A close-up photograph of a person's eye, showing a contact lens being inserted or adjusted. The eye is looking upwards, and the contact lens is visible on the cornea. The background is blurred, focusing attention on the eye and the lens.

Called to be saints

RANDALL J. BREWER

"This book is dedicated to the loving memory of the late Sheryl Herbert, whose prayer of salvation led me into the arms of my beloved Savior. She was a saint, if ever there was one."

—Randall

Called to be saints

**RANDALL J.
BREWER**

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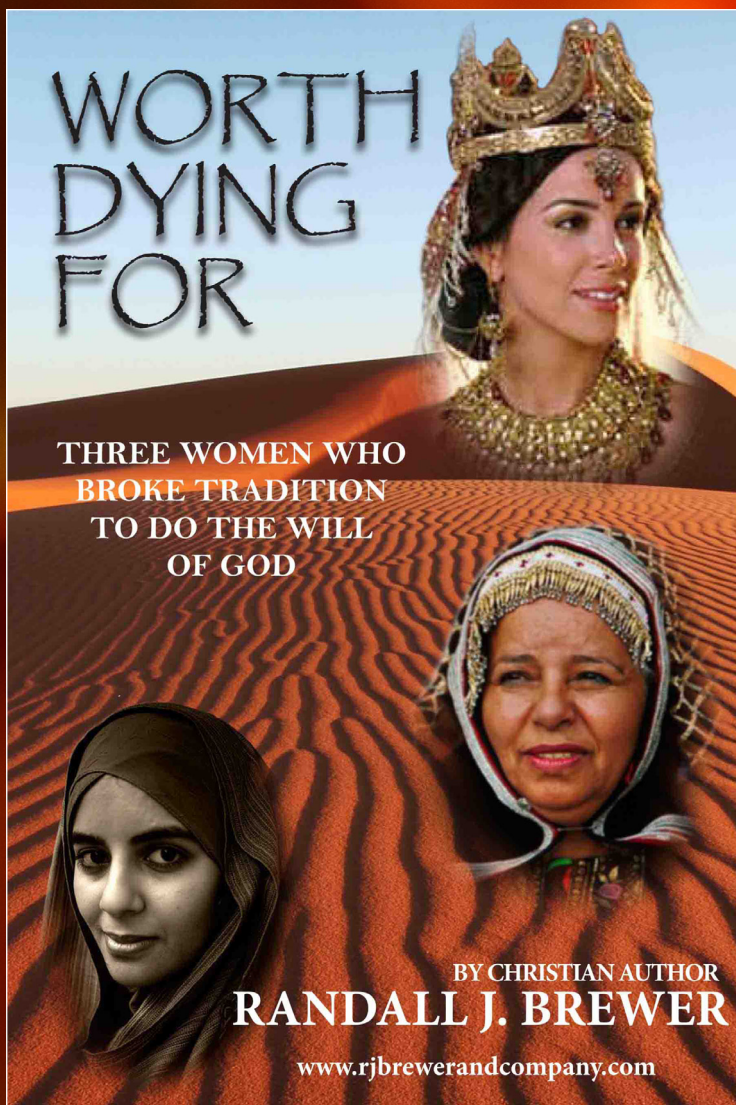
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SAINTS, SAINTS, EVERYWHERE A SAINT

While visiting a friend's church one Sunday morning, I recognized the pastor's widely used sermon referring to the righteousness of Christ and how we too must reflect the holiness of our Savior. But in reference to the Saints, he mockingly stated that he "had never met a saint."

Regarding the Catholic faith, saints are mostly people who have performed miracles *after* they have died, which constitutes a list of over 900 people referred to by Catholicism as saints. Just make sure you have the list handy when you pray, so you will know who to pray to in regard to your situation or the trade in which you work. (*It's that important.*)

If you're a member of a myriad of any number of other religions, you would pray to the one who founded that faith, was martyred for the faith, wrote the bible of the faith, or made a such a major literary contribution to the faith, that it has become a standard of those beliefs.

The Apostles of Protestant Christianity, however, referred to those who followed their example in faithfulness to God, as saints. We are instructed by *our* Bible pray only to the Holy Father, Christ our Savior, and the Holy Spirit of God. To these Members of the Holy Trinity, it doesn't matter Who you address, because your prayers are heard by all three at the same time, every time, no matter what your situation or what your job title is.

In this book, *Called To Be Saints*, Randall J. Brewer opens up to us the attitude of God through Holy Scripture, that insists that we take our place as kings and lords, in this life time. In all of Randall's publications, he presses into our hearts and minds the image of God that we are to become. To be like Christ does take a long time to achieve, but it will take even longer if we don't start today. Being like Jesus is your goal, and your journey toward that goal has to begin with you. Don't put off 'til tomorrow what you should be doing today.

Paul Baker,
Publisher and Covenant Partner of Randall J. Brewer

INTRODUCTION

A FEARFUL THING

by Randall J. Brewer

I see it everywhere I go... Christians are willfully and habitually sinning with no thought of what will happen to them tomorrow. They “eat, drink, and be merry” ^{Luke 12:19} with no regard for Gal. 6:7 which says,

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

The end is near and Jesus is coming back for a glorious church, not one marred by willful disobedience and sin.

Recently I was shocked and appalled when I heard a news story out of Egypt. A Muslim cab driver picked up a Christian man and dropped him off at a Muslim brothel. The cab driver was greatly angered that this Christian man would commit blasphemy by going to a Muslim brothel, and not one of some other religion.

This cab driver went and put together an angry mob of fellow Muslims. They stormed the brothel and pulled the Christian man outside where they stabbed him 16 times, poured acid on

him, and set him on fire. They then went and ransacked all the Christian businesses that were in the area.

My, oh my! What is going on here? 1 Peter 4:17a gives us the answer,

“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God...”

My friend, sin is a serious matter, but far too many believers sin at will with no regard that they will be held accountable for their words and actions. So why do they dive into the abyss of sin?

Years ago a fallen television evangelist gave us the answer. This preacher was known all over the world, but a sexual encounter with a woman in his organization caused him to fall from grace. On top of that, a financial scandal sent him to jail for many years.

Upon his release he was asked in an interview, “Why did you do these things? Didn’t you love God?” His answer should burn in all our hearts. He said, “Yes, I loved God. I still love God. My problem was I didn’t fear

God.”

Sin is rampant in the Christian camp because people do not fear God. Simply put, people are not afraid to sin.

Our God is patient and all merciful, and because people are not struck down instantly like Ananias and Sapphira, people think they can go on sinning and get away with it. Sad to say, these people are in for a rude awakening.

The wages of sin is death and we must be diligent to tell believers everywhere that the day is coming when all of us will be held accountable for our words and actions.

In the parable of the 10 virgins Jesus taught us to always be prepared for the coming of the Bridegroom. The 5 unwise virgins were not prepared, and were thus locked out of the bridal chamber.

One way we prepare for the catching away of the church is to face head-on the issue of sin. I have written this book as a means of dealing with this subject, and I pray that, like a loud trumpet blast, God will use this story to open the eyes of those who are spiritually blind to the consequences of willful and habitual sinful actions.

May this message shake

them to the core of their innermost being, because for sure, “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Hebrews 10:31

1 CALLED TO BE SAINTS

A long time ago, God created a race of people made in His image, with whom He could share an eternity of love and fellowship.

He began by walking in the cool of the evening with His most perfect creation, Adam. (How uplifting it would be to know the things they talked about.) God loved His new friend so much that, He created for him a wife taken from his own side.

Then the day came when sin entered the world and the fellowship between God and man was broken. A mighty angel cast Adam and Eve out of the garden away from the tree of life, because if they were to partake of it's fruit they would become immortal sinners.

Also, never again could man look upon God face-to-face, because the very brilliance of His glory would cause the instant death of any sinner who looked upon Him. But God, in His unfailing love, did not give up on man and a plan was put into motion

to return people to a right standing with Himself. This plan of redemption eventually led to the birth of Jesus Christ, but before it could unfold, communication first had to be restored between God and man.

Since God could no longer speak to man face-to-face as He had once done in the Garden of Eden, the great Jehovah was now forced to find new and different ways to correspond and converse with His people. Old Testament scripture records a variety of interesting and highly unusual methods in which this was accomplished.

One time God talked to a shepherd named Moses through a burning bush, while another time He used a donkey to speak to a wayward prophet. Visions and dreams were a common occurrence, and occasionally a message was personally delivered by an angel. More times than not, however, God chose to speak to His people through the voice of the prophet. As a prelude to the indwelling

Holy Spirit, this vessel of honor received a special anointing to become a spokesperson for God. The first words out of a prophet's mouth were usually "Thus saith the Lord..." And when the prophet spoke, people listened.

Consider the time Nathan boldly stood in the presence of King David and openly accused him of adultery and murder. David took this reprimand as coming directly from God, which indeed it had, and Ps. 51 expresses vividly the sorrowful, but yet positive effect, it had on his repentant heart that came as a result of this confrontation.

Vast knowledge and wisdom can come from a careful study of the prophets and the messages God spoke through them. Interestingly, Jesus in Matt. 11 tells us what the greatest of these messages was.

John the Baptist, the "voice of one crying in the wilderness" ^{Matt. 3:3}, has the unique distinction of being one of only a handful of men whose birth and ministry were foretold in scripture. Called by Jesus the greatest prophet of all time ^{Matt. 11:11}, John the Baptist's mission is described in v. 10,

"For this is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send my

messenger before your face who will prepare Your way before You.'"

Jesus did not bestow this high honor on John because of who he was as a person, but rather because of the message John brought to the people. It was a special time in history and the Son of God was about to be revealed. It was John's responsibility to prepare the people to receive Him. With a loud voice he would cry out,

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" ^{Matt. 3:2}.

The message of the greatest prophet of all time was a message of repentance. Jesus also fulfilled the role of a prophet, and He too, had a message to bring. In total submission to His Heavenly Father, this Son of a virgin always proclaimed that the words He spoke were not His own. John 12:49,50 says,

"For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father Who sent Me gave Me a command. What I should say and what I should speak. And I know His command is everlasting life. Therefore, what-

*The first century
A.D. was
a special time in
history.*

ever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.”

Genesis to Revelation reveal to us the profound wisdom and teachings of our beloved Savior, and each and every one of them point to a central theme. The summation of the message Jesus came to bring is clearly expressed by Peter in his first epistle,

“But as He Who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy”

1 Peter 1:15,16.

The Message© translation says,

“As obedient children, let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God’s life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness.”

***Born as a man,
Jesus brought to us, from the Father, a message of holiness.***

To prepare the hearts of the people to receive this living telegram from heaven, God sent John the Baptist with the message of repentance. How do these two messages correlate? Simple...

REPENTANCE

True repentance leads to a life of holiness. We can conclude from God’s desire for us to be like Him that a life of holiness should

be the ultimate goal of every believer. Are we not all “called to be saints” ^{1 Cor. 1:2?} The Message© translations describes saints as,

“Christians cleaned up by Jesus and set apart for a God-filled life.”

Consider Eph. 1:4,

“just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”

Also, the book of Hebrews distinctly expresses the importance of holiness. We are commanded to,

“Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” ^{Heb.}

12:14.

Without a doubt, God takes the subject of holiness seriously. So should we. The Bible records the story of two people who were perfectly holy and without sin in their lives. They enjoyed a unique and almost unheard of relationship with their heavenly Father. They walked with Him and shared with Him their most intimate feelings and desires, and He His. Their names were Adam, and the one called “the second Adam,” Jesus.

They were without blemish and they were perfect in every way. Nothing could separate them from the close and ultimate fellowship they had with their God. Nothing, that is, except sin. Adam ate of the fruit and along with his wife, was forced out of the Garden of Eden.

On the cross, Jesus was made to be sin on our behalf, and the Almighty was forced to turn His back on His beloved Son. Christ's greatest pain was upon Him as He cried out,

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Matt. 27:46

Since light and darkness don't mix, sin always separates us from our fellowship with God. Because He loves us so much it is God's greatest desire that we get sin out of our lives so that we can "be holy as He is holy" 1 Peter 1:16, and fellowship be restored.

If we are born-again, God no longer sees us by ourselves, but instead sees us united with His Son, Jesus. A marriage, a heavenly covenant, was performed the moment we asked Jesus into our hearts. A wonderful and exciting journey takes place, as we begin a lifetime of letting God mold and shape our lives until Christ becomes formed in us Gal. 4:19.

To become more and more like Jesus should be the daily goal of every believer. One of the first things we learn is that there is an enemy arrayed against us, a thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy John 10:10. The name of that enemy is Satan and his biggest weapon is sin. It cannot be emphasized enough the alarming words of Is. 59:2,

"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear."

The death penalty for sin is broken when one believes in Jesus.

Sin, regardless of its degree, always separates us from God. Light and darkness do not mix. If continued long enough, this separation can and will lead to spiritual death as it did to Adam in the Garden of Eden.

True, the death penalty for sin is broken when one believes in Jesus, and physical death only becomes the doorway into the presence of God. Sin will have a dire effect on the believer in that it hinders his fellowship with God.

It is hard to believe that a Christian man will have a close relationship with God if he is committing adultery on his wife. Ha-

bitual sin in the life of a believer is a terrible thing and is not to be tolerated.

While it is true that all believers will trip and fall into sin, some more than others, it is never necessary for him to do so. Jesus broke the power of sin over our lives and left us an example of how to live a sin free life. John wrote in 1 John 2:1,

“My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin...”

This should be the goal of every believer. Thus God’s desire for us to be holy as He is holy.

HOLINESS

Before we go any further, we need to understand just what “holiness” is. Simply put, holiness means to be without sin. And since God commanded us to be holy, we can rightfully surmise that a life of holiness, a life where sin does not have a stronghold on our behavior, is an achievable goal. In order to attain holiness we need to purge ourselves from sin. 2 Cor. 7:1 tells us,

“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the

fear of God.”

The Message® translation says this,

“With promises like this to pull us on, let’s make a clean break with everything that defiles or distracts us, both within and without. Let’s make our entire lives fit and holy temples for the worship of God.”

And the way to be released from the bondage of sin is through the gateway of repentance.

As one walks and grows in the Christian faith, a deep love relationship develops between a born-again believer and his blessed Savior. A wholesome dread of displeasing God begins to grow in one’s heart, and this in turn compels the committed Christian to face head on the problem of sin.

Daily we are instructed to “crucify the flesh” ^{Gal. 5:24} and to become a slave of righteousness. The writer of Hebrews in chapter 6 lists, “repentance from acts that lead to death” ^{v. 1}, as the first of many basic foundations for Christian living. The believer should never condone or attempt to excuse his sin.

There are only two things that should be done about sin:

confess it and forsake it.

- Forgiveness comes when we confess our sin ^{1 John 1:9}, while
- Repentance is the act of forsaking our sin.
- Forgiveness is an attitude of the heart whereas repentance is an action.

The road to holiness always begins with a Godly sorrow for having sinned, which means to “miss the mark.” David says in Ps. 38:18,

“For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin.”

James also tells us to,

“Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom” ^{James 4:9}.

The Message© translation says,

“Quit dabbling in sin. Purify your inner life. Quit playing the field. Hit bottom, and cry your eyes out. The fun and games are over. Get serious, really serious. Get down on your knees before the Master; it’s the only way you’ll get on your feet.”

Also, do not confuse a genuine Godly sorrow with the pride-

ful sin of feeling sorry for yourself. When a person feels sorry for themselves they regret having sinned, but don’t do anything about it. Basically, they’re just sorry they’ve been caught and they regret that they will have to pay the consequences for their sin.

True Godly sorrow, however, causes a heaviness to come to one’s heart, and this compels a person to rise up and do what’s necessary to get the sin out of their life. It is pride that causes a person to feel sorry for themselves, whereas humility will push a person to the point where one strives to get to the position where that particular sin will no longer be a stronghold in their life. After telling us to “mourn” for our sins, James next tells us to

Pride causes a person to feel sorry for themselves.

“Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” ^{James 4:10}.

HUMILITY

Before you ask for forgiveness, you must humble yourself and admit you have sinned. You must own up to what you did wrong, and take upon yourself the responsibility of doing something to change your wrongful behav-

ior. Humility is the ability to hear the truth about yourself. David said in Ps. 32:5,

“I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.’”

The word “confess” means ‘to acknowledge or say the same thing as.’

The worst thing a person can do is run away from God when a sin has been committed. Acknowledge your sin and run to God, because He is merciful and is able to cleanse us completely from anything that is inconsistent with His own moral character.

Our God is faithful and just.

He can be counted upon to keep His word, and He is just in dealing with and forgiving our sins, because Jesus paid the price for them on the cross. There is no sin too great or too small that is not covered by the blood of Jesus, which He willfully poured out for us.

One of the most remarkable chapters in the Old Testament is Psalm 51. This Psalm contains the actual words of David’s confession after being confronted with his sin

of murder and adultery. Like David, we must admit our sin, regret the actions of our sin, plead the blood of Jesus over our sin, and most important of all, we must forsake our sin.

As we do we must believe that God has indeed done what He promised, namely, to cleanse us from sin and restore us to fellowship and service. A side note to be added here is that if we expect God to forgive us our sins, we must in turn be willing to forgive those who have sinned against us

Matt. 6:14,15

Having received forgiveness and cleansing, the believer is next to forsake his sin and yield himself completely to God. This is called “repentance” and in so doing the believer is restored to full fellowship with God. Remember,

***Forgiveness is an attitude,
whereas repentance is an action.***

Forgiveness will not do us much good if no action is taken to remove the sin out of our life. Our deep sorrow and remorse for having sinned should make us so contrite in our hearts, to the point where we are willing to change our sinful ways. Repentance always brings change! Is.1:16 tells us precisely what the actions of a repentant believer are,

“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil.”

Also, James 4:7,8 says,

“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (Notice that the devil will not flee from you unless you are totally submitted to God.) Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

Do not play games with yourself and God by thinking you can ask Him to forgive you without the willingness to change your sinful ways. If you don't perform the proper actions that true repentance demands, you are only hurting yourself. If you refuse to change your ways and habitual sin becomes a stronghold in your life, you will not,

“Escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” ^{2 Tim. 2:25}.

There is always a penalty to pay for habitual sin. Gal. 6:7,8 says,

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also

reap. For he who sows to his flesh will reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”

A special promise is given to us in 1 Cor. 10:13,

“...but God is faithful Who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape (bring the temptation to an end) that you may be able to bear it.”

This verse clearly shows us that there is no reason for any born-again believer to sin. No, the devil didn't make you do anything. When we sin we do it knowingly and willingly. Jesus walked the earth as a man, and if He can walk daily before His heavenly Father without sinning, then so can we. Jesus came to be our example, and when tempted to sin, the first words out of His mouth were “It is written...”

A walk of holiness is accomplished by daily absorbing the Word of God into our hearts. Ps. 119:9-11 says,

*Repentance
always brings
change.*

“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your Word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your Word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You.”

Naturally, repentance is always coupled together with obedience to God’s Word. Is. 1:19,20 says,

“If you are willing and obedient you shall eat the good of the land. But if you rebel you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

In the Bible our life as a Christian has been compared to being on a straight and narrow road. Called the “Highway of Life,” our destination is always to become as Christlike as we possibly can. To do that we must to put our spiritual gears in motion, and with great determination and tenacity hook up with God, as He leads us on the road to holiness.

On that road we will often-times “miss the mark” and fall short of our goal. Paul tells us precisely what our attitude should be during those times when we fall.

“Not that I have already attained or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” Phil. 3:12-14.

When we fall, the apostle Paul tells us to press on with our walk with the Lord. Go forward! Don’t look back at past failures. The Word says,

“Old things have passed away, behold, all things become new” 2 Cor. 5:17.

Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, but they looked back to their time of bondage and slavery. Eventually, all but two people of that entire generation died in the wilderness and they missed the blessings of the promised land. Lot’s wife looked back to sinful Sodom and Gomorrah and was turned into a pillar of salt. Be like Joseph, who despite all his setbacks, always looked forward to the blessings he knew God would one day give him. No

where in scripture do we read of a spot or blemish in the life of Joseph, a man who always pressed on.

When you fall, pick yourself up, wipe the dust off your clothes, and keep going forward, knowing in your heart that God has a pre-planned destiny for your life.

Indeed, you have been “called to be saints.”

2 GET OVER IT

More than anybody, Paul knew that the enemy of our faith walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. In his early travels he founded a series of churches in the Roman province of Galatia, and a few years later he wrote them these special words,

“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!” Gal. 5:14,15.

The Message© Bible says,

“If you bite and ravage each other, watch out - in no time at all you will be annihilating each other, and where will your precious freedom be then?”

Many times Satan steals the Word from people and hinders the fulfillment of their call, by getting them offended. No matter where you go, there will always be people who will rub you the wrong

way. Without even knowing why, they’ll dislike you and begin to say things in an effort to destroy your character and rob you of the peace that is in your heart. These people are nothing more than puppets on a string controlled by the devil himself, as he attempts to destroy the mission for God that you are on.

*The spirit of offense
is like a cancer,*

...if not dealt with, it will destroy your calling and your very life. This is why Paul says ,

“Beware, lest you be consumed by one another.” Gal 5:15

It’s a warning worth giving heed to.

Two thousand years ago when Jesus walked the earth, He made it clear to His listeners that He would one day return again to the earth. This sparked the interest of all those who heard Him say this, and one day He was asked,

“Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and

of the end of the age?” Matt. 24:3.

He was unable to answer the first question, because only the Heavenly Father knows when the end will be ^{v. 36}, but He was able to make known to them the signs that would precede His glorious return to planet earth. He then spent nearly two chapters expounding on the answer to their second question. Natural calamities will occur and the actions of the godly and ungodly alike are recorded in great detail.

Any person who is even remotely aware of the conditions of the world around them, will quickly come to the correct conclusion that all these predictions have been fulfilled, and we are indeed living in the last days. Jesus can and will return any day now.

As believers we must pay particularly close attention to what Jesus said in vv. 10-13, because it contains a warning to all those who claim to be children of God. What He says may shock you.

Matt. 24:10 reveals the stark reality of what will happen to many believers in the last days. Pray you are not one of them.

“And then many will be offended, will betray one another,

and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”

It is a stab in the heart to realize that these verses describe the actions of born-again believers and not the wicked sinners of the world. The office of prophet is a ministry given to the church. False prophets will not deceive non-saved sinners, because they won't be preaching to them.

Those who will be deceived are cold-hearted believers who are unable to tell the difference between right and wrong. Their sin will dull their spiritual senses and will take away their ability to hear from God. Truly there is a price to pay for sin, and dullness of hearing and a lack of discernment are two of them.

Notice also in Matt.24:12 where it says,

“the love of many will grow cold.”

The word “love” in this verse

*False prophets
will not deceive
non-saved
sinners.*

is the Greek word ‘agape’, which is the God-kind of love. Only believers can have this kind of love, and Jesus is saying that many people who are saved and born-again will allow this God-given love to turn cold within their hearts, and as a result will begin to betray and hate one another. It doesn’t say they’ll hate the unsaved sinners of the world, but one another. Christians hating Christians! And what causes this love to grow cold? Lawlessness! Sin! The absence of holiness in the lives of wayward believers!

It is a shame to know that Christian divorces outnumber the divorces of the community of non-believers. Churches everywhere are grasping the idea that homosexuality is an acceptable behavior, and some are electing openly gay clergymen to the highest offices in the organization.

What must the Lord be thinking? Churches are split nearly every day, and each night many believers go to bed bitter and angry at their fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord. What caused these evil feelings to take root in these people? To answer that we must go back to the beginning of our scriptural context and see what Jesus said.

Matt. 24:10 begins by saying,

“And many will be offended.”

Notice it says that not a few will be offended, but many! Believers being offended at one another is a sign that the end of the age is fast approaching. The Amplified© translation of v. 10 gives an even more clear picture of the repulsive condition many members of the body of Christ are now in,

“And will begin to distrust and desert Him (Whom they ought to trust and obey) and will stumble and fall away and betray one another and pursue one another with hatred.”

It is a sad commentary that sin in the church is even listed in this category of end-time events. For sure, the root of bitterness runs deep.

The word “offense” means ‘to create resentment, injustice, insult, to hurt the feelings of.’ If not dealt with, hurt feelings will grow to bitterness and hatred. In Greek the word means ‘to bait a trap, to ensnare.’ It’s that part of the trap where the bait is laid. It pleases the flesh to lash out at others when one’s appetite for self-centeredness is not filled to full

capacity by those around them. Getting offended is a bitter reaction to not getting one's own way, and only selfish and selfcentered people get offended. Sadly, these same people often turn to uncontrolled anger that causes them to do harm to the one whom they are offended at.

The Bible is filled from cover to cover with stories of people who got caught in the deadly trap of offense.

- In Gen. 4 Cain got offended when God rejected his offering, and as a result, rose up and murdered his brother Abel.
- The sons of Jacob got offended when their younger brother Joseph told them about his God-given dream that foretold a day when they would all bow down before him.
- King Saul was jealous when more attention and praise was given to David, and once offended, tried on several occasions to murder the anointed heir to his throne.
- In the New Testament, Martha got offended because her younger sister, Mary, sat at the feet of Jesus instead of helping with the serving of the guests.

- And let's not forget what some offended people did to the Lord Jesus Christ, after He spent all His life doing nothing but good to those around Him.

The number of stories in the Bible about people getting offended are vast and informs the readers with certainty that offenses will come. Minute by minute they'll come and every person on planet earth will be tempted with- and will be given the opportunity to get offended at somebody. Listen to the stark warning Jesus gives in Luke 17:1,

Christian divorces outnumber divorces of non-believers.

"It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come."

The devil is a thief and he uses offenses to bait the children of God into a life of resentment, hatred, and ultimate destruction. The solution to this evil deception where one believes they have the right to be offended, is found in the Lord's prayer where Jesus taught us to pray these words,

"And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" Matt. 6:12.

What is forgiveness? It's

when you give up the right to have retribution made against the person who did you wrong. The devil will make you think the other person owes you something for having offended you, but in truth it is you that owes them something. Forgiveness is a debt you owe and Rom. 13:8a says,

“Owe no one anything except to love one another...”

When you forgive, you are then free to be forgiven by God for those times when you have missed the mark and became an offense to somebody else. Forgiveness cancels the debt you owe and it also releases that other person from the debt you feel they owe you, because you were offended by them.

Once forgiveness is made, you must get over the hurt and pain you felt and quickly obey the words of Matt. 5:44,

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you...”

On the cross Jesus set the example by asking the Father to forgive His tormentors and those who betrayed Him. Paul says we

are to do the same thing when he writes in Eph. 4:31,32,

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

If believers would take heed to these very important words, they can have full confidence they will not be one of those end-time saints whose love has turned cold.

Has somebody offended you? If so, forgive that person, *get over it*, and then go out and show the love of God by doing something good for them. Remember, Jesus could return any moment now. The question is, “Are you ready?”

It cannot be emphasized enough. The answer to the spirit of offense is to get over the hurt and pain, and to walk in the kind of love that only God can give. John, the “apostle of love,” tells us in 1 John 1:3,

“That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

In Greek the word for “fellowship” is ‘koinonia’ and it is the highest degree of love two people can generate toward one another. It means “fellowship, partnership, social intercourse, companion, communion, par-taker.” John later goes on to say,

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” ^{1 John 4:7,8}.

The agape love of God is a fruit of the Spirit and is the most powerful, the most dynamic, and the most dominate force in the world. And why is that? Because as we have just seen, “God is love.” In simple terms, *the love of God is the overwhelming desire to be a blessing to somebody else*. The Bible says that “faith without works is dead,” and so it also is with love.

The love of God will always manifest itself with actions that line up with the Word of God. Love gives for the purpose of blessing the recipient, and Paul writes these encouraging words in 1 Cor. 16:14,

“Let all that you do be done with love.”

We are commanded by God

to love, because people everywhere have a need to be loved and accepted. No amount of achievement can fulfill the need for acceptance. It is a void that only love can fill. Insecurity comes from a lack of one-on-one relationships, and can cause people to try to do great accomplishments for the sole purpose of getting accepted by others.

As Christ-ians, we are “rooted and grounded in love,” and because we have been “accepted in the Beloved,” it has become our responsibility to share with others that God has accepted them as well. This will cause hearts to be filled with joy, and it is only joyful believers who will be able to reach out and lead others to Christ.

When Christians having fellowship with one another are observed by non-believers, the love and joy they see being shared will like a magnet pull them into the body of Christ. This is why fellowship should be the utmost desire of every believer. We cannot demonstrate to the world the love of God without a loving relationship with one another.

The agape love of God is a fruit of the Spirit and is very powerful.

The best friends are the ones who love Jesus together and a church is only as strong as the relationship among its members. It is common knowledge that good things don't just happen to people. Life is what you make it and more times than not, we are the ones who have to make good things happen. The same can be said about covenant relationships. Prov. 18:24 says,

"A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

TAKE THE FIRST STEP,

...and be willing to reach out and get personally involved with those you are in covenant with. Don't sit around and wait for someone to come and offer you their hand in friendship, because more times than not it won't happen. You make the first move, and begin by asking the Lord to place in your heart the name of a person who desperately needs a true friend in their life. For sure, there is at least one person out there who is urgently waiting to hear from you. Jesus said in John 15:13,

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

True friendships are rare,

because they often require sacrifices to be made. The covenant bonding of a God-centered friendship involves a willingness to conform and become what the other person in the relationship needs.

Love is not selfish and sooner or later it will become necessary for you to put the needs of your friend above your own. Prov. 17:17 says that "a friend loves at all times," and true friendships bring with it endurance and stability.

You can always depend upon your friend and your friend can always depend upon you. The best friends are the ones who stick by your side no matter what happens, and is a person you can talk to about anything.

A true friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out.

Helping each other and being there for them is what covenant love and Godly relationships are all about.

Prov. 27:9 says,

"Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man's friend does so by hearty counsel."

One of the many reasons

a person should daily study the Bible is so he will be able to give Godly advice to a friend in need.

“The heart of the righteous studies how to answer” Prov.

15:28a

And Prov. 15:13 says,

“And a word spoken in due season, how sweet it is!”

Words of advice from a true friend are pleasant, because they are used to lift up and not tear down. A friend should always strive to promote and advance the life of the person he is in fellowship with. At the same time, love is also honest. When a friend sees something that needs to be corrected, he will reach out in love and give Godly counsel to his friend and encourage him as the correction is made.

The Bible says,

“Faithful are the wounds of a friend but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” Prov. 27:6.

The Word also says in Prov. 28:23,

“He who rebukes a man will find more favor afterward than he who flatters with the tongue.”

Words spoken in love will never be mistaken for criticism. A friend who speaks words of wis-

dom should also strive to perfect the art of listening. God created us with one mouth and two ears, and oftentimes all a person needs is a friend who will listen to them express the needs and concerns of their heart. Psychiatrists earn hundreds of dollars an hour, because several years of college has taught them that, more can be accomplished by listening than through talking. How better off we'd be if each of us had a Godly friend who would be there for us during our time of need. It'd be a lot cheaper, too.

Finally, covenant relationships are continuous and

should last a lifetime. Many people give roses when they want to make a friend, but give thorns and briars afterward. They then wonder why the friendship failed. You get out of a friendship what you put into it, and we must continue to treat people the way we treated them when we were first trying to gain their trust and confidence.

For sure, Godly friendships are very rare indeed. Some people will go through an entire life and never find a true friend. But don't give up. A true friend is worth a

Wounds from a true friend are worth it.

lifetime of work. Friendships have to be born and nurtured. They require time, effort, and a lot of sacrifice. And it all begins with you. Become a friend with somebody in need and see what happens.

It has been said that there are two types of people in the world: those who make deposits into your life and those who make withdrawals. What type of person do you want in your life? What type are you?

BE YE PERFECT

Getting saved is not all there is to the salvation experience. Many who have confessed Jesus as their Lord and Savior believe that once they're born-again, they can eat, drink, and be merry until Jesus comes back to take them home to heaven. These people are greatly deceived and will not live the good life if they continue to believe and act this way.

Every person who has made Jesus the Lord of their life has an assignment from on high, for which they will be held accountable at the judgment seat of Christ. The end is upon us and now is the time to work and not play, because life is a vapor and is quickly passing us by. Jesus is coming soon and the kingdom must be advanced and the work of the ministry must be done.

God is raising up an army of believers right now who are being trained and will soon be receiving assignments from above. Pay attention, listen well, and put into practice that which you have

learned. Take advantage of every opportunity to learn and grow, because your training is very important and will soon be complete. You are a soldier in the army of the Lord and soldiers are not in training forever. They're trained and then they're sent on an assignment.

Without a doubt God gives us all things to enjoy and we are to be happy and joyful in our every day lives. However, having fun *all the time* is not what we're here for. There will be plenty of time for fun in the afterlife, but in the here and now we've got a heavenly calling on our lives, and the fulfillment of that call is what living the good life is all about.

Everybody has a call, everybody has a place, but you must be trained until you reach a place where you can perform and operate on a high level in the graces and abilities God gives you. In other words, you have to grow up.

It is the will of God for you to be perfected, developed, and matured for the work of the min-

istry. You can't serve God fully and completely unless you are spiritually grown up. You don't give a five year old a grenade launcher and send him into battle. But the more grown up and mature you are, the greater your development in the things of God, the greater and more effective your contribution to the overall building up of the body of Christ will be.

It is a commandment in the Word of God that you become like Jesus, for He is the perfect example of being grown up and mature. 1 John 4:17b says,

"As He is, so are we in the world."

Jesus was not a whining baby, nor was He childish. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords! When you grow up and become a mighty warrior like He is, you'll be able to endure hardness like a good soldier. You'll fight on the front lines of battle and push through the adversary. You'll complete the mission you were commissioned to do. God needs warriors who don't sit around and think about how they feel all the time. He needs grown up and mature believers who press on in battle; whose war cry is "Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world! I can do all things

through Christ which strengthens me!" 1John 4:4; Philippians 4:13

Everybody has a call on their life to advance the kingdom of God. He gives you special gifts and abilities to help fulfill that call, but you have to grow up to see the manifestation of those gifts. If you remain a baby, you won't see the full potential your spiritual gifts can achieve. For this reason God gave to the church anointed ministers to help all believers become all they were meant to be.

Eph. 4:11-16 says,

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into Him who is the

head - Christ - from which the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

God uses people who surrender to the call on their life to do the work of the ministry, and He has positioned you to be His answer to the needs of those around you. You are called to build up and edify the church but first you must grow up to the full stature of Christ. The Message© Bible says we are to be,

“fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ. No prolonged infancies among us, please. We’ll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are an easy mark for impostors. God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love - like Christ in everything.”

You must *see the need* to grow up before you can begin the journey to spiritual maturity. There is an over exaggeration of one’s own maturity, and most Christians won’t admit they’re spiritual babies. People who get upset when they’re told to grow

up, think they already have but the fact that they are upset proves that they have not.

One characteristic of being immature is to think you’re more mature than you actually are.

There are Christian babies everywhere and this can be confusing to new believers, because there are spiritual infants in fifty year old bodies. It is God’s will for you to grow up, and He has anointed people to tell you where you actually are in your spiritual development, and what needs to happen next. You need to be told the truth in love, and this truth will set you free from the restrictions of childhood.

Babies can’t decide for themselves.

Babies can’t do much. They have things decided for them. They don’t have the freedom and the responsibilities and the rewards that adults do.

- Babies live in a small world that they are the center of. The only thing they are aware of is what pertains to them.
- Babies have themselves on their mind all the time.
- They like to vent, and it’s not

pretty and it's not nice.

- Babies need somebody to do things for them.
- Spiritual babies look to somebody else for everything. They want their problems fixed and be told what to do.
- More than half the believers in the world want other people to pray for them and believe for them.
- These people need to be confronted and asked, "Why can't you pray for yourself?"
- Babies need to grow up and learn to put on their own clothes and start doing things for themselves.

They need to work and carry their own weight and take on their responsibility to the body of Christ.

The majority of your learning comes from you doing the work of the ministry.

You need to learn how to grow up and not burden other people with what you're dealing with. You need to deal with things for yourself. Paul said in 1 Cor. 3:1,

"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to

babes in Christ."

Babies can't handle much. Babies will ask you things you can't tell them, because they don't have the maturity and understanding to comprehend the answer to their questions. You can't feed a baby a T-bone steak.

Everybody has room to grow. You need to grow up from where you are right now and you need to do it quickly. It is not okay to be a childish baby for thirty years. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 2:14,

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

You need a mature, well developed spirit to evaluate and discern the things of God. When you grow up you get very interested in the things of God, for no longer is it foolishness to you, but instead is the source of life. Don't be fooled into thinking you can discern the things of God with a great intellect. It doesn't matter how smart you think you are, a good education only goes so far, for it can't tap into the realm of the Spirit.

Some people are so dumb and ignorant that they actually

think they're smart, that they know more than anybody else, including God. They'll dispute over doctrine or any little thing that comes up, like what color the carpet should be at church. They complain if the church service went too long, and they'll stay home if it's too cold out to go to church. You say up, they say down. You say left, they say right. You say white, they say black. It is time for these spiritual babies to grow up! Paul said,

"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things" ^{1 Cor. 13:11}.

The Message© Bible says,

"When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good."

Those who are deceived into thinking they're more grown up than they actually are, become rebellious to the point where they won't let anybody show them where they're missing the mark and failing to grow up. It is shameful for a person to wile away the years of their life and not grow up and reach their full potential.

Jesus said in Matt. 5:48,

"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

People often neglect this verse, because they falsely believe the manifestation of it is not possible. They assume the fulfillment of what Jesus said is beyond them, so they pass right over it and move on to the next verse. The truth of the matter is that Jesus did not say "try" to be perfect, He said do it!

"Be ye perfect."

He would not tell you to do something were it not possible for you to do so. In the Bible, the word "perfect" does not mean 'flawless.' Everything and everybody in the natural realm is flawed in some way, because of sin and the curse that is on the earth.

God is a Spirit and He's not holding a magnifying glass on your flesh. Thank God for that. He looks at the heart ^{1 Sam. 16:7}. His eyes roam to and fro across the earth to show Himself strong on him whose heart is perfect and loyal toward Him ^{2 Chron. 16:9}. That does not mean 'flawless.'

People say "nobody's per-

"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as the Father in heaven is."

fect”, so they don’t even try, but the Word commands you to be perfect and therefore you must be able to be perfect. The Hebrew word for “perfect” is ‘complete’, and a composite of both Hebrew and Greek means ‘brought to its end, complete, lacking nothing necessary to completeness, brought to its completion.’ Phil. 1:6 says,

“Being confident of this very thing, that He who has began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

According to scripture a person who is “perfect” is mature, fully grown, and completely developed. The more mature you are, the more you’ll be like Jesus.

God intends for you to reach your full potential, and for that to happen you must grow beyond where you are now. You know you’re grown up when you become like Jesus. 1 John 2:6 says,

“He who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk just as He walked.”

Jesus emptied Himself and walked the earth as a perfect and mature man proving it can be done. He is now calling you to do the same thing and it is exciting to

believe that you can. You grow up and get perfected so you can do the work of the ministry. When you do something for God, He requires that you do it perfectly, in a sense of following a thing through to its completion. You see it through to its end. You work on it, you continue on it until you have the satisfaction on the inside of you that the task is completed.

Shortly before his death, Paul told Timothy,

“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” ^{2 Tim. 4:5}.

He then said in v. 7,

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

Every believer has a job to do, and the more complete and mature you are the better you’ll be able to fulfill your ministry.

You need to,

- Grow in faith;
- Walk as Jesus walked;
- Say what Jesus said, and
- Do the things Jesus did.

Even Jesus said,

“Most assuredly, I say to you,

he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father” ^{John 14:12}.

When you begin something, see it through to the end. Jesus said,

“No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”

^{Luke 9:62}.

Be led by the Spirit and follow what’s in your heart until you get a release in your spirit to stop and move on to something else. The Bible calls this “perfection.”

When Jesus said “**be ye perfect**”, He was telling you to be complete just as your Father in heaven is complete. God created man in His own image ^{Gen. 1:27}. He patterned you after His own self and He is perfection. Eph. 5:1 ^{AMP} says,

“Therefore, be imitators of God, copy Him and follow His example as well beloved children imitate their fathers.”

The Message© Bible says,

“Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents.”

Paul did this and wrote in 1 Cor. 11:1 ^{AMP},

“Pattern yourself after me, follow my example as I imitate and follow Christ.”

People will imitate who and what they respect, and imitation is the path God gives you to help develop your spirit and your involvement in the things of God. 2 Thess. 3:11 says, “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you.”

3 John 11 states,

“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.”

Heb. 13:7 says,

“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”

You must position yourself to be in the presence of strong, well developed believers who can show you how to grow up and be more mature and complete. We learn by observation. We imitate

Be lead by the Spirit and follow what's in your heart.

what we see people do, not what we hear them say.

In today's world there is too much "do as I say, not as I do." Paul addressed this when he wrote in Phil. 4:9,

"The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you."

The Amplified© Bible says,

"Practice what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me and model your way of living on it and the God of peace will be with you."

Jesus, of course, is the ultimate example of whom we are to follow. Every day, press toward the mark of being like Jesus. Luke 2:40 says,

"And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him."

Verse 52 says,

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

Jesus grew up! He is our example and you are to pattern your life after His. At age twelve Jesus was in the temple,

"sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers"

Luke 2:46b,47

Every year His parents went to Jerusalem at the Feast of the Passover. The previous year and the years before that Jesus went home with the rest of His earthly family. But this year, at age twelve, He stayed behind and went to the temple. A change had taken place. Jesus began to grow up at age twelve. His focus began to change. His interests and priorities were different than they were the year before.

Instead of playing with the other children, He chose to go sit in the temple to learn spiritual truths. He's asking questions about the Word and sharing what He knows. As our example, Jesus is showing us that children at age twelve should be hungry for and pursuing the things of God. They should want to learn more about Jesus than they want to go outside and play. It is not acceptable for a teenager to sit on the couch and play video games all day long. In times past, sixteen year old boys were putting on armor and going

into battle and fourteen year old girls were getting married. This generation is expecting far too little from their children. They let them act like children all through their teenage years, and when they turn eighteen they're not developed as an adult and can't handle the pressures of an adult world.

How do you know if you're grown up? You know when it's time to play and when it's not time to play. God believes in vacations, but not every week. Heb. 11:24,25 says,

“By faith Moses, when he became of age” - (when he grew up) - “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.”

The prodigal son was an impatient young man who wanted his inheritance, and he wanted it now! His father gave it to him.

“...and not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living” Luke 15:13.

A characteristic of youth is waste, and when his money

was gone, the prodigal son had no friends. Many people are users, who will hang around you if you're popular and have money, but scatter when the going gets rough. Young people are easily influenced. They want to be like their peers and don't discern if they are doing good or not, all for the sake of being accepted.

It's popular today to get tattoos all over your body and body piercings, and to dress in a certain way. They smoke and take drugs and have sex.

Youth are impatient and wild and act insane and insecure. They have wrong priorities. Jesus

wanted the rich young ruler to sell everything he had and come follow Him.

“But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” Matt. 19:22.

Jesus wanted him to grow up and mature and He was showing him how. Jesus wanted him to put God first, and offered him a place with Him in the ministry right then and there. The young man thought his money and earthly pleasures were more im-

“Practice what you have learned received, heard and seen in me.”

portant, so he turned and walked away.

It is time for the body of Christ to wake up and grow up! You have to change the way you think, talk, and act. You have to put away childish habits and behaviors. Paul said,

“When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me” ^{1 Cor. 13:11b NIV}.

You are not supposed to go through a second childhood. The outward man is perishing, but the inner man is being renewed day by day and growing stronger and stronger ^{2 Cor. 4:16}.

A characteristic of one who is grown up is to be self-disciplined and self-motivated. You’ve got to make yourself turn off the television and read your Bible. Force yourself to pray and visit the elderly and help the widow.

Babies always express what they feel, but a mature person learns the value of words and only speaks when necessary. He doesn’t spew out of his mouth every lame thought or feeling that comes to his brain.

Good listeners are not as common as they should be. Even a fool is considered wise if he keeps his mouth shut. Believers who are

grown up don’t use words to vent their feelings. They don’t chat and say things that have no substance, but instead use words as tools to build up and edify. What comes out of your mouth reveals the level of your maturity and development.

Children and those who are grown up speak differently. Adults don’t talk about their problems, nor do they gossip about other people and judge them. They talk about love and important things that have to do with the kingdom of God.

Babies are carnal and ruled by their feelings, but there will come a time when you feel one way, but act another. You’ll want to tell somebody off but you’ll love them anyway. You’ll endure hardness like a good soldier as you act in faith and talk in faith. You’ll stir yourself up in the spirit as you press on and take that hill.

Jesus is the standard by which all spiritual growth should be measured. He is the perfect example of the perfect spiritual man. He is the Complete One, the Fully Developed One. When you grow up you are to be just like Him. You can operate like Jesus. You can think like Him; talk like Him; act like Him; pray like Him; love like

Him; be led like Him; and live like Him. Most of the church doesn't believe this. For them it is a reality not to be grasped, but Jesus said in Luke 6:40,

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher."

The Amplified© Bible says,

"A student who is completely trained will be just like his teacher."

You can be just like Jesus. In fact, you're commanded to. You can grow up and be just as honest, and faithful, and genuine as Jesus. You're bridging the gap as the days go by. You'll never surpass Him, but when you're grown up and fully developed, you'll be just like Jesus.

He was the brightness of the Father's glory ^{Heb. 1:3}, and the image of His person. When you've seen Jesus, you've seen the Father. His plan for you is that, when people see you, they've seen Jesus. And when they see Jesus, they've seen the Father.

After the ascension, the people said about the disciples, "They've been with Jesus" ^{Acts 4:13}. They trained under Him, and they acted like Him, and sounded like

Him. We are living in the last days and there is a work to be done and little time to do it. He needs all of us to grow up and stop acting like babies. You need to put away childish things and operate in your full potential and do the job, and let the Lord come back.

Babies don't get to rule and reign, but only those who are perfect, complete, and whole. It is imperative that you grow up and become just like Jesus. There is no time to lose. Live the good life and start to grow up today.

NO PRICE TOO HIGH

Freedom. People have fought for it and millions have died for it. The desire for freedom is the top craving of every human heart, and nations have gone to war for the sole purpose of giving its citizens the right to be called free.

People cry out “give me liberty or give me death,” for the taste of freedom is sweet and worth dying for. Those who have tasted the redemptive blessings of being free would rather their life end than to never again bask in the glories of true, unadulterated freedom.

It was for freedom that the Heavenly Father sent his only begotten Son to the earth to save all people from the shackles of a bondage so oppressive that no man, woman, or child could be loosed from it on their own. Setting people free from the bondage of sin and death was the purpose for which Jesus lived and died. He said in John 8:36,

“Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

This freedom is not free, nor is it cheap. It cost Jesus His life to give it, and will cost you your life to obtain it. Matt.16:24-26 says,

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’”

The Message© Bible says,

“Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade

your soul for?”

There is *no price too high* to pay for this freedom, although most people have chosen to drink the bitter waters of death, hell, and the grave. Paul spoke of a man named Demas who,

“Has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica...” ^{2 Tim. 4:10}.

Even Jesus said,

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” ^{Matt. 7:13,14}.

The Message© Bible says,

“Don’t look for shortcuts to God. The market is flooded with surefire, easygoing formulas for a successful life that can be practiced in your spare time. Don’t fall for that stuff, even though crowds of people do. The way to life - to God! - is vigorous and requires total attention.”

Difficult is the way that leads to a good life in Christ Jesus, but most people choose to travel

the road of least resistance. They spend most of their time looking for shortcuts around the path of hardship, instead of pressing on and learning to fight like the soldiers they’re called to be. They don’t realize that if something is not worth fighting for, then it’s not worth living for. Paul said in 2 Tim. 2:6,

“The hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crop.”

It’s the diligent farmer who gets the produce, but too many believers are living lazy, sloppy, and fleshly lives.

To avoid fighting for what rightfully belongs to them, they instead quote scripture out of context thinking they’ve found the shortcut to an easy life. This leads to a life of deception, for people will think they’re more spiritual than they actually are. They’ll have no defense against the wiles of the devil, and this deception opens the door for the enemy to come in and wreck havoc in their lives.

Jesus did not promise you an easy life. He did say if you would put on your armor and fight you could have a victorious life, a

If it's not worth fighting for, then it's not worth living for.

good life of freedom that nobody can take from you.

Our society has produced a generation of people who want things handed to them without any work or effort on their part, and this “want something for nothing” attitude has crept into the local church. To obtain freedom without fighting for it, born-again believers often quote John 8:32 which says,

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

They confess this verse over and over again, because they think it’s a shortcut to freedom. Little do they know that not all believers will know the truth and be set free. This verse is almost always quoted out of context and to get the full meaning of what Jesus is saying, one needs to back up and read v. 31 first,

“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’”

This verse is speaking to disciples. Being a believer doesn’t automatically make you a disciple. In v. 31 Jesus was talking to people

who were already believers. He then said “if” and that is a conditional word. The Message© Bible says,

“If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure.”

The Amplified© Bible states,

“If you abide in My word and hold fast to My teachings and live in accordance with them, you are truly My disciples.”

Believers are those who believe in Jesus but disciples are those who continue in His Word and become followers at any cost. Just like the student trains to become like his teacher, the true disciple of Jesus trains to become just like his Master. He seeks to become more and more like Him every day.

In Greek the word “disciple” means ‘learner’ and ‘follower,’ and is the same as being an intern and an apprentice. A disciple is not only a pupil, but is an imitator of the teacher much like an oriental martial arts student who copies and mimics the ways and moves of his master. This is more than a scholastic study where you sit in a chair and take notes.

You don’t learn everything from a book, but like in the east-

ern culture, you imitate what you've been taught. This is not a small, trivial matter. It will cost you to become a disciple of Jesus, unlike anything that has ever cost you before. Becoming a disciple requires a greater level of submission than a believer, a greater level of commitment. When Jesus told some fishermen that from now on they'd be fishing for men and women,

"they forsook all and followed Him" ^{Luke 5:10,11}.

This describes the beginning of becoming a disciple of Jesus. Luke 5:27,28 says,

"After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' And he left all, rose up, and followed Him."

This is not the same as saying "believe in Me," because only believing in Him will not change your lifestyle. If your life and priorities don't completely change, then you didn't become a disciple, you just became a believer. Becoming a disciple will require great discipline on your part. You will have to live like a highly trained athlete and the Holy Spirit will be your personal trainer. He'll lead you and train you in the ways

of the Master. Luke 6:40 says,

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher."

After Pentecost, the disciples were operating just like Jesus. They told a crippled man "rise up and walk" and he did ^{Acts 3:6}. They forsook all, but soon realized that there is no price too high to become like Jesus and do the same things He did.

Paul said in
1 Cor. 9:24,

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it."

*A disciple is
an intern,
an apprentice,
an imitator.*

This verse describes being a disciple and Paul compares it to having the lifestyle of a top athlete. Every athlete in training submits to strict discipline. He says in v. 27,

"But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

The NIV says,

“No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave...”

Other translations say,

“I harden my body with blows”
and “I beat my body black and blue.”

Paul is talking about training spiritually so that you can become a disciple of Jesus. You must train and maintain your spirituality at the level of an Olympic athlete who begins training when they’re children. They train year after year, and endure injuries and soreness, and they follow a strict diet. You must discipline yourself and become like Paul who said,

“I bring my body under total control.” v. 27

Millions of believers have no concept of this at all, and we now live in a generation of weaklings and whining babies. When Paul was stoned to death, he got up and went back to the same town he came from and preached the gospel. He was a highly disciplined disciple of the Lord and wrote in 2 Tim. 2:3,

“You therefore must endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

Olympic athletes and sol-

diers are all disciplined and don’t get distracted and entangled with other things. To become a disciple, you must commit yourself to the Lord and do what He tells you to do *when he tells you to do it*. It doesn’t matter how you feel.

The Lord needs you when He needs you, not when it’s convenient for you.

It is a good thing to become a disciple of Jesus and is worth any sacrifice you’ll have to make. In Luke 14:26, 27 Jesus told a great multitude of people that, becoming a disciple will cost them everything, for it requires a great commitment.

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

Jesus is not saying to literally hate your family, but to love them less than you love Him. He said in Matt. 10:37,

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

Many believers are not dis-

ciples because daily they demonstrate that they love somebody else more than Him. It may appear to be a noble thing to say that your family is your top priority in life, but if family comes first, then God is not first and you can not be His disciple. No man can serve two masters ^{Luke 16:13}, and there is a place for only one person at the top of your priority list.

Family does not come first, nor does your job or education or anything else. There is one Master, one Lord, and He is to be first. You must feel strongly about this and come against anybody and anything that comes between you and God, and prevents you from following Him all the way.

To obey the Lord's command to "follow Me" will change your life and your priorities dramatically but there is nothing better in existence than a life committed to Jesus. He's training you to rule and reign with Him for all eternity in His glorious kingdom. The price to become a disciple can not be compared to the glory that is to be revealed.

Jesus taught about the true cost of discipleship in Luke 9:57-62,

"Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that

someone said to Him, 'Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.' Then He said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.' And another also said, 'Lord, I will follow You but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.' But Jesus said to him, 'No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'"

There is one Master, one Lord, and He is to be first.

Many people miss the plan of God, because of procrastination for family's sake. They wait until their elderly parents die, or until their children finish school, or until their business becomes successful. Months turn into years and years turn into decades, and before they know it their life is over. If you choose a person over God, that person will not love you for it or be thankful for you

for doing it. If you miss the plan of God because of your spouse or children, it will not endear you to them. Even if you do what they ask and want, they will not respect you for it, because they'll see you as being weak even though they won't admit it. Down in their heart they know you're being disobedient to God, and there are millions of people in this situation right now.

If you want the perfect will of God for your life, then you must do the perfect will of God in accordance to *His* plan. The best favor you can do for somebody you love is obey God. Go with Him whether they go with you or not.

Many believers say they want to be a disciple of the Lord, but do they really know what they're saying? People move and speak too quickly and make commitments based on what feels good at the time without counting the cost. Jesus said,

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it - lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all who see it begin to mock him” Luke 14:28, 29.

Consider the cost before you start. People set goals all the time, but aren't honest with themselves that it's going to cost them something, and whether or not they're willing to pay the price for what they want. It will cost you to buy that new house and to lose that thirty pounds.

How badly do you want to become a disciple of the Lord? Be honest with yourself. Do you want it enough to pay the price? After telling the multitude to count the cost Jesus said,

“So, likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple” Luke 14:33.

Some things are worth paying the price for. Do whatever it takes to become like Jesus.

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.

You have a Master and you are in training to be just like Him. You can pray like Jesus prayed and you can help people like Jesus helped people. There will be hardness and tough trials to endure, but you must gird up your loins and press forward.

Marathon runners experience great pain but they keep going anyhow. They set their face like flint and they've got their eyes on

the finish line. They push themselves past all comfort levels and bypass past performance levels. They push through the pain, for they consider it worth the price for what they will accomplish.

There is a cost involved in becoming a disciple of Jesus, but too many people think of this in a negative sense. People get quiet and uncomfortable when you talk about sacrifice and submission. We live in a no-sacrifice generation and people don't like to be asked to give up anything, but Jesus said to become His disciple you must give up everything.

Many boldly proclaim that they'll die for the Lord, but won't clean toilets at church, or stand in the heat and cold to help park cars at the church service. They won't go to church if they were up late the night before, or if the weather is too bad, even though bad weather won't keep them from going to work on Monday morning. They'll die for Jesus, but won't live for Him; won't lose sleep for Him; and won't miss a meal for the gospel's sake. Becoming a disciple requires a greater commitment than what many believers are willing to give.

A disciple is to be like a highly-disciplined athlete and a

well-trained soldier, who push themselves and endure strict training. An athlete may not feel like running ten miles every day, but he does it anyway. You learn by doing, for it's the doer who gets results. Paul told Timothy,

“So, my son, throw yourself into the work for Christ” ^{2 Tim.}

2:1 MSG.

When you're strong you don't talk about how you feel. You lay your feelings aside and do what you're supposed to do. Strong Christians have feelings, but are not ruled by them.

*The best favor
you can do for
somebody you
love- is obey God.*

Your training will teach you that, when the Master tells you to do something, you lay aside your feelings and do what He says. Soldiers have a sense of duty and when they're given orders, they pick up their gear and go no matter how hot or cold it is or how dangerous the situation appears to be. You've got to be willing to step out in faith and stay with it, even if in the natural you see no immediate results, and it looks like you made the wrong decision. If you're His disciple and He's leading you in a certain direction, then you go where He tells you to go, and stay

where He tells you to stay.

There are millions of believers who are content just being saved and they don't even try to become like Jesus. Most churches are filled with believers and non-believers, and maybe three disciples and the disciples do all the work. These same three people volunteer for everything. They have other things to do, but don't have more important things going on so that they would neglect the work of the ministry.

You make time for what's important to you, and if you're bothered about making sacrifices for Jesus, then you're not worthy to be His disciple. Paul said,

“Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ as my Master firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant - dog dung. I've dumped it all in the trash so that I could embrace Christ and be embraced by Him” Phil.

3:7-9a MSG

This life will be over with real soon, and there will be no reward in heaven for how high you climbed the corporate ladder, or how much money you saved, and

how early you were able to retire.

In the Parable of the Great Supper ^{Luke 14:15-29}, the Master said “Come,” but all the people made excuses for they had other things to do. Many are called to become disciples, but few accept the invitation, few make the commitment. The Master got angry at all their excuses and even today, there are millions of believers all over the world who won't show up. There is no good enough reason not to accept the invitation to “come.”

God uses people who are available, people who will come, people who will show up, people who have made a greater commitment to follow Him and do what He says to do. Is all this possible? Yes!! It's what you're made for. You are predestined to become like Jesus. It's your destiny, your future. It's why you exist. You're not here to punch a time-clock, mow the grass, and wash a pile of dirty clothes. You're here to become just like Jesus.

To become a disciple of Jesus, you must train yourself like an Olympic athlete and discipline yourself like a good soldier. Keep your mind and your mouth and your desires under control. Every day you're becoming more and more like the Master. Philip said,

“Show us the Father” and Jesus responded, “If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father” John 14:8,9.

Our goal is exactly the same thing. If people see us, they’ve seen Jesus. If they’ve seen Jesus, they’ve seen the Father. People who believe they can get the same results as Jesus, but not live like He lived, believe they are above the Master. If Jesus sought the Father’s will and only did those things that pleased Him, then you must do the same thing. You must become like Jesus. Luke 6:40 ^{AMP} says,

“A pupil is not superior to his teacher, but everyone, when he’s completely trained, readjusted, restored, set to rights and perfected, will be like his teacher.”

The purpose of becoming a disciple is to be just like Jesus. Millions of people all over the world are believers, but that’s all they are. They believe Jesus died for their sins and they confess Him as their Savior, and that’s all they do. They go to church sometimes, and read a Bible verse here and there, and they pray when they get into trouble. These believers are oblivious to anything beyond confessing Jesus as their Savior. Another group believes they can become

like Jesus, but are unwilling to do what it takes and are not willing to change their life enough to become like Him. And then there are the few, the faithful, the disciples. They believe they can become like Jesus and that there is no price too high to become His disciple, here and now in this life.

1 John 4:17b says,

“as He is, so are we in this world.”

That’s what you’re called to do, become like Jesus, here and now in this world, to be conformed to His likeness and His image.

You are called to become like Jesus, here and now in this world.

The objective is to be so radically changed that, when people see you they see Jesus. Even people who don’t know Jesus will hear Him when they hear you talk and see Him when they see you act. 1 John 3:2 says,

“Beloved, now are we children of God.”

When? Now! You can be more like Jesus today than you were yesterday, and more tomorrow than you are today. You should strive to be like Jesus every day, from the moment your eyes

open in the morning to the time you lay down to sleep at night. Be willing to make radical changes in your life and,

Make up your mind to be one of the chosen few.

Jesus said in Matt. 9:37,

“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few,” and

Matt. 20:16 states,

“So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.”

People call themselves “Christian,” yet there are many believers who are nothing like Jesus. People who say “I’m only human” are saying, don’t be surprised if they sin and don’t become like Jesus. Isaiah 59:19b says,

“When the enemy comes in, like a flood the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.”

A disciple has a standard and His Name is Jesus. A Christian is “one like the Christ” for He is their standard. In Biblical times before the people were called “Christians,” they were first called “disciples.” It was the disciples whose standard had not been dropped and lowered who were called “Christians.”

A “standard” is a banner or

emblem, much like a country’s flag represents what the people believe and what they hold precious and valuable and important. It is,

“a degree or level of requirement, excellence, or attainment that is widely recognized or employed as a model of authority or excellence.”

Discipline yourself daily to stand strong and hold fast to the standard Jesus set. Hold up the standard and live by it. Stop watching bad television shows and speak the truth in love. Don’t lie and watch porno movies and commit adultery. We have one standard and it’s the Master. Eph. 4:13 ^{AMP} says,

“That you may arrive at really mature manhood, completeness of personality which is nothing less than the standard height of Christ’s own perfection.”

This is what you are called to. The New Living© Bible says,

“Measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.”

How do you measure up? You need to change and don’t be conformed to this world ^{Rom. 12:2}. The world is telling you that homosexual marriage is an accept-

able behavior and that it's okay to kill babies before they're born. The enemy is the inventor of low standards, and the more you tolerate what is wrong the lower you'll go.

Tolerance is the first step toward conformity, and today the world has no standard and has fallen into a bottomless pit of sin and deception. Jesus is the standard by which every person will be judged. No longer is He called "the only begotten Son of God." Now He is called "the first-born among many brethren" ^{Rom. 8:29}, people just like Him. He's the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Disciples are in training to be kings and lords. They're the kings He's King of, kings just like Him. He'll show you the light and then you raise your standard and walk in it.

There is *no price too high* to fulfill your destiny to become like Jesus. The more like Him you become, the better your life will be, the more you'll live the good life.

You can't start the next chapter of
your walk with Christ if you
keep re-reading the last one.

Try turning the page
and grow strong.

...the
...ed
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...and take
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...him forth
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...and he placed at
...Eden Cher-u-bims,
...which turned every way,
...the tree of life.
...knew Eve his wife; and she
...and bare Cain, and said, I have
...from the LORD.
...again bare his brother Abel. And
...a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a
...of the ground.
...And in process of time it came to pass, that
...brought of the fruit of the ground an
...offering unto the LORD.
4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings
of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the
LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering;
5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had
not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his
countenance fell.

Randall J. Brewer has been faithfully serving the Lord since the day he first bowed his knees before Him in the summer of 1974.

Since that time Randall has stepped through every door that the Lord has opened for him and over time he has been involved with a children's ministry, a teenage street ministry, and has led a Christian singles ministry. He has been involved with an outreach to those in prison and many inmates have been blessed as the result of his efforts.

Randall has also managed a church bookstore, has been the substitute host of a three hour Christian radio program, and has taught Bible classes at church and hosted many home cell groups.

Recently the Lord had him write the eye opening story "Heaven: The Great Adventure" with the promise that it would open doors all over the world, giving those who read the message the incentive to grow closer and stronger in their own personal walk with the Lord. Since the completion of this book, Randall's work has been translated into several languages, and invitations have come in to go and teach the world.



Randall and his beautiful wife Anne Marie have been bonded together by one God, with one love, for one purpose. They know firsthand the trials and pain that come with having a sincere desire to serve the Lord.

The result of going through many harsh battles is that the Lord has anointed them to lift up and exhort those who are also serving the Lord and going through similar circumstances.

Their mission in life is to encourage all believers to rise up in the midst of their adversity and become all they were meant to be in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Their heartfelt prayer is that once you read this book, your life will never be the same.