



Reasons
Why
God
is
NOT
Mad at YOU.

*If you have ever felt hopeless, condemned or not good enough...
If you have ever given up, walked away or been fed up...
Come read this message. It WILL change your life forever!*

Mike Harding

Top Ten Reasons Why God Is Not Mad at You

by
Mike Harding

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
Chapter One: The Devil Is a Liar	5
Chapter Two: God Is Good and He Loves You	8
Chapter Three: The Law Leads You to the Cross	10
Chapter Four: God Understands Your Weaknesses	17
Chapter Five: Jesus Reconciled You through the Cross – part 1	19
Chapter Six: You Are Highly Valued	21
Chapter Seven: You Are God’s Happy Thought	25
Chapter Eight: God Is Committed to You	27
Chapter Nine: You Are Now Part of Jesus	32
Chapter Ten: Jesus Reconciled You through the Cross – part 2.....	34
Prayer for the Making of a Masterpiece	36

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever struggled with the idea that God is mad at you? Have you entertained the discouraging thought that He's disappointed with you, disapproving of you, or unhappy with you in some way? If you've ever had any of those thoughts or feelings, I want you to know, first of all, that you are not alone. A lot of people have these thoughts and feelings, sometimes on a regular basis. It's no surprise that these ideas can be debilitating to your perception of yourself and of God. Having the feeling that God is angry with you, or disappointed, can affect your relationship with Him, with others, and your ability to effectively function as a child of God.

I want to share with you an important message in this book: God isn't mad at you. He's not disappointed in you, or angry with you, or unhappy about you. I'm going to tell you why He isn't mad. In fact, I have *ten* reasons why God's not mad, and I'm happy to share these reasons with you. Knowing the truth can be the difference between bondage and freedom. The Bible says, "*The truth will set you free.*" (John 8:32)

This booklet is a transcript of a two-part message that I gave in my home church. My prayer is that this book will bring you the freedom to know God as He truly is and that you will be empowered to live in the confidence and assurance of His love for you.

CHAPTER ONE: THE DEVIL IS A LIAR

This might sound like an odd reason to start with, but I'm going to start here because it's important for you to understand that the devil has a particular plan. Satan wants to alienate you from God, and he has a strategy to do it. The first reason that you can know that God isn't mad at you is because the devil is a liar. His strategies are his lies, his deception. He's called "the father of lies" for a good reason.

Have you ever known somebody who had the sad "ability" to break up good friends and to destroy friendships? They're sometimes called busybodies. They're the kind of people that will go to someone else and say, "Do you know what so-and-so said about you?"

Then they'll go to somebody else and whisper, "You know that he said such-and-such about you?"

If that happens a couple of times, guess what? Even really good friends can find their friendship stretched, if not completely broken. That busybody can plant a little seed of doubt, suspicion or rejection, and can totally poison and divide a relationship just by that kind of whispering – telling lies and spreading deception.

That's exactly what the devil is doing to break up the relationship between you and God. That is his strategy, and it is sadly a very effective one.

Satan Accuses God before Us

Picture Adam and Eve in the beginning, right after God created them. They are in the Garden of Eden. They have a beautiful relationship with God. In fact, they walk together with Him in the cool of the day, every single day. Imagine such a wonderful and close relationship with the God of the universe.

Now, God gave them only one rule. He said: *"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)

Satan comes into the picture. He's a rebel angel, originally called Lucifer, now called Satan – which means the enemy. His goal is to break up this beautiful relationship.

Why?

He's jealous. This rebel angel is jealous of Adam and Eve's relationship with God, of their *position* with God, and of the *destiny* that God has for them.

He comes in the form of a serpent, or speaks through a serpent.

Look at Genesis chapter three, verse one: *Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"* That is the beginning of his deception.

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'" (Genesis 3:2-3)

God put the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, and he also put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil there. He put it right in the middle of the garden, and He told them, "Any tree you can eat from except that one. If you eat from that one tree, you will die."

Like many things in the Bible, those two trees are symbolic. They foreshadow the two ways that we can approach God – two ways that we can try to have a relationship with Him.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents the Old Covenant – the Covenant of Law – the Ten Commandments and all the other commandments and laws given to Moses. The tree of the knowledge of

good and evil says, “This is what’s right. This is what’s wrong. You choose. You perform. You’re responsible. See how you do. See how you measure up. Stand before God on your own merit.”

There’s another tree in the garden, which is called the tree of life. That tree represents the New Covenant and Jesus. God said to Adam and Eve, “From this tree you can eat ...”

How?

Freely.

“Freely eat from this tree.” Take of the presence of Jesus. Take of His grace. Take of His love. Take of His salvation. Eat freely. Live forever!

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents the Old Covenant, which is you standing on your own merits, standing on your own performance before God. It represents your personal decision that something is right, that something else is wrong, and that if you do what is right, you’ll meet God’s standard.

Right there in the beginning though, God said, “That doesn’t work. It brings death. Don’t eat from that tree.”

Again, those two things are a foreshadowing.

God didn’t just randomly put a tree there to see if they would disobey. There was a meaning to this tree. It represents the Old Covenant...and the Old Covenant doesn’t save anybody.

The serpent is testing Eve, planting a little doubt by asking, “Has God said...?”

Eve answered, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” I think she was exaggerating a bit there. God never said they couldn’t touch it. Maybe she had already been thinking about it a bit or wondering about it.

The serpent started with his deception by saying, paraphrased, “God is lying to you. He’s trying to keep something good from you. He’s trying to keep you in the dark. He’s trying to pull the wool over your eyes. You won’t really die.”

The serpent goes on to say in verse five, “*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.*” The seed of suspicion and doubt was planted in Eve. It was the thought that, “Yeah, maybe God *is* trying to keep something from me!”

In the very beginning, Satan is accusing God before Adam and Eve. He is accusing the character of God, the trustworthiness of God, the motives of God, the heart of God – bringing in that accusation, which ultimately results in division.

He planted that seed, and it worked.

Satan Accuses Us before God

Interestingly, if we skip to the very end of the Bible, in Revelation chapter twelve, we see the same devil, the great liar, doing his thing. He’s doing the exact same thing – spreading deception.

This is after Jesus has won the victory. The kingdom of God has fully come, and Satan has been cast down. It says, “Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.’” (Revelation 12:10)

Here in this verse, Satan is called the accuser of the brethren, the accuser of God’s people. It says that he accused us before God. If you put this together with Genesis, we see that Satan goes to Adam and Eve, and

he accuses *God* to Adam and Eve. Then, in Revelation, we see that he goes over to God, and he accuses *us* before God.

He's playing both sides, just like a busybody, a talebearer, a gossip.

What's he trying to do? He is jealous of your destiny in God. He's jealous of your calling before God. He's jealous of the position that God gave you and the relationship that God wants to have with you.

He wants to destroy it. And he does it through lies.

Truth Makes You Free

Jesus said: *"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32) Satan can't pull his tricks on you when you know the truth. Truth will set you free!

God wants you to know that He is not angry at you. He is not disappointed in you. He is not disapproving of you. He loves you. He wants to have an amazing relationship with you. He *loves* you. He's not angry. If you have felt that God was angry at you, disapproving of you, not accepting of you, I hope you realize now that somebody was lying to you.

You know who it was. And you don't have to listen to him any longer. You know the truth, and the truth has the power to set you free.

CHAPTER TWO: GOD IS GOOD AND HE LOVES YOU

A huge question that a lot of people have is: “Is God fundamentally an angry God, or is God fundamentally a loving God?”

God’s nature – His core, who He is, His essence – is fundamentally loving. He is a loving God.

That question is a legitimate one because there have been famous sermons preached with titles such as, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” A lot of people ran to the altar to receive salvation after messages like that, I’m sure. “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” was, in fact, a famous sermon, written and preached by Jonathan Edwards, a Christian theologian back in the 1700s. You might have even heard of it. The “angry God” sermon was very effective in that many people were saved. But does the “angry God” idea truly represent God’s heart and nature?

Again, the question is asked: “Is God fundamentally angry, or is He fundamentally loving?” Fundamentally, He is a loving God.

Now, does God *get* angry? Yes! God gets angry at injustice. He gets angry at sin. He gets angry at wickedness. He gets angry at immorality. He gets angry at abuse.

Why? He is a loving God ... and He is a *holy* God.

I can show you quite a few verses in the Bible that show us that God does indeed get angry at sin, injustice, and immorality. He gets angry when people are being hurt and abused. But God’s anger at injustice and sin is the proof that He is fundamentally a loving God. It is proof that He loves every single person with an eternal love.

John clues us in on the true nature of God by saying, “*He who does not love does not know God, for...*”, here’s the key: “*God is love.*” (1 John 4:8) This verse tells us clearly of God’s essence and His nature and the core of who He is: *God is love*.

Parents understand this concept. If you are a parent, if you have raised kids, you love your kids. Do you ever get angry? Yes. Do you still love them? Of course! Is your anger motivated by love or just by your own selfish frustrations? Hopefully, if you get angry at them, it is an anger motivated by love. If your kids are playing in the traffic, you’ll get angry, right? “Get out of the street this instant!” Why are you angry? It’s because you don’t want your children to get hurt!

God gets angry at injustice. He gets angry at sin. He gets angry at abuse. He gets angry at immorality. He gets angry about all these things. Why? The bottom line is that sin hurts people. Every single person on earth is created in God’s image. He values us. He loves us. He has a high destiny and calling for us. We have a high value. Sin always hurts people. Somehow or another, where there’s sin, somebody is getting hurt. Somebody is getting debased, abused, taken advantage of, robbed, devalued, or degraded. Sin always hurts people. And God hates sin for that very reason. Does He get angry? Absolutely. But His anger is always motivated by love. His fundamental nature is love.

Love is God’s basic nature. God’s first reaction to anything will be love, compassion, and mercy. It’s who He is. When you know His heart, you can trust that. The flip side of that is if you *don’t* know God’s heart it will be easy for the devil to lie to you and tell you that God is mad at you, disapproving of you, distant from you, or angry at you. But if you know God’s heart, you can trust that He is a God of love. That is His basic essence and His core nature.

Pretty much everybody knows John 3:16: *“For God so...”* It doesn’t say, “God was so angry at the world that he came to chew everybody out.” It says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

The verse doesn’t say, “If you join the right church, if you join the right religion, if you perform the right ceremonies.”

It simply says, “If you believe in Jesus.” Call on the name of Jesus. Believe in God’s Son. He came to save us because God loves us.

Like the Waters of Noah: The Covenant of Peace

If you are familiar with Isaiah 53, you will recognize that it’s a chapter that describes in amazing detail what happened to Jesus on the cross – His sufferings on the cross and why He did it. It tells us that Jesus has redeemed us through His death on the cross; through it, He took upon Himself our sickness, our sin, and our disease. It is phenomenal in that it describes Jesus on the cross in an amazing and descriptive manner. Why is this amazing? Because Isaiah prophesied and wrote this some 700 years before Jesus actually came and did all this.

After this prophecy in Isaiah 53, it transitions into Isaiah 54, which talks about the New Covenant. It outlines what happens because Jesus died for us and rose from the dead. It describes this New Covenant. Isaiah 54:9, based on the finished work of Jesus, is written in the context of the New Covenant. It says, *“For this is like the waters of Noah to Me.”* What does that mean?

Do you remember the story of Noah? It occurred way back in Genesis chapters six and seven. The human race had become completely corrupt and horribly wicked so quickly after He had created it. Because of Noah’s faith and obedience, God saved Noah and his family when He flooded the rest of the earth with water. After the flood was over, the waters slowly receded, and finally, Noah and his family got off the ark. They were ready to begin again.

Then God made a covenant with Noah. He put a rainbow in the sky and said, “Here’s the deal, Noah. See that rainbow? That rainbow is going to be a symbol. I’m not going to flood the earth again. I promise. When you see the rainbow, you can know I will never do that again.”

So when Isaiah 54:9 says, *“This is like the waters of Noah to Me,”* what is it talking about? This verse is referring to the New Covenant, to the finished work of Christ.

The verse goes on to say, *“For as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be angry with you nor rebuke you.”* This message is based on what Jesus has done. Through what Jesus did on the cross, God has sworn that He will never be angry with us again.

“For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness will not depart from you, nor shall my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD who has mercy on you. (Isaiah 54:10)

Because of what Jesus did for us, God says, “It’s a new covenant, and it’s called the covenant of peace. That covenant of peace is permanent and everlasting. I’ll never break it. Because of what Jesus did for you, I will never be angry at you.”

Will God still correct us? Yeah, sure. He receives us as His children, and He becomes our Father. Of course He’ll correct us! But He says, “I will never *reject* you. I will not remove my covenant of peace from you.” If the devil is trying to tell you that God is mad at you, he is lying because God said right there in the Bible, “I have sworn that I would not be angry with you, nor rebuke you.”

God’s core, His very essence, is love. Love is what He has for you today and always.

CHAPTER THREE: THE LAW LEADS YOU TO THE CROSS

When you read through the Old Testament, you see that after God gave the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel and gave them all the other laws, Israel broke the laws and the Commandments of God over and over again. That's the story over and over and over. They just didn't keep those laws. They kept breaking them.

And when they broke the laws, God got mad.

So if you read through that, you get the idea that, "Hey, I break God's rules too. God must be really mad at me. I mess up. I fail. God got mad at the Israelites for messing up, for not keeping His laws, so God must be mad at me too. He's probably always mad at me."

Here's the deal. God's laws – the Ten Commandments and all the other laws – really had one major purpose. That major purpose was to bring you to the cross...to help you recognize your need for a Savior.

The laws can't save you. The laws are all about, "Thou shalt not...Thou shalt not...Thou shalt not..." None of those things empower you to actually live the way that God commanded. None of those things actually help you if you fail. They are simply instructions that as much as hang you. They are rules that convict you, pronounce you guilty, and hang you all at the same time.

Their primary purpose is to help mankind recognize, "I can't keep these rules. I can't do this myself. I have a sin problem. I need a Savior. I need forgiveness. I need salvation. I need mercy."

If the law of God accomplishes its purpose, it will bring us to Jesus. The law brings us to the cross. The third reason that you can know God isn't mad at you is because God's laws were only meant to bring you to the cross.

A Lawyer Tests Jesus

This concept is found in the Bible. There's a story in Luke 10:25-37 where a man came to Jesus and asked Him some questions: *And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'* (Luke 10:25)

First of all, it just said that the lawyer was testing him. This wasn't a lawyer like we understand lawyers. This man was an expert in the law of Moses. That's what it meant by "lawyer" – an expert in the Jewish law. He's testing Jesus. He's putting Jesus to the test a little bit. *"What do I do to inherit eternal life?"* Is it a sincere question? No. This man thinks he can trick Jesus and expose Him in some way as a fake or a fraud.

Jesus answered by saying to him, *"What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?"*

Is the law really the answer? No, and Jesus knows that. So why didn't Jesus just say, "Believe in me. I'm going to pay for your sins on the cross. I'm going to rise from the dead. I'm the Messiah. Call on my name and you will be saved"?

Jesus doesn't say all that because the purpose of the law was to help that man recognize that he needed a Savior. Sadly, that man was not in that place yet. In fact, he was basically saying, "I am an expert of the law. I keep the law. I'm good. I don't need a Savior."

Jesus was in essence replying, "Okay, if that's how you think it is, let's go with that." Jesus asked the man, "What does the law say?"

So he answered and said, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.' (Luke 10:27)

Stop there for a second, and think about those laws.

Those are the two greatest commandments from the Old Covenant. First of all: love the LORD your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with and all of your strength, and with all of your mind – with every thought, every motive, every emotion, every intention, every word, and every action. This is perfect holiness, perfect righteousness, and perfect love.

Has anybody passed the test yet? Of course not. And why not? The fallen state of the human race has made it so that we are incapable by nature, by corruption, and by the disease of sin, to fully conform to that law. Fallen man is incapable of loving God with all his heart. We can't do it. Our fallen human nature betrays us.

The Bible actually says that, outside of Christ, we were enemies of God. (Romans 5:10) Something in our human, or earthly, nature actually opposes God and is hostile towards God. (Romans 8:5-8) This greatest of God's laws wasn't meant to *save* us. It was meant to *expose* us.

It was meant to bring us to the cross, to bring us to place of saying, "I need a Savior."

The next law, which was "like unto it", is to love your neighbor as yourself. With every thought, every motive, and every action, we are meant to express perfect love towards everyone around us.

Has anybody passed that test? Again, the answer is no because this law wasn't meant to *save* us; it was meant to *expose* us, to bring us to the cross of Jesus and show us our need for His salvation.

That is what Jesus was trying to do with this man, this "expert" in God's law. He was trying to bring him to the point of saying, "I need a Savior."

And Jesus said to him, "*You have answered rightly; do this and you will live.*"

Is that really the right answer? Well, under the law, it is the right answer! Follow the law perfectly, and you will live. What Jesus was really hoping for was that the man would say, "Wow! I don't think I'm following the law perfectly. I don't think I really love God with every thought and every motive of my heart. I need a Savior."

But the man didn't say that. I think that the Spirit of truth was convicting this man, but sadly, he wanted to get out from under that conviction. He wanted to find an escape.

So the man, *wanting to justify himself*, said to Jesus, "*And who is my neighbor?*" This man instantly recognized in his heart, "I don't love everybody. I don't love my neighbor like myself. I know that I don't."

The problem is, instead of saying, "Jesus, I just recognized that I need a Savior. I just recognized that I don't love everybody," he asked, "And who is my neighbor?" He was as much as saying, "You know, I love the good people...but I'm not going to love the scummy people. I'm not going to love the lower people, the dirty people, those who aren't righteous and religious like me."

There's no way of knowing exactly what he was thinking, but in his mind, he apparently had people nicely placed into separate categories. There were the people whom he would love and those whom he wouldn't. He might have been trying to gain support for his hypocritical stance by asking, "Who *is* my neighbor? Who do I have to love really? Because certainly I don't have to love everybody, right?"

Jesus is not on the same wavelength though. In all this, Jesus is trying to bring him to the ultimate purpose of the law, to the place where he would finally say, "I need a Savior."

The Good Samaritan

Jesus answers by telling a story in verses 30-37. Pretty much everybody has heard the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The point of the story is that *everybody* is your neighbor. Love everybody. You can't just pick and choose.

But the story has a lot more to it. The story of the Good Samaritan is really a symbolic or prophetic picture of the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It is the story of Adam and Eve. It's the story of Jesus. It's our story as well.

The story goes like this: *Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead."*

"A certain man went down..." The man represents Adam – Adam and Eve really, but let's say that it's Adam. Adam *"went down."* Which direction did he go? He *fell*. He went *down* from Jerusalem to Jericho – the fall of man – and he fell among thieves.

Who is the thief? Satan. He comes to steal and kill and destroy. (John 10:10)

Jesus said, "He fell among thieves who stripped him of his clothing."

What does that represent? God clothed us with His nature and His righteousness. When Adam fell, the clothing of righteousness was stripped away from him.

They wounded him and departed, leaving him "half dead."

Half dead. You'll remember that God said to Adam and Eve, "If you eat from that tree, on the day you eat of it you'll die."

When Adam and Eve ate from the tree, did they die physically that day? No. Did they die spiritually that day? Yes, absolutely. Adam and Eve were half dead: spiritually dead, but physically alive.

"Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side." (verse 31) The priest actually crossed the road to get away from the wounded man.

"And likewise, a Levite when he arrived at the place, he came and looked, and he passed by on the other side." (verse 32) What did the priest and the Levite represent? They represented the law: the laws of Moses' time, the Ten Commandments, the Old Covenant, the entire system of the Old Covenant.

When the Law sees Adam and his family – that's us – lying on the road, stripped of our righteousness, half dead, wounded, beaten by Satan, robbed of our destiny and our purpose and our relationship with God, the Law crosses the road to get away from us. The Law says, "I can't help you." The Law tells us what the requirements are but does not give us the ability to follow them. We are obviously not able to obey all of them with our own ability.

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where the man was. And when he saw him, he had compassion." (verse 33) What was the deal with Samaritans in those days? The Samaritans were half Jewish, half Gentile. It's a long story. I'm not going to go into it now. But basically, every society has its prejudices and its bigotry, doesn't it? It doesn't matter where you go; you'll find it because it's human nature. So, in the culture and society of Jesus' day, the Jews considered the Samaritans to be on the same level as dogs. They weren't pure. They didn't follow the laws. And so, they were the dogs. In the story, however, Jesus is going to use the Samaritan as the hero.

First of all, that's an affront to the man to whom Jesus is telling the story. Remember, this man is an expert in the law and he's basing his righteousness on the commandments and laws of God. To him, using a Samaritan as the hero of the story is offensive.

Symbolically, the beginning of the story represents the fall of Adam, the end of the story represents redemption, and the Samaritan represents Jesus. Jesus uses the Samaritan as a symbol of Himself.

Jesus goes on to say, *"The Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was."* What does that mean? He came where the man was. He didn't cross the street to get *away* from him. He crossed the street to get *to* him.

Jesus came out of Heaven to come to where we were fallen, wounded, and beaten. He came to save us. He didn't say, "Try harder. See if you can make it up here." He said, "I'll come down to you. I'll help you."

When the Samaritan saw him, did he get angry at him? Did he say, "Oh, you stupid man. Look at the condition you got yourself into"?

No, he didn't do that. Jesus says, "When he saw him, he had compassion." When Jesus sees us in our mess, in our wounded state, in our sin, and in whatever condition we might have gotten ourselves into, He has compassion.

Verse 34 states, *"So he went to him and bandaged his wounds...."*

When Jesus began his ministry, He quoted from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me. He's anointed Me to heal the brokenhearted." (Isaiah 61:1) Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted, to bandage the wounds, pouring on oil and wine. The oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit and the new birth. The wine is a symbol of the blood of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins.

The story goes on to say, *"...and he set him on his own animal, brought him into an inn and took care of him."* (verse 34) The inn is a symbol or picture of the church, the body of Christ, where Jesus brings people to be taken care of and healed.

Here is verse 35: *On the next day, when he departed he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said to him, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you."*

In that culture, at that time, a denarius was one day's wage. The man says, "I'm going to go away. I'll pay for two days in advance." That's prophetic because back in Psalm 90, it says, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day." The apostle Peter quotes it also, "With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, a thousand years is like a day." (2 Peter 3:8)

The Samaritan, representing Jesus, paid in advance for two days. He said, "I'm going to go on a trip, but I'll come back." Jesus went back to Heaven after the cross and the resurrection. He's been gone about two thousand years.

He said, "If I have to delay a little bit longer, I'll repay you. I'll cover the cost. I'm paying for two days but it might take a little longer." Why might it take a little longer?

Jesus said, "Preach the gospel to all the world, and then I'll come back." When we finish our job, He will come back. (Acts 1:8-11)

Finally, Jesus asked the man, *"So which of these three do you think was the neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?"* (verse 36)

The story ends in verse 37: *And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

Of course, in this story, Jesus is also giving the man a lesson in mercy and compassion and trying to help him understand the concept of who your neighbor is. The man probably had no clue that he got a lot more than he asked for. He had just been given the entire picture of the Bible, Genesis to Revelation – including the redemption story. But this man, this lawyer, totally missed it because he was trusting in his own righteousness through the law.

Let's sum it up. Let's paraphrase: how did Jesus talk to the lawyer? Jesus asked him, "What does the law say?"

The lawyer's answer: "Love God. Love your neighbor."

So Jesus asked him, "Are you doing it?"

His answer, basically, was, "Yes, I am doing it."

Jesus as much as replies, "All right, if you say so. Good luck with that. If you ever decide you need a Savior, we'll talk again."

The Samaritan Woman

Let's take a rabbit trail. Let's look at a story in John's gospel, chapter four, when Jesus talked to a Samaritan woman. He asked her for drink of water. If you read that story, you'll notice that Jesus didn't talk to the woman about the law or the Ten Commandments at all. What did He say to her? He said, *"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."* (John 4:10)

A little later in their conversation, she says, *"I know that Messiah is coming."* (verse 25)

Jesus said, *"I who speak to you am He."* (verse 26) He was saying, "I am here. If you ask Me, I'll give you living water."

He didn't talk to her about the Ten Commandments. He didn't talk to her about laws, about religion, or about anything else that God might require of her. He just said, "Ask me. I'll give you life." This woman had some issues too. She had sin issues. She had relationship issues. Jesus said to her, *"You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."* (verses 17-18) Jesus knew what her issues were, and so did she. She knew she needed a Savior. That was why He didn't have to talk to her about the law and the commandments. She already knew she needed a Savior.

Jesus simply said to her, "Ask me. I'll give you life." And she went and told the whole village and brought everybody back to Jesus. Revival broke out.

Why did Jesus deal with these two people so very differently? Why didn't Jesus tell the lawyer that He was the Messiah? Why didn't He offer the lawyer the free gift of life that He offered the Samaritan woman? Because the lawyer was basing his righteousness on his own performance of the law.

Jesus basically said to him, "Okay, let me know when you think you need a Savior."

The Rich Man

You'll find a similar story in Mark 10:17-22. It's a different story and Jesus is talking to a different man, but it's similar: *Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"*

It's a great question...if he's sincere.

So Jesus said to him, *"Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God."*

This is pretty interesting. Is Jesus denying that He is good? Or is He denying that He is God? No, of course not. Jesus is God. He's the second person of the Trinity; He became a man like us. He joined the human race to save us, to love us, and to make us His own, but His true identity is one with God.

He is God, *and* He is good, but here He asks, "Why do you call me good? What is your motive? What is your understanding of who I am?"

There are two possible reasons that this man came up to Jesus saying, "Good teacher." The first possible reason was that he recognized that Jesus is God, that He really was the Messiah. If he was sincere, that's good.

But the second possible reason is that he was just trying to "butter up" Jesus. It was flattery. If his statement was nothing more than flattery, that wasn't so good.

The man then asked, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Notice the question: what shall I do? What are the requirements that I must fulfill? What are the works that I must do? What is the standard that I must uphold? The key words are "I" and "do". His question assumes self-effort and performance.

To the woman at the well, Jesus said, "I am the Messiah. Just ask Me, and I'll give you eternal life."

But here is another man who is trying to justify himself by keeping the law. He sees Jesus only as a teacher, an instructor. To this man, who is basing himself on the Ten Commandments and on the law, Jesus says, *"You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'"*

All those things are meant to bring us to the cross, to bring us to the point where we recognize our desperate need for a Savior.

The problem with a lot of the people in that culture is that they had gotten very, very religious and very self-righteous. They all pretty much said, "Yeah, we're doing that. We're keeping the rules."

Jesus said some amazing things that were really challenging. He said things like, "It is written you that shall not commit murder. You shall not kill. But I say to you that if you even hate someone in your heart, you're committing murder. If you even stay angry at somebody, you're committing murder. It's written in the law that you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that if you even look on somebody that you're not married to, to lust after them, you're committing adultery in your heart." (Matthew 5:21, 22, 27, 28)

What Jesus was trying to express was, "You may think you're following the Law of Moses, but the laws were meant to expose your need for a Savior, to expose the sin disease so that you would finally admit that you need a Savior."

Have you ever lusted after somebody? Do you hate somebody? Do you stay angry at people sometimes? It's all the same disease. It's called sin.

Do you need a Savior or are you okay? I think we all know the answer.

That's what Jesus was trying to get this man to see when He asked, "What does the law say?"

And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." (verse 20)

His response is, "I'm following all the rules. I think I'm doing good."

Then why did he ask the question? I suspect actually that he knew in his heart that he wasn't really right with God; he knew that something was missing. But he was trying to reassure himself of his claim to righteousness through the law: *"All these things I have kept from my youth."*

Was his statement true?

No, of course not. *"For all have sinned..."* (Romans 3:23) Jesus knows that. But the man doesn't really know it.

Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me." (verse 21)

This man actually got a call from Jesus to become one of His disciples. He could have become one of the apostles! It was an amazing opportunity.

But Jesus also said, "Take up the cross." That was how Romans executed criminals. Those listening might have wondered what He was talking about. Later on, it would make sense. At that time, it didn't really have so much meaning.

So Jesus said, "Sell whatever you have been given. Give it away to the poor, and then come and follow Me."

Does Jesus require everyone that follows Him to sell everything they have and give it all away? No, He doesn't. Why did He require it of this man at this moment? Jesus knew that this man's idol – his god – was his money. His security was his money.

What's the first commandment? "You shall have no other gods before me." The man had already broken that commandment because he was trusting in his money.

Jesus saw that. He knew that and exposed it to him: "Really? You're sure you're keeping all the commandments? You're sure you don't need a Savior? You're sure you're doing okay?"

"I'm fine."

"How about the money issue?" Jesus loved the man, and was trying to help him see that he wasn't keeping the law like he thought he was, that he needed a Savior.

Verse 22 states, *"But the man was sad at this word, and he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions."* He went away conflicted, maybe convicted, maybe sad. But he did not admit that he needed a Savior.

Paul writes, *"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."* (Romans 3:19-20)

The only One who ever kept God's Law perfectly was Jesus. Why? Because it was in His nature to do so. Jesus is God in the flesh.

Here is the key of that verse: *"For by the law is the knowledge of sin."* By the law is the awareness of sin, the awareness of the fallen condition and the need for Savior.

The law was to help us realize, "I need a Savior."

Paul also says, *"Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith."* (Galatians 3:24)

The whole purpose of the law was to bring us to the point of saying, "I need a Savior."

Is God mad at you? No.

When you have broken His rules, broken His laws, failed Him in some way, fallen short in some way, is God mad at you? No.

In each of these cases, Jesus looked at these people, loved them, and had compassion for them. He said, "I'm just trying to make you aware that you need a Savior."

And then under the New Covenant, if we believe in what Jesus did for us and trust in what Jesus did for us, God says, "You are forgiven. You are saved. You are now My child. I will never be mad at you again. I will never remove My covenant of peace from you."

CHAPTER FOUR: GOD UNDERSTANDS YOUR WEAKNESSES

God understands what it means to be human. How? It says in the book of Hebrews that through Jesus, God became a man. It also says that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are tempted. He experienced human nature. (Hebrews 2:14-18 and 4:15) He wasn't a sinner, but He experienced the flesh, the temptation, the battles, the struggles, the emotions, and the conflicts that we humans go through. He experienced all of this, and the Bible says that He has compassion for us.

He knows. And God knows what the fall did to mankind.

The Effects of the Fall

In Romans 7:15-25, Paul is describing the struggles of humanity that exist until we find our solution in Jesus: *"For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do."*

Have you ever done something you actually hated, and the moment you did it, you hated it, and you even hated yourself?

What is it that causes us to do that? Paul is saying that it's the sin disease.

"If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good." (verse 16)

God's laws are good, but they don't help you change. God's laws are all perfectly good, but they don't save you.

"But now, it is no longer I who do it but sin that dwells in me." (verse 17) In other words, if I didn't have the disease of sin in me, I wouldn't be having that struggle. But the disease of sin from the very beginning puts that sin nature in me. That's when I do what I hate, and I know it's wrong, but I still do it.

God understands what man struggles with. He understands what the disease of sin has done to us, what separation from God has done to us. He knows what we struggle with. He's not mad at you. He wants to save you and help you even when you're born again; even after you have Christ in your heart.

When you accept Jesus and the Spirit of God enters your heart, your nature is changed. You're born again and you're different on the inside. Your nature is love and righteousness and goodness. It's changed; it's really different.

But we all understand that even after we're born again, we still struggle with a lot of these things. We all have some of those thoughts, those emotions, those pulls, those old appetites. We struggle with stuff, don't we? We're still capable of sin. Our natures have changed. Our heart has changed. But we still struggle.

God understands. He's not mad at you. He understands, and He loves you anyway.

He loves you. He says, "Don't think I'm mad at you, and don't run away from me. Come to me. Let me love you. Let me help you. Let me continue to change you, transform you, and work in your heart."

Healing the Brokenhearted

When Jesus began His ministry, He quoted from the prophet Isaiah, which defined His ministry. He said, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He's anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."* (Luke 4:18)

This fantastic prophecy from Isaiah describes the ministry of Jesus and the purpose of Jesus: *"He's anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor."*

Where it says the “poor,” the word doesn’t exclusively mean people without money. What this word actually means is people who recognize their need, people who are poor in spirit and heart, people who are broken, and people who have come to the place of recognizing that they have a need. That’s what it means. Jesus has come to preach the gospel to those who recognize they need a Savior. If you don’t recognize that you need a Savior, you’re not ready for the gospel.

Those two men in the Bible who were basing themselves on the law didn’t recognize they needed a Savior. They didn’t get the gospel yet. Jesus just fed the law back to them.

What does the law say? The law says, “How are you doing at that? Let me know how that works out for you. Whenever you come to realize that you need a Savior, you’re ready.”

Jesus was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor. Jesus said, “He has sent me to heal the broken hearted.”

Have you ever been broken hearted?

In this world we get damaged, don’t we? We live in a fallen world, in a broken world. There’s sin, corruption, evil, abuse, trauma, and immorality. We get broken. We get hurt in this world. At times we’re victims, and at other times we’re victimizers. We get hurt, and then we pass on the hurt to others. It’s a broken world.

If you went into a prison and you interviewed the most hardened, dangerous, violent criminals in a prison, and if you got them to talk to you and answer your questions, do you know what you would find? Many of them – probably most of them – could tell you the time when they were a little boy or a little girl, when their dad walked out and never came back, when they were beaten over and over with a belt, or when they were harshly treated or abandoned. The hardened and violent criminals that are locked up because they’re very, very dangerous and damaged people could probably tell you the time in their childhood when it all began. They are very, very hurt people.

Does that excuse us from any responsibility? No, we are always responsible for our actions. We need a Savior. We need forgiveness.

My point here is that God understands. Whatever has caused you to struggle with those things you struggle so hard with, God understands. He understands the disease of sin. He understands the brokenness that we experience, our hurt and anger, our wounded hearts, and our frustration. He understands. He’s not saying, “I’m mad at you. Straighten up.” He’s saying, “I love you. I understand. Let me be your Savior. Let me heal you.”

CHAPTER FIVE: JESUS RECONCILED YOU THROUGH THE CROSS – PART 1

Jesus reconciled you on the cross. That's why God is not mad. *"But My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed."* (Isaiah 54:10)

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 is a very, very cool passage. I go back to this passage often because it's just so amazing: *"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."*

"That God was in Christ..." Who is Jesus? He is God in the flesh. *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."*

Jesus wasn't going around making a list of everybody who sinned. He was here to reconcile. He was here to bring salvation. It says, *"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation."* (verse 18)

Enemies Become Friends

What does the word "reconcile" mean? It means to make up, right? If two friends have a big fight, everybody in their circle knows they are mad at each other. But then you see them a day or two later, walking together, talking and laughing. You ask, "What happened? I thought you guys were mad at each other."

"No, it's okay now. We made up. We reconciled."

If a couple gets in a fight, you hear things like: "I can't stand her." "I can't stand him."

Then the next day, they are all huggy and smoochie.

"What happened?"

"Oh, we reconciled. We made up. Okay, we fixed it. Whatever was wrong, we fixed it."

Reconciled!

We needed to be reconciled with God because from the time Adam and Eve sinned, the human race plunged into rebellion and darkness. We were at odds with God. And God said, "You know, they can't fix it. They can't fix it on their end, and if I wait for them to fix it, they never can and never will."

Unilateral Reconciliation

God reconciled us unilaterally. Do you know what unilaterally means? It means on one side – it's one-sided reconciliation. God, on His side, said that we could never possibly fix it. He said, "I'll fix it, and I'll invite you to enter into it."

He reconciled with us how? By Jesus on the cross paying for our sins with His life, with His blood, satisfying the justice of God, dying for us, dying as us, being put in a tomb, rising from the dead and on the third morning walking out of the grave and saying, "It's finished. Call on my name and be saved."

Call on the name of Jesus, and be saved.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever would believe in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

God unilaterally reconciled with us through Jesus Christ, which means the conflict is over. There's nothing between us to separate us. God did it on His side, and He says, "I invite you to receive it. Would you like to be my friend? Would you like to receive the reconciliation? Call on the name of Jesus and be saved."

Isn't that amazing?

He's not asking you to join the "right" church, join the "right" religion, or do the "right" ceremony. He simply says, "Call on the name of Jesus, and be saved."

You may have felt for a long time like God was mad at you. Perhaps you have struggled with the idea that God was mad, that there was a separation, and that He was disapproving of you.

I want to put you at peace. Romans 5:1 says, *"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

We're not trying to *get* peace, not trying to *find* peace; we *have* peace.

If you accept what Jesus did for you, you have peace.

Ephesians 1:7 says, *"In Jesus we have redemption."*

How?

"Through his blood, the forgiveness of sins."

We have peace. We have forgiveness. We're reconciled.

God wants you to know that. God never wants you to struggle with the idea that He's mad at you, that He's disapproving of you, or rejecting you in any way.

He loves you. The price has been paid. He wants you to have confidence and feel His love.

CHAPTER SIX: YOU ARE HIGHLY VALUED

For a lot of people, if you ask them to picture God, or to picture what it would be like to approach God, they see Him as disapproving, angry, distant, and cold.

Please know that you are valued by Him! He considers you to be a pearl of great price, one worth dying for. You probably don't know how valuable you are, and if you don't realize that, it's easy to start believing that God is mad at you.

Made in God's Image

One of the greatest verses that I absolutely love for this purpose is Genesis 1:26. I read it all the time, and preach it nearly as often. The reason I share it so frequently with my congregation is not because they don't know what it says and means, but because I want it to become a part of their being and thinking, almost an element within their DNA, their heart, their identity. And I want this verse to do the same thing for you.

You may or may not have heard of an evangelist named T. L. Osborn. He has gone on to be with the Lord now. He was an amazing evangelist who did huge crusades around the world. Hundreds of thousands of people would show up and hear about Jesus. One of the "revolutionary" things about T. L. Osborn is that he believed that God is good. This apparently put him at odds with some other preachers of his day.

T. L. Osborn believed that God is good, and he preached it freely and powerfully. That one message brought literally millions of people to accept Christ during his crusades. He also wrote a number of books. Several of his books were foundational to me when I accepted Christ more than 30 years ago.

One of my favorite books of his is entitled, *You are God's Best*. It's a classic. It was based on Genesis 1:26, and it taught a concept that, at the time, was revolutionary to me. At that time in my life, I felt like such a loser. That's how I perceived myself. When I would look in the mirror, I would see this unwanted, unloved loser. It's a long story as to why I felt that way, but I know everybody relates because we all have our inner scars. I used to almost feel guilty just breathing other peoples' air. When I took a breath of air, I'd think, "Oh, that's somebody else's air. I'm taking up some space here that should belong to someone else." I was kind of messed up. But when I began to read T. L. Osborn's books, especially *You are God's Best*, I began to understand the message of Genesis 1:26: *Then God 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 on the earth."*

"Let Us..." Who is speaking? The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The triune God is saying, *"Let Us make man in Our image."*

In Colossians 1:15 it says that Jesus, when He became a man, was the image of the invisible God. He is the model. He is the image of God. When God said, "Let Us make man in Our own image," that means we're going to turn out like Jesus, if we let Him do that. Your destiny, your purpose, is to become like Jesus. You are meant to have a relationship with God, an intimacy with God. This is God's ultimate purpose and project. Every non-fiction book has an introductory chapter which tells you what the rest of the book is going to be about. Genesis is the introductory chapter for the Bible; all the major themes in the Bible are in Genesis in "seed" form.

Within the introductory chapter, there's usually one key statement that says, "This is what this book is about." I believe that the key statement of the whole Bible begins in Genesis 1:26, when God says, *"Let Us make man in Our image."* It's His project. Why is He going to do that? He wants a family. He wants sons and

daughters. He wants people that will know Him and love Him and be with Him forever, people that are able to fellowship with Him.

Interestingly enough, the next verse says, *“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”* (verse 27)

When it says, “God *created* man in His image,” that’s an instantaneous thing. It happened in a moment. But it’s a different word that appears when it says, “Let Us *make* man in Our own image.” The word “make” indicates a process, a project, something that’s going to happen over time. God is going to finish you in the image of Jesus if you let Him.

It’s not *my* project; it’s *God’s* project. I’m not the one who thought it up; it was Him. He started this whole thing. God wanted to have a family and people who will love Him. That’s what we’re created for. That’s your destiny. And that very fact means that you have huge value. You are not an accident floating in the great big universe. You are not a product of evolution. You have a specific purpose and calling. You’re hugely valuable, and I hope that by the end of this book, you will know that as a fact.

You are extremely valuable!

The universe is like a giant factory. If you were to go to a place like Michigan – or another location with a giant car factory – you would see that they have massive factories with all the automation, technology, machinery, assembly lines, and all this incredible stuff going on. It’s a huge process. Well, all those huge factories have one and only one purpose: to produce cars. A car factory produces cars. When the car comes out on the other end, hooray! The factory has accomplished its purpose. If it stops producing cars, that car factory has no more purpose.

The universe is the same. The entire universe was created as a giant factory for one, and only one, purpose: to produce you and me as the sons and daughters of God. We are meant to be the bride of Jesus Christ, the church of Jesus Christ, the eternal family of God. God is drawing us out of Adam’s fallen race. Adam and Eve and the entire human race fell into sin and corruption, but out of that fall, out of that corruption, God is drawing a people to be His bride, His forever family.

Once that purpose is realized, once we are produced in the image and likeness of God, the Bible actually says that Heaven and Earth will be burned up, and God will make a new heaven and a new earth. The entire factory will be disassembled, and God will make a new heaven and a new earth. And the best part is that we are going to be with Him forever.

The entire universe exists for you, to be your home. Carl Sagan, an astronomer on TV, used to talk about how many billions of galaxies there are, and how many billions of stars, and all that stuff in the universe. And he would say, “It all happened by accident. You are insignificant. You are a speck of dust floating on a speck of dust, and you mean nothing.”

He was wrong.

The entire universe was created to host planet earth, where God would bring forth what would be His eternal family, the eternal bride of Jesus Christ.

All of that is to say: you’re very, very valuable. You have to know that. The reason this is so important is because Satan, God’s enemy, is trying to convince you that you are not valuable. Satan is trying to convince you that you are rejected, unwanted, and unloved, that you are insignificant, that you don’t matter. If he can convince you of that, he wins. But if you know who you are, what you’re called to, and what your purpose is, then you rise up on the inside. You refuse to believe that lie, and you start to find out what God’s plan is for your life. You will embrace it and run with it.

It's so important to know how valuable you are. Sadly, religion has had a knack for convincing you how unworthy and undeserving you are. Even among Christians, it happens. If you have ever been feeling down and then walked into church, and then you walked out feeling even worse, you know what I mean. It isn't usually intentional, but it happens.

I know what sin has done to the human race. I know what our sin and our rebellion has done; I know the evil that people are capable of – the corruption, the wickedness. It's mind blowing.

But in spite of the brokenness and wickedness, you need to know that you are worth saving. God created you in His image with a purpose and an eternal destiny. When we got broken, corrupted, fallen, and marred, God said, "I do not give up on My purpose. I do not give up on My goal. I'm going to finish what I started."

God looks at you and says, "You're worth saving." Whatever you've done, you're worth forgiving. You're worth it to Him.

Religion always focuses on how weak and undeserving and unworthy we are, and it robs us of faith and confidence before God. It poisons our relationship with God. It poisons our desire to even have a relationship with God. We were all equally lost. We all needed to be saved. But when you know that you are *worth* saving, it changes everything.

In one of T. L. Osborn's books that I read, he gave the example of a woman from India. She had been abandoned as a child and struggled to make it on her own. She felt very unworthy, very unloved, very alone.

T. L. Osborn was talking to her, trying to tell her of God's love, and he used the idea of a coin. He found a little coin on the ground and held it up. It was all covered with grime and tarnished, scratched up, and beat up.

He asked, "How much is that coin worth?"

"Five rupees," she answered.

He then asked, "How did this coin look when it was first made?"

"It was bright and shiny, beautiful and new."

"And now look at it," Osborn went on. "Somehow it got dropped in the dirt. It got run over and stepped on. It's grimy and tarnished. What was it worth when it was first made?"

"Five rupees," was her answer again.

"Well, what's it worth now?"

"It's still worth the same. Five rupees."

Her face lit up. She understood. She was like that coin! All we have to do is clean up that coin, make it shiny and new, and it will be restored. It still has value.

That's what God does for us. We were created in the image of God. What was our worth when we were created? We had huge value! But then we fell into the dirt as a human race. We fell into sin, into corruption, and got all messed up, trodden on, dirtied. But what are we worth?

You're worth saving. God made you worth saving.

Do we *need* to be saved? Yes. This is not a do-it-yourself project. We need to be saved. We need a Savior. But you're still a valuable person made in God's image. And when you're saved and washed in the blood of Jesus, when you're cleaned up, you look like a shiny new coin again. When you accept God's love into your heart, your heart is changed and you are being restored. You are going to become who God made you to be.

When God made us in His image, He created us with free will. He created us not with an illusion of free will, but with actual free will. You get to make choices, and every one of those choices have consequences. Some of those choices are going to be bad, and so some of the consequences we face are going to be bad. God will

allow that to happen. He set that in motion. Why? Because, in a relationship, love without free will is meaningless. It's counterfeit.

God gave us free will and the ability to make choices, fully knowing that at some point these choices were going to go bad. And they did. Mankind's choices have brought about very real and sometimes very horrible consequences. And yet He did it. God made us with free will, knowing the choices we would make and knowing the consequences that would result. He already knew that the one and only way to redeem us would be for God Himself to become a man – one of us – to die for us, to satisfy His own justice, to pay for our sins, and then to rise from the dead and offer us salvation.

From the very beginning, He knew that's what it would cost. Even when He first created us, even before Adam and Eve fell, He knew what it would cost, and He had already committed Himself to our redemption from the moment He created us.

That's why in Revelation 13:8 it talks about *"the Lamb of God who was slain from the foundation of the world"*. In the heart and mind of God, our redemption was already planned and done and accomplished before Adam and Eve were even created. The sacrifice on the cross was already planned because God knew it would be necessary, and He was committed to it. Why?

You're worth it. You're worth saving. He didn't want to lose you because of wrong choices that you're bound to make. You're worth saving, and you're worth forgiving. You are much more than your current problems and issues, habits, or struggles. You are not defined by your current struggles, issues, or problems, whatever they may be. You are much more than that. There's an eternal purpose, an eternal destiny, for you. And God knows how to finish what He started.

CHAPTER SEVEN: YOU ARE GOD'S HAPPY THOUGHT

God has a picture of you on His refrigerator. God has your picture in His wallet. We are His happy thought!

"How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand. When I awake, I am still with You." (Psalm 139:17-18)

This verse is talking about God's thoughts. God is thinking about you. He is thinking about you all the time and every one of those thoughts is precious. His thoughts are not angry. His thoughts are not disapproving. His thoughts are not rejecting.

He is thinking about you all the time. You are God's happy thought. It's scriptural. It's right there in the Bible. It's not just a sweet thing to say. *"If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand."*

"For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and hope." (Jeremiah 29:11)

God is saying, "Look, if you think that I'm disapproving of you, that I don't love you, that I don't want you, that I don't care about you, that I'm angry at you and distant from you, let me tell you what I really think." This is God saying, "Listen up! I'm going to tell you what I really think. Don't presume that you know what I think. I will tell you what I think. The thoughts that I think towards you are thoughts of peace, not of evil; I plan to give you a future and hope because I want you to have a good life. I want you to be blessed. I want you to be loved. And I've got good plans for you. Trust me. Believe me. That's what I think!"

God is all about *you*. Just as any parent knows, from the moment your child is born, it's all about them, isn't it? You just look at that baby, and you fall in love. You never realized you could love someone that much. You couldn't have imagined loving someone that much. You would be willing to die for them. That's exactly what happened when Jesus came down to earth because that's how God feels about us.

In the Bible, Zion symbolically represents the church. (Hebrews 12:18-24) We read in Isaiah 49:14: *But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me."* People so often think that God is far away. They think, "God has forgotten me. God has left me alone."

God's answer in verse 15 is, *"Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Even they may forget..."* It's possible. It's unlikely, but it's possible. But God says, *"I will not forget you."* It's not going to happen. No way.

He goes on in verse 16 to say, *"See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me."* He said it right there: "I've written your name on the palms of my hands." That's the same as saying God put your picture on His refrigerator and that He carries your picture in His wallet.

God's Goodness Changes Us

Paul's letter to the Romans is the most amazing theological presentation of the gospel message. A masterpiece! He talks about the grace of God. Paul says, *"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"* (Romans 2:4)

In his presentation of the gospel in Romans, Paul was talking about God's grace. Some people hear about God's grace, and it doesn't make sense to them. They say that there have to be rules; there have to be laws; there has to be fear; there has to be judgment to keep people in line. They are sure that's how this thing has to work: if you just say, "grace, grace, grace," then everybody will run off the cliff into sin and unbridled wickedness. You gotta scare 'em!

Paul says that if we understand God's grace, if we understand His love, it changes us. It's not fear of judgment that changes us. It's not God's anger and wrath that changes us. What actually changes people, what actually motivates people to change, is God's goodness and love.

You probably know this very well. If somebody is angry and mad at you and expressing anger or bitterness, does that really motivate you to change on the inside? No. It may motivate you to change on the outside for a while. You may think, "I'll do what you want; just stop being mad at me." But did it actually change your heart? No, it built a wall between you. When there is threat of fear and punishment, does it motivate you to change on the inside? Generally, no. Fear of punishment motivates you to change on the *outside*. You think, "I'll walk the way you want me to walk, I'll talk the way you want me to talk, I'll dress the way you want me to dress because I'm afraid when you're angry." Those are external changes, though. They are not genuine. They are not real. It's like religion.

Religion pressures you to change, but it's external pressure – change that is on the outside only. These changes are not in the heart. It's like an artificial plant in your house. Artificial plants are great because you can make them "grow" any way you want to, right? "I want this branch like this, and I want this branch like that." Done. It looks exactly the way you want it to. The problem is that it's not alive. And that's what religion does. Religion says, "Talk this way, dress this way, and walk this way." The response of many people is, "Fine, just don't be mad at me. I'll do what you want me to do." The problem is that it's dead. It's not genuine change. There's no life in it.

What Jesus does, however, is He actually gives you life.

When Jesus comes into your heart by your invitation, something changes in your heart. And it's a transformation that is real. It happens on the inside and eventually shows up the outside. It's real, internal change. What this verse is saying is that the only true motivation to change...is love.

When somebody loves me and I know they love me, and they really care about me, and they show it, I willingly receive their influence. Now I'm going to change. It's the goodness of God that leads to repentance. It's not somebody shouting at you, threatening you with a raised hand. It is God's goodness.

It is the love of God that fuels the change. It's the revelation of His goodness. *"...not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance."* (Romans 2:4) Everything else is religion – external and counterfeit.

The Holy Spirit is perfectly capable of speaking to each one of us, letting us know what we need to change. And God's Spirit will change us through love, not through fear.

CHAPTER EIGHT: GOD IS COMMITTED TO YOU

God is *committed* to you. When we think that God is mad at us or angry at us, we think “Okay, I probably just used up my last chance. I’ve blown it again, and God is probably done with me. He’s just shaking his head saying, ‘I’m done with you.’”

That’s what we think. That’s how we feel. What we really need to know is that God is absolutely committed to us!

Eternal Commitment - God Became a Man Forever

“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” (John 1:1) The second Person of the Trinity is called the “Word” – Jesus. The Word was with God, with the Father. And the Word was God; not just with God, He also is God. There is one God somehow in three Persons.

I don’t struggle with that issue personally because I have realized that you and I are a trinity as well. The word “trinity” is not in the Bible, but the Bible does say that you are spirit, soul, and body. You’re one person, no doubt about that. At the same time, your spirit, soul, and body – each of those parts of you – are distinct and very individual parts of who you are. Each of those parts of you has its own voice, so to speak – its essence. You’re one person with three parts.

God is one God, not two Gods, not three Gods. One God. And these three Persons or parts of God have been revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So, *“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”* Then the most amazing thing happens: *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”* (John 1:14)

God became a man. I guess we can say a *part* of God became a man. And His name is Jesus. That’s the most amazing thing.

It gets even better: *“But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.”* (Hebrews 10:12)

Here’s a thing that blows my mind. I absolutely love it. God became a man to save us because each one of us is worth saving. But the most amazing thing is that after He became a man, after He walked in this world, after He was crucified, after He rose from the dead, after He walked out of the tomb alive on the third morning, after He ascended back to Heaven, He now sits at the right hand of God the Father.

The Bible says He commissioned His disciples and said, “Go into all the world and preach this gospel to everybody. Tell them I paid for their sins on the cross. I rose from the dead and redeemed the world. Whoever calls on the name of Jesus will be saved.”

Then it says that Jesus went back to Heaven. How did He ascend? As a man. He was resurrected in His human body; in His human body He went back to heaven. It says that when He got back to Heaven, He sat down at the right hand of God. OK, I understand that He sat down at the right hand of the Father because He is God Himself. That was already His place before He became a man. But when He went back to Heaven as a man, He sat down at the right hand of the Father...as a man!

Here’s what is amazing to me. The Bible doesn’t say that when Jesus got to Heaven that He reached back and unzipped that human body and threw it aside and stretched out, saying, “Ah! It’s good to be God again.” It doesn’t say that at all. It says that the man Jesus sat down at the right hand of the Father, and there He remains as a man, forever and ever. God became a man.

If you were God and you created this race of people, would you become one of them forever? I call that commitment.

And I call that love.

Why would you do that unless your love compelled you to become one of them, to rescue them from the choices that you know they're going to make? Rescue them. Redeem them. And become one of them forever. That is an amazing commitment.

God Finishes What He Starts

When we think, "Oh, God is mad at me; He's giving up on me," think again. He's committed to you. *"Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."* (Philippians 1:6)

What does that mean? Paul is saying that we can be confident that God has started a good work in us. Who began the work? God did. Whose work is it? It's God's work. Who started it? God. Who will finish it? God.

What is His work? What is He doing? He's doing a good work *in you*.

Remember, Genesis 1:26 says, *"Let Us make man in Our image."* Even when we fell into sin, through real choices with real consequences, God did not give up on His purpose. Anybody that says yes to Jesus is restored to that purpose. Anybody that says yes is instantly put back on that track where God is working in your life, making you become like Jesus.

Can we do that ourselves? No. When we try to do it ourselves, that's called religion. That's a self-help project, right?

But this verse says, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Who started the work? He did. Whose work is it? It's His. Who's going to finish it? He will. What's His work? It is turning us into the image of Jesus so that we can be His eternal sons and daughters, His eternal family. We are redeemed from sin, redeemed from the fall, redeemed from wrong choices and their consequences.

Paul said, "I'm confident." I'm not confident in *my* own ability to be a Christian. What I am confident in is that God who started the work in me is able to finish it. I'm His project; you're His project. I'm more confident in His ability than I am in mine. That's called faith.

You Are God's Masterpiece in Process

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.." (Ephesians 2:10)

Let's look at the first couple of lines of that verse: "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works..." God has good things planned for you. He's got a destiny for you. He's got amazing stuff for you to do and become; that's all good. We are His workmanship. The word "workmanship" is the Greek word *poema*, from which we get the word poem. What is a poem? It's a work of art. Poetry is art; music is art; sculpture is art; painting is art; drama is art.

What is art? Art is how someone expresses himself or herself. If you're a painter, you express yourself through a painting. If you're a sculptor, you express yourself through sculptures. If you're a singer or a musician, you express yourself through song, through music.

God is the Great Artist. God says we are His poem; we are His artwork. We are how God is expressing Himself, and He's making masterpieces. The masterpieces got marred by sin, damaged by sin, but God said, "I'm

not going to give up on this. I know how to repair the damage; I know how to restore this thing.” But because we are people with free will, we have to say yes. We have to allow Him to begin that work of restoration in us.

That’s the main part of what God requires of us – to say yes to Jesus. If you just keep saying yes, that’s pretty much all you have to do to keep being restored as God’s workmanship. Just keep saying yes! When God wants to do a work in your heart, say yes. When God wants to correct something within you, say yes. When God wants to stretch you and challenge you, say yes. When God wants to teach you something, say yes. When God wants to change you in some way, say yes. Just say yes to Jesus.

We are His workmanship, we are His poem. We are His artwork, His masterpiece in process. Is this a do-it-yourself religion? No, you are God’s artwork. He created you in Christ Jesus and He is making you into a masterpiece.

You know how artists work. The painter, when he approaches the blank canvass, already has the picture finished in his mind. If his skills match the picture in his mind, then when he’s finished painting, you see the image he had in his mind. It is the same with the sculptor. He takes a piece of clay or a piece of rock and he already knows in his mind what this sculpture is going to look like when it’s finished. If his skills are good enough, when it’s done, it will match what he saw in his mind.

What did God do? God dreamed you and how He wanted you to turn out. Individual. Unique. Beautiful. Amazing. God dreamed you, and if you let Him finish you, you’ll turn out exactly the way He dreamed you to be. Even though sin marred us and the fall of man corrupted us, God says, “Just say yes to me. I’ll redeem you. I’ll wash you. I’ll fix you. I’ll restore you, and I’ll make you into the masterpiece I always intended you to be.”

Romans 8:28 says, *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”*

“Those who love God” are those of us who have said yes to Jesus. And it says, “Those who are called according to His purpose...” What is His purpose? “Let Us make man in Our image.” His purpose is to make you that masterpiece, that amazing, beautiful thing. Since God causes all things to work together, everything we go through – even our mistakes, even our falls – God redeems it all if we just keep saying yes to Jesus. We just need to keep giving Him our heart.

As long as we surrender to God every day, He causes all things to work together for good. Even if you make a mistake, even if you fall, God can weave it together like a tapestry and in the end, He is going to finish the masterpiece.

God’s Eternal Purpose

“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.” (Romans 8:29)

Did God foreknow all of us? My opinion is that, yes, God foreknew each one of us.

Did He predestine everybody to become like Jesus? According to Genesis 1:26, yes. *“Let Us make man in Our image.”* Every one of us was intended to be a masterpiece. Every person out there on the street who doesn’t know God yet was predestined to be a masterpiece. They just have to say yes to Jesus. If you don’t say yes to Jesus, it doesn’t happen.

We are His poem. He is the Artist. We just have to say yes to Jesus and give Him our hearts. We need to surrender our lives into His hands, or He can’t do it. This is not a do-it-yourself religion. He predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son so that Jesus will be the firstborn of many brethren. God wants lots of people just like Jesus – with that same love, that same grace, that same nobility, that same amazing DNA of God in us.

“Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” (Romans 8:30) In other words, what Jesus did, He did for all of us. He predestined you to become like Jesus, a masterpiece, and He called you His own. The Holy Spirit is drawing people, saying, “Come.”

Those whom He called, He also justified. Jesus justified us on the cross by shedding His blood. Jesus paid for everybody, even the person there on the street who’s lost right now, running away from God. Jesus already justified them, but they have to hear it; they have to say yes. They have to accept it.

“And whom He justified, these He also glorified.” In the mind of God, you’re the finished masterpiece already. You’re already glorified in His mind. Just like the painting in the artist’s mind – you’re already finished. You’re already a beautiful masterpiece that He will love forever. His beloved son, His beloved daughter. We just have to say yes and let Him work in us.

“What then shall we say to these things?” What’s our response to all that? The response is, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31)

Is God for us? Yes! Who is against us? Well, the devil is; he’s jealous of us and wants to destroy God’s calling on our lives and our destiny. But if the devil is against us and God is for us, if you say yes to Jesus, who wins? God wins. If you just say yes to Jesus, God wins. God can overcome anything the devil tries to do. If you say yes to Jesus, you’ll make it. Nothing the devil does will matter because God will make sure that you get there.

“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32) If He already made the greatest commitment to become a man and to die on a cross for us and rise from the dead ... if He already did that, is He then suddenly going to say, “Now you’re asking me *what*? No, that’s too much.”

Romans 8:33 shows us His amazing love: *“Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.”* Who can really go before God and accuse you? Who can bring a charge against you before God and turn God against you? Can anybody go before God and accuse you and thereby turn God against you? No, because it said, “God already justified you.” Through the cross of Christ, God already justified you. Nobody can bring a charge against you and turn God against you.

“Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us?” (Romans 8:34) Who is he who condemns? Have you ever felt condemned? As a Christian, if you do something wrong or make a mistake, or even willingly sin, this sense of condemnation starts to come upon you – a deep sense of condemnation, disapproval, and even separation. You feel like God’s done with you, that you’ve blown it for the last time. Is that the voice of God? No. It came from the devil, plain and simple. He’s trying to tell you, “Oh, you have utterly blown it now. God is so done with you. God has given up on you. You’ve totally blown it now. You’re done. You’re out of here.”

That voice comes from the enemy. How do we know that? Paul writes, “It is Christ who died for you and also is risen. And right now He’s at the right hand of the Father making intercession for you.” If He already justified you on the cross by His blood, if He already died for you, and is already sitting with the Father at His right hand, praying for you and interceding for you that you’ll make it, how can He turn around and condemn you at the same time? He’s either for you or He’s against you. Which is it? He’s *for* you. And He’s not going to change His mind. He’s not going to go back and forth. He’s for you. If you make a mistake, if you blow it, if you sin, if you run away, if you make a mess, whatever happens, He’s *still* for you. Of course He still wants you to come to Him and be honest and confess it and get right with Him, but He’s for you. He’s not against you. He’s

not saying, “Okay, that was your last chance. You’re done now.” No, He says, “Come. Run to the Father’s arms - His arms are open to you. I already justified you.”

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Romans 8:35) There are many places in the world today where people face serious persecution for being Christians. There are places in the world today where people pay with their lives for following Jesus. The question is: can that separate you from the love of God? Nope.

As it is written: “For your sake, we are killed all day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” (Romans 8:36) It’s a prophetic verse from the Old Testament that says God’s people will be targeted for persecution and will be martyred. Satan is targeting God’s children to try to stop people from calling on Jesus. But even if you lose your physical life, you’re with God forever. Is it worth it? Yeah.

“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37) How are we conquerors? I’m not the one who overcame sin. I’m not the one who overcame death. Jesus did it for me. He shows up and hands us the key and says, “Here, I did it for you.” And now He calls *us* more than conquerors! Wow!

The last two verses of Romans chapter eight bring to completion the whole thought in a beautiful and compelling manner: *“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)

What Jesus did for us is perfect, and nothing can separate us from His love because He’s totally and completely committed to us. Just call on His name, and He’ll make you His. The whole plan will kick in, and He’ll begin working on that masterpiece – restoring you, healing you, making you whole, and making you into the image of Jesus. He began a good work in you, and He will complete it. Just say yes to Jesus, give Him your heart, and be like clay in His hands.

CHAPTER NINE: YOU ARE NOW PART OF JESUS

God is *not* mad at you and *can't* be mad at you; He makes you part of Himself. Jesus literally makes you a part of Himself.

Two Become One

Ephesians chapter 5 speaks about marriage – about husbands and wives – but it's really talking about Jesus and the church. It says, *"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."* (verses 25-27)

Who is "her"? All of us – the church, His bride, His people. "That He might present the church to Himself as a glorious church." He presents the church to Himself, how? As a *glorious* church without a spot or wrinkle. How does that happen? We are His masterpiece. I don't think I did that myself. It is by the washing of His blood and the working of His Spirit in me and His Word in me. The transformation is motivated by His love and all the things God is doing. He is making us a glorious church, every one of us a masterpiece – and He will present us to Himself as a finished work.

I have confidence that He who began a good work will finish it. We are holy and without blemish before Him because of what He did for us. *"Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife, loves himself."* (Ephesians 5:28) How is loving my wife loving myself?

"For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.'" (Ephesians 5:29-31) This is a quote from Genesis chapter two. God made Adam and brought Eve out of Adam, and then presented her to Adam, saying, *"For this reason a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife ..."* (Genesis 2:21-24) and the two become one. One flesh, one life, one body, so to speak.

"This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." (Ephesians 5:32) He's writing about man and woman becoming one flesh, and then he states, "I'm really talking about Christ and the church." *"So husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies."* (Ephesians 5:28) Why? He who loves his wife, loves himself. As verse 29 says, *"For no one hated his own flesh but nourishes it and cherishes it..."*

Sadly, some people do hate themselves. Some people commit suicide, which is the ultimate form of self-rejection. Some people cut themselves, and some people make horrible decisions and end up destroying themselves. When we're damaged by sin and spiritually unhealthy, we do hurt ourselves. But when you're healthy and your emotions and your soul and your self-image are healthy, you know who you are, you love yourself, and you take care of yourself in a healthy way.

If you're healthy, you nourish and cherish your own self, your own body, your own life. You nourish and cherish it, just as the Lord does the church. The Lord cherishes the church. Why? *"For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones."* (Ephesians 5:30)

Just as Adam and Eve – man and woman – became one, Jesus and the church are one. He literally makes you a part of Himself. He's going to love and cherish His own body, which is you. In other words, you're part of Him now. And if you're part of Him, He's not going to cut you off or throw you away. You don't cut off your hand, do you? You cherish and nourish it. That's what the Lord does with the church. He makes you part of

Himself; that's why your identity now is Christ. That's your identity; that's who you are. You're a part of Him forever.

Don't think of yourself as somebody separate from the Lord, that you're trying to be accepted and you're not really sure if He really accepts you. If you've called on the name of Jesus, the Holy Spirit has come into your heart and added you to His body. You are now a part of Jesus. He will nourish and cherish you as part of His own body forever.

CHAPTER TEN: JESUS RECONCILED YOU ON THE CROSS – PART 2

Why is God not mad at you? Because Jesus reconciled you on the cross. What does that mean? *“For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”* (Colossians 1:19-20) In other words, by extending Himself into the earth as a man to reconcile all things to Himself, He has made peace. Through the blood of His cross, all reconciliation was accomplished.

The Bible says, “God reconciled you to Himself.” We broke the relationship. We are the ones who ran away from God, rebelled against God, and sinned against God in every possible imaginable way. We’re the ones that started the fight, so to speak. Who ended the fight? God. How? He reconciled us to Himself through the blood of His cross.

“...And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled.” (Colossians 1:21) We were enemies. He wasn’t *our* enemy; we were *His* enemies. We were people running away from God, rebelling against God, rejecting God, coming up with every kind of imaginable wickedness and sin. We were enemies of God, yet the verse says, “God reconciled us.” He reconciled us in a one-sided way.

Holy and Blameless

Colossians 1:22 tells us that we were reconciled *“in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight ...”*

What did He accomplish by His sacrifice on the cross? He has made us holy and blameless and above reproach in His sight. Is that something I did by cleaning up my act, or is it something *He* did by paying for me on the cross? It’s what He did. We are blameless before God, holy before God; we are above reproach in His sight. It is not because of anything I’ve ever done, but because of what Jesus did for me. All we have to do is to say yes. Jesus did the reconciliation; God invites us to receive the reconciliation and to come into relationship with Him. He says, “I’m not mad at you. I have open arms. Come, and I’ll receive you.” (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)

Colossians 1:23 says: *“...if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister....”* There’s the condition. Continue in the faith. You start off by saying yes to Jesus. Just say yes to Jesus every day. Just believe in Jesus every day. Trust in Jesus every day. If He wants to do something in your life, say yes. If He wants to correct you, say yes. If He wants to challenge you, say yes. If he wants to stretch you, say yes. As long as you say yes to Jesus, the Genesis 1:26 project kicks in. God is working on you to make you a masterpiece, finished in His image, because He loves you.

“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace.” (Ephesians 1:7)

I don’t know about you, but I needed a Savior. I still need a Savior even though I’m saved. I must still say yes to Him every day. By the blood of His cross, we have the forgiveness of sins, and it was the only way it could be accomplished. God was committed to the cross and the sacrifice even before He created us.

So, *“...whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”* (Romans 10:13) It’s not joining the right church; it’s not joining the right religion; it’s not doing the right ceremony or the right ritual. It’s not trying really hard to be good enough. Just call on the name of Jesus. Believe what He did for you and be saved. Become part of His body.

Just say yes to Jesus, and give Him your heart in a fresh way. Be clay in His hands; be the canvass that He is painting into a masterpiece. Just give Him your heart, and say yes.

PRAYER FOR THE MAKING OF A MASTERPIECE

Jesus, I say “yes” to You! Thank You that You reconciled me to God through the cross. I thank You, Father, that You are not angry at me. Thank You that I am forgiven, saved, righteous and holy in Your sight because of what Jesus did for me. The devil is a liar. He accuses You to me, and he accuses me to You. But the truth sets me free. You are good in every way, and You love me. You understand my weaknesses, and You reconciled me to Yourself through Jesus Christ. You highly value me, and You are eternally committed to me. Thank You, Father, that Your laws were meant to make me aware of my need for a Savior. You reconciled me to Yourself through Jesus, and I have accepted the reconciliation. Thank you, Father, that I am Your masterpiece in process. It is wonderful to know that You already see me as a finished work of Your grace. Lord, I am confident that You who have begun a good work in me will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. Yes, Lord, I am your artwork, your poem, created in Christ Jesus. I am Your happy thought! Thank you, Lord, for being absolutely committed to me; You became one of us forever. And You made me a part of Yourself. I am now part of the body of Jesus Christ. He loves Me and values me even as He loves Himself. May your Holy Spirit work in my heart, to give me the fullest confidence and assurance of Your love for me. Help me believe in the perfect finished work of Christ on my behalf, of Your calling and Your destiny for me. I give You my heart today, and I ask that You give me the grace to be clay in Your hands as You make me into the masterpiece that You destined me to be. Thank You that You have had a vision for me from the beginning, even at the times when I had no vision for myself. Thank You that You will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ name, amen!

What if your worst fears weren't true at all? What if God isn't mad at you at all, ever? What if you could be enjoying a close, intimate and joyful relationship with God every moment?

Have you ever struggled with the idea that God is mad at you? Have you entertained the discouraging thought that He's disappointed with you, disapproving of you, or unhappy with you in some way? I want to share with you an important message in this book: God isn't mad at you. He's not disappointed in you, or angry with you, or unhappy about you. I'm going to tell you why He isn't mad. In fact, I have ten reasons why God's not mad, and I'm happy to share these reasons with you. Knowing the truth can be the difference between bondage and freedom. The Bible says, "The truth will set you free." (John 8:32)



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