



*The
River*

Bruce Montroy

The River
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DEDICATION

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 wishes take the water of life without cost. Revelation 22:17 nas

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Bible Abbreviations

kjv – King James Version
nas – New American Standard Bible
ncv – New Century Version
niv – New International Version
nkj – New King James Version
nlb – New Living Bible
nrs – New Revised Standard Bible

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INTRODUCTION

Many years ago the Lord had me wade out into a river of mercy that was flowing from His throne. It was in my devotions and the river was one that I saw with my mind's eye. Some people may think this strange or New Age, but I have learned that all of us have a continual flow of pictures going through our subconscious mind. Research has revealed that we all dream, and in fact our mind goes through the same process as dreaming while we are awake. In the Bible God reveals how He has spoken to people through the ages via internal pictures. Let Him use these simple words to paint pictures that will draw you closer to Him.

It is my earnest desire that we all continue to fall deeper and deeper in love with the God who IS love! Holiness, to me, is being so in love with Yahweh that we would never consciously do anything to hinder our relationship with Him! And as we drink in deeper drafts of His love, I believe we will be better husbands, wives, children, employees, employers, and the world that is stumbling around in darkness will be drawn to His awesome love and light!

A principle of focus is description. In chapter one the detail I give is meant to draw your focus into the experience with the River. You can use the same principle in your prayer times. Get as descriptive of situations as possible and it will increase your focus.

If you have not entered into a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, please read the last chapter and let me know if you have any questions. May the Lord's presence be a blessing to you every moment of every day!

Bruce Montroy

THE RIVER

*The lame will leap like a deer, and those who cannot speak will shout and sing! Springs will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams will water the desert. Isaiah 35:6
nlt*

climb a low, barren, desolate hill...Arizona at its driest. As I top the ridge, I can see the next valley, likewise barren, except for a green path lumbering through the valley, lush vegetation hugging a river. This river is calling me. It sings a song of abundance from the midst of a dry and thirsty world... “Come, be refreshed...be filled with life!”

Soon I am poking through the Arroyo Willows and Cottonwood trees that line the river. Before me lies a short sandy beach that slopes down into a beautiful river, running fairly fast, but not turbulent. The water looks to be chest high. I can see down into the clear, delicious water; the river bed is sandy, clean, welcoming. Out in the middle of the river is a rock, smooth and as though it were placed there to be a chair – a place for a weary traveler to sit and soak up the life-giving rush of water.

The wet sand feels good to my toes. The temperature is perfect. As I enter the water, the most desirable sensation begins to enter my feet. My ankles feel intoxicated. It's as though I melt into the water. It calls me to come deeper. I know I must get to the rock chair in the middle of the stream. The water floods me with the most delectable, overwhelming feeling I have ever experienced. My toes are dancing in the sand of the river bottom. My calves draw in the water...my thighs draw in the water...warm, delightful, perfect temperature, clean, every drop glistening with life... eternal life! I feel a song deep inside beginning to arise – “Jesus, Lover of My soul!” His wonderful name comes to my lips... “Jesus!” I can't restrain this feeling of love and appreciation – “Jesus, I love You so!”

My waist loses its apprehensiveness as I continue to submerged beneath the exhilarating flow. My stomach is warm, delighted, aroused. A tingling sensation is arising from my mid-section. Such delight. I go deeper into the stream...deeper...my chest is wanting the water to penetrate my skin... “Fill

me...water, fill me! Jesus, Living Water, fill me with Your awesome life!”

I find the rock. The One who designed this knew exactly how high to make it, for as I sit on the rock, the water comes to my neck. The warm, heavenly water flows around me with a cheerfulness. Each drop, each wave, is filled with joy. The water is glad to see me; it embraces me. It's as though we're old friends meeting again after a long season. We have something in common. My skin hugs each drop. The water is loving me, welcoming me. What a blessed feeling... like I'm home after being gone too long! This is awesome. I am disappearing into the water. This River of Life is penetrating me...entering every cell in my body... washing away every bit of stress...every bit of infirmity. Every bit of stiffness, weariness, weakness is leaving me... “Jesus, I love You with all my heart – with my whole being!”

There is something in this water... it's life. I can feel a mild current tingling through every part of my being, probing even into my soul. My mind is euphoric! I feel as though I am in the middle of the most beautiful dream I've ever had. Such peace, such belonging – I'm home – I'm safe, totally safe. “Jesus, You're all around me, protecting me, entering me, filling me with joy and peace blended with deep understanding. It's, yes, it's as though I know You! I'm experiencing the Mind of Christ. Jesus, we are One!”

The water swirling around me is pushing against my skin, yet it's pulling me, drawing me deeper into life... Abba's life...Jesus! I feel a word arising from deep inside, where my stomach used to be... “Jesus...” Yes, the word is “Jesus.” The word swirls around me. I see the name, the awesome name, Jesus. I say it out of my mouth... “Jesus!” As I say Jesus, everything I see turns into the most beautiful gold color I have ever beheld... “Jesus!” Waves of excitement make my mind reel with pleasure...I'm tingling with enjoyment and delight. It's as though I'm smelling the most wondrous fragrance in the world and eating it at the same time; as though my skin is being rubbed with exotic oil by a

thousand tiny fingers while every cell in my body is singing a new song of adoration and worship – “Jesus, You're not only the lover of my soul, You're everything I could ever need! You're my life, my delight, my song! Jesus, you're my reason for existence! Jesus, You are more than pleasure, You are life! Awesome Lord, You are greater than anything I've ever experienced.”

“I feel You, Jesus. It's as though I were one of the drops of water, and You are the river! We are One! You in me, me in You!” I am part of the flow. I came from the Father. He spoke one day and I was conceived. He personally oversaw my total development! There are no mistakes. I am what the Father wanted me to be. Mom and dad were selected from a million candidates. “Abba, You were in total charge. Father God, You have always been in total charge! This wonderful river is not our first meeting – I came from You, I've lived in You, and had my being in You! I have a purpose in life – it's Your purpose! I am because You created me!”

“Father God, I've spent my entire life trying to establish my sense of being apart from You without knowing that was what I was doing! The whole time, my entire being, sense, purpose and reason for existence is You! I was made by You, for You, to give pleasure to You! The delight I feel in every part of my being right now is because I have chosen to give way to You – to be lost in You! I feel so silly, because this is where You designed me to live – living in Your flow – flowing in Your life!”

As I look down at the clear water rushing around me as I'm sitting on the rock in the middle of this stream, I can see my feet. I wiggle my toes. They spring into life, delighting in the living water. They signal their excitement with this delectable experience. “Hey, toes, are you enjoying this water?” Am I crazy, talking to my toes? Wait, they answer me... “This is awesome! Are you telling us we could have experienced this sooner?” My feet have read my mind -- wait a minute I am my feet! We are one. I feel a sermon coming on....

“Jesus, You said the church is Your body. Wow! What if each member felt for each other what I feel for my feet, just now? Wouldn't it be astonishing? What if my intoxication with You drew other members of the body deeper into You? Jesus, I want to draw Your hands and feet, and ... yes, Your whole body deeper into this river of life! Jesus, when my feet break forth into song because of the enjoyment of the Living Water, my entire body is enraptured, enthralled! I've felt the negative aspect of the entire body feeling pain, now it's time for the whole body to enjoy Your delight!”

The river is entering me. It fills me, yet I'm not swelling. The water is pure life, pure pleasure, as it rushes into me. I am experiencing the greatest sensation imaginable... pure intoxicating pleasure. My body is being renewed – or is this my body? Such joy, what pleasure! Ecstasy, rapture, peace, thrilling, tingly... “Jesus! I love You Jesus, I need You Jesus, I give way to You Jesus...more, more, deeper, please come deeper.”

The water is the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus said. But this water has substance, firmness. This Living Water is surrounding me, entering me, filling me with love. It's as though there were a door to each cell in my body and the water is entering – pressing deeper, slipping in deeper. I feel Jesus inside of me – every cell of my being is tingling with delight. I feel light-headed, drunk with joy and exuberance, delicious joy, yes, I can taste this joy, like every delectable, exciting taste I've ever experienced, all rolled up into one!

“Jesus, You're inside of me. Yes, but not just as theology – You're real, more real than life itself!” I'm alive, more alive than I've ever felt before! I can run through a troop, I can leap over a wall! All tiredness is gone. I'm revitalized! “Jesus, this is not me; it's not my imagination – It's You! You're giving to me this new life! Jesus, You've taken away my sin, my guilt, my weariness, my sense of failure and aloneness! My God and my King! You are more real than my breath, my heart beat!”

“Jesus, You are my life!” Jesus has actually become a part of

me...or, for the first time I realize that, as His Word says, “As He is, so also are we in this world (1 John 4:17), and “It's no longer I, but Christ (Galatians 2:20)!” I can see His face. He's experiencing joy at my awareness of what His Word has said all along – Jesus is pleased that I've finally received His Word as being more real than the feelings of isolation that have dogged my heels all my life. He's delighted that I've let go of the focus on my past failures and embarrassments. My faith in His complete work is giving Him pleasure (Hebrews 11:6). “I can see now, Jesus. I had to let go of my failures in order for the River of Life to do it's deepest work of refreshing! I had to focus upstream for my troubles to float downstream!”

“Wow! This is crazy. I could have enjoyed this experience a long time ago. All I had to do was to agree with Your Word and deny all the so-called evidence that contradicted Your promises! Voices out there in the desert said You didn't care. Feelings of aloneness mocked Your very existence, when the whole time, this River was running, available, free, limitless. I didn't have to beg. My fickle promises were not the ticket for admission.”

With each insight, I realize that even this revelation is from Him! I put my foot in His flow by faith and He's taken over from there. He is singing a love song to me -- what a beautiful sound; so powerful, yet gentle. His voice floods me with peace... “I know My plans for you, my little one, they are for blessing, not for hardship. My plans for you, as the flow of this River, is for abundance. My perfect will for you is to live in My exceedingly great and precious promises, the supply that is above and beyond all that you could ask or even imagine. As the byproducts of life in the natural plane produce pollutants that can cloud and impair your perception of My provisions of grace and mercy, greater so is this flow, available to keep you refreshed, and your vision crystal clear! As pain is part of life in the flesh-realm, more so is this revitalization part of life in the Spirit!”

I see! I see! My ignorance of this place in no way lessened its

reality! This River is free to as many as believe, yet it is accessible only to those who will deny their own lordship, independence and even their faulty perceptions of what God should or shouldn't do. God's flow is always on; it's my faulty, frail focus that keeps me limited to four stale, static dimensions! In the River, the Spirit, I realize that all things are possible for the one who believes! "Lord I believe, Living Water, help Thou my unbelief!"

"I love You Jesus...You are my husband, my lover, my life! You are everything I've ever hoped for; everything I've ever wanted! I can feel life flow from me into You! Jesus, You are actually taking pleasure from me...I am giving God pleasure! My God and my King, I am giving You pleasure! You are amazing. We are one. You are singing! I am giving God pleasure! This truth makes my mind explode with more pleasure! I am giving my God pleasure...I love You Lord...I love You Jesus!"

*For I am about to do
a brand-new thing.
See, I have already begun!
Do you not see it?
I will make a pathway
through the wilderness
for my people
to come home.
I will create rivers
for them
in the desert!
Isaiah 43:19 nlt*

FAVOR

His anger lasts for a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime! Weeping may go on all night, but joy comes with the morning.

Psalm 30:5 nlt

iver, you are favor! The very favor of God!” As I sit on this rock in the middle of the flowing river of God’s favor, I purposely draw up each drop of living water into every cell of my body. My cells are like sponges. I pull the liquid love in deeper as an insatiably thirsty sponge. My heart and my flesh cry for more of this favor. I pull. I draw. It flows harder. I am full of God’s grace, His mercy, His favor. I feel His unconditional love bubbling inside me. It’s not because of anything I have done, but because of His awesome grace and love! His favor is causing my skin, my muscles, my bones to sing!

“Yahweh! Your favor is my life! I am full and running over with Your grace. I feel so loved, so encouraged, so wanted, so important! You are giving to me fresh purpose! You are my Vision, my Goal, my Favorite Pastime, my Breath! Your favor is the sunshine of my life, the fresh spring air, laden with the fragrant contributions from thousands of beautiful flowers. I feel more alive and younger than ever, because this rushing current of favor, this tingly, surge of anointing and power! Truly Your power is working in me.

“Your favor is making me wealthy. The world is bringing me its gain, designed to enhance my ministry and enable me to steward massive wealth. This favor is equipping me to grace thousands with millions. I feel like a billionaire! I possess all things because the favor of God is mine! I feel Your favor as wealth. I sense I am among the richest in the world! You, my God and my King, my Husband, have made me wealthy with possessions, lands, and monies. I enjoy letting Your wealth flow through me to others! I take great pleasure in allowing Your favor of funds to flow to the hurting, the despondent, the broke, the fatherless, the widows, the strangers! Father, Your exorbitant wealth is tickling inside me, wanting to flow out. I am laughing with

the sensation of so much wealth, that I am asking You continually if I can but give more away! I delight in seeing the faces of multitudes of desperate folk bursting forth with joy and praise for God's abundance!

“This flow of favor rushing into me as I sit, poised upon this most comfortable rock in the midst of the river of Your love, is washing away every hurt, every confusion, every evil designed by the arch foe. Your words to Jeremiah run around inside my mind... *‘Thy words were found and I ate them, and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Thy name, O Yahweh, God of hosts’* (Jer 15:16). The Father's flow of favor is a flood of delight! Your liquid love, this rushing stream, is washing every fear away with favor! As I inhale this river, my lungs burst forth with favor, a song of victory, always being led in victory, total and complete victory. I feel drunk with victory over shame, confusion, fear, memories, gossip, pettiness, and sharp tongues!”

The crust over my affections is being eroded by this stream of favor. I can feel the pseudo protection of inner walls and defensiveness dissolving under the flow. My inner man is awakening. The youthful child of joy is arousing, stirring, stretching as the current of favor washes, erodes the shell, disintegrates the pane of glass that allowed me to be a spectator without getting involved or feeling. My feelings are being kissed awake by my Prince, the lover of my soul. “River of Favor, I love You! Fire River I need You! Exhilarating River of Love and Mercy I draw you in deeper!”

“Father, I hear Your voice speaking to me from the droplets that dance on my skin... *‘Therefore, thus says Yahweh, “If you return, then I will restore you – before Me you will stand; and if you extract the precious from the worthless, you will become My spokesman. They for their part may turn to you, but as for you, you must not turn to them”’* (Jer 15:19). Yes, Favor of God, wash away the worthless from my life! As the prospector extracts the gold from the stream by washing away the dirt and stones, so I wash away each painful reminder of my

inadequacy, every failure, every fiery missile intended to destroy me. I pull in this delicious solvent, this extractor deep into the secret place where past hurts have been categorized, filed and sealed up. Favor, please purge the hidden hurts. Favor, dissolve the secret fears. I know one drop of this favor can silence a score of mocking cries, stabbing lies. Come flood, enter, wash, destroy the destroying, eroding lies that mock Abba's intentions and designs on my life!"

Because He is, I am! Favor from the Father has rained upon me! Favor from my lover is reigning within me! Favor from my luxuriant Husband is sending servants out in front of me, as presidential aids, to arrange accommodations. My favor servants are enhancing life! My atmosphere of favor is infusing everyone I meet with a smile, with courteous demeanor, with favor! This gift of favor is ushering me into the presence of kings and nobles. Stars among men are seeking me out to hear of the Source of my favor river. They thirstily drink in news of this River of Life. I am leading masses of sincere seekers to the stream. My favor is a song that is attracting untold millions to the stream of life, the River of Favor, the massive mercy-flow of God's unfathomable love! I see the desert blossom before me as a verdant garden! The true heart of the Father is seen by the lost, the discouraged, the infirm. "They are running to us, Abba! They are coming to drink at Your river! Your more than enough flow of mercy and grace is flowing from my belly and they are coming by the thousands! Flow stronger sweet current! Flow stronger intoxicating river!"

"Because I am totally healed by this flow, because I am totally renewed and am enjoying the fact that "I am complete in You, Jesus... I am accepted in You... I no longer need man's approval... I no longer need to see the countenance of people giving me approval – because of this dependant independence, the world wants what I have! This is witnessing at it's finest! The lost knocking on my door, pressing me to touch the Jesus walking beside me! Lord, this is what I've craved – wanting to be a light that directs a darken world to the Light of Life! Hallelujah, Jesus! I am so letting my light shine before men that they

are seeing Your good works flowing through me and they want ‘in’. Yes! Jesus, I can see the “touched” running to tell others! I see weary sojourners revitalized and exuberantly gathering others to hear of Your awesome mercy!

“Jesus, You are all that I need! I can actually please someone! The most important person ever! My life! My Jesus! I am full of power! I can do miracles because You live in me! I can heal because Jesus the healer lives in me! Jesus, we are one so everything You can do, I can do! Flow through me Jesus and save the lost! Flow through me, Jesus and heal the sick! Flow through me Jesus and draw the thirsty, the hungry, the ones longing for love! Jesus, let's revive the tired...let's heal the sick...let's set the captives free...give the depressed hope...the habit-bound freedom! O, River of Spiritual Reality, flow into the massively needy physical realm!”

*There is a river
whose streams
make glad
the city of God,
the holy place
where the
Most High*

dwells.

*God is within her,
she will not fall;
God will help her
at break of day.*

Psalm 46:4,5 nlt

-16-
Chapter 3

AMAZING LOVE

*I am my beloved's, and His desire is toward me.
Song of Solomon 7:10 kjv*

What is this bubbling feeling deep inside? Joy? Yes, and more. I'm excited. My Beloved is coming for me! I'm excited because the One who made me is in love with me! He desires me! He wants me above all others. His eyes follow me as I move. His ear is tuned to my every word. My members are written in His book. He delights in my every movement.

When I first heard that His knowledge of me was so detailed, I felt ashamed. Who could love one such as me, especially if they knew the swirling thoughts, the confusing thoughts, the less than nice thoughts and feelings. My own knowledge, sitting as a spectator in the gallery of my mind, is sometimes appalled at the stench that somehow slips into this sacred chamber. Oh yes, I eventually call for the janitorial staff to come clean up the mess, but how ghastly the lust that exposes itself, the jealousy that grabs and complains, the pride that pushes and usurps. How could anyone care to enter this place – especially if they knew of the events that occur in this spot? Sheer disgust at the episodes that occasion my inner sanctum causes me to put on finer wraps, speak in more distinguished tones, and mask the outward lest anyone would suspect the inner sham.

When I first realized that He, the designer of my temple, knew what would transpire within these porticoes, I shrunk back in fear and shame. Would He rend me? Surely He will cast me away in disgust and be done with the likes of me. But, no, that's Him, there at the door of my temple! His look of love is so firm, so full of resolve, so magnetic. I feel Him draw me, just as I am, inconsistent, incomplete, insincere – drawing me to Himself! His open arms, rippling with strength, call as a safe place in a time of storm. His face appears to be hiding

a laugh – lips poised, ready to break into joyful song! His look is that of a confident lover who knows that His solicitations, His wooing, has not been in vain. That His effectual love has won my heart! How could He have such confidence in our relationship when I had so little?

As I neared this awesome Being of pure love, His smile broke forth, nearly knocking me to the floor. The love from His countenance penetrated my understanding – pure light! This relationship is not about me! Yes, that's the power of His joy! It's not about me, the arena of confusion and circus of feelings. My roller coaster existence is not what this is all about! This is all about Him! All about the God who IS love! It all began eons ago deep in the heart of the God who IS love! His need was for objects to love; recipients that could drink in the extremely ferocious River of pure love. Creatures that would desire and require this love as much as He needed to give this love!

One creature, the first of His creation, was hit with such a powerful blast of this love and acceptance that he decided that he was capable of taking over the Creator's job. Apparently, a heart that knew no sin, only perfection, when bathed in pure love, lacked the balance of "need" to produce a gravity that would prevent pride. Such sheer confidence, unknown and unknowable to mortals, overrode the capacity of the heart, causing an implosion of pride, a black hole of sorts, that began sucking in attention, love and acceptance at such a speed that a massive, cosmic leech was produced – the prototype of all sin!

This father of lust, drunk beyond measure with his own worth, would become a useful tool for the Perfect One, a counter-balance of sorts that would provide this inner chaos, a field of need! How could pure love ever produce in and of itself the soil of need that would draw in seed. How could the River of Living Water make a dry place that would crave its own liquid refreshment? But now, this inferno of intense need, this monster of lust could turn fields of the heart into parched soil, raped by his lust, left screaming for acceptance, for the Pure! Yes, but the danger would be that the suction of death and

darkness would so mesmerize the ignorant that their deafness to love would petrify their ability to discern true love. The lie of lust, the twist of pride and selfishness would intoxicate many – but there was no other way! Without the gamble, devoid of risk, only blind loyalty, like that of a dog, would result. What robots cannot give – yes, what machines and stones and predictable molecules can never yield – this is the stuff the Divine seeks! Solicit-able! Capable of refusal. A challenge to love's ability! Not a prearranged, predictable, sure bet, but a chance for love! Hey, that describes my heart!

When I realized this truth I was instantly drunk with passion! When the person who lives inside my mind saw this scenario for what it truly is, there was such a rush of joy unspeakable and full of glory! I was created for such a purpose! Capable of running after that which would never satisfy or diving into the River that could never run dry! I am free to turn this Suitor at my temple door away or I can draw Him in with an intensity that expends my everything. Will I let go of who I am and run to Him, risking the loss of all that I am? But what am I. What risk is this? Trading death for life? Giving up independent emptiness for loss in His River of love? How could I hesitate for a second? For me to live is Christ! Please let me be lost in You – Lover of my soul! Here I come, ready or not! Here I am, without time to debate how I can clean up, fix up, rearrange! Here I come Master! Watch out everything; get out of my way, I'm running recklessly for the only One who truly loves me!

What is this song breaking forth from my heart as I near my Sovereign? I can't make out the words! Unintelligible syllables of love! Pure love! This passion of pure love supercedes lust and all its counterfeit feelings! I am totally out of control! My speech is being constrained by an inner source of love out of my control! I feel a river inside of me surging toward this fantastic Creator of love! I know it to be acceptable to Him – acceptable service – it's causing Him to laugh now! Out loud! His joy is causing my mind to go into spasms of ecstasy! I am accepted in the Beloved! I am His and He is mine! We are one! As He is, so also am I in this world! His Word has become to me

the very life and nourishing of my soul! In Him I live and move and have my being! Sought by love, sought for love! I've tasted and God is good! Without Him I can do nothing. He is my All-in-all! He's my Rock, my Sword, my Shield! He's the Wheel in the middle of the wheel! He's the Fairest of all! He's mine! He's mine! He's mine!

This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.

1 John 4:10-12 niv

ARTISTRY

*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us
anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good
things he planned for us long ago.*

Ephesians 2:10 nlt

didn't know you had it in you," said the father to the son as he marveled at the picture junior had drawn. But was that picture in there, hiding in the mind's filing cabinets? And if the picture emerged from the son's soul, just how did it get in there?

Mom's comment of encouragement to daughter as she sought to catch her breath after shattering the school's track record for the 100 meter race was, "I knew you had it in you! I knew you could do it!" How did this speed get inside her? Who put it there?

Where does someone go to get an artist put inside them, or an athlete? Are we like bottles on an assembly line, passing under high pressure nozzles that fill us with talents, cap us off and smack a label on us: ingredients, nutrients, fat, protein, carbs? Is life about reaching inside, fumbling around in the recesses of our soul, seeking to pull out a bouquet of flowers or a rabbit, or a beautiful person?

And if we find the contents of each hidden closet and expose them to the reviews of man, does that mean we've accomplished our purpose on earth? Have we spent it all? Or is it possible that a mystery guest might visit us while we sleep and replenish our store and perhaps bequeath us some new treasure? Have we the right to fuss over what we find inside or the lack there of?

What does the word "gifted" mean? That Patricia was given the ability to outrun her classmates, that she was preselected to shine in this fashion – a vessel for honor? Or did she put her edge to the grindstone until her sharpness was as a razor? Is the phrase, "I knew you had it in you," proper payment for the grueling hours she spent walking out leg cramps, gasping for each breath, drowning in sweat, gulping Gatorade and allowing a monster coach to squeeze out another tenth of a second?

Shouldn't it hurt a bit to hear someone dismiss the hours spent going over the scales and banging on the old ivory ad

nauseam with a glib, “You are so gifted!”? Wait, where were you when I wanted to go out and play, run, pretend, or veg in front of the boobtube? Thanks for the discount of hours and years of paying a price!

What did we learn by Michael Jordon trying out for a baseball career or Garth Brooks donning a jersey? Can one do it all? For all his artistry on the court, could Michael’s fortune even begin to be measured next to Mr. Gates’ nerd-won wealth? Can jars of clay begin to contain the possibilities?

Or, is there a River? A stream that all can draw from. Perhaps with different conduit, but draw more or less. Is there a source that must be co-oped with to find the vessel’s worth? What if what we call talent is but a combination of ingredients, a recipe of sorts, that necessitates not only the right stuff, but also the timing, the blending, the proportions, and the right amount of heat? Is success an accident where timing is king? Would basketball skills be a fit gift for Caesar or Shakespeare?

Will a gifted pianist, emerging from the halls of procrastination and excuses outshine the diligent, disciplined ungifted but determined pianist? After a month? After a lifetime? In arid country, whose crop will be the best, the one waiting for rain to grace his crops or the one who pays the price to irrigate? Whose marriage will be sweeter, the one who watches more love stories or the one who invests more selfless acts of kindness?

Where does the River start and human effort stop? Or, where does human effort start and the River stop? Why do we want to know? To run and get more? To succeed? To tap the power so we will have to do less work? Why? Maybe we can sell our find to the highest bidder? What would be a good label? Maybe, just maybe, if we can prove that the River is prejudiced, out of reach, impossible for our grasp to contain, then we can allay criticisms, those outside voices that imply we’ve failed; or are they inside?

Doesn’t the aspiring athlete have a right to bemoan the Creator’s lack of endowment as he’s passed over for the team? Doesn’t the corn

stalk have a right to sass the Master for not making it like the mighty Ponderosa? And if the vegetable kingdom only tries hard enough, are not all things possible? Can not potatoes rise to become next year's jack-o-lanterns? Isn't it all about faith and sweat?

What do trees and crops and cities all have in common? Is not the River the source of life for all? One draws the rain, one pulls up irrigation and another processes and pumps the golden drops of water. The most successful tree can not feed the village. Nor can crops build a boat. Have we mortals wasted years and tears trying to "become" when we should have drawn more? Is the Master more pleased when the tomato radiates as a prize winning tomato or when it appears to have tried to be a cucumber?

If I focus on "becoming" I might win the prize of a pat on the back and the little sought after, "I knew you had it in you," or even the "I didn't know you had it in you." And end up being tossed on the compost pile where tomatoes go when they try to be potatoes. If I seek to soak, to draw in the River as best as I can, however possible, then will I not give pleasure to the River, whose job it is to fill me? Will not the purpose of the Designer be satisfied automatically when I find in each moment of life the expression of His River for me, not for others, for me? Can I criticize others for not drawing as I do when their design disallows it? Can I sink in pity and remorse as I watch another excel because they've found the River's flow, when I've misaligned my focus? Or worse, covet another's lifestyle that displeases the Creator?

Is success in finding the River or in pulling in the River? Is the River all around me or over another hill? Is it drawn with sweat or praise? Does it flow with faith or works? Is it true that "In Him we live and move and have our being," or is life about moving carrots and fanciful dreams? Is there "River" in every situation? Which response opens the River's gates: "Where are You River?" or "Thanks, I needed that!"?

WHEN THE RIVER BENDS

*Then coming to the borders of Mysia, they
headed for the province of Bithynia, but again
the Spirit of Jesus did not let them go.*

Act 16:7 nlt

What's going with this River? It's not so straight any more. I just had it all figured out. I knew I was supposed to do all I could to reach all that were in my path. Those right in front of me – family, friends, neighbors – now the Spirit is not going in that direction! What's up. I feel a check, an inner stop sign. I can't go the way I thought. Is there a timing known only to Abba?

I feel strangely out of control. Have I no say? One minute I'm being carried along effortlessly by the flow of the Spirit. His anointing is flowing through deserts, over rocks, down expected paths. I glide with the flow. What joy! Now it's shifted! To keep going straight ahead in the direction I assumed I was to go is suddenly work. I don't mind hard work; in fact it gives me an opportunity to show the crowds lining the stream just how dependant this stream is on me. But, frustration of frustrations, the flow is gone. This effort is not impressing anyone. I think the audience that once cheered is now mumbling and gossiping. Yes, I'm sure of it.

Where did the stream go? Did it turn back on itself? This doesn't make sense. When there are souls to save, why would the Spirit tell me not to go into Bithynia? Does God not care? Are not these precious folks as valuable as any?

“But Father, this is the logical choice. This is close at hand. If I but pray more, and work harder, this can work. Father, I'll show you, like Moses, as he talked You out of destroying the rebel crowd gathered at the foot of Sinai, intent on reinventing religion. Were they not just misguided? Was not Moses' heroic efforts rewarded with the acclaim and support of the masses?

“Okay, so they were a little more stubborn than

these. But Father, these need the stream! You're no respecter of persons. These have as much a right to Your signs and wonders as any! Abba, Bithynia calls. Can't You hear it? I hear it. I think. Anyway, if You'll just send the stream now, we can get them on track! Yes, Father, send the power just now. Let's show them! You and me, Abba. You'll see, trust me on this one! Hey, You don't want me to be just a robot, do You? 'Bithynia, are you ready?' Here we come. Say it with me....

"Abba, we need to talk. Your Spirit is not helping at all. He's doubling back. I sense Him retreating and pulling to the left. What do I have to do to convince Him to keep going straight ahead? He's doing a U-turn to the left. Am I just supposed to sell out and comply? Is my brain a mere decoration, something I'm supposed to turn off and just coast, and let Him take me anywhere He wants without my critical analysis? Really Father, sometimes I think I know why Lucifer left heaven. Where's all this free will stuff I've so faithfully preached for all these years? I need You to back me on this one. 'River, flow!'"

Maybe I'm not saying it with enough authority. Maybe I need to find someone to agree with me on this. Perhaps I need to say it more. Should I record it on a tape and play it over and over? Maybe there's a trick I'm missing. It seems to work for others. Maybe someone has a seminar I can attend to tell me how to get the River to flow where it should flow! It works for others, why not me. It's probably all in the technique.

"Father, that rushing sound of water off over my left shoulder is irritating. Could You hold that down a bit. It can't be right; it's not the way I feel this thing should be going. You know there's going to be lots of deceptions in the last days, which interpreted means that I can only trust my instincts, my very valuable intuition. After all, wasn't it my insight that found Your River in the first place? I wish those people over there would hold down the noise, they're distracting my heavy, sobering reflections. Here I'm trying to recall how easy this flowing was and why it stopped and all they can seem to do is make noise and

splash water in my face. I'm getting irritated. You don't want to see my temper, do You Lord?

"Could You come down here for a minute, Creator. They told me in science class that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Were they right or wrong? These brainy people were able to put a man on the moon and they have civilized virtually the whole world. Pollution? Can we talk about that a little later, right now I'm trying to get You to see my point. Yes, I do have a point. You'll see, if You just let me talk long enough. H-m-m-m, the shortest distance, yes, that was my point, the shortest distance... Where? Yielding to the River? But what if the River is going in the wrong direction? How do I know it's the wrong direction? Easy. It's just not right. Look at it. It's just not right. Rivers are supposed to go straight! Just ask me! It would take a lot less effort to go straight, less time, less energy. Are you mocking me?

"So, what You're saying is I have to sell out to get back in the River. I have to turn off my brain (that You gave me) and like a dumb sheep, just follow the River? Like a what? A surfer? Standing on the wave, riding the wave, allowing the wave to set the direction and I just let the wave do the work? It sounds so, so establishment-ish! I'm getting the distinct impression that You're not with me on this one. Do I need to hire some bulldozers to make a channel? I can, You know. All things are possible for the one who tries harder... Is that a challenge?

"I'm just about out of patience. If I don't get some encouragement I'm pulling back. There's a lot of stuff that needs to be done at home. If I'm not appreciated here, I'll just hang in there where I am appreciated. Who's fickle? But at least he appreciates me. Well, he hasn't been himself lately. You'll see. My insights and abilities won't be wasted. I'll get the respect I deserve. My opinion will count for something. It's been quite a while since I've felt like my opinion mattered; actually I've felt like I've sold out part of who I am just to float in that dumb old River anyway. You don't think I can please him either? I know he's not

crazy about You, but I can please him. I know him! I'll whip him into line. Wager? You don't really bet do You?

“So, let me see if I'm hearing You right. You're saying that all I have to do is quit being silly and prideful and jump in where the River is flowing, and You'll not even hold my arrogance against me? I can go from dry to wet how fast? One eighty? That's it? That's all? No beating on myself? No, ah, no what? What's so self-centered about pointing out to the folks how wrong and how evil the human heart is? Hey, if I don't convince them that their heart is totally depraved, what will they come up with next. You know, one of these times they might just stumble on to an alternate way! What do you mean? Are You laughing?

“All this talking has made me very thirsty. Can I bother You for a drink of some of that Living Water? How did I know You were going to say that? Okay, okay, here I come...”

*Against all hope,
Abraham in hope believed
and so became the father
of many nations,
just as it had been said to him,
"So shall your offspring be."
Without weakening in his faith,
he faced the fact that
his body was as good as dead
--since he was about
a hundred years old
--and that Sarah's womb
was also dead.
Yet he did not waver
through unbelief
regarding the promise of God,
but was strengthened
in his faith
and gave glory to God,
being fully persuaded
that God had power
to do what he had promised.
Romans 4:18-21 niv*

THE FLOOD

You will have no rest among those nations and no place that is yours. Yahweh will make your mind worried, your sight weak, and your soul sad.

Deuteronomy 28:65 ncv

iver! River! Talk to me. Tell me of Your tales. As You have rushed through the centuries, carving, depositing, changing hearts and lives, speak to me of Your greatest moments, Your saddest times. Tell me of mysteries and victories. Have You ever been a flood?"

Not really expecting an answer, I laid back as though I were in a floating recliner. The River's supernatural buoyancy provided true relaxation! Luxury! I scooped up a handful of the Living Water and dripped it over my head, opening my mouth to catch the last few drops. Imagine my surprise when I actually heard a voice coming from deep within the River.

"Little one, you float so calmly, so relaxed. It would fill you with terror if I told you of My flood days. Yet you must hear some."

"Sir, do You mean the great flood of Noah's day? That must have been so awesome. It totally transformed the earth's surface, huh?"

"No, that's not the flood I was going to tell you about. Yet you see that flood only from Noah's side. A family of eight and two of each unclean animal, seven of some of the clean. What a drop in a bucket compared to the millions of souls that were unprepared! Have you pictured the souls clinging to rocks and trees, seeking refuge from the flood? What of the cries and barks and strange, drowning noises of millions of animals? Is awesome a word you would use to describe that?"

I scooped another handful of the Living Water, this time to drink and reflect like one would slowly sip their coffee as they talked of deep things with a close friend. I knew He wasn't upset with my inappropriate response, but He did have my full attention. His question required no answer, just

a thoughtful time of quiet.

“Noah’s terrible flood was My holiness and justice unrestrained by mercy. If one can not understand there being a hell, then let them ponder My uncontrolled wrath as a flood! Living Water taking lives! That hurt Me so much that I swore I’d never again destroy the earth with a flood of water. That incident hurt Me so much that I took the form of a man and paid for every transgression of those wicked people. I went personally in the form you will know forever as Jesus, and preached mercy and restoration. That flood hurt so much that I led captivity captive.

“No, My child, My sheltered, feeble lamb, so frail, so protected from the terrible floods. Grace has pampered you. Love has spoiled you. My kindness has so intoxicated you that you will have a difficult time understanding the full impact of what I must tell you. Must? Yes I must tell you as I told them!”

Was it my imagination, or was the water getting warmer? I had a sudden flash of fear, like you get when you go swimming after you’ve seen a movie about sharks. The water seemed a tad bit less safe. I shifted position as I continued to float down stream so I could look beneath myself. I was talking to the Living Water! The River was telling me of His great moments.

“What do you think I would consider the saddest flood of all times? You know Me well. You have read My memoirs. You have studied Me intensely for thirty some years.”

“The greatest flood in a positive way would have been Pentecost, for it started a river of Living Water that has never dried up! And, if that was the greatest good, then the most horrific would have to be the rejection of that River!”

I felt a bit proud of myself, but only for a flash, for I realized that everything I have depends on this River I am floating in.

“You speak from My Spirit. For centuries My people dabbled in My River. It was small then. They were only allowed to wade, and then

only occasionally. I gave them three splashes a year. Not enough to get real drunk on, wouldn't you agree? But even that little bit of Living Water proved too much for their carnal natures to enjoy. They chased after tame religions that they could control. Idols. Money. And some even thought they could lock Me up in a scroll!

“Tragedy turned into calamity a few days after Pentecost's flood. Leaders that spoke for the Old Ways spurned the Living Water and the overwhelming proofs I freely provided. The cry at the mock trial of My lamb was that the blood of salvation be upon their heads – they actually requested the flood of life to become a flood of damnation! They put their marvelous brains together and voted me right out of Jerusalem! My city! They once again murdered my prophets and turned the River of Living Water into the worst flood the world has ever known!”

“I know it was bad, but Father, why do You say it was the worst flood?”

“Because the annals of time have recorded how My covenant people triggered the curses of Deuteronomy. Let Me refresh your memory...

Be careful to obey everything in these teachings that are written in this book. You must respect the glorious and wonderful name of the LORD your God, or the LORD will give terrible diseases to you and your descendants. You will have long and serious diseases, and long and miserable sicknesses. He will give you all the diseases of Egypt that you dread, and the diseases will stay with you. The LORD will also give you every disease and sickness not written in this Book of the Teachings, until you are destroyed.

Deuteronomy 28:58-61 NCV

“Did anyone think I was joking or that perhaps I was a liar? Was I not duty bound by the same integrity that you stand on for your healing? For your salvation? If I gave trickles of life and the trickles

rejected brought bondage and captivity, how much more was I duty bound to release the full impact of Moses' words, My Words, at the same time the greatest flow of Living Water was provided?

“Lord, You're saying Pentecost rejected pushed the terrible button that launched the centuries of horrors Your covenant children have endured?”

“It has to be! The flood must destroy the house on sand. It's not much of a flood if it doesn't! My Words through Moses were just smoke if the greater rejection didn't release a greater flood of destruction. But woe to the ones who empower the flood.”

“I just had a terrible thought. What about those today who love You and Your Word but who mock the living reality of Pentecost? They say they are believers yet they deride those who seek to live by faith! They so condition Your promises that faith is hamstrung; “God's will” is used as a hammer instead of the sword of freedom!”

“Your answer is to be found in the principle of rigidity.”

“Oh my King, another principle. Tell me please, what is this principle of rigidity?”

I noticed up ahead that something had fallen into the River, causing an eddy current with attending white water. I leaned to the left that I might avoid it. Though it took but a moment, I felt I had acted out part of my answer.

“What if you had remained in your previous position as you neared the fallen branch? Whose fault would it have been as you got pulled to the bank in the side current? Looking to the Spirit, listening to the Spirit, walking in the Spirit prevents fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, but it requires flexibility! Rigidity gets one hung up on submerged branches.

“Humans are always searching for security. It's partially because they are created in My image and I AM SECURITY! I am the Rock! I am the Fortress! And when they refuse to seek Me for security, they will look to rigidity for security! Security becomes a meter or gage of

sorts. How secure does your soul feel? You will only be able to enjoy a relaxed, flexible, peaceful security when your trust is in a living relationship with the Living God!”

I could feel an inner picture developing. The Lord does me this way so much. He frequently asks, “What do you see,” when there is no picture present in my mind. And no sooner does He say it, then a picture appears.

I could see a dry riverbed with a cork sitting next to a rough, jagged rock. It immediately became evident to me and I burst forth with my newly gained insight...

“Father, the cork represents the Spirit-filled person and the jagged rock represents the rigid flesh! When the flood hits, the cork is only temporally shaken, but the rock is hit hard, and is ground along the rough riverbed until its edges are smoothed, forcing it to either become more flexible or be destroyed! The cork, or the Spirit-flexible believer is soon on top of the flood, once again enjoying Your sunshine and the unlimited power of Your buoyancy!

“Father, Living Water, help me to always trust Your flood, Your flow, Your control, and to see You in everything! To yield quickly to You in every situation, every moment! That Your peace will guard my heart and mind through Christ Jesus!”

WHEN DIFFERENT FELLOWSHIPS

Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness?

2 Corinthians 6:14 nrs

iver, You are so exciting, so alive, so powerful, and yet You seem to be interested in me! Who am I that You, limitless, eternal River should be taken up with such a temporal blip on the screen of life? A mere mortal, being of interest to the Creator of all! This is hard for me to compute.”

I hit a pocket of cold water, then warm, then perfect temperature. Everything that I encountered as I floated down the River was a lesson, that much I knew for sure. What was the lesson with different water temperatures?

“Can we have true fellowship, little leaf floating on My back? Is it possible that two so different things could have an interchange of interest to both? Is vital fellowship limited to equals, and if so, why do so few humans share it? Can a man and a woman from two different cultures, different tastes, and vastly different mental orientations enjoy time together?

“Can light truly fellowship with darkness? If give and take is a requirement of fellowship, what does darkness give up to show its involvement and desire for a long term relationship? Can light compromise its flow of electrons and still be light?”

“River, You’re doing it to me again! You’re causing a brain cramp!”

“Let me ask you, can a human and a dog have fellowship? Look over there on the bank... the master is throwing the frisbee and his dog is running, jumping, retrieving it. They seem to be enjoying each other. They are sharing the moment in the sun. They are developing fond memories.

“Back a few minutes ago you felt a pocket of cold water, followed by a pocket of warm water and then the temperature returned to what you were used to. Was it all water? The fact that you could feel a difference, did that cause you to stop

floating? Did the temperature alter the water's composition? Did that dog on the sandy beach have to forgo his nature to give pleasure to his master? Did his master have to lower himself or deny himself any of his prerogatives to have the delightful interchange? Did either require that the other surrender his uniqueness to enter into the time of exchange?

“Is the lack of differences the basis for fellowship or is it the ability to find common ground without surrendering one's essence? Can light have interchange with darkness and not destroy darkness? Can a leech have fellowship with its host and not seek the elimination of its host?”

“So, River, You're saying as long as two different entities can mutually enjoy each other without exploiting and destroying each other they can have fellowship? Maybe that's why so few people can give themselves freely to You, Mighty River – they fear that You will consume them. Fear of loss. Afraid that the One that made them is out to destroy them! That's crazy. Fellowship with the One who made me can only mean that I give pleasure to the One who made me unique, different, special while I maintain my uniqueness. Right?

“Another thing I just thought of (or You put into my mind), many couples fall in love and experience tremendous fellowship as they freely give and take with no thought of exploitation. But somewhere in the relationship they slow their giving but continue taking. Father, I feel a philosophical urge coming on me...”

“That's not always bad, floating cork, for as a man thinks in his heart, so is he! By the way, are you enjoying your trip in the medium so different from yourself?”

“Now where was I, yes, of course I enjoy You awesome River. Now, as I was saying, could sin and unrighteousness be defined in terms of the shift in this vital balance in a relationship? If to know to do right and not do it is sin, then doing what gives pleasure to another, whether that be God or man, leading them on to invest in the relationship but only for the purpose of selfish exploitation, must be wrong. Sin could be pictured by the blackhole that has extinction of

light as its goal!”

“You drink in My refreshment and provision and give back to Me praise and affection. I buoy you up; you lift Me up! I oversee, provide, give of Myself to you; you look for ways to draw me into every situation, giving Me full credit for every blessing. We have a vital interchange and thereby bless each other. Would you understand if I said you maximize My love and My nature, without getting a big head?”

“Can you begin to feel the hurt or understand the rejection that darkness can do to light? When creatures made by Me, pull away in fear of loss, it hurts. Or am I not to have feelings? When a mortal knocks at My door only to seek to trick Me into doing their bidding, it has to hurt! You wouldn’t believe some of the stories I’ve heard as to why I should be their errand boy or magical genie in the bottle! And most don’t even offer to pay! Which makes our relationship even lower than that of a, well, you know where that was going.”

“My God. My King. Forgive me for all the years I’ve exploited and selfishly treated You as though You were this huge sugar daddy in the sky. You made me to enjoy me and I’ve set about my whole life to “find myself” and enjoy life rather than enjoy You, my Source! Father, I feel so stupid, so evil. Have mercy on me.

“Oh my, my tears are falling into You, River. I’m sorry, they will contaminate You.”

“Wrong! You are swimming in My tears! We are having the deepest fellowship yet! Oh, there’s more to come, and deeper still, but we are sharing our likeness!”

RELIGION

*You have let go of the commands of God and are
holding on to the traditions of men.*

Mark 7:8 niv

on, get ready for a surprise. We're heading into a broad place, a broad way. The River must pass through the most dangerous place it will ever go – popularity!"

Such strange words. "Isn't this the goal of the River, to bring life to all? Is this one of those paradoxical statements? Surely if everyone knew of the River and jumped in it would be glorious, wouldn't it?" My thoughts were to myself. The silence had my attention.

We had been through quite a bit together, the River and I. The last canyon had so invigorated me that I felt terribly selfish. What of the masses? Can I be enjoying the Awesome God to this extent and a world out there be missing Him so totally? Isn't it wrong? Should I feel more guilty for not getting the crowds into the River?

The vegetation that had been thick along the banks of the River began to thin out, giving view to a widening of the River. I could see up ahead where the River seemed to be about a mile wide and boats of all sorts dotted the surface of the water. There were crowds bunched up on the banks. I could feel a huge lesson about to unfold.

My speed floating down the River seemed to be faster than the many craft, thus I was coming up on the floating menageries. And a zoo it was. The first craft, an old fashioned river boat, paddlewheel and all, was moored to the bank at a dock. A crowd of people stood on the dock and what appeared to be the captain, stood on the second deck, crying out to the people: "Come to the Water! Come to the Water! You who are dry and thirsty, come to the water." His voice was strong and melodious. He began pointing over his shoulder to a tank on the upper deck. "The vessel is filled with Water, come! We have the Water! Come!"

His convincing tones encouraged a few to step on board.

They were taken by well dressed men to the second level where they were handed a cup and allowed to scoop from the tank. Meanwhile, the captain went back to his strong oration.

It looked like quite a setup, and I was impressed. My only question was when would they jump in the water and join me? I just can't imagine how such a controlled tank of water could suffice. Surely they'll want more and jump in to the River flowing freely for all. I wondered if the crew of the river boat had ever entered the water freely? How could they ever settle for such a "contained" expression of the River? Oh well, to each his own. But something caught my eyes as I floated by the boat. The downstream side of the craft gave the impression that it had been docked there for a long time. Here on this side, the water caused a back eddy, and bushes and moss had grown from the bank to the side of the boat. This boat must have docked here for a long, long time. I wonder if it ever traversed these waters? It's for sure it's too big to navigate the narrow gorges where there's barely room for a single floating person.

One of the passengers on board was looking out toward the middle of the stream, and in my direction. I waved. Perhaps I could encourage him to jump in. I don't think he sees me. I'll yell. H-mm, that didn't work. He's point toward me now and apparently asking one of the ships' hands about me floating out here. Oh my, the attendant is pulling him away from the railing and shaking his head. I'm floating too far away to catch his attention any more. I wonder if...

What's this? A crowd assembled on the beach and a man in the water is beckoning the crowd to join him in the water. Yes! There goes one into the water now. Great! Oh, he's dunking the man under the water. Maybe he'll swim out here and I'll have someone to talk to and share the excitement of this adventure. No, the man is being led back out of the water. He's standing there with the others. Most of them are dripping wet. I guess the better part of them have been dunked! But they are out of the water. They are treating the River as a sort of sport!

There is not an abandoned casting of one's self into the River to go wherever the River leads. No, this is a "River experience." I wonder what would happen if one of these people caught a glimpse of me floating out here? Would they dare to swim out.

I had no sooner thought this when one lady spotted me and grabbed the person next to her, pointing in my direction. I waved and motioned for them to come on out! Three of them started moving toward the water and from behind a rather intimidating figure stepped forward and blocked their way. I could see he was giving them quite a lecture, shaking his head in negative fashion as he pointed out toward me. I made motions toward them that the water was desirable! Oh well, to each his own.

Now this is different. Here comes a large cruise ship toward me. The Water must be really deep out here for such a large ship. It's traveling upstream. Interesting. As it gets closer I see large crowds on each of its four decks. They are partying! The music is so loud I can hear some of the words... "Come to the River...." Excellent! Here's hope! Why they even have a diving board extending out over the water. People are diving into the River. This is great.

Yes people were diving into the River and splashing around and yelling back to the others on board, but then the crew would throw a life preserver to them and pull them back in. Of course, they can't get separated from the others. They are a fellowship and the boat is moving up stream, but in the water, they are floating downstream. Yet, something doesn't feel quite right about this picture. The fellowship of the ship keeps them safely together and prevents them from getting lost on their own. That seems both good and yet stifling. I wonder if the individuals ever get the yearning to get lost in this awesome river by their self?

Who are those people? There are a bunch of people individually floating in the water. They are separated from each other, but because they are just floating, I'll likely never catch up to them. H-m-m, they

are sure scattered out. They look like they came from the various groups I've seen. Yes, that gal over there to the right is wearing clothes like the old fashion bunch that were on board the steamboat. She seems lost in the River. But, she's all by herself. No, up ahead I see some more that look like they were part of that group.

And who is that over there? They must have slipped past the "guard" at the beach baptism! Yes, some from each group, but now they are committed to the River. In fact, as I look up ahead, I see many, many more individuals, so many that they appear like a fabric... a floating fabric! All colors, shapes, sizes, and clothing... interesting! I'm alone in this River but in the company of so many more!

"River, You are more than enough! You're all I need. I just wish there was some way to share You so that more could enjoy You. There's sure plenty of You to go around! Show me how to share You more convincingly. Teach all of us how to be a part of each others' lives, yet retain our individual interaction with You!"

*I don't mean to say
that I have already achieved
these things
or that I have
already reached perfection!
But I keep working
toward that day
when I will finally be
all that Christ Jesus
saved me for
and wants me to be.
No, dear friends,
I am still not all I should be,
but I am focusing
all my energies on
this one thing:
Forgetting the past
and looking forward
to what lies ahead.
Philippians 3:12,13 nlt*

LAZY PEOPLE AND RIVER GIVERS

The desires of lazy people will be their ruin, for their hands refuse to work. They are always greedy for more, while the godly love to give!

Proverbs 21:25,26 nlt

Why do you give, Corky? What is the compelling force behind your continual pouring out? Is there a deep, unmet psychological need for acceptance? Are you so hooked into people pleasing that continual giving appears to be the best way to make others like you? You offer to help even when it puts you in no-win situations and terribly inconveniences you. What is your problem? This obsession with giving, at least at times seems unhealthy. It threatens your stability and personal security. How can you ever stockpile for the future when you give away so much?"

The River's questions seemed cynical, sarcastic, taunting. Yes, I had felt each of these questions many times, usually so deep that they were easy to pass over and deny by being busy with giving. Was there an answer? Is this a personality flaw? Wait a minute. Wait just a flowing minute!

"Excuse me, Sir, if I may answer and not be deemed rude; but, am I not a drip off the Old Stream? Am I not floating even at this very moment in the Greatest of all Givers? Is not Your essence, nature, makeup, to give? Is not every blessing flowing continually from You? Could not each of Your questions be turned back on You – with all due respect, of course?"

"River of Blessings, as I drink in Your abundance, I am strengthening my habit; You are enabling me. The more I receive from You, the more I must give out to others! I am hooked in a very dangerous cycle! How can I hoard? How can I store up. There's not enough room to hang on to more or cling to yesterday's provisions of Your grace! I must give. I feel like I've only just begun to learn how to give. About the time I feel like I've given

all I can, a new wave of Your grace hits me, compelling me, driving me.

“Lord of Abundance, where did the notion come from that people who give too much are sick? And where did the idea come from that people pleasing is evil or twisted? If we came from You, the most compulsive Giver, should not selfless giving be our very nature?”

“What do you see, little one?”

“Desert. Dry, dusty desert.”

“Tell me what you know about rain and the desert.”

“H-m-m, it seems like I remember reading that one of the triggers that cause clouds to give up their moisture as rain is the level of humidity or moisture that rises up from the land. Something about causing a super-saturation of the clouds and the clouds spill over, so to speak, thus watering the ground below. Dew point, or something?”

“Close, but don’t apply for a job teaching science just yet. Corky, does it not seem strange that the places that need water the most get the least and the places that need it the least get the most? What was the verse you read this morning in your devotions?”

“Let’s see, I was in Mark chapter four... Yes, here it is... Mark 4:25 *‘For whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.’*”

“I have established a spiritual law concerning giving – give and it shall be given to you – a law of the Universe that originates from My very nature! This is not about convenience, security, self-protection or really even about making wealth. This is about My very nature! Rivers live to flow. Water exists to give life.”

“Master, I just had a thought about Eden, that most idyllic spot. Wasn’t it all ruined because Adam and Eve were tricked into changing their focus from giving care to the garden to trying to steal Your glory?”

“Pretty much. The delicate balance of ‘enjoying’ comes from

successfully navigating between giving and receiving. As a gardener, one must harvest at the appropriate time, and proper use of the produce is a compliment to the trees, if I might say it that way. Pruning, nurturing, watering, all are aspects of giving as well as harvesting the fruit. Is a tree sick or psychologically impaired for spending its life giving? Is it wrong for a fruit tree to want to please people with its fare? Don't get me wrong, there is a kind of people pleasing that is self-centered and manipulative. Seeking to please people, especially before pleasing Me, can be a deadly twist of the principle of flow.

“Might we consider for a moment the verse I directed you to at the top of this chapter?

The desires of lazy people will be their ruin, for their hands refuse to work. They are always greedy for more, while the godly love to give! Proverbs 21:25,26 nlt

“Recall for me the story of the rich man who ended up in hell.”

“Seems he had a problem with giving, didn't he. That brings up a question. I've wondered if some people's gift isn't to make money, like others are gifted to write music or fix things. What if the gift to make money is nothing other than that, just a gift?

“Father, if a rich man is gifted to make money, then that money would be for others, much as a tree's fruit is not for itself but for others. If a painter painted only for himself and never shared his art with others, we'd think he had a problem. Yet our society fully expects the rich to use their gift only for themselves with a pittance being miserly doled out!”

“Floater, can you see why hell is what it is? The takers are put in a place where taking is the law of the land. Imagine being in a place where every drop of moisture in your system is being extracted, and there is none to replenish the lost water? Where there was nothing to take when your life had been built around taking?

“River, the words “desire” and “love” jump out at me from the two verses in Proverbs. They are describing the intent, or heart’s desire of the two opposite kinds of people, aren’t they? Greedy and lazy people love to take while givers love to bless others. Why oh why did this get turned around? Society says people pleasing is sick and hoarding is cool? I smell sulfur with this one!”

“You not only smell sulfur, you smell the nature of hell. Is it any wonder why the rich who abuse their gift cannot enter heaven. Can you imagine what would happen?”

“Oh mercy, I could see them damming up the river of life, selling irrigation rights, and marketing the leaves of the trees meant for healing the nations. I’ll bet they’d even try to sell You on a pyramid scheme, and offer You a prime distributorship! Ha! That would be a marketer’s dream! Franchising heaven!”

“Think not that it is evil, My son, to market, invest and control. For those are the tools of the rich. The danger is that the gift is seen as personal wisdom to be guarded and directed without My involvement. You’d be surprised at the excuses I receive when I try to get them to give! Mercy, they are a touchy bunch. Makes the expression “touchy musicians” look rather mild.”

“So, what is the main principle I am to learn from today’s lesson?”

“Don’t give more than you receive from Me – allow lack to prompt you to draw more from Me. And don’t scheme on ways to get more without plotting out plans to give more! Simple, right?”

“One other thing, Father. Why do you call selfish people lazy? Is it because they don’t want to waste their time giving where they aren’t insured a return? I was thinking about the fellow who buried his one talent because he thought there wasn’t anything in it for him. And don’t some of these “lazy” people turn right around and bend over backwards to give and fuss over people that they think will give them favors?”

“A River flowing from a limitless source is not worried about drought or exploitation. It’s the man who’s mentality is like the lost

desert wanderer with only a few swallows of water left. Fear of loss is the controlling motivation. The laziness comes in when they know how to get more but sell out to just get by.”

“For me to give is to truly live!”

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 niv

A RIVER OF FRUIT

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.

John 15:1-9 nas

oes water pull or push? Is each droplet connected? And if it is, does the leader pull the follower? Or do the followers push the leader? Does our abiding in Him pull Him into each situation? Or does He in us push us into each situation?

“Father, those trees that line this river. They drink up Your living water continually. I see they are heavy laden with fruit. And just beyond them is desert where sand blows and nothing grows. I feel a lesson coming on. And this tree here, as we pass it by, I notice that not all of its branches are fruit bearing. As I recall, You said that if branches don’t bear fruit that they’ll be thrown into the fire. Why?”

“Little drop, listen to the tree. Place your spirit ear to the trunk and listen. What do you hear?”

“It sounds like a tiny river, much like this One in which I float. Oh River, are You in there too?”

“You hear well, floater. For yes, I am in all things and all things are held together by the Word, the Living Word of My power. If I am in this tree, then why would fruit not be on this branch?”

“Could it be that the cells in the branch have grown independent? Have they pulled away from You, if indeed that is possible?”

“You see well the impossibility of anything existing outside of Me, but the intention of the cells, the heart’s desire to exist without interacting with Me is the problem. Death is what results in that which seeks to pull away from Me. I can and will use this branch, for everything will serve Me, for everything is mine; however, glory it wants, then glory it shall have.”

Strange. The branch that was fruitless, suddenly dries before my eyes, falls to the ground, breaks into several pieces as though invisible hands were making a small

campfire. From down inside the neatly arranged dry sticks smoke appears. Flames leap from the small pile of sticks, dry sticks, very dry sticks. As the flames spiral toward heaven, carrying their little puff of smoke, I can feel I am being released from my grip on this tree. We are floating down River once again.

“Father, if I were cold, that little fire would afford some heat. If I were lost, the light might signal sufficiently to attract the search party. And, I suspect that the cold ashes will end up enriching the soil. Wow! You truly do use all things to bring glory to Yourself. Even our failures will praise You!

“Abba, Lover of my soul, are You seeking to tell me that even the fearful end judgement of fire is going to bring praise to You? Are You trying to lessen the fear of hell’s fire, or lessen the faithful’s concern for the tragedy awaiting those who in ignorance pull back from You?

“I’m confused, O Mighty River of Life. Why a lesson on death? I don’t want to ponder death. I want to enter deeper into the creative aspects of Your very nature, Your power, grace, mercy.”

As I float further from the bank where the dead fruit tree branch was crackling, making its own kind of joyful noise, celebrating its freedom from producing fruit, it seemed strangely content to burn. And yes, there was a glory. I suppose a glory. As one star differs from another in glory, this little fire’s glory differs from the glory of the fruit hanging loftily above it.

“Is that what You’re saying? I can choose which way I will bring glory to You? As a fruitful branch or as a campfire? I can seek to avoid Your involvement in my life, but I can never outrun Your total control of the universe? I guess if Your Word says that even the wrath of the wicked will praise You, then our silly rebellion cannot escape Your massive, overarching plan. If this be the case, then loving River of Life, I simply yield afresh to Your genuine mercy and life. I can’t escape Your watchful care to every detail of existence! Why try? Why seek to pull back and dry up, only to be consumed by Your love? I would be

ahead of the game to soak in Your awesome, unlimited love, and let that river I heard within the tree, flow into every part of me! With Its life-giving flow, not only will I continue to grow, fruit will effortlessly appear from within me!”

“Do you suppose, little branch, that My reward for faithful abiding would bear the same conclusion that the rebel branches received? My verses for you this day told of cutting for the faithful fruitful as well as for the dry resisting. Would the same fate lay ahead for both?”

“Whatever the puzzle’s piece, I’m convinced that it pays well to serve Thee, Master. You reward well those who diligently seek to serve Thee. What I wonder, is, is the branch that has born its fruit in faithfulness really there when you trim it back? What’s cut off, is it the branch’s total existence or merely a contribution to someone’s campfire? Is not the life of the branch still there, and will it not jump forth next spring to joyfully pursue its design to bear fruit? I hear you saying that every whack of life, every cutting afforded by situations is merely Your tender process of pruning. Father, I love You so much I trust You completely. I see that yes, truly Your hand must allow every set of shears, every pruning saw, every bruising object or they cannot touch me! No weapon formed against me can touch me! No pruning by the destroyer can reach me! Only that which can be converted for my overall fruitfulness can even get close enough to impact my life!”

“Son, the tree is symbolic of the spirit within you. It grows, it reaches, it produces fruit. Trimming and cutting no more injure the tree than the “setbacks” of life hurt your spirit. It’s your mind that focuses on the incision. Your mind worries about the loss of sap, the redirection that pruning affords. But under the watchful eye of the husbandman, your future is secure in fruitfulness for that is why your were made, and that is what you will always seek! The essence of who you are is either vine-minded and thus really part of that which remains after the cutting, or branch (independence) minded and one with that which is cut off. One focus is death and the other is life.

“River, the fire had to hurt for the little rebel branch that fell and burned. I can see that its craving for independence resulted in not only in independence but isolation and destruction. That has to hurt, even more than physical pain. He that seeks to save his life will lose it; and the one who loses his life for Your sake will gain it. God who is love, I just want to abide in You!”

“Droplet, lean back and enjoy your trip.”

Do not fret because of evildoers, Be not envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass And fade like the green herb. Trust in the LORD and do good; Dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD; And He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He will do it.

Psalm 37:1-5 nas

FIRE

"But someone will ask, 'What are the deep cuts on your body?' And each will answer, 'I was hurt at my friend's house.' Sword, hit the shepherd. Attack the man who is my friend," says the LORD All-Powerful. "Kill the shepherd, and the sheep will scatter, and I will punish the little ones." The LORD says, "Two-thirds of the people through all the land will die. They will be gone, and one-third will be left. The third that is left I will test with fire, purifying them like silver, testing them like gold. Then they will call on me, and I will answer them. I will say, 'You are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'"

Zechariah 13:6-9 ncv

peaking of fire, Lord, why is there so much talk of fire in Your Word? Your Son said that we all have to be salted with fire and Paul said that we all had to pass through the fire and if some of our works made it through we'd receive a reward. And I guess the most scary aspect is how Daniel described a river of fire flowing from Your throne."

"You are floating even at this moment in the River of Fire!"

"What? Oh my! Are You kidding?"

"Do I kid? No, My little drop, tell Me what you know or think you know of the subatomic action taking place in every drop of water in which you float."

"This ought to be interesting. Me, a science dropout, sharing my feeble insights of creation with the One who actually created all things. Feel free to correct me any time You want (as if You would ever feel constrained to do so).

"As I understand it, which leaves lots of room for reality, subatomic particles have not been actually seen but more their effects have been mapped or deciphered. Is that right?"

"I see them all the time!"

"Oh, I guess so. Well, let me ask You. Is it true that electrons zoom around inside of atoms at the speed of light? Because if they do, then such activity might give the appearance of fire."

"For the sake of you starting a new theory of relativity, let's just say you're close."

"Well, if there is great activity within atoms, then that rock over there on the bank could be flowing and alive much like this river. Is that part of the reason why the verse says 'In Him we live and move and have our being'? Are You not constantly interacting with all things?"

“Yes, I AM that I AM! Everything that exists, exists in Me, and therefore moves, and lives in Me, the ultimate River of Life!”

“And the Scripture says of You, ‘Our God is a consuming fire,’ making all of us alive in a River of Fire!”

“Go on. What do you know of fire?”

“The word oxygenation comes to mind. Fire is the interaction of substances with oxygen. Isn’t rust, or ferric oxide, the byproduct of oxygen and iron, a form of oxygenation?”

“Son, how important is oxygen?”

“Well, Mr. River, Sir, I’ve thought it to be like the very Spirit Himself. When You breathed into clay it became a living soul, Adam. And doesn’t Ecclesiastes say that when You take the breath away the person dies? I would say that at least oxygen pictures the Holy Spirit.”

“And if it does, then would not the interaction of substances with My Spirit be indeed fire or oxygenation?”

“Wow, and that would mean that every time we mortals breathe, fire is happening inside our lungs and blood. I guess that’s where our internal warmth comes from, right? Burning off energy?”

“So, what’s to fear of fire? You live every moment in the middle of a fire stream! As the fire is contained, it produces energy and life with the byproducts being properly disposed of by the antioxidants and the system as a whole. Is this scary or life?”

“So, Abba, what does this mean to me in a practical way. If all this fire and burning is going on all the time within me and around me, then what’s the big deal about being consumed by fire or passing through the fire? The verses You led me to today talked of being tested with fire. How is this significant?”

“Which do you want to be, the fire or the object being burnt up?”

“For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

“If Christ means anointed One or oiled One, what is the oil for but to burn? If He is but an expression of Me, the Word of God, then He is

both the Fire as well as the Fuel! And if it is no longer You little droplet, but Christ, then you likewise will be both the fire as well as the fuel.”

“That would make me on both sides of the equation. I would never be ‘outside’ or separate. I would always be a living part of whatever You were doing. Albeit, I could then, in theory at least, be content in every situation, for I would be in You and You would be in me and in the situation! We would be oxidizing everything. Interacting with everything. Concerned about all things and able to effect all things. Wow, this would also be a picture of prayer – intercession! Every breath of prayer would be infusing You and divine life into every situation!

“Every obstacle in our path would be fuel! Every stumbling block, each rock, alive with life itself, would be either our companion in the flow of fire or fuel for our fire! All things would be mine, Ours! Your’s as Creator, Supreme master of all, and mine as well because in You I live and move and have my being. And anyone, as they turned, repented, let go of their kingdom and yielded to Your’s, could likewise flow in the River, Your River as an integral part of Your fire! From fuel to fire! That could be a song title!

“I think I’m getting a brain cramp. Could I just float for a while.....”

BOREDOM

Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!"

Numbers 11:4-6 nkj

Golden Flow, kissed by the sun, radiating, glistening, shimmering with life, what is the lesson for me this day? What of this story from Israel's sad trials of desert wanderings? Is there a warning for me?"

"Droplet of shimmering, mini-reflector of sun, what was the soul agony these weary travelers bemoaned? Was there not due cause to petition the great Creator of Variety for an enlarged sample from His table?"

"I guess that's what gets me, Abba. And You, being such an unlimited source of variety, why would You take exception to their request for a bit of broadening to their diet? You're not a bread and water kind of God; You're the buffet par excellence, Creator of all things and unimaginable variety!"

"Think, little one, of a series of events that leads to rebellion. First there is interest, then acceptance, then neglect, followed by wandering, then a critical eye, and on its heels disgust, only to be fermented into rebellion. What is a mortal capable of when the end state of rebellion is reached?"

"Isn't rebellion the reckless power behind anarchy; the suicide-mission-like abandonment to destruction, careless even for its own safety?"

"Indeed, the emotion that paves the path to hell. But, son, at what point along this downward spiral is sin first noted? When is a normal reaction twisted into an unacceptable response?"

"Father, the word joy comes to me. I wonder if when interest and acceptance are replaced with neglect that somehow sin is knocking at the door. Isn't that when marriages begin to fall apart? I'm thinking that growth requires continual nourishment and attention. But how does

a mortal maintain joyful interest and excitement about the same old stuff?”

“Am I not the same, yesterday, today and forever? But are you not still content in Me? What is the secret you’ve learned so far in maintaining the sense of awe and novelty in our relationship?”

“But, Great River, You are so different! You’re limitless!”

“Have you not been floating in the same old water?”

“Yes, but we’ve been so many places, seen so many things! Every moment there is a new twist or adventure. Floating in You is anything but boring!”

“Reflect deeper. Why is floating in Me anything but boring?”

“I hear my soul say, ‘Because of everything You do!’ Abba, it has to be that You are reflected in Your works, Your mighty, diverse works and I see only a minute fraction of Your awesomeness in each event... it teases me for want of more!”

“And what is My greatest work? You’ve read My Book a few times. What have I crowned with glory even above the angels?”

“Man!”

“And can you see My diversity with them and My unique workings within them and appreciate them individually as an expression of My workings?”

“Wait a minute. What of evil people. They distract us because they are so opposite of Your awesome nature! The suffering, the hurting, the exploiting, and even the Christ-rejecting; Abba, how can such wickedness even be considered in the same breath as the joy-producing flow of Your River?”

“One day a wicked man presumed to say that he held the power of life and death over Messiah. Can you recall what the Master’s response was to this evil mortal?”

“Yes, ‘You would have no power unless it had been given you from My Father.’ But surely You are not implying that You give the power to

do evil to wicked men?”

“What if I provide the tools and allow the freedom for them to be used for My kingdom or against My kingdom? What if I give gifts of healing and some give them freely, others charge exorbitant rates as though they devised their own gift, and still others hide their gift so deeply within the earth, no one would ever suspect they had such a gift! Is this not what you’ve seen in your short journey thus far?

“And, what is your favorite promise, the one you would preach on every day if I let you?”

“I guess Romans 8:28. I think I see something emerging from this discussion. Life in You could never be boring, thus starting the downward spiral leading to rebellion, if I but seek to see how You are turning everything to work for good for those who love You!

“Not only will the wrath of man praise You, but You are turning what evil people mean for evil into good, into salvation! Father, that verse from my devotions this morning just popped into my head, ‘Watch and pray and you will not enter into temptation.’ As I watch for Your hand in every situation, past the evil intent of wicked people, as I carefully watch, knowing that You’re there and that You will manifest Your glory, then excitement will arise, renewing my joy! I see that this is true trust – faith at its best!

“O delightful River of Life, You could never get boring. As You penetrate every situation, as You stand poised, ready to turn every event I witness into an intimate moment of enjoyment that couples share, what could erupt from my soul but excited anticipation, wondering how You’re going to pull this one off! Like lovers fondling their coffee cups, gazing deeply into each other’s eyes, almost oblivious to the storybook quaintness of foreign landscapes and moments, any place, any time is but a memory of intimacy with You! I love You, delightful lover of my soul! Take me deeper into the world behind the world, the story behind the story, the love behind the hate, the good overshadowing invisibly the evil. Take me to the sidewalk café, where lovers are lost to the

unbelievable spectrum of yesteryears, drizzling rain, passersby, and lead me into the strange world where all things are not only possible, but that are being painted by inebriated artists, intoxicated with love's nectar!"

OUTRUNNING THE RIVER

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. 2 Corinthians 7:10 NIV

elicious Living Water, if only I had known of Your splendid refreshment, my youthful trek would have been so different! If only I had Your resources when making career choices and raising my children! Is there any way I can go back? If only I could go back and redo so many things, take back so many words, relax more, drink of You more! If only..."

"If you don't mind my interrupting your splashing, droplet, might I instruct you now lest you turn My flow into white water? Do you see the little cove over there to the right? Head for it."

Not far from me was an inlet which, no doubt, was used for irrigation. It was wide enough for perhaps two rowboats to pass side by side. I stroked my way to the far shore entrance and grabbed on to a Willow branch to stabilize myself.

Looking back out to the main part of the River, I noticed an object floating downstream. It appeared to be a rather large book, about the size of the family Bibles many folks have on their coffee tables to use for pressing flowers and collecting obituaries.

"What is that?" I asked, squinting and straining to decipher. "It looks like a big book."

"That My little squirt, is the book of 'If Only's'."

"Huh?"

"The covers are made of a special material called remorse. It causes the book to float on top of the Living Water."

"H-m-m... if this book is floating, are there other books beneath the surface or on the bottom of the River?"

"Everyday, every moment of your life is recorded in the

Book of Life, son, and then it is tossed into the River. As the Water permeates the fabric and weave of the paper, the pages begin to melt into the River. In a day or so the book of the previous events is absorbed into the River and all is well. Yesterday is thus not allowed to spoil today's journey."

"So, Abba, the remorse coating is not a good thing. You intended for our yesterdays to blend into Your ongoing, every expanding River, didn't You?"

"Yes. Notice where the book is now."

The bobbing article was now almost out of sight, having passed ahead in the River's flow. A thought hit me. It must have been the Spirit's doing...

"Mighty One, my musings earlier on 'If only's', though sounding noble, are really a distraction, aren't they? For me to try to go back or even ponder how things could have been different, causes me to miss what You're doing now and the impossibility of going back means the whole thing is a double waste!"

Just then I heard a commotion out in the center of the River. A swimmer was flailing wildly with his arms trying to go up stream. The current was fast enough to make it a rather tough job to gain much distance, and the poor soul was trying so hard.

"River, Sir, who is that trying so hard to swim upstream and why are they doing it?"

"Look close at them. You tell Me who it is."

Well, it blew my mind. It was me! Crazy me! As I focused on "me" swimming madly upstream, I could hear me chanting inside my soul... "If only, if only, if only..." Crazy indeed!

"Sir, I'm not swimming after that book that just floated by, am I?"

I could sense a deep chuckle, then it burst forth into an outward laugh. At least Someone was getting some good out of this!

"Is this funny? Look at poor me, trying so hard to correct past

mistakes, and all You can do is laugh?”

Suddenly I felt embarrassed.

“I’m sorry, Abba, if You can get any pleasure from my life, please take it, I don’t mean to be disrespectful.”

“Little drop, you have no idea how much disrespect emanates from My droplets as they seek to improve on My system! My River of Grace and Mercy! Ponder for just a moment the silliness of trying to go back and negotiate with remorse. It pretends to have “the best” in mind, when in actuality all it is concerned with is pride! The best is truly for all things to meld into My River of Life; remorse desires human perfection! The ‘if only’ is flesh pure and simple, seeking to take over My job! If you could perfect your past, you would feel better about... pick one: (a) Yourself; (b) Others; (c) My Kingdom?”

I could feel prompted by the inner urge to push back out into the main flow of the River. I felt the weird sensation of rebuke and love, and that if I could but splash a little more of the Water up on me, it would sooth the stinging to my slapped ego.

“Look ahead, Corky. What do you see?”

“I can see that book up there, bobbing up and down. Rather distracting I would say.”

“Catch up to it.”

“I thought I couldn’t catch up to the book of “If Only’s” because of the covers of remorse. But as You say.”

I began doing the breast stroke, pulling my way through the Water. Each stroke caused the moving Water to stream over my chest, feeling like it was even entering my soul. This felt good. I was doing something, yes, I was enjoying a measure of control, but it was much less frustrating than swimming upstream. Could it be that God indeed wanted me to enjoy being in control, but perhaps a different kind of control. I pulled harder at the Water and virtually hydroplaned toward the meandering book. As I reached out for the book, my hand hit it, my

fingers latched on to it, and naturally pulled it under the Water. Something strange happened. The covers of the book that felt rough at first, almost irritating or splintering, as submerged in the Water, became slimy!

“Yuk! Nasty! Slimy! Abba, that’s nasty!”

“Hold it under just a little longer.”

It took just about everything in me to hang on to this now repulsive book and keep it under the Water. It reminded me of trying to hold a floatation device under the water in a swimming pool! The pressure for the book to pop up to the surface began to abate. The sliminess was also disappearing, but so was the book.

“River of Mercy, what was that all about? I mean, I feel like I just learned a lesson, but for the life of me I can’t remember what I was just doing?”

THE RAINCOAT

O my strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love.

Psalm 59:17 nas

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

John 4:13,14,23,24 nrs

These passages called to me from my devotions this morning. The continual flow of Abba's love – steadfast! The Living Water that comes from within, as a flowing spring. The seeking Father, the responding child, the Spirit's work of matching up Creator and creature in divine interaction. What abundance! What life!

A silly picture has latched on to my mind. I see someone walking in a yellow rain suit with the arm and leg ends snug and the suit is full of water. The individual looks awkward, walking about like a balloon, dripping water, but immersed inside the suit with this fluid. Picture the backdrop of a desert. Here this one walks, leaving a trail of mud as they plod through barren, dry, deadly wasteland. Fearing not for the dehydrating effect of the desert, for the inner flow is mostly retained in the bulging suit. Water streams down the face and back of the head from under the yellow hat. What a strange picture. Abundance amid extreme dryness.

We could add a few spigots to the rain suit. Faucets for the famished. The availability of the inner flood to share with as many as need, but not a wasteful gushing forth that passes all by and possibly allows for partial dryness for the holder of the inner spring. I sense the Father, The Master River, our Source, warning that in dry places we must hold next to our self, the precious Living Water. We must keep in contact with the Water with a suit of restraint, allowing the flow to first do Its work with us, lest we find dehydration in our extremities. We know that deep inside we cannot wither, but will not the heat and the sun burn and blister all unprotected areas? Can we not find our joy tarnished and our victory compromised by dry spots on the vessel that yields forth the living flow? Father of Life, show us how to retain and remain in contact with this Living Water to maximize our effectiveness.

The yellow of the rain suit is a symbol of caution. Our minds must notice. Our inner man must “take care” lest while abundance is flowing forth from our belly, our shoulder joints weaken under the sun’s rays and burdens of the day. Our mind must warn us to stop, take the time necessary to put this cumbersome suit of “taking every thought captive to Christ” on; to go ahead and stop. It is okay to stop. This pause is for life! This detour from our driving goals is actually an investment in our future – our tomorrow depends upon our wise investment today! Oh yes, it is a cumbersome suit. Indeed it is awkward to stop the screaming tyrant of the urgent and apply the protective coat of “putting on Christ,” but this is God’s way of our not fulfilling the lusts of the flesh – lusts that rage out of control in deadly, dry deserts! Dying wanderers say crazy things. Delirious, lost, bewildered saints full of potential can ramble on like those who’ve never tasted the Living Water. Why such madness. We know too well. The pain of dryness draws our attention away from the flow. Our mental focus shifts our affections to death instead of life. The trap is easy to fall into. Survival is programed into us. The Cross is alien to the natural man.

People who think our suit is weird might talk us out of it by their urgent needs. Their pain drives them and warps their focus. They see distortion, unreality, denial. We’re ignoring the “reality” and it repulses them, but only because of their dryness induced distortion. Our only way to help them is to keep the suit on and make the faucet of Living Water as available as possible!

What is worship? At the start of this chapter, the Psalmist extols God’s sufficiency, protection and continual love! The next passage is the Lord Jesus telling the woman at the well that Father God is seeking worshipers, those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. The water that springs up from the inside, Jesus would tell the crowd in John 7, is the Holy Spirit. I see a different definition of worship from what is commonly understood. A man-centered definition of worship can mislead us if we’re not careful.

To most people, isn't worship a person humbling their self before the awesome God? Picture the person standing, hands raised or kneeling with head bowed, and God's presence before them on a throne. Reverence is a part of worship, as is focus. But what I sense Jesus sharing with the woman in John 4 is that true worship is our imbibing in the Living Water that flows from our born again spirit. True worship involves the true picture and the truth is that we're not "disconnected" from Father God, but that He lives inside of us! The danger of seeing God as inapproachable or apart from us is that we will begin devising laws, rituals, gimmicks – reasons why God "should" hear us, answer us, provide for us! These futile efforts will never work because the flow is enjoyed by grace working through faith! Time spent trying to convince God that we're humble, or impress Him with our "religious" vocabulary is time spend not enjoying the River that is continually flowing!

Romans 13:14 is rather simple: *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts (nas)*. The flesh wants to be in control, the spirit wants to drink freely of the inner spring. The flesh will one minute be contrite and "humble" so as to impress God, and the next minute be squaring off with other humans as if their very existence was dependant on others responding the way they think they should. The spirit of a Christian draws resources, purpose and overall enjoyment from Jesus – and He lives in our heart!

The flesh takes life seriously – every little nuance is seen as a potential threat! The spirit rests in God's overarching control of every minute detail of life – nothing escapes Father's notice and superintending! The flesh fears being drained, ripped off, lied to, stole from, while the spirit walks around the desert in a yellow rain suit, faucets ready to provide life to the thirsty, the dying, almost begging the needy to draw from the source of inner bulging because the joy is so full. The unspeakable glory must needs be shared! True worship declares God's worth by living actions and not just by a pause in a busy schedule to offer a sacrifice of praise. According to Matthew 25,

Mother Theresa's ministry to the destitute of Calcutta was true worship.

Remember how granny glowed as everybody extolled her delicious goodies? Her painstaking efforts in the kitchen were not wasted on ingrates but provided a mutual enjoyment. Is this not a mini-picture to true worship?

“Jesus, keep us wet! Jesus, show us how to keep Your Living Water in contact with our every need. Jesus show us how to not sell, hawk or force Your Living Water on others, but how to make it available to all!”

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 1:1-6 niv

THE OFFICE OF THE ORIFICE

Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. {5} "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

John 15:4,5 nas

What limits the flow of life into the branch? Is there something that only the branch can do? Is the deadliest sin “apart-ness” from the vine?

Go with me to the mighty Colorado River as it emerges from the base of the towering Glenn Canyon Dam. It’s a Saturday morning and the flumes are more restricted as the demand for power is reduced at the beginning of a weekend. Lessened flow allows us to walk out further on the normally wet riverbed, nearer the center of the river. As morning stretches out, the waters begin to rise. The awakening cities below are calling for more power and the gates of restriction are inched open, increasing the flow of liquid that in turn propels the generators. Demand downstream triggers a greater flow. The pull for power causes the orifices, the gates, the limiters, to open, that the stored energy, the potential power might be transferred into kinetic, dynamic, need-meeting power! The Colorado River yawns, stretches and increases its gait!

The overall system of fruitfulness has a weak link. The size of the orifice! The valve that opens slightly is showing its mastery over the ocean of potential! All power in heaven and earth reside in the limitless Son of the Living God, Who lives within each believer. Yet Jesus said, *“As your faith, be it unto you.”* The Apostle James revealed a major cause of unfruitfulness: *You have not because you ask not!* The potential of the promises that proclaim superlative possibilities is constricted by the human will. Yes, Ephesians 3:20 is very true: *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us (nas).* And Ephesians 1:3 should excite us: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed*

us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (nas). However, recall the teaching of Jesus when the woman with the issue drew His power: *But Jesus said, "Someone did touch Me, for I was aware that power had gone out of Me" (Luke 8:46 nas).* And in verse 48 He ties it into the power of our faith to draw His power into our need: *And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."* The branch draws the Vine's life-giving flow by faith!

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples

John 15:7,8 nas

Our God is glorified when we are fruitful even though it's His River that flows through us that produces the fruit! Notice in these verses that there are two orifices that limit the flow of God's power: abiding and asking. In verse 11 Jesus connects our abiding-asking-fruitfulness to the amount of joy we will experience. Our Master desires us to have more joy than we can even imagine! The bigger our faith orifice, the more we both are blessed – God is pleased by our faith!

In order for the inner potential to reach the surface and explode as fruit, the branch's meristem must pull from deep within – all the way down into the vine, the all-powerful vine. The limitless dam of the vine is choked down by the gate of the branch! As Glen Canyon Dam's potential is regulated by the flumes discharging the water and in the process propels the generators, so the fruitfulness of the branch is regulated by the branches' abiding ability. Abiding, pulling, allowing – the branch is designed to allow the flow of vine-life into and through itself! If the flow is inordinately diverted to branch growth, there will be none for fruit growth. If too much vitality is sent to produce fruit, the weakened branch will not be able to contain the fruit. The Master's plan

requires intimate, continual monitoring to distribute this power. Life must be monitored!

As the downstream demands for power signal the dam monitors to open their valves, so the needs in our life will cause us to open up more to the Lord of abundance. Jesus told Paul that His power was manifested in man's weakness. Our need draws God's power. And, when we see that part of our need is to bear fruit for those around us, then we can be in a state of continual need! If I told you I was bringing someone over for you to minister to, you would probably start praying, drawing! You would get ready by placing faith-demands on God's power.

When we grow complacent with life and the needs of others are "their problem," our faith-orifice will close down. Little need, little draw, little reason to abide in the Vine! Big expectations, big need – big draw – much abiding in the Vine! I know we can grow weary with the needs of others, but this too is part of God's bigger plan to keep us hooked up to Him. Jesus asked His disciples why they didn't leave His ministry and they replied, "*Where else can we go?*" Once we've soaked in Living Water, what else can ever satisfy? What else can we draw from?

"Father, show me how to place faith-demands on Your flow! Reveal how I can open my gates wider. Grant me an increase in wisdom to balance between structural strength and fruitfulness! Timing is crucial for I realize that when the season for fruit preparation is past, Your team of helpers (bees, wasps, gentle breezes that carry pollen) will not be available to do what I cannot do. I understand that being distracted and dense to Your Holy Spirit will result in my missing the moment, which will require patiently awaiting another Spring time! The drawbridge for crossing the gulf of "impossible" is regulated according to Your schedule. When I abide in You and in Your Word, I know Your Spirit will nudge me for the appropriate growth response – drawing! Your abiding Word, the Living Christ, directs and monitors the flow, as the

head, the central switching office. Holy Spirit, increase my sensitivity, my networking, that I might receive all the impulses You would have transferred in and through me!”

CONSERVE OR CONSUME?

And the angel showed me a pure river with the Water of Life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, coursing down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.

Revelation 22:1,2 nlt

his morning I sit, having my quiet time with the Lord, looking out over the Snake River in Idaho, at the Massacre State Park. I am on vacation with wife and friends and we've just spent three days at the Grand Teton National Park. The stark contrast to the pine-smothered landscape of the Tetons, this rough, volcanic debris-strewn place that hugs the Snake River tells the tale of horror in years gone by. The Visitor's Center takes us back to the early settlers in the 1800's and how confused and threatened Native Americans saw the pioneers as a danger to be eliminated. Their ruthless massacre of the harmless settlers was used to name this barren campsite.

The sun just crawled up and over the mountains to the East, and in the process it painted the rocky cliffs on the opposite side of the river with hues of hope. Somehow when the day dawns, hope arises. The wide river, so very wide in contrast to my native Arizona's creeks, speaks of abundance. More than enough. Why should natives fear that simple travelers would deplete the continual flow? At this moment I'm wondering why anyone would fight, steal, kill another to "keep" God's abundance for themselves? Isn't there more than enough?

Isn't God's River of Grace enough for all? If the oceans of the world were made sweet, and every human, all six billion of us, were taken to drink at the same time, our slurping would barely make a dent in the volume! Traveling this country on vacation and seeing the countless miles of desolate land – Arizona, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming – this is but a part of only one of many continents. There is more than enough room, more than enough resources, but what we lack is the cooperative trust that the God who made us all is equally in love with His creation! His sufficient grace flows like this Snake River... meandering through many farms, giving irrigation, providing recreation, being recharged by tributaries, being useful by its

selfless contributions. We cannot grasp His flow; we will not contain His love! Ours must be to drink in all we need and allow His abundance to flow on to others.

Sometimes the Father's flow graces lush forests. Sometimes the River of Life almost screams in contrast to barren hillsides. Onward it flows. Only those who avail themselves of this flow will be blessed. Instead of fearing that another mortal or millions of mortals can hamper our potential, why not rather fear that others would seem to come short of this abundance and thus disappoint the Father of Grace? What taints our vision with fear when the Source has signed His name so largely? Isn't the greater compliment that He who calls us is able to keep that which we have committed unto Him? Faithful is He who calls, who promises, for He will see to it that His Word, His eternal stream of grace and provision will not return empty?

Splash! Step back and take delight as others run to the River's edge! Whistle and wave! Hail the rushing motorists to come and drink – deeply, freely! Take an extra drink! Fill your containers! Publish a map to this exciting, invigorating location! Give out free samples! Don't fear the crowds or worry with overuse – the more we give this Living Water, the greater it flows!

The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will make rivers flow on barren heights, and springs within the valleys. I will turn the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs. I will put in the desert the cedar and the acacia, the myrtle and the olive. I will set pines in the wasteland, the fir and the cypress together, so that people may see and know, may consider and understand, that the hand of the LORD has done this, that the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Isaiah 41:17-20 niv

THE ABUNDANT LIFE
How to Become a Christian

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.
John 10:10 nas

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.
John 5:24 nas

he Bible tells us how we can enjoy a rich, fulfilling life. The Awesome Creator designed us with a capacity for love and a desire to be successful. This abundant life was formulated around mankind living in close fellowship with the Lord. Listen to the words of Jesus Christ:

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.

Revelation 3:20 niv

God's design includes provisions for us even when we're drained:

Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28 niv

Yes, our loving Father God has our best in mind:

...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

John 10:10b).

I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

John 15:11 niv

Why is it that most people are not experiencing this abundance? Mankind has stepped out of God's plan and has

tried to do their own thing. The Bible calls this sin. This rebellion blocks God's blessings from us. None of us is excluded from this problem of sin:

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
Romans 3:23 niv*

Some people feel that sin is an old-fashioned concept, but the Bible tells us that our sin separates us from God's blessings:

*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
Isaiah 59:1,2 niv*

Our good works and noble intentions are not sufficient to reinstate us to a standing where the holy God can bless us:

*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all
our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up
like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away
Isaiah 64:6 niv*

God's plan of salvation is the provision of His love for a race of fallen, stubborn beings. Because the Almighty is holy, His standards are essential and can't be ignored. But, because "God is love," He designed a way to reinstate those individuals who, out of sincere love for Him, would obey His instructions.

GOD'S SOLUTION

God's Spirit overshadowed a virgin named Mary, and the child that was conceived was therefore both God and man. God entered our world in human form as the son of Mary and the Son of God—Jesus, the Christ (or “Anointed One”). Jesus led a sinless life by complete obedience to Father God. Then, as our substitute, He took our place and our punishment. Whereas the punishment for sin was death, and because He was just, God couldn't ignore sin, but He revealed in the Old Testament that He would receive a substitute payment for man's sins. Animal sacrifices pointed to the day when God, in human form, would come to earth and be our substitute sacrifice—the Lamb of God! What God's holiness demanded, God's love provided:

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

Because Jesus was a perfect man, He could pay for our sins; because He was Eternal God, His blood paid for **all** who would come to Him. Jesus willingly went to the cross and died as our sin substitute. He arose from the dead to demonstrate that God's holiness was satisfied. By rising from the dead, Jesus broke sin's power over us.

...He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption...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.

Hebrews 9:12b,14 niv

This salvation is all of God. Going to church, doing good works, etc., will not save us. It is very hard for independent individuals to accept that they can do nothing to merit salvation.

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—
and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by
works, so that no one can boast.*

Ephesians 2:8,9 niv

OUR RESPONSE

A free gift cannot be earned, but it must be accepted! An essential aspect of God's plan of salvation is that it separates between those who could care less about God's will and those who, when they see the error of their ways, will repent, or turn from doing their own thing:

...unless you repent, you too will all perish.

Lk. 13:3

*I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must
turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.*

Acts 20:21 niv

We receive Jesus' payment for our sin by submitting to His Lordship over our life. Submission and obedience puts us back on the original path God designed for us:

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:9 niv

Do you want to receive God's gift of salvation right now?

Do you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins? That He arose from the grave on the third day? Will you turn from being the boss of your life and surrender to Jesus, and ask Him to be your Lord?

Here is a sample prayer. Ponder it, then put it in your own words and say it to God, if you truly mean it.

Dear Heavenly Father, I come to You admitting that I have sinned and have not done Your will. I believe that, out of love, you sent Jesus, Your Son, to die for my sin. I believe that He rose from the dead and has destroyed sin's power over my life. I turn from my sin and receive Jesus as my Savior and my Lord!

The exact wording is not as important as the heart response. Did you turn from being the lord of your own life and, in receiving Jesus, are you making Him your Lord?

This may seem like a simple prayer, yet it is a legal transaction, a covenant. If you were sincere, God will honor His Word and will save you and send His Holy Spirit to live inside you.

GROWING AS A CHRISTIAN

Read the Bible every day. Get an easy to understand translation, such as the New International Version (niv), the New Living Bible, or the New American Standard Bible. Start reading at least a chapter a day. Begin with Matthew's gospel and read through the New Testament first; then begin reading in the Old Testament. Make notes as you read, and write down any questions you may have to ask a Bible teacher later. Begin each Bible study with prayer for God's guidance.

Look up these verses on the importance of Bible study: 1 Peter 2:2; 2; Timothy 3:16,17; Psalm 119:11; Psalm 1:1-3. Check the index of your Bible for the location of the books of the Bible.

Talk to God your Father in prayer, every day. Begin your prayer time like Jesus' example, with praise (Matthew 6:9). Confess any sin. 1 John 1:9 tells us the Lord will forgive us when we confess our sin to Him. Look up these verses to see what happens when we don't confess our sin: Ps. 66:18; Ps. 32:1-7. Pray for others (Ephesians 6:18, 19; Colossians 4:2-4). Instead of worrying, pray (Philippians 4:6-7). Give thanks in your prayers (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Bring your requests to the Father in Jesus' name (John 16:23,24).

Beware of a new pull. Our enemy, Satan, wants to pull you down, discourage you and make you give up. Jesus said the first thing that would happen to us after we receive the Word would be that Satan would come to try to steal the seed ("I didn't feel anything; nothing happened"). Also, persecution, worry, cares of this world, and the love of sin will attempt to choke the word (Mark 4:3-20). Resist the devil in the name of Jesus the very instant you recognize his temptation traps of sin and doubt: 1 Peter 5:6-9; James 4:6-8; Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. Think of "resisting" as chasing away a thief that's starting to climb in your window: "...Get out of here, in the name of Jesus!" If temptations or pressures get too strong for you, get together with another believer. The Lord wants us to strengthen each other

(Galatians 6:1,2). We're to help others!

Meet regularly with other Christians (Hebrews 10:24,25). Find a good church home where the Bible is taught, God is praised, Jesus is served, and the Holy Spirit is honored.

Look into being baptized in water (Matthew 28:19,20).

Begin seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This is when Jesus pours out the power of the Holy Spirit on us. Study these verses: Luke 11:9-13; John 7:37-39; Acts 1:4-8; Acts 2:1-4; Acts 10:44-46.

Begin sharing the story of God's love and salvation with others. You may be the only “preacher” some people will listen to (Romans 10:9-15).

Learn all you can; share all you learn!

Please send your comments and insights:

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Eternal Security or Security of the Believer
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