

New Life!

The New Covenant Paradigm

“‘The time is coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord. ‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the Lord. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’” —Jeremiah 31:31-34

“...Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.” —Hebrews 9:15

This New Covenant is what Jesus lived, died, and rose again to bring to us! It was God’s plan from the beginning of time to move throughout history to culminate in the day when man’s sin and separation would be removed by God himself. He paid the price required to make it possible for man to once again enjoy the fellowship and intimacy with his Creator that Adam and Eve experienced and enjoyed before their fall into sin, to experience new life. As Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

But when the New Covenant is referred to, how many people are familiar with the term, much less its meaning? We talk about the New Testament, which is a synonym for the New Covenant; but when we say “New Testament,” don’t we usually think in terms of the books of the Bible that are in the back part of the Bible rather than in the front, or “Old Testament,” part? We think of New Testament and Old Testament somehow being names of parts of the Bible, but how often has the meaning of the word “testament,” or “covenant” been taught or preached about? I’ve heard one sermon in 30 years as a Christian that described the amazing, wonderful, good news that the New Covenant is. If we don’t hear much teaching and preaching about it, how can we live our daily lives with the mindset and appreciation that God meant for us to have?

According to Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary, the definition of “covenant” is, in the general sense, “A mutual agreement of two or more persons or parties, or one of the stipulations in such an agreement.” The theological definition is, “The promises of God as revealed in the Scriptures, conditioned on certain terms on the part of man, as obedience, repentance, faith, etc.”

In the time I’ve been a Christian, I’ve heard many things taught and emphasized and expected of those of us who love and want to serve God—often things that have missed the point, complicated life, and even led well-meaning and sincere people astray from the life of peace and joy and intimacy with God that the New Covenant promises. I’ve been in dead churches, with no evidence that the Spirit of God is allowed to work in and through the members. I’ve been in churches that at first appear to be alive and vibrant, where everyone seems friendly and happy, but where over time it becomes apparent that there is little depth either in the body life of the church or in the lives of many of the members; they do their church thing and then go about their own business until the next appointed time to have a church service, content to be able to check going to church off their schedule without wondering whether it served the purpose God intended. And I’ve been part of churches that are trying desperately to serve God and apply biblical principles to daily life, but where the members are burdened and stressed rather than peaceful and joyful.

But this is not intended to be a critique. Rather, my hope is that we can be sparked to think honestly about the very foundations of Christianity, to re-examine our paradigms or models for how we live our lives and how we view “church.” If every Christian were to have a New Covenant mindset, much of life—though

at times full of hardships and stresses in this world—would be simplified and joyful. Whenever I realize I'm not peaceful and joyful, I have to bring myself back to the perspective of the New Covenant.

The writings of the New Testament (the books that were written about life under the New Covenant) can be summarized by what Jesus taught as the most important commandment in Mark 12:28-33: "One of the teachers of the law...asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?' 'The most important one,' answered Jesus, 'is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.'" The teacher's response to what Jesus said, that to love God and love your neighbor as yourself "is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices," was appreciated by Jesus as a wise answer. He commended, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

That teacher was one of the few who heard Jesus' teachings to "get it"—to understand that what matters to God is how we love and relate to others, to God first and then to the people in our lives. How to love others, whether fellow believers or nonbelievers, is articulated both generally and specifically in everything written by the apostles and other writers in the early days of the New Covenant era brought in by Jesus. The New Covenant is experienced in our daily lives as loving and encouraging each other among believers and loving and sharing our faith with nonbelievers.

We can and often do complicate our daily lives and our church activities. We can get hung up on planning and organizing and compartmentalizing what we see as the work God has given us to do. I was once part of a church where leaders organized the lives of the members from a sense of responsibility to "make it happen," to be sure that members were loving each other and sharing their faith. That led to imposing specific goals in every area of life for members to not only live up to but to prove by having schedules and statistical reports and results of their activities critiqued by those leaders. Eventually, by taking some time to re-examine what the Bible teaches about the New Covenant, I was able to see why that church was not producing the peace and joy that Jesus promised. And because it was not producing peace and joy in the lives of members, many left, as I did—to seek a more biblical way to live and to escape the pain and frustration that inevitably results from trying to be pleasing to God apart from the New Covenant way.

The New Covenant is an amazing promise from God to all people that through Jesus, we can become his children, we can experience life on a new and higher plane of the "divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), and we can overcome our sinful nature's control. The most concise way to describe the New Covenant promise is to say that we can know God and be known by God—not in an intellectual, factual sense but in a family relationship that is intimate, affectionate, completely honest, and totally focused on giving to each other. Amazingly, we can have the same sense of God as our "Abba"—which is the Aramaic familiar name for a father, like our "Daddy"—that Jesus himself had (Mark 14:36): "'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'" Galatians 4:4-7 summarizes this important difference between life under the Old Covenant law and life as a child of God: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir."

In this father-child dynamic, the Father provides what the child needs and the child is helpless and completely dependent on the Father for what is needed in life. Yet there is also a mutuality in the relationship, in that both the Father and the child love, serve, and give to one another and work together to accomplish good and right purposes which God wills and which he reveals to his children through his inspired word, the Scriptures.

In the New Covenant, God promises and provides "everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Peter 1:3-4). That's his part of the covenant. Our part is to respond to his offer and become his child through being born again of the water and the Spirit in

baptism into Christ (John 3:3-8), and then to live as his child in our daily lives. We live under the New Covenant with a completely different perspective than we did before our new birth. We are given a new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17): “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” Also, we’re given a new mindset (1 Corinthians 2:16): “But we have the mind of Christ.”

God has made it clear to mankind throughout history that his ways are very different from our ways: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (Proverbs 16:25). God’s ways are loving and perfect, but our natural way is selfish, sinful, and destructive. In the New Covenant, God rescues us from our path of destruction and death and sets us on a new path of joy and life.

All this sounds very ethereal and high-minded. We go to church services to be inspired and taught about God’s high and holy ways. But so often when we come home from church and go about our daily lives, we lose perspective. We have a hard time translating a spiritual perspective into a paradigm or framework for real life in this world. Jesus told his disciples that they needed to be “in the world” but “not of the world” (John 17:11,14-18). That’s the challenge. And that’s what we’ll be aiming for as we look at the New Covenant lifestyle that God reveals in his Word. But before we can appreciate the New Covenant, we need to understand the purpose of the Old Covenant.

The Old Covenant Purpose

Never having experienced life overtly under the Old Covenant as the Jews have, we “Gentiles” may have a hard time grasping or appreciating the contrast of the New Covenant. But, as Paul writes about in Romans 7 and 8, everyone really is affected by the Old Covenant, which was an era of Law. God chose the Israelites to be his people, promising Abraham that his descendents would have a special relationship with him (Genesis 12:1-3). Eventually, God gave those descendents the covenant of the Law, using Moses as the prophet to deliver the Ten Commandments written on tablets of stone at Mt. Sinai as well as the detailed laws (Exodus 19-24).

God revealed his will to man. And man couldn’t live up to it.

Not only could no one live up to the requirements of the Law, God knew that was true from the beginning. The overview of the history of man’s relationship with God is, as Romans 7:10-14 says, “I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.” Romans 3:20 says it even more concisely: “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.” It’s true for all of us, isn’t it, that we don’t live up to what we know is right and true. We don’t even live up to our own consciences, much less the detailed rules of the Old Covenant Law.

In Jeremiah’s day, God’s chosen people—those living under the Old Covenant—were well on their way to proving their inability to honor their part of the covenant. They failed over and over to live up to the requirements of God’s law. At times they even hated to be reminded of God’s will by the prophets, much less try to live up to it. Then in Jeremiah 31:31-34, God offered the hope and promise that someday he would provide a better covenant with man (see page 1).

The book of Hebrews, written to Jewish Christians, goes into more depth than any other book of the Bible about the significance of the New Covenant in contrast to the Old. Chapters 8-10 especially give the big picture:

It is superior (Hebrews 8:6): “But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.”

It is desperately needed (Hebrews 10:1-2,19-22): “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly

year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins....Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

It makes the Old Covenant obsolete (Hebrews 8:13): “By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.”

And Jesus is the one who made it possible (Hebrews 9:14-15): “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.”

Through the Old Covenant, mankind became aware of how hopeless and helpless we are and how much we need to be rescued from our sinfulness. God was patient for thousands of years, letting man prove that point over and over, leading to the indisputable conclusion that, as Romans 3:23 declares, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Galatians 3:24-25 describes this temporary purpose of the Old Covenant: “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”

In order to appreciate the good news Jesus came to bring, every person has to face up to the bad news that trying to live up to laws, rules, commandments, or even our own innate sense of right and wrong is impossible. As humiliating as that is, that is exactly where God knows each person needs to be to appreciate the greatness of the New Covenant.

The New Covenant Paradox

“At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This passage in Romans 5:6-8 says so well the great news to each of us who is broken and contrite about our sinfulness. Jesus’ death for us *is* the good news of the New Covenant.

The Old Covenant law was met perfectly by Jesus. He fulfilled the law (Matthew 5:17-18). God didn’t change his mind and decide that the law no longer applies; rather, he came to earth, lived with the same human nature that we have, and kept the law perfectly. Then he changed places with us by dying for us on the cross, going through the separation from God that we deserve, and gaining the victory over death and freedom from sin that we need by his resurrection. And now he offers to give us his righteousness. Romans 8:1-4 explains this: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

God paying the price for man’s sin is a paradox. It goes completely against human wisdom. It doesn’t make sense to believe that the Creator of the universe, the one who designed both the physical and moral orders to perfection, would condescend to become one of us, much less that he would “be sin” for us (2 Corinthians 5:21) and take our guilt and punishment on himself. Why would he do that?

What we must try to wrap our minds around is the completely different paradigm that the New Covenant calls us to: “Know God in order to do right”—the opposite of our default approach of “Do right in order to know God.” The human, worldly paradigm or perspective is that we do right to avoid punishment and to receive rewards. But that doesn’t work in our relationship with God, because we all, by the time we reach

adulthood and are accountable to God, have already done wrong and deserve punishment, and we can never fix the guilt or earn back God's favor.

We can understand this in our own frame of reference when we think of an extreme example: A murderer can't undo his crime and bring the person back, can never say "I'm sorry" enough to remove the pain of loss to his victim's family, and can never do enough good deeds to offset or make up for the life of the one he killed. The results of murder are so blatant and obvious to us because a person's absence is felt so keenly by everyone who knew, loved, and interacted with him or her. The guilt of the murderer is almost a tangible thing, with every memory of the person's life or every imagining of what that person may have become or experienced in the life that was stolen being a palpable reminder of that guilt.

What we have a hard time grasping in our own lives is that the guilt we bear for each and every sin is just as tangible and palpable as for murder in the consequences it has in our relationship with God. From the first time we deliberately, knowingly and with accountability to God choose to do what we know is wrong, we bear the guilt that sin brings upon us. As children, we were answerable to our parents as his stewards and delegated authority in our lives, as Ephesians 6:1, the only command to children, says: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." When we matured to the point of being accountable to God directly, we all chose over and over to sin.

We know in our heads that it's just as wrong to lie as it is to murder, that "whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10). But it's human nature to "grade on a curve," to assign seriousness to sins based on their consequences in our lives. And it's also human nature to rationalize that if we don't get caught by anyone or if what we do doesn't tangibly affect anyone else, then what we do isn't really wrong. We all know this from our own lives, but sometimes it's easier to grasp how easy it is to rationalize sin when we hear of someone else being caught in some sin that we ourselves have been tempted by or given in to. We get shocked when others' deep dark secrets are exposed when they seemed to be such good people, yet we often remain deceived about our own sinful nature's pull, even when we're giving in to a temptation that we'd be humiliated for others to find out about.

Each sin has the same consequence as any other sin to our relationship with God. Isaiah 59:1-2 spells it out: "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." Sin separates us from God. We can never undo or take back or make right whatever sin we commit. When God's laws are broken there is only one sentence possible: Our fellowship—meaning being one in mind and heart—with God is broken because we no longer live by what is true and right. Whenever we do what goes against God's nature and the moral order of the universe that flows from it, there is a result that comes not from God being vindictive and wanting to punish us. Rather, the result is that we suffer the lack of the good that God created us to experience when we live by the truth of what is right. Closeness with him becomes impossible. We reveal that we have trusted our own wisdom and not his. We can't have it both ways!

Jesus didn't come to judge and condemn us, but to save us. As John 3:17-18 says, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." In other words, we are already condemned by our own rebellion from God's truth; Jesus doesn't do the condemning, he does the saving of those who have condemned themselves. He repeats this theme in John 12:47-48: "As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."

We are so used to our Western mindset of earning everything by our work. That carries over to our assumptions about our relationship with God. We try to earn our way back into his good graces by trying to "be good." But it's already too late for that, as we've seen. The paradox of the New Covenant is that God doesn't ask us to do what's right to make up for our sins—that won't work. But he does ask us to do what's right because it is right, because when we trust his instructions and his revealed truth, life works the way he designed it to. Since we can't make up for our sins, all we can do is accept his gifts of forgiveness and a

fresh start. That he forgives and re-creates us through Jesus taking our place and dying to pay the price of our sin is so hard to accept, so humbling, that most people refuse to believe it's true. But if we do believe it and accept his offer by being baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection (Romans 6:3), then we get to start over again, as if we'd never sinned, and get it right this time.

And what is the right perspective, the right paradigm or operating principle for how we live? It's to love God and love others, doing the right thing not to earn God's love or to earn our relationship with him but rather because we already have a relationship with him and we trust his wisdom enough to obey him. We follow his direction for life, knowing that he designed us and he's so gracious to reveal to us how life is meant to work. We gratefully submit to the truth of the Bible, because "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We get to experience life as God meant for it to be lived.

Remember Jesus' promise in John 10:10? "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." And he promised in John 8:36: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." The only way God could make a full and free life possible is for him to provide the way for our sin and separation to be paid for. Jesus did that. And because we will continue to face temptation and will struggle against the pull of our corrupted, sinful nature, he even gives us the power to grow and change. We are given the Spirit of God as a gift when we're baptized (Acts 2:38), and from then on we live with a completely different mindset, as Romans 8:5-6 says: "Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires, but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."

God makes a process of transformation possible once we have begun living under the New Covenant that Jesus brought in. Ephesians 4:22-24 describes it: "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." So we have the choice, the way to experience the completely different pattern for life, as Romans 12:2 says: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

What about when we do sin? We have the promise of 1 John 1:7,9 to answer that question: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin...If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." His forgiveness is ongoing and continual as we repent of them and confess them.

But the focus is on the finish line rather than the hurdles along the way. Colossians 3:1-4 makes this clear: "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." That focus leads to the spiritually-natural result of verse 5: "Put to death, *therefore*, whatever belongs to your earthly nature..." and verse 12: "*Therefore*, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with [a list of godly qualities]."

When we enter a New Covenant relationship with God by being born again in baptism and then start living it out, we can understand the paradox. One of my favorite scriptures, that calls me to long for deeper understanding and greater dependence on God's Spirit and his truth, is 1 Corinthians 2:6-16: "We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him'—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is

from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: 'For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?' But we have the mind of Christ."

God truly is awesome and generous, isn't he! He not only gives us what we could never attain on our own merit, he also gives us the power to understand what he has given us, as Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:17-19: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."

When we grasp how God's grace is lavished on us in Jesus' life and teachings, his death and resurrection, and his offer to us of a relationship with God, we choose to obey him out of love and appreciation, not obligation. Titus 2:11-14 sums this up so well: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."

The New Covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34 doesn't make sense to us from our human perspective, but it's God's dream for us to experience it. Jesus made it possible, and the Spirit of God in us makes it come true for us in our daily lives as long as we cooperate with the process!

God's Part and Our Part

The pattern in the Bible is uncomplicated: Christians spent time together and bonds of love, affection, and unity developed. It can't be made to happen or rushed or structured—it doesn't need to be, because God is going to produce in us through his Spirit what no humanly-organized system can accomplish. That's the New Covenant in a nutshell.

I'm not saying, however, that we're just to float through life expecting God to somehow make things happen without our participation and planning. I'm just saying that the planning has to flow from an understanding of what is our part and what is God's part. God gives us spiritual principles and we are to apply them, helped by the wisdom of the Spirit living in us and adapted to our own circumstances. We can't make seed grow to fruition, for example—God gives the increase, both physically and spiritually. Paul made this very clear in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9 (see also Mark 4:26-29, Colossians 2:19): "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building." But we can and are admonished to sow to please the Spirit (Galatians 6:7-10), and sow generously (2 Corinthians 9:6-15). The principle that we sow and God produces the harvest applies to many areas of life.

In loving each other, planning would involve scheduling time to spend in activities that will build and strengthen connections with others, and it would shape speech and actions during that time spent. We are to "consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" as we meet together (Hebrews 10:24-25). So it does naturally take thinking and planning, but we don't need to complicate or program the time together. Mostly we just need time to talk, to get beneath the surface and be real with each other, to share ourselves—the good, the bad, and the ugly—with each other, to give and receive the encouragement we all need. Staying connected in encouraging relationships with other Christians isn't complicated, but it is easy to neglect. We have no excuse in our day and time with cell phones and email and instant messaging making it so much easier to keep up with friends!

A good way to examine whether we're experiencing what God intended is to ask ourselves who we know and who knows us well enough to put into practice all the "one another" principles that the New

Testament is full of. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). How that love is expressed is elaborated on by the rest of the New Testament writers. One can’t read far without running into practical instructions, such as “accept one another” (Romans 15:7), “serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13), “be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other” (Ephesians 4:32), “encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11), “do not slander one another” (James 4:11), and on and on! The logical question to ask ourselves is whether it is true in each of our lives that others can tell that we love other Christians by watching us and listening to us talk about what is important to us and what’s going on in our lives.

Another of my favorite Bible passages is 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12: “...we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This describes so well the balance of what is God’s part and what is our part. When Christians give to God good purposes and acts prompted by faith, God fulfills his part and causes growth in the body, both spiritually and numerically.

The same principle of knowing what is our part and what is God’s part is true for our mission and our desire to share our faith. Our part is to “be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). Our part will involve learning God’s will for ourselves first, as 2 Timothy 2:15 admonishes: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” We’re even instructed how to handle opposition in 2 Timothy 2:24-26: “And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

Our part is to know enough to instruct others and to talk to others about God so we can know what they need to learn. God’s part is to bring about repentance if someone is open to seeing his truth.

Hebrews 4:12-13 speaks of the power of the word of God to judge, convict, and expose hearts: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” We don’t judge others, but we can discern possible needs and teach others the word of God in hopes that they will prove to be open to whatever convicting work is needed.

We are given Paul’s example to follow in 2 Corinthians 3-5, where we can learn from his boldness (his part) combined with his dependence on God to do his part: “Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold (3:12)...Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God (4:1-2)...It is written, ‘I believed; therefore I have spoken.’ With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak (4:13)...Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men (5:11).”

Yet in all of our attempts to be bold and to speak to people about their relationship with God, it’s very freeing to know that ultimately, we can’t make people respond to the truth revealed in God’s word. Many Jews obviously missed the point even about the Old Covenant, which made them miss the point about the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:14-15): “But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts.” And non-Jews miss the point, too (2 Corinthians 4:3-4): “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

The responsibility for anyone’s acceptance or rejection of the gospel falls on their own shoulders, as John 3:19-20 makes clear: “This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness

instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.” And yet we keep hoping to find those who have a humility toward God and a desire to live by truth, as John 3:21 describes: “But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.”

The Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-39 was seeking God in the logical way of reading Scripture—a good sign that he was sincere and wanted to understand God’s will. God sent Philip to him for a good reason: “Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him” (verses 30-31). God has revealed himself through the Scriptures, but he knows people will need help to understand it and apply it. It can be overwhelming to people, as it was to this man, to try to figure out what to read and where to find answers to their questions. God has always used people to help other people learn his revealed will. Verse 35 says, “Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.” The man was so eager to do God’s will that the next verse says, “As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?’” How many other people are ready and waiting to learn and obey God’s will, trying their best to read and understand but just needing someone to show them where to look to find the answers in Scripture? I was one of those, so I can’t help but wonder how many are having to wait more patiently than they should have to!

Cornelius (Acts 10) is also a good example of someone who was a God-seeker, who took responsibility to look for truth and humbly accepted it when God provided it in answer to his prayers. Though he didn’t have the advantage held by the Jews who had the revealed word and will of God taught to them from infancy, his seeking heart proved to Peter that, as he says in 10:34-35, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.” God showed that “the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of all” (10:36) will be made available to anyone who seeks God. This is what Hebrews 11:6 promises: “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Lydia of Acts 16:14 is another good example of this kind of heart. She was “...a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.” Those are the kind of people we continue to hope to find. There’s no joy greater than getting to watch God’s truth work on an open heart and mind.

It’s a great blessing, not a burden, to be able to experience as Paul did in his generation what he says in 2 Corinthians 5:19-6:1: “And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.” What we have received freely, we freely give to others. In doing so, we appreciate even more what we have received. As Paul says in Philemon 6, “I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.”

We’ll have to plan time and opportunities to cultivate relationships and to have ways to get into conversations about spiritual issues. There *are* practical considerations on our part, ways we can give ourselves more and better opportunities to be able to broach the subject of a relationship with God and share our faith. For instance, we can have Bible study groups to invite friends to, or invite them to church or social events with our Christian friends. Whether or not they choose to come, they will know our interest in spiritual things and we’ll get some idea of how open they are to talking about God.

We can’t do God’s part; we have to rely on him to put seekers in our paths and to soften hearts and draw them to himself. We are to “plant and water,” in this aspect of life as a Christian as well as in every other area, and rely on God to “give the increase” causing our actions that flow from our faith to be fruitful and effective. We are told by Jesus that the number is small, which is sad to God and to us: “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

There *are* seekers that are “ripe” in their readiness to find God, and our part is to be willing to be workers to “harvest” them for God, as Jesus said in Matthew 9:37-38: “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’” It seems that though the number of those who even look for the narrow road is few, that number is “plentiful” relative to the “few” workers willing to go out and help them find it. We have the great privilege to get to participate in God’s work on earth. We need the encouragement of one another to appreciate what we have to the point that we want to share it with others.

The church is the physical body of Christ, and we want to present an accurate picture to the world of God’s nature and his will. The principle Paul told Titus to teach to slaves is true for all of us as we live in the world: “...that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (Titus 2:10). Paul also said, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). A big part of our role is to be sure we don’t present a distorted picture, to let the attractive nature of the good news be clearly seen. We can be bold and present the truth about the need everyone has to repent of sin and to submit to God’s will without being offensive or negative. We can be sensitive and loving and as gentle as possible and yet honest in helping our friends face the bad news about their sin so they can appreciate the good news of the New Covenant promise. Because we can empathize with them and we want everyone to experience what we’ve had the privilege to receive from God, we can take the necessary risks to share our faith with those we know. Though we will experience rejection, “put our foot in our mouth” many times, and think in hindsight of things we wish we’d said or done, in the long run we’ll see the trend of growing in our confidence and occasionally finding a God-seeker who responds gratefully to the message God entrusts to us to share. There’s no greater thrill than that! That’s when we really become grateful for the privilege of being God’s fellow workers.

So, to apply the K.I.S.S. principle (which I’ll kindly interpret “Keep It Simple, Saint”), the main practical questions we need to ask as we go through life are these: How can I show my love to my brothers and sisters in Christ today? And how can I share my faith today? There obviously are no pat or simple answers to those questions, because needs, opportunities, and circumstances will be different for every person and every day. But we look at people from a completely different perspective (2 Corinthians 5:16): “So, from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.” We see beneath the masks all people wear in public, and we know the needs of their hearts and souls. We have the only thing that will meet the needs and God lets us get to share it. That’s the wonderful, awesome, amazing, exciting element of the New Covenant, of walking with God and letting him lead and work, privileged to have a part in his work and living from a completely different paradigm than those who are still separated from him. We enjoy the fellowship of life on a higher plane with others who also have become “new creations” (2 Corinthians 5:17), and we try to persuade nonbelievers to join us in fellowship with God and with each other. It’s that simple.

New Covenant Equipping

There *are* ways to become more effective at both loving each other and sharing our faith. Peter urges us to add the godly qualities of faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love to our lives because “they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5-8). Along with those qualities in our personal lives, we need leaders in the church who can equip us to minister, meaning to apply God’s truth to lives—ours and others’. Ephesians 4 lists leadership roles, the purpose of which is “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining the full measure of perfection found in Christ....From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (verses 12-13, 16). But the practical equipping needed isn’t overly complicated. Mostly those who have practical experiences and have learned how to apply scriptural principles to everyday life are able to share what they have learned by doing.

The pattern that Paul in particular demonstrates is equipping by example. He said, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). He simply had close relationships, with everyone

he got to know and especially with those he was training, like Timothy and Titus. He did his work and showed them how. Nowadays the jargon is “mentoring” or “discipling.” Back in Jesus’ and Paul’s time, it was normal for skills to be learned by apprenticeship, spending time with and working with a teacher. In our different culture, we may need to realize that some of the ways God worked then need to be paid attention to. Perhaps God chose that time and that culture for a reason, that some cultural norms were uniquely effective for the establishment and growth of the church.

What we discount as culture vs. what we appreciate as a wise pattern for us to follow is worth re-examining. Voluntarily seeking to learn from and to teach other Christians is the attitude that is encouraged. Paul urged Titus to “teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God” (Titus 2:3-5). And Peter admonished, “Young men...be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’” (1 Peter 5:5). To be teachable and eager to learn from those who are older and wiser, whether in years or experience or both, will help us grow into being like Jesus more and quicker than trying to do it on our own. We need to humbly ask for help, advice, and equipping.

When we think in simplified terms of loving each other and sharing our faith, the equipping process of Ephesians 4 becomes a new lifestyle perspective in contrast to the American corporate culture mindset that is so natural to us nowadays. We’re so used to top-down leadership and seeking recognition as the norm. But we’re cautioned in Colossians 2:8, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.” We need to consciously retrain our minds to operate from New Covenant principles rather than the natural, human, worldly principles we’ve always defaulted to. The question, “What does God say about this?” is the new default for Christians.

Jesus set the ultimate example of New Covenant leadership and then called the apostles (who in turn called others) to the same mindset in Matthew 20:25-28: “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’” “Top” leadership in the church is the responsibility of elders, who are admonished, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2-3).

1 Corinthians 12 describes the new paradigm with an easy to understand analogy to our physical bodies. It gives us a way to picture the organic and dynamic way God designed us to function as part of a bigger whole, the church: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every

part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

What strikes me as I read that passage is that all the structure, planning, organizing, programming, and scheduling in the world cannot make a group of any type become an effective, close-knit, loving and giving organism. No corporate flow-chart or hierarchical structure works as well as God’s design for the body, the church. God works from the inside out, changing our thinking which in turn changes our actions. When we understand how we are a needed as well as needy part of this group of people who all love God, we’re happy to use our God-given strengths for the good of others. And we can be free to be humble, to admit our weaknesses and get help from the strengths of others.

New Covenant equipping boils down to wanting to do what God says to do because we love and trust him and are thankful for the new life he gives us, then reading the Bible to find out what his will is, then doing it—with much prayer and much encouragement and even advice as needed from other Christians that we have become close to by spending time together. Once one has the mindset of wanting to follow God’s will and has the relationships with others of the same mindset, it’s natural to experience the give and take of helping each other learn to do what God says is right. Colossians 3:16 encourages this: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.” Romans 15:14 reveals the confidence that Paul had in all Christians: “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.”

We learn from our own experiences and pass on what we’ve learned, and we learn from others’ experiences that they pass on to us. Once again, it’s not complicated! While classes and planned training are always helpful to our general spiritual development and may be especially appropriate at times, the best-learned lessons are usually those that come as the need arises from circumstances in our lives.

The New Covenant Effect

God brings us into a new life of loving and serving others voluntarily from the heart, because we’re so grateful for what he has done for us and for the love he gives us for one another in this new family. We now operate from a “want-to” attitude rather than an “ought-to” one. 1 Peter 1:22-23 describes this so well: “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.” Obeying the truth of the good news and being born again by being immersed into Christ does purify us, and through that God gives us a sincere love for our brothers which can’t help but come out in our actions.

What does it take to put this into practice? Nothing complicated—mostly we just need to spend time with each other. And the time spent doesn’t always have to have an agenda or a goal or a purpose greater than gradually making and strengthening the connections. If I am excited about the promises God makes about the love and affection and help I can experience in my relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ, then I’ll seek out opportunities to spend time with them, and I’ll be alert and thoughtful when I’m with them. I won’t be able to stand shallow, superficial interactions. I’ll want to get deeper, to enjoy the freedom to be real and to talk about things that the world can’t understand but which are precious truths to fellow Christians.

No one can force me to love others or “make it happen” to me. God knows that we will always devote ourselves to what is important to us. He said in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.” Though the context is comparing serving God versus seeking wealth, the principle is true for anything that is more important to us than seeking and serving God. So if I’m not eager to make and take advantage of opportunities to deepen relationships with others in the family of God, the solution is to change my perspective and appreciate how important those relationships are.

Once one grasps the New Covenant paradigm—everything done from the heart rather than from duty—it becomes the obvious, unspoken but always-there assumption from which everything written in the New Testament flows. For instance, look at the attitudes and assumptions that exuded from the first Christians, from the first day of the New Covenant in Acts 2:41-47: “Those who accepted his message were baptized,

and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." No one commanded or admonished them to meet together or to help those who were in need—no one could have even been tempted to try to make that happen because it was unnecessary. Their gratefulness was their motivation. And others were drawn to what they saw in those joyful and devoted new Christians and wanted to join them and have what they had—a relationship with God and with each other.

If we truly appreciate the price Jesus paid to be able to offer us the power and possibility of living as God intended for us to live, we will find ourselves longing to change to be like him and not rationalizing how to keep on sinning and still go to heaven. That is the New Covenant's inherent, miraculous but essential effect. That's how God designed us to function, in loving and grateful response to his love. This is summarized in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15,21: "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again....God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

New Covenant Pitfalls

The very nature of the New Covenant being not only voluntary but also dependent on internal motivation rather than external pressure or control means that there are inherent dangers that have to be watched for and guarded against. Though, as Romans 8:39 says, nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord," we can change our minds and leave God. God will keep his part of the New Covenant. Will we keep our part?

The choice we make to love and serve God is not once for all time but is renewed every time we are faced with a decision whether to obey him. God's commitment to the covenant is once for all time, as Hebrews 9:26-28 reveals, concluding, "so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." But on our part, we have to continue to choose because it's in the choosing to do God's will that our love is expressed. As Jesus pointed out in John 14:23-24, as he ate his last meal with his apostles, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching....He who does not love me will not obey my teaching." It's only logical to draw the conclusion that someone who chooses not to obey Jesus' teaching must not love him!

Jesus was very up-front about what our choice involves (Luke 9:23-25): "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" He was pointing out the paradox that real life is not to be found in this world but through knowing God and following his directions for how to live while we're here on earth. And we must choose afresh each day whether to follow him or follow the world.

What are the potential pitfalls? God knows our weaknesses, and warns us in the Bible of five types to watch for and guard against:

1. Forgetting is the greatest challenge to avoid. Because we can and do tend to forget easily, there are many reminders and warnings about that, and many reminders to remind each other! In Peter's second letter, he urged his readers to add godly qualities to their faith and concluded, "But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins" (2 Peter 1:9). Knowing human nature always works against the best of intentions, he added (verses 12,15), "So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have....And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things."

Jesus knew our forgetful nature so well that he even gave us a ritual designed to serve as a regular reminder of his death for us. Paul even had to remind the Corinthian church of the meaning of that Lord's Supper, in 1 Corinthians 11:23-28: "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup."

The example of the early Christians is found in Acts 20:7: "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread." They took seriously the need to regularly "break bread," as is commonly understood to mean the Lord's Supper, and it seems that by this time it had become their custom to meet on Sundays—the day of the Resurrection—for that purpose especially, along with the fellowship, preaching, teaching, singing, praying and encouragement that would have gone along with getting together as the church. The meaning of the Lord's Supper, as Jesus emphasized, was to remember him and the New Covenant that his blood paid for. It is so important to keep that focus that to participate without taking it seriously is the equivalent of "sinning against the body and blood of the Lord."

When Paul talks about taking the Lord's Supper in an "unworthy manner," he is not saying that we are to wait until we are worthy, as I've heard some wrongly assume, and who then are afraid to participate. We are never worthy of Jesus' death for us—that's why he had to die! No, rather the manner of partaking of it needs to be worthy of the meaning of it, as Paul clarifies by telling us to examine ourselves and to be sure we are being reminded of Jesus' death and are motivated by it to live as God says. The next verses, 1 Corinthians 11:29-32, are almost scary: "For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world." We need to be reminded that it is not only forgiveness that Jesus' death gives us, it is the power to change and to become godly!

2. Knowing but not doing is another hazard to watch out for. James 1:23-25 emphasizes this: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does." The practical benefits of knowing God's word—the freedom from sin and power to live as God meant life to be experienced—come not from knowing what's right but from doing it.

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). Holding to his teaching means to live by it. He set the example for us in that: "...the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me" (John 14:31). And we don't have an excuse to wait until we understand every why and wherefore, because Jesus promised, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own" (John 7:17).

Sometimes we have to do what God says before we understand why he says it, in order to be able to understand the wisdom of it by experience. A good example of this is Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18:15-17 for resolving a conflict with "a brother," starting with going to the person directly and not involving anyone else unless it isn't resolved between just the two of you. It's hard to believe that it would work, and we so easily fall into the same patterns of gossip, slander, and severing relationships that we were used to in the world. But if we try it, we'll see that it works and experience how great it is to be able to keep the bonds of love and unity, often even stronger than before the conflict.

3. Being busily religious but not being sure that what we're doing is really God's will is easy to fall into without realizing it. Often churches are full of activities, but not necessarily ones that flow from our relationship with God and the desire to love each other and share our faith, which we know are God's will.

Jesus encountered and condemned the deceptive mindset of being religious but missing the point of knowing God. Matthew 7:21-23 makes it clear: "'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" We can be very involved in church activities and yet remain "ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:8). The fact that these people Jesus says will be condemned were even able to perform miracles in Jesus' name would tend to make them confident that God was with them, wouldn't you think? There is great power in Jesus' name, isn't there! It is proof that God is real and powerful without necessarily proving that one he works through has a relationship with him. Read Acts 19:13-16 for a sad but funny example of this, where a demon was told by some Jews, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out," and he replied, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" Then he did react, but by attacking the Jews.

We can also be religious but wrong in other areas of our beliefs and our worship. I've discovered in talking to many sincerely religious people over the years that there are few who question what their churches teach about basic things like the New Covenant vs. the Old Covenant, how to be born again, how the leadership of churches is to be handled, and how God wants us to relate to each other and to the world. If we haven't studied it for ourselves, how can we be confident that we're doing God's will? An example of the kind of attitude held up as an example for us to follow is in Acts 17:11, "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." The result was that many believed from having their own convictions.

4. Yet another way we can stray is by relying on ourselves, trying to live for God with our own strength. It's a very natural and understandable thing to do, because all our lives we've been trying to do right from our own discipline and self-control. But it didn't work before we were born again, and it's always futile to think we're capable of doing God's will on our own strength. If Jesus couldn't do it, how could we? He was given the Holy Spirit upon his own baptism (Luke 3:21-22) and was immediately put in circumstances that forced him to rely on the Spirit of God and not his human nature (Luke 4:1-2): "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil."

We are reminded often of where our strength must come from: "Do not put out the Spirit's fire" (1 Thessalonians 5:19). "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). And Romans 8:12-15 is so encouraging: "Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'" Paul was taught a lesson that he shared with us: "...he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Corinthians 12:9). God removes our humiliation at being weak, replacing it with humility that motivates us to use the strength and power his Spirit in us provides. Who wouldn't be thrilled to learn the promise of Ephesians 3:20-21? "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen!"

5. All of these pitfalls that we've talked about so far remind us of one more important fact: As long as we are in this world, we have an enemy, called Satan or the devil, who is literally dead-set on keeping us from either finding God, or, if that fails, from staying faithful to him. We must remember that we need to

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Paul said about Satan, “...we are not unaware of his schemes” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

We are at war with Satan, evil, our own weak natures, and the temptations of this world. The devil’s goal is to deceive us into thinking we’re fine when we’re not. As Hebrews 3:12-13 makes clear, we will always be in danger of sin creeping back in unless we watch for it and let others get close enough to spot it, too: “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”

Jesus reminded his disciples when he asked them to watch with him as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak” (Mark 14:38). And as Paul honestly stated in Romans 7:21-25: “So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Some try to interpret that as meaning that the battle is hopeless. But though the chapter goes on and on about the struggle between the sinful nature and our desire to do what’s right, the point of it is to bring us to the same conclusion as Paul reached, that we are wretched and need rescuing. And as he asked the question of who can rescue us, he gave the wonderful answer that is the heart of the New Covenant: “through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

We have hope! In John 16:33, one of the last things Jesus told his disciples before leaving the Last Supper, to summarize all he had been telling them, was, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” One of the promises that gives us hope is in James 4:7: “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

We can have confidence that with the help of God’s Spirit, we can experience victory if we rely on his strength to overcome our weakness—not perfectly, not every time, but with the trend toward becoming more and more godly. As 2 Corinthians 3:18 promises, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” In God’s eyes, when he looks at his children he sees Jesus’ perfection: “...by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Hebrews 10:14). It’s like we’re given Jesus’ spotless, stainless garment to wear and which is what God sees, covering our sinful selves, and we grow little by little to become in reality on the inside what God sees, with less and less sin and more and more righteousness in fact rather than on the credit of Jesus. We’re given perfection as a gift and then the power to live up to it. And it’s all from God.

Satan, the devil, wants us to forget what Jesus died for, to know God’s will but not do it, to be religious but wrong, and to rely on ourselves. Bottom line, his goal is to keep us trapped in the sin that is so destructive or, failing that, to snare us all over again into the slavery of sin. He will even use people who are “false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). So we have to be “as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

All of these dangers are very real, but the great news is that God promises that we can have victory over them. Ephesians 6:10-13 is a tremendous encouragement: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”

We need to be on guard, yet bask in and be motivated by the New Covenant promises. 1 Corinthians 15:57-58 is one of those promises to live by: “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves

fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” God makes everything we go through worth it!

He doesn’t promise life here will be easy, and in fact promises it will be very hard. We don’t have to make sense of every difficulty in life. Sometimes we may be the victims of the evil in this world that is no respecter of persons. Other times we may need to “endure hardship as discipline....God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:7,10-11). We may not be able to tell whether trials are just life or God’s discipline, but with a New Covenant perspective, we can have joy and peace as “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Though it’s hard not to understand the “why” of everything we go through, we can learn to “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). Philippians 4:6-7 is a great encouragement and example of how a New Covenant mindset works in real life: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

The hard part in overcoming the pitfalls we’ve talked about is that we have a hard time totally trusting God and practicing 2 Corinthians 5:7, “We live by faith, not by sight.” But over time, as we do step out in faith and put into practice what God tells us about how to think and act, we understand and experience the wisdom of his word and we see ourselves transformed. Faith becomes sight only in hindsight.

“Your Kingdom Come”

One more aspect of the New Covenant promise becomes very noticeable when the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are read with a New Covenant mindset. We’ve seen that God’s overall plan for mankind was that, by proving beyond all doubt the inherent failure of the Old Covenant law to produce righteousness, he would prepare us for the day when the New Covenant promise could be received and appreciated. Once we grasp that, we can see a pattern in the Gospels that ties the New Covenant promise to Jesus’ emphasis on the kingdom of God. Jesus spent three years before his sacrificial death and victorious resurrection publicly teaching and preaching about the kingdom. He used parables, object lessons, and miracles, in conversations with individuals and his disciples as well as public discourses. He talked often about the kingdom of God being “near.”

Jesus began his public ministry after the announcement of his Sonship by God directly as he was baptized by John the Baptist, who confirmed that Jesus was the Lamb of God for whom he had been sent to prepare the way (Matthew 3:15-16, John 1:32-34). After enduring and conquering forty days of temptation by Satan following his baptism, we read in Mark 1:14-15, “Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’”

Jesus immediately set out in his first recorded teachings (what we know as the Sermon on the Mount) to make a clear contrast between external, superficial religiosity—that had become the norm under the Old Covenant law—and internally motivated spirituality and godliness. His first sentence promised the kingdom of heaven would belong to those who are “poor in spirit,” who know that on our own we are powerless, spiritually bankrupt, and totally in need of God’s mercy and grace (Matthew 5:3). Later, he taught that we need to pray that “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). And he set out right priorities for us in Matthew 6:25,33: “Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?...But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

After he had chosen and called his twelve disciples who were to become his apostles, he sent them out on a mission with these instructions: “As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near’” (Matthew 10:7). Then in Matthew 16:18-19, preparing for the apparently fast-approaching opening of the gates to the kingdom of God, he said, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in

heaven.” A few verses later, in Matthew 16:28, Jesus gave a clear hint about when the kingdom would arrive: “I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” So it was to come in the lifetime of Jesus’ hearers.

Getting even closer to the coming of the kingdom, at the Last Supper, Jesus explained in Luke 22:14-20: “When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.’ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” Here we get the first clear indication that in Jesus’ mind, the coming of the kingdom of God and the New Covenant are connected. A few verses later, in Luke 22:29, Jesus said to his apostles, “And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me.”

After Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected, the time was fulfilled for the kingdom of God to come—and for the New Covenant promise to be fulfilled. All that the prophets had said about the coming reign of God in the hearts of men and women and that Jesus had taught about the kingdom (over 100 references in the Gospels) was ready to be experienced. His last instructions to the apostles before leaving them to go back up to heaven finally pulled it all together (Luke 24:44-49): “He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’”

What did the Father promise? He promised, as Jesus had been saying, that the kingdom was coming, it was near, that those who would be born again would be able to see it and enter it (John 3), and that Peter would have the keys to open it. And what would it look like? Luke 17:20-21 says, “Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.’” And that is where the definitions of the kingdom and the New Covenant between God and man intersect.

The kingdom came and the New Covenant was first experienced on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. Peter used the “keys of the kingdom of heaven,” pointing to Jesus as the way to enter in, as he said in John 10:9-10, “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.... I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” On the first day of the coming of the kingdom of God to man, three thousand entered the kingdom by obeying Peter’s instructions in Acts 2:38, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The kingdom came with power and has grown ever since that day.

Those first Christians began their new life in fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit, and they started to experience what Jeremiah foretold so long ago: “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

At last God’s desire and plan from the beginning of time was fulfilled. As Paul said in Colossians 1:25-27, “I have become its [the church’s] servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness—the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

The definition of the kingdom of God, the reign of a loving King through his New Covenant with man, really can’t be made any more concise than that: “Christ in you, the hope of glory!” If we can only

comprehend how amazing and wonderful that promise is—that the mystery of life is answered for us by being in Christ and Christ being in us—our lives will be completely transformed as we live each day, no matter our circumstances!

The New Covenant Conclusion

The New Covenant is God's solution to our sin! He has paid the price of death for sin through Jesus' death and resurrection. He takes away our sin and gives us his own perfection. In the New Covenant, he took away the rule of law and replaced it with a relationship with himself that will result in the very thing we long for: the opportunity and power to overcome sin and become truly righteous and godly.

The question always boils down to whether we will believe it, receive it, and then live by it. If we will, we'll experience the "fruit of the Spirit" when we cooperate as he transforms us to become like God himself, with ever-increasing "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

And what we get to experience here on earth is only a foretaste of what we have to look forward to for eternity! We must never forget that our life and relationship with God here on earth is preparing us for the day when we will experience and appreciate the promise of Revelation 21:2-4: "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'"

If we really appreciate the greatness of what God offers us, we'll have the same conviction and courage as the apostles in Acts 5. Jailed for preaching the good news about Jesus, they were miraculously freed, kept on preaching, and when rearrested, they declared: "We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead...God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." A respected Jewish leader prophetically advised, "Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." After being flogged, "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ." Acts 6:1 confirms that the message couldn't be stopped and was proven to be from God: "...the number of disciples was increasing..."

The apostles understood and lived by the promise of Romans 6:4: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a *new life*." And they gladly obeyed the instructions of the angel who opened the jail doors in Acts 5:20: "Go...and tell the people the full message of this *new life*." May we all understand, experience, and then be eager to share with others this *new life* found in the *New Covenant*!



Dedication

This booklet has grown out of many church experiences over several years of seeking God and then 44 years as a Christian. In many of those years and those churches, I felt like I was acting from tradition, habit, “the way we’ve always done it,” and mindless conformity to the dictates of other people. But eventually in each circumstance, my half-conscious questions would surface and I’d try to make sense of issues that were stealing my peace and joy.

During a very long stretch of years, I abdicated my responsibility and privilege to love and serve God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. I was a people-pleaser and not a God-lover. Eventually I was forced to face the serious disagreements I had between what I saw for myself in the Bible and what I was being taught and expected of by leaders of my church. It was on leaving that religious group 12 years ago that my focus on the New Covenant promise became a conscious quest. The paradigm for life as expressed in loving other Christians and sharing my faith with those who are still lost started to jell as I questioned everything I believed and had been taught. As I wondered what direction to pursue after several bad or at least disappointing church experiences, it seemed that every question led to a more basic question, until what distilled out was the New Covenant promise on which the church of the New Testament is built.

Two Scriptures haunted me:

First, Paul spoke in Colossians 1:26-27 about the role God gave him to present “the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory.”

And second, in Luke 17:20-21 Jesus said, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because *the kingdom of God is within you*.”

I was amazed by the New Covenant promise that “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.” After years of trying to please God by having as much as possible checked off my religious to-do list but never knowing peace and joy, the contrast of the focus on the internal work of God rather than external pressure to conform to my church’s expectations jumped off the page. I finally saw where I and so many others had taken a detour off the narrow road.

In trying to understand how I had gotten so far off-track, the question seemed to be, “What was I seeking to lead me to think that what I had in that church was the answer?” I had to admit that what I had been looking for was a great church experience, a sense of accomplishment spiritually, and someone to just tell me what to do so I could do it and know I was pleasing God. It was very humbling to realize that I had not been seeking to know God. I was putting the cart before the horse, wanting to experience the results without first seeking to know the Giver of Results. I couldn’t say, as Paul did in Philippians 3:10-11, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.” I didn’t want to just know him and let everything else flow from that as is the New Covenant way that started to become obvious as I read the Bible with an open mind and heart. I had wanted what God could give me, not God himself.

I was like the Laodiceans in Revelation 3 who didn’t realize that what they valued in their religiosity was really worthless, and what they really needed was this in verse 20: “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” I had always focused on the fact that this verse was written to Christians who had missed the point, not to people wanting to become Christians. But I had missed the point myself, that as a Christian what Jesus offers is a relationship that is intimate as sharing a meal always is, and that everything else would fall into place if I had that kind of close relationship with Jesus through his Spirit and with the Father through Jesus.

I do still forget, don’t always do what I know, often discover new areas where I’ve been ignorant or wrong, and rely too much on my own strength and wisdom. I still too often see in hindsight how I’ve given in to Satan’s schemes and let sin creep in. But now I focus on how far God has brought me in the

transformation process he promises, so I rejoice at progress I experience because it comes from inside as he planned rather than from trying to live up to a list of rules. What I do, I do from my choice to serve, work together with, and obey God because I love him and I know he loves me.

So I dedicate this booklet to my “Abba” Father in heaven, my brother and savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who strengthens and comforts and transforms me. I thank God for knowing me and letting me know him!

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