



The Difference

by Tricia Berg

For anyone who is running from God today, I would advise against it. Christian song lyrics today are popular when they talk about God pursuing us. It is true that without His calling us, we are unable to come to Him. However, that is not the same as knowing His will and running away anyway. Jonah ran and God did not coax him to return, but rather He put Jonah in a place where he had no other option but to repent of having run away and to call on God for help, promising to do His will as he should have done in the first place.

The prodigal son ran off to enjoy the world and squander his inheritance, but his father did NOT run after him to retrieve him and bring him to his senses. His father waited patiently for him to return and welcomed him back with great joy. His story could have ended tragically if he hadn't "come to himself" and realized how much better it was to be under his father's authority, which he had unwisely thought that he wanted freedom from. Isn't that exactly what the world promises us today? "Freedom"?

We can learn from the prodigal son that our Father knows best and we only harm ourselves by rebelling against Him. His father patiently waited, watching and longing for his return, but at no point did he force him to do so. He was an adult making his own choices, good or bad. God does not violate our free will, which is a gift from Him, in accepting His gracious, merciful offer of salvation by grace through faith. Neither does He force us to remain faithful to Him in our thoughts, words and deeds. If we truly believe in our hearts as well as our minds, then we (during this present age) have His Spirit within us to conform

our desires and our will to align with His. Even so, we have the capability to resist. If God wanted robots, He would have certainly have designed them instead, but He didn't.

God allows unpleasant and even unbearable circumstances in our lives so that we will cry out to Him in repentance and return to Him if we have strayed. Even if we're not being deliberately wayward, our faith needs to be tried to be proven genuine. God has NO interest in false confessions of faith, fair-weather worshipers or people who believe in a God they have constructed in their own minds instead of in Him as He revealed Himself to us in the Holy Bible. Will we trust Him no matter what our circumstances, as Job did when He was tested? Don't tempt God by running away from Him as fast as you can, thinking that is the way to get attention the way a wayward child in our society might do. Just as with our own children, the attention gained by that kind of behavior will not be positive.

People who want to justify their "inability" to stop sinning often point to Paul's claiming to be the "worst of sinners." Paul was NOT referring to delighting in and taking pride in sin. Paul was a Pharisee who believed in God, but rejected Jesus. The Pharisees enjoyed their power and status among the people and were not willing to give it up, even for God's own Son. They CHOSE unbelief, insisting that God's plan to deliver them must match their expectations of it. Like other Pharisees, Paul kept the LETTER of the law, but not the SPIRIT. One of his greatest sins had been to persecute Christians, and therefore Jesus, IN IGNORANCE. Paul wanted us to know that there is forgiveness for ANY sin, NOT that we are meant to continue sinning after coming to faith and NEW LIFE in Christ. He didn't contradict himself under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. His words need to be taken in light of the rest of Scripture.

There is great joy in heaven when a sinner repents and Jesus said he was here to seek the lost. However, there is a difference in the way that God lovingly seeks one who is lost due to their own ignorance and the way He deals with one who willfully chooses to be "lost." If you belong to the one, true, living God and yet insist upon going your own way, then you can be sure that there will be suffering in your future. Just ask Paul. God disciplines each one He loves and all the Father gives to Jesus WILL come to Him. You will be glad of it when you look back and realize what nearly happened to you when you thought you knew better than God what was best for you. You'll be so relieved that God loved you enough to bring you to your knees and never let you go.

It's your choice if you want to do this the easy way or the hard way. I recommend submitting to God willingly as soon as possible. Don't look around

you and think that nothing bad happens to other people who rebel against God. Either they will be "getting theirs" eventually on this earth, or they are not His at all. You worry about you and your own relationship with Him. He'll deal with them in His own way and His own timing.

To anyone who claims to believe in and belong to God and yet lives in a way that mocks His holiness and mighty power, as if He doesn't know and see what they are doing: You are TEMPTING God. Stop, NOW. There are only two options. 1) You will be disciplined by God and it will not be pleasant, but it is far preferable to the other option: 2) You do not actually belong to Him! In that case, you may do whatever you want, but it will result in your eventual punishment NEVER ending, because you have rejected the ONLY way to have your sins forgiven and washed away.

I recommend repenting ASAP. Tear off the bandage that's hiding your sin and let God attend to you as His dear child so the healing can begin. It will hurt for a while, but with time it will be forgotten and replaced with joy in Him. God wants ALL to be saved. This is your invitation to put your trust in Jesus, repenting of your unbelief as well as the sins that caused your separation from God.

Scripture Verses:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me **draws him**. And I will raise him up on the last day. John 6:44

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me." **But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish. So he paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish, away from the presence of the LORD.** *But the LORD hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship threatened to break up.* Then the mariners were afraid, and each cried out to his god. And they hurled the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them. But Jonah had gone down into the inner part of the ship and had lain down and was fast asleep. So the captain came and said to him, "What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call out to your god! Perhaps the god will give a thought to us, that we may not perish." And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know on whose account this evil has come upon us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. Then they said to him, "Tell us on whose account this evil has come upon us. What is your occupation? And

where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" And he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and **I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.**" Then the men were exceedingly afraid and said to him, "What is this that you have done!" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you, that the sea may quiet down for us?" For the sea grew more and more tempestuous. He said to them, "*Pick me up and hurl me into the sea; then the sea will quiet down for you, for I know it is because of me that this great tempest has come upon you.*" Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to get back to dry land, but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them. Therefore they called out to the LORD, "O LORD, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not on us innocent blood, *for you, O LORD, have done as it pleased you.*" So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. *Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.* **And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.** Jonah 1:1-17

Then **Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish**, saying, "I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice. For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.' The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. *When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple. Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love. But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!*" And **the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.** Jonah 2:1-10

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he *squandered his property in reckless living.* And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into

his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. "But **when he came to himself**, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! **I will arise and go to my father**, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" And he arose and came to his father. But *while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'* But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. *For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'* And they began to celebrate. "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" Luke 15:11-32

These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. *For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. **For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.*** For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. What the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire." 2 Peter 2:17-22

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.** The slave does not remain in the house forever; **the son remains forever.** So **if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.** John 8:34-36

And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, **choose this day whom you will serve,** whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But **as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.**" Joshua 24:15

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." Matthew 6:24

For **by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* Ephesians 2:8-10

Therefore, my beloved, *as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* Do all things without grumbling or disputing, **that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,** holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Philippians 2:12-16

Now this I say and *testify in the Lord,* that you must *no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the **futility** of their minds. They are **darkened** in their understanding, **alienated** from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their **hardness of heart.** They have become **callous** and have **given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.** But **that is not the way you learned Christ!**—**assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to **put off your old self,** which belongs to your **former** manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to **put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.**** Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go*

down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. **And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Ephesians 4:17-32

Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. **Abstain from every form of evil.** 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

For you were called to freedom, brothers. **Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh,** but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.** For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;* against such things there is no law. And **those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.** Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:13-26

Or **do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness,**

there will be wrath and fury. *There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.* Romans 2:4-11

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. 1 Peter 5:6-10

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, **you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.** *Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.* 1 Peter 1:6-9

And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "*Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.*" And the LORD said to Satan, "*Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.*" So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. Job 1:8-12

Then Job answered the LORD and said: "**I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.** 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore **I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.** 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.' **I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.**" After the LORD had spoken these words to Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite:

"My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." Job 42:1-7

And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And **the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.** Job 42:10

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the **true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth**, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:23-24

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" **Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again,** the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'*You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.*"' Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. Matthew 4:5-11

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that *your passions are at war within you?* You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You *ask and do not receive*, because you ask *wrongly, to spend it on your passions.* You adulterous people! Do you not know that ***friendship with the world is enmity with God?*** *Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "*God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*" ***Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*** James 4:1-10

"But He knows the way I take; **When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.**" Job 23:10

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. **Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.** *Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.* **Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.** James 5:7-11

Behold, **I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.** For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how **should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.** Isaiah 48:10-11

Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? **“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”** It is for *discipline* that you have to *endure*. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? **If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.** Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. **For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.** Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. **Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.** Hebrews 12:3-14

“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, **because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.** For you say, *I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.* **I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you**

may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”
Revelation 3:15-22

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though **formerly** I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But **I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief**, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost*. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might **display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life**. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:12-17

And I answered, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And he said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are **persecuting**.’ Acts 22:8

“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel **according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day**. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.”Acts 22:3-5

“My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that **according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee**.” Acts 26:4-5

For **I delight in the law of God, in my inner being**, but I see in my members another law **waging war** against the law of my mind and making me

captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. **Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?** Romans 7:22-24

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:17

So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, **there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.** Luke 15:3-7

For the Son of Man came **to seek and to save the lost.**" Luke 19:10

For I [Jesus] will show him [Paul] how much he must **suffer for the sake of my name.**" Acts 9:16

"**Blessed** are those who are **persecuted for righteousness' sake**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "**Blessed** are you when others **revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad**, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:10-12

And when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.** And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. Acts 5:40-42

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should **lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.** John 6:37-39

Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.
Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

*Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; **fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land. In just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace. The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him, but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming. The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose way is upright; their sword shall enter their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. Better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous. The LORD knows the days of the blameless, and their heritage will remain forever; they are not put to shame in evil times; in the days of famine they have abundance. But the wicked will perish; the enemies of the LORD are like the glory of the pastures; they vanish—like smoke they vanish away. The wicked borrows but does not pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives; for those blessed by the LORD shall inherit the land, but those cursed by him shall be cut off. The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way; though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the LORD upholds his hand. I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread. He is ever lending generously, and his children become a blessing. Turn away from evil and do good; so shall you dwell forever. For the LORD loves justice; he will not forsake his saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever. The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice. The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip. The wicked watches for the righteous and seeks to put him to death. The LORD will not abandon him to his power or let him be condemned when he is brought to trial. Wait for the LORD and keep his way, and he will exalt you to inherit the land; you will look on when the wicked are cut off. I have seen a wicked, ruthless man, spreading himself like a green laurel tree. But he passed away, and behold, he was no more; though I sought him, he could not be found. Mark the blameless and behold the upright, for there is a future for the man of peace. But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed; the future of the wicked shall be cut off. The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; he is their stronghold in the time of trouble. The LORD helps them***

and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him. Psalm 37:1-40

Truly God is good to Israel, **to those who are pure in heart.** *But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind. Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the generation of your children. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; **then I discerned their end. Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!** Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms. *When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. **You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you.** But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.* Psalm 73:1-28*

*Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an **evil, unbelieving heart,** leading you to fall away from the living God. But **exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."** Hebrews 3:12-15*

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become **defiled**; that no one is **sexually immoral or unholy** like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, **when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.** For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. **See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.** At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus **let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.** Hebrews 12:15-29

What shall we say then? **Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might **walk in newness of life.** 11 **So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.** For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? **Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are**

slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, **having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.** I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. **For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.** For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But **what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?** For **the end of those things is death.** But now that you have been **set free from sin** and have become **slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.** For the wages of sin is death, but the **free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Romans 6:1-4, 11-23

Some of you have become arrogant, **as if I were not coming to you.** But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. **What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?** 1 Corinthians 4:18-21

But if we **judged ourselves truly**, we would not be judged. But **when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.** 1 Corinthians 11:31-32

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may *lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.* For there is one God, and **there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all**, which is the testimony given at the proper time. 1 Timothy 2:1-6

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, **if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.** For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. Romans 10:8-10

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. Revelation 22:17

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