see the love of the Father in the life and death of His Son.

This surrender ushered in the New Covenant. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus regained what Adam had lost in the Garden of Eden. Adam had chosen his own will above the will of God; Jesus chose God's will above His own. In dying to the desires of His soul, Jesus conquered sin and death which reigned on earth through Adam's soul-guided nature. By the complete surrender of His will, Jesus gave up His soul-life in order to give us His Spirit-life.

In the New Covenant, Jesus provides a way for us to regain our original God-given destiny. We were made in the image of God to radiate His likeness on earth—just as Jesus did. As Jesus received from the Father, so we receive. Jesus said, "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love" (John 15:9). In an abiding love-relationship, our souls surrender their independent ways and come to rest in the loving guidance and care of God.

Jesus came to save us from ourselves—from our soul-guided way of living that can never be right. He made a way to restore our spirits—in Spirit-to-spirit relationship with God. And He

made a way to restore our souls; our mind, will and emotions are renewed in the love of God as our souls come to rest under the leadership of the Spirit. In this way, in alignment with God, we become as He created us to be—born of the Spirit *and* led by the Spirit. In this way, as spirit-soul-body channels, we radiate the image of God—just as Jesus did.

Reflection Questions:

- If God audibly said to you, “You are My beloved son/daughter,” how would you respond? How convinced are you that God loves you?
- In what ways do you find it difficult to accept and embrace God’s love?
- Think of a specific situation in which you found it particularly difficult to accept and embrace God’s will. What made this difficult for you?
- How might embracing more of the all-powerful, all-knowing, infinite love of God have helped you in this instance?
- Jesus was a human being like us. Yet, He surrendered His will to His Father and went to the cross. What might be keeping you personally from surrendering to what you feel God desires of/for you?

6



New Covenant: Faith Promises

Jesus didn't just *show* us a new way; He made it possible for us to *live* in that new way. He gave us the New Covenant to replace the Old.

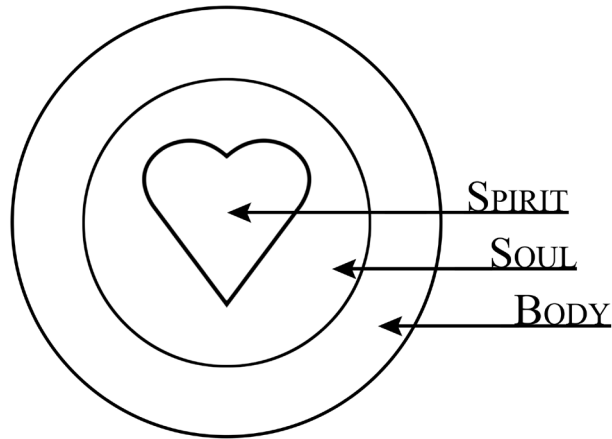
In the New Covenant we receive from God by faith. It is a two-step process summarized clearly in First John: "And this is His commandment: that we should [1] *believe* on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and [2] *love* one another, as He gave us commandment" (1 John 3:23). We (1) *believe* that Jesus is the Son of God and we (2) *love* as Jesus commanded with the love He first gave to us.

The New Covenant speaks, not of what *we* should do, but of what *Jesus* has done. He has made a way for us to live in love-relationship with God. It is God who changes us from the inside out. Obedience to the New Covenant does not depend upon the work of our independent soul; the only requirement is that we believe in Jesus and all that He accomplished for us on the cross.

The first command of the New Covenant—the first step in restoring relationship with God—is to believe in Jesus as the Son of God. Scripture repeats this first step with its promises over and over again. John 3:16 tells us, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever *believes* in Him should not perish but have *everlasting life*." John 3:36 says, "He who *believes* in the Son has *everlasting life*." John 6:40 reiterates, "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and *believes* in Him may have *everlasting life*."

When we believe that Jesus is the Son of God who died for us, our sins are forgiven and we have eternal life. When we die, we will go to heaven. No good works are required of the independent soul. We simply accept the truth by faith. Salvation is a free gift. The Holy Spirit comes to live in our spirit and we are born again. When we invite Jesus into our heart, our spirit becomes a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit and we begin our relationship with God. In this way, our spirit fulfills its God-intended purpose; it connects us to God and His all-embracing love.

The diagram on the next page shows that the spirit of one who believes in Jesus is filled with the love of God.



During the time of the Reformation, in the early 1500s, the church was reintroduced to the first command of the New Covenant. God used the teaching and writing of Martin Luther to make it clear that eternal life cannot be earned by works but is a free gift to be received by faith. With strong resolve Luther held to the truth of Scriptures such as Romans 1:17, “The just shall live by faith.” Today many Christians have an understanding of the first command of the New Covenant. We know that we are justified by faith and not by works of the law.

When I was 16, the truth of believing in Jesus became clear to me and I accepted Him into my heart. As a new believer, I spent the first few months of my new relationship with God just enjoying Him. I would ride my horse into the hills, find a spot for him to graze, lie under a tree and read my Bible. Some days I would get up early and walk down the dirt road with my dog just to watch the sunrise and sing made-up songs to Jesus.

But then I began to learn about all the things “good” Christians were supposed to do. I didn’t understand that these things were meant to come naturally from the Spirit relationship I was enjoying, so I began trying to do my own good deeds. I thought this was what God wanted me to do. And so the framework of my Christian life became twisted. I began to assume that God would bless me and love me *because* of my good deeds. Thus, in working *for* God, I lost the simple rightness of living life in relationship *with* God.

My Christian life had begun well—with Jesus in my heart—in Spirit-to-spirit relationship. And I knew it would end well—with eternal life in heaven when I died. But I was completely deceived about how to live life on earth—in those important in-between years.

Salvation by faith in Jesus as the Son of God isn’t all that God intends for us. We were made for more than a born-again spirit and eternal life. We were created in the image of God to share His life and love with others—just as Jesus did. God intends that, through our spirit connection, we begin to understand more and more of His love—so that our souls also come to be renewed.

Reflection Questions:

- Share one way, meaningful to you, that the New Covenant is different from the Old.
- What does the Bible teach about how to receive everlasting life?
- Why is believing in Jesus a critical first step in our relationship with God?
- Share three ways that believing in Jesus has changed you.
- John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world ...” Why is God’s love central to understanding what this verse is saying?

7



New Covenant: Love Promises

As mentioned in the prior chapter, the New Covenant includes two parts: “[1] *believe* on the name

of His Son Jesus Christ and [2] *love* one another, as He gave us commandment” (1 John 3:23). Throughout the New Testament we are repeatedly reminded of *faith* and *love*.

Faith alone isn’t enough to live a full New Covenant life. Scripture tells us, “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20), and “faith work[s] through love” (Galatians 5:6). But what are these loving works? How do they come about?

How does Jesus want us to love one another? It certainly isn’t by loving God and our neighbor as spelled out in the Old Covenant. Even with God in our spirit, the law is still impossible to obey. Just because we have a born-again spirit does not mean that our soul surrenders its independent ways.

On the night of the Last Supper, Jesus spoke of “the new covenant” (1 Corinthians 11:25). On that same night, He also gave His New Commandment: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; *as I have loved you*, that you also love one another” (John 13:34). Later in the evening, Jesus repeated: “This is My commandment, that you love one another *as I have loved you*” (John 15:12).

I first heard the emphasis on this truth in 2007 when I listened to a message by Gaylord Enns.¹ When I realized that my love for others *comes from* Jesus’ love for me, I knew it was God’s deep solution to my problem of not loving. For me, this truth was the vital, missing piece of how God designed us to love—by sharing His love with others.

Yes! Now loving is possible because it doesn’t depend on the independent soul. *We* aren’t the source of the love. It is not about trying to love God “with *all your* heart, with *all your* soul, and with *all your* strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5; see also Matthew 22:37) as the law demands. It is about receiving the love Jesus has for us; it is about believing that He loves us.

The two greatest commands in the Old Covenant and Jesus’ New Command all have to do with love. But there are vast differences between the Old and New. Jesus commands a love that we don’t have to work for. God’s love for me is not conditional upon my performance, nor my obedience. I don’t earn God’s love by doing good things. He loves me because His nature is to love. He made me to receive his love, not as a human *doing*—but as a human *being*.

Under the Old Covenant, the independent soul is responsible for the impossible task of generating love for God and others. In the New Covenant we love with the love God first gave to us. John writes, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

In the New Covenant, love starts with God. “The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). God pours His love into our hearts (spirit and soul together) so that we can share it with the world. We are meant to be channels for His love. His love flows through us—through our spirit, soul and body.

The love the Holy Spirit pours into our soul from our Spirit-to-spirit relationship with God does not have a form the world can understand. But when it passes through our soul, and expresses itself out through our body, that love takes on a physical form. It becomes a servant. It washes dirty feet. It feeds the poor and visits the sick. It is a friend to the person who needs one. We understand the language of God’s love because that love died on a cross for us.

The soul was created to be loved and to pass that love along to others. When we come to know and believe in Jesus’ love for us, our soul surrenders to the Spirit’s leading and we come to live life on earth as God intends. Our souls are renewed as God’s nature floods our mind, will and emotions. In relationship with God—as His love flows through us—we come to be the people He created us to be. Spirit, soul and body are aligned with God.

After that day at Edna’s in 2004 and the understanding of John 13:34 in 2007, I began to see what Scripture was repeating over and over. Somehow, through the ongoing trials of life, I began to know and experience God’s love for me in deeper and deeper ways. And as this happened, I began to see His love-promises. The second step of the New Covenant comes with amazing promises—not for up in heaven, when we die—but for down here on earth, as we live.

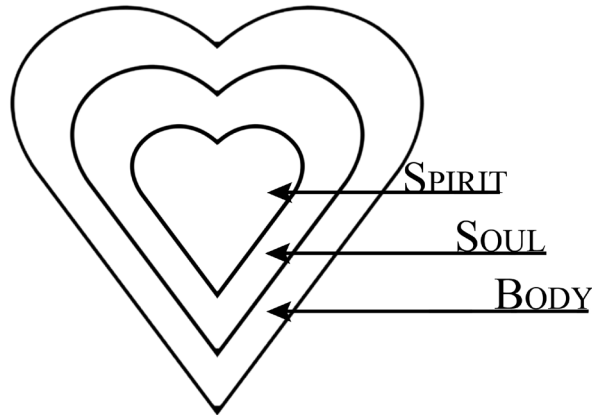
In John 13:34–35 Jesus says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you *love* one another; as I have *loved* you, that you also *love* one another. *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” Love marks us as disciples of Christ.

First John 4:16–17 tells us, “And we have known and believed the *love* that God has for us. God is *love*, and he who abides in *love* abides in God, and God in him. *Love* has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because *as He is, so are we in this world.*” When we believe and experience the love God has for us, we come to be like Him in this world.

In Ephesians 3:14–19 Paul prays, “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you being rooted and grounded in *love*, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the *love* of Christ which passes

knowledge; that *you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*” In coming to know the love of Christ, we will be filled with the essence of God.

The diagram below shows the state of one who believes in Jesus as the Son of God *and* who has come to know God’s love. The spirit is filled with God’s love, the soul knows His love and the body expresses that love to the world. The framework of our nature is transformed.



The chart on the next page shows the promises that come with the first and second commands of the New Covenant. Faith Promises come from believing in Jesus as the Son of God. Love Promises come from knowing and experiencing the depth of God’s love.

Working to gain God’s love or trying to love others as rules or traditions demand might help us to live “good” Christian lives, but they definitely will not aid us in experiencing the glorious life God promises. We were created to be filled with the nature of God so that His love flows through our spirit-soul-body channel to others. Jesus made a way for us to live as He did—in perfect, unbroken relationship—in oneness with our Father.

Reflection Questions:

- What ideas presented in this chapter are new to you?
- How does Jesus’ command to love one another as He first loved us differ from the two greatest commands in the Old Covenant to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself? (See John 13:34 and Matthew 22:37–40.)
- Ephesians 3:19 ends with the phrase, “that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Imagine and describe what living such a life on earth might look like.
- The 3-heart diagram illustrates how God’s love transforms our entire nature. In what ways is God’s love transforming you?
- In your Christian experience, have you been more aware of Faith Promises or Love Promises? Why are both important?

<i>Faith</i> PROMISES	<i>Love</i> PROMISES
Come by <i>faith in Jesus as the Son of God</i>	Come by <i>knowing and experiencing Jesus' love</i>
Defined by a <i>one-time decision</i>	Defined by a <i>continual abiding</i>
<i>Spirit</i> is born again	<i>Soul</i> is renewed
Mark the <i>beginning</i> of the Christian life	Mark the <i>fulfillment</i> of the Christian life
Work <i>backward</i> in time <i>to cover past sins</i>	Work <i>forward</i> in time <i>by changing the sin nature</i>
Result in <i>justified</i>	Result in <i>glorified</i>
Make us <i>children of God</i>	Make us <i>sons of God</i>
Grant <i>eternal life in heaven</i>	Grant <i>Christlikeness in this life</i>

1. Gaylord Enns, *Love Revolution: Rediscovering the New Covenant Love of Jesus*, <https://jesusonline.com/forever-loved/love-revolution/>.



Paul's Warning: "O Foolish Galatians!"

Today many Christians understand that a mix of grace and self-effort will never save us. Martin Luther clearly taught the truth that we are justified by *faith* alone. Eternal life is not earned by works of the law, but by *faith* in Jesus as the Son of God.

However, Luther did not teach Jesus' New Covenant *love*. He did not emphasize that "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). He did not clearly portray the lifechanging significance of Jesus' New command, "Love one another *as I have loved you*" (John 15:12). Luther realized the importance of love in Scripture, but he seemed to see it as something to be earned under the Old Covenant—rather than as something to be received in the New. Therefore, even though he knew the law was impossible to obey, he treated love as a work to be accomplished under the law—by the independent soul. After trusting God for eternal life, Luther tried to live his life on earth by loving God and others with his own self-effort. He wrote, "Since you have found Christ by faith ... begin now to work and do well. Love God and your neighbor."¹

Many of us today have inherited that same wrong thinking. For living a life of love on earth we are trapped into relying on a mix of grace and works. We are caught in the bondage of the Old Covenant. Despite having a born-again spirit, we keep trying to do "good" things to live rightly on earth. We ask God to help us with our plans, rather than embracing His. Adam's independent, sin nature has a deep-rooted strangle hold.

Before we are saved, Satan fights to keep us from Spirit-to-spirit relationship with God. However, once we have God's Spirit in us, his tactic is to keep the Holy Spirit bottled up inside our spirit so God, who is love, cannot express Himself to the world. One of the ways he does this is to disguise evil by calling it "good." He masquerades as an angel of light bombarding us with "good" things for the independent soul to do after receiving Christ by faith. He deceives us into thinking that after we are born again, we can somehow—by following a set of rules or good advice—love others and live on earth as God intends.

That is a lie.

In the New Testament, Paul confronted Peter for teaching similar falsehood. When Peter was teaching faith in Jesus and obedience to Jewish laws and traditions, Paul "withstood him to his face" (Galatians 2:11). Paul did not want Christians falling back into living under the bondage

of the law. Jesus did not begin a good work and then leave it to Moses to finish. Any mix of faith and flesh—any combination of grace and law—is toxic and cannot produce life as God designed.

With strong words, Paul warned the believers in Galatia: “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth ... Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the *flesh*?” (Galatians 3:1–3). The believers in Galatia had begun well; they were born of the *Spirit*. But now they were attempting to live their Christian lives in the *flesh*—by the strength of the independent soul.

Flesh is the combination of soul and body. Just as the heart refers to the spirit and soul together, the flesh refers to the soul and body together. The flesh is neither sinful nor righteous. It is made sinful or righteous depending on who leads it.

When the *flesh* controls itself—when the soul is master—it is sinful. Although it may look good on the outside, such as when it does good and avoids evil, the flesh, cut off from God, cannot produce life as He intends. At its best, *flesh* describes a Pharisee in the temple; at its worst, it describes an unrepentant murderer in prison. Paul says, “In me (that is, in my *flesh*) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find” (Romans 7:18).

However, when the Spirit is Master, the flesh radiates the nature of God—the glory of God. It is through the flesh of the Man, Jesus Christ, that we see spiritual God in a physical, earthly form we can understand. The Bible says, “And the Word [Jesus] became *flesh* and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory” (John 1:14). Paul goes on to tell us, that the life of Jesus is “manifested in our mortal *flesh*” (2 Corinthians 4:11). When God’s Spirit lives in our spirit *and* when the Spirit leads our soul, we function *in the Spirit* and radiate God to the world. When I surrender my *I will* to *God’s will*, God pours through my spirit-soul-body channel and waters the world with His love.

Paul also said to the Galatians. “If we *live in the Spirit*, let us also *walk in the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:25). To *live in the Spirit* and to *walk in the Spirit* are two different things. The first begins at the moment of salvation. When we *live in the Spirit*, we are born of the Spirit and become *children of God*. Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are *children of God*.”

The second—*walk in the Spirit*—happens in a continual love-relationship with God as we walk out our life on earth. We *walk in the Spirit* by living our lives guided by God. Our soul gives up its own will and surrenders to the Spirit. We die to our will and desires and become one with Jesus. When we let God lead, we become mature sons and daughters of God. Romans 8:14 says, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are *sons of God*.”

But how does one become a son or daughter of God who is continually led by the Spirit? If choosing to walk in the Spirit is something I try to do, I put myself back under the law. If I make

walking in the Spirit (or loving others) a rule, I put myself back under the impossibility of the Old Covenant. Even if I am born-again in my spirit, my independent soul won't be able to consistently yield to the Spirit. The soul, with all its good rules and self-effort will fail. (I know. I have tried and failed miserably.)

Yet the Bible clearly tell us, "Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:8). God has done it. Jesus accomplished for us everything we need for eternal life *and* for living lives of love on earth. We just need to believe in Jesus as He really is—full of love for us. God is the source of the love for which our soul so desperately longs. His love completely satisfies the soul and holds it in a position of surrender to the Spirit. The love of God draws us and cradles us in unity with Him.

Earlier in Galatians, Paul put it this way: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live *by faith in the Son of God, who loved me* and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Paul is living life on earth, by faith in Jesus who he knew loved him. Obedience to both parts of the New Covenant—the faith command and the love command—brings life as God designed.

Paul longed for the believers in Galatia to live life as he experienced it. He addresses them, "My little *children*, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). Paul had labored for their salvation. They were born again—*children of God*. But now he was laboring again—in order that Christ might be formed in them. Paul desired that they be remade in the image of Christ—and become *sons/daughters of God*.

But what does it look like to have Jesus formed in us? Is such a life really possible?

Reflection Questions:

- How is Paul's warning in Galatians 3:1–3 relevant to you today?
- Give an example of an evil-looking behavior that is the result of living in the flesh. Give an example of a good-looking behavior that is the result of living in the flesh.
- How is it possible to be born-again, yet still live in the flesh?
- Share some good rules or traditions you might be using to guide your life. In what ways might these be beneficial or detrimental to your life?
- How is a Christian transformed from living life on earth *in the flesh* to living life on earth *in the Spirit*?



Glorified: Radiating God's Love

Many Christians today understand that we are *justified* by Christ alone. A justified person knows that their sins are forgiven and eternal life is theirs. But, far too few of us really understand that we are also *glorified* by Christ alone.

In Romans 8:29–30, Paul tells us, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also *justified*; and whom He *justified*, these He also *glorified*.” God’s intent is to restore us to His original created design for humanity. “God created man in His own image; in the image of God *He* created him” (Genesis 1:27). To conform us to the image of His Son, *He* predestined, *He* called, *He* justified and *He* glorified. The independent soul has no part to play in the process. God does it all!

What does it mean to be glorified? The Greek word for “glory”—*doxa*—does not refer to an outward shining appearance that attracts attention to itself. Rather *doxa* refers to the innate character—the substance within. To give glory to something actually means to recognize the thing for what it is—for its true worth. When we give glory to God, we attribute to Him His true, innate value. When God gives glory to us, He attributes to us all the worth He created us to have in Him.

On Mount Sinai, Moses asked God, “Please, show me Your *glory*.” And God replied, “I will make all My *goodness* pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you” (Exodus 33:18–19). God showed His *glory*—by letting Moses see His *goodness*. God’s glory and God’s goodness (loving nature) are one and the same.

God shares His glory with us by sharing His nature with us. Before He went to the cross, Jesus prayed to the Father for us, “And the *glory* which You gave Me I have given to them ... that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me” (John 17:22–23). We are glorified in relationship with God. A glorified person reflects the image of Christ. Jesus’ nature radiates out of us as we live our lives in one with Him—surrendered to His love.

Something glorious is coming. What God longs to share with us today is much greater than the fading glory He shared with Moses (see 2 Corinthians 3:7–11). Paul spoke of “Christ *in* you, the *hope of glory*” (Colossians 1:27). Christ *in* us is the *hope of glory*. But Christ *in* us is not the actual

glory itself. The manifest glory comes when Christ in us pours out of us to the world—when we radiate God’s love.

When we accept Jesus into our heart, we are saved and God lives *in* our spirit. But He doesn’t just want to live *in* (and bring His life to) our spirit. He wants to have access to the whole of our heart (the spirit and soul together). God doesn’t want to stay locked up *in* our spirit, He wants to bring His life to our soul and body as well.

The world does not see what is inside our spirit; it sees what is inside our soul. When others see us, do they sense our love for them, our peace and joy? Or do they sense our displeasure toward them, our anxiety or depression? When God fills our soul, the world will see Jesus through us. God designed the whole of our earthly temples—spirit, soul and body—to be fully His so that we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

As partakers of His nature, God’s nature flows forth from our souls and we bear much fruit. Jesus said, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.... As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love” (John 15:4–5, 9).

Working hard to clothe ourselves in “good” deeds (like loving others) doesn’t make us right with God. Even the *gifts of the Spirit* won’t make us complete, as God designed. We become right with God simply by abiding in love-relationship. Paul tells us, “The *fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, patience, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Galatians 5:22–23).

Fruit of the Spirit is a natural, outward manifestation of the life God intends. When abiding in Jesus’ love, we come to *act* right because we *are* right on the inside. In love-relationship with God, we actually become the people we have tried so hard and unsuccessfully to become. Fruit of the Spirit grows without effort on a branch grafted to Jesus, the Vine. Obedience comes naturally. Walking in the Spirit—with the soul surrendered to the will of God—comes naturally.

In abiding relationship, our soul ceases its independent work and finds rest under the leading of the Spirit. Hebrews 4:10 tells us, “For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.” We don’t do our own work—generated by the efforts of the independent soul. Rather, God accomplishes His loving work through us; we are His hands and feet. He leads us in the “good works [He] prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

Our only work is to *believe* in Jesus and all that He accomplished on the cross. When the crowds came to Jesus with the question, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus replied, “This is the work of God, that you *believe* in Him whom He sent” (John 6:28–29).

A glorious time is dawning. The Old Testament speaks of three main feasts: Passover,

Pentecost and Tabernacles (see Leviticus 23; Deuteronomy 16). The church has seen the spiritual fulfillment of Passover and Pentecost. But we have not yet experienced the spiritual fulfillment of Tabernacles—the last and greatest of the three feasts.

In the Old Testament, the Feast of Tabernacles was known as the feast of *glory*, the feast of the *fruit* harvest and the feast of *rest*. It was on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles that Jesus stood and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37–38). In the complete spiritual fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles, rivers of living water will flow from our hearts. We will be spirit-soul-body channels through which His life-giving waters flow.

The writers of the New Testament knew that something surpassing the greatness of their time was coming. John wrote, “Beloved, now we are *children of God*; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). At this time, God is revealing Himself to us as He really is—as the God of love! And we shall be like Him!

Paul said, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the *sons of God*” (Romans 8:18–19). Creation eagerly awaits. God’s glory—His goodness and nature of love—will be revealed through us as sons and daughters of God. We will radiate God’s love!

Now is the time for transformation.

Reflection Questions:

- Which one or two ideas from this chapter stand out to you?
- Based on what you have read in this chapter, how does God share His glory with the world? How might you allow God to more fully share His glory with you and through you?
- Reread Jesus’ prayer in John 17:22–23 (as quoted in this chapter). What do these verses mean to you personally?
- How do we bear fruit and become the people God created us to be?
- What does it mean to you to “abide in Christ”? How does abiding in Christ affect your relationship with others?



Transformation Awaits!

Up until that August day at Edna’s in 2004, I’d stayed busy, living my version of a “good” Christian life by trying to love God and others. I’d lived this way because deep down in my soul, I thought I had to earn God’s love by doing “good” things. I thought I didn’t deserve God’s love and therefore needed to work for it. That lie went so deep that I interpreted all of Scripture through its distorted lens, so that even God’s Word, meant to bring freedom, held me in bondage.

That lie expressed itself in the life I lived; I raised our four children in bondage to it. Because I didn’t understand God’s love for me, I couldn’t share His love with them. They grew up going to church but not knowing the unconditional love from parents—which helps build a foundation for receiving God’s unconditional love.

It has taken time, but now I am coming to better understand and accept Jesus’ incredible, unfailing love. As the trials and sins in my shattered life pushed me to Jesus, I began just spending time again with Him—like I had when I was 16. And He began healing me from the inside out.

Initially, when I felt Jesus saying, “Mary, I love you,” I would respond with something like, “But I messed up ...” Then I would tell Him what I hadn’t done that I should have or what I should have done but hadn’t. “But,” “but,” “but ...” In my mind, hundreds of things I had done wrong in the past, was doing wrong now or might do wrong in the future excluded me from His love. I wouldn’t accept His love because I didn’t feel deserving of it. Each “but” was like a brick in the wall that sealed me off from receiving Jesus’ love.

Jesus didn’t give up on me though. He continued dismantling the wall brick by brick. For every “but,” He had a response. “Mary, don’t listen to the lies.” “There is no condemnation for those who are in Me.” “I love you.”

Over time, as I grew to understand more of His love for me, I was able to come to Him with greater and greater boldness. Knowing His love for me freed me to open hidden places in my soul, which previously I had not even known existed. Psalm 139:23–24 became my daily prayer. “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

And always His response brought life and healing. “Mary, it isn’t about ‘good’ and ‘evil’ as you see it. You can’t be ‘good enough’ to earn My love, and I’ll never withhold it from you because you are ‘bad.’ The battle isn’t between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ as you see them, it is between life and death as I see them. I want life for you—because I love you.

“Mary, My dear one. Stop struggling and trying to figure it out. Only believe. Breathe in My love as you breathe in the cool, crisp air. Don’t fight it. It’s all around you. Just rest ... and breathe ... and live.”

Today His love continues to wash my soul of hurts, anxieties and guilt by removing the wrong thinking to which they cling. The very framework of my life is coming into alignment with Him. My mind is being transformed—my soul renewed—as I let the love of God embrace me. This is so exciting! In life now, I am actually coming to love others with God’s love!

God loves you with an infinite, sacrificing love! Nothing, absolutely nothing, can stop Him from loving you! And you can love others with the same love He lavishes on you! Incredible promises await!

God doesn’t love us because we are good, He makes us good because He loves us. His love makes us good—as He created us to be. God made our hearts with holes that can only be filled with His love. In His design, like a pair of magnets, Spirit and soul are drawn and locked together in the life-giving love of God. Our souls long to understand the words, “I love you.” Knowing the truth of these words brings transformation.

In Romans 12:2 Paul tells us, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind [soul], that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” The word “transformed” is from the Greek word *metamorphoo*. Through the process of *metamorphosis*, a lowly, crawling caterpillar is transformed into a beautiful, flying butterfly. And so we also are meant to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (souls). Such transformation will allow us to manifest God’s perfect, loving will.

Our soul—our mind, will and emotions—was designed to know and experience God’s love. God created us to be led by the Spirit—with our souls in willing surrender to the love of God.

When led by the Spirit, the soul rests from its works. In that rest of abiding love, we become our true selves. We become God’s channels to the world. We bear His image. We express His nature. We radiate His glory. We express God’s heavenly, spiritual love by loving others in earthly, physical ways—just as Jesus did.

Jesus taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come, Your *will* be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). God’s *will* comes to earth when we let it find a resting place in our mind, *will* and emotions—in our soul. We rule on earth, as Adam was created to, by letting God in our spirit be Master of our soul. God’s *will*—His glory and nature of love—comes to this world through us.

And as He shares His loving nature with us, His glory will be over all the earth. Isaiah 60:1–3 encourages us. “Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth. And deep darkness the people; but the LORD will arise over you. And His glory will be seen upon you.”

Satan opposes us in horrible ways to try and shake us from believing in and experiencing

God's complete love for us. We do not see the vastness of God's love promises. We have not embraced the truth that "love [really] is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). To step out of the box of our incomplete Christian belief system requires a foundational shift in how we think of God. It requires that veils be stripped from our eyes so that we see God as He really is.

During the time of the Reformation 500 years ago, Martin Luther battled similar unbelief as he fought his way out of the mixed-up, partial belief system of the medieval Catholic Church. With resolute faith, he stood firm on God's Word that everlasting life is a free gift to those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. That truth is clear to us today because those in Luther's time blazed a trail.

Now is the time for *transformation*. At this time in history, God is raising up a people to make clear the way of love and right living on earth. We hold up God's Word, stand firm in faith and live a life of loving others. We live in obedience to Jesus' New Covenant command, "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). We become living proof of His transforming love. Multitudes will follow when we, as fishers of men, cast our nets on the other side (see John 21:6) and fish for souls in this new way.

In God's love, victory is assured. "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). Nothing can hold us back because nothing can separate us from His love that makes it all possible. "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38–39).

Onward, Forever Loved!

Reflection Questions:

- Romans 12:2 encourages us to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." What truths is God using to change the way you think and transform your life from the inside out?
- How does God plan for His will to be done on earth? How do you see yourself being used by God to accomplish His will on earth?
- Are there promises from God's Word that you are having a particularly hard time accepting? If so, can you identify what is preventing you from embracing these truths?
- Get alone in a quiet place and reflect on God's love for you. Let Jesus show you something of how much He loves you. Record your experience.
- Imagine the earth being filled with the glory of God as His glory radiates out of you. Imagine His will coming to earth and expressing itself out through you. Imagine loving others as Jesus first loved you. Record something significant from this time.

