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'EAGLES FLY HIGH!' from which these words have been drawn, is a trilogy for the hungry in God - those desiring God's best for themselves and the church. These books will encourage you to seek more and more of Him.

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WALKING THE ROAD WITH JESUS – Revelation 12:11

What to write about this amazing verse! Where do I start? When the Lord first gave me the verse 8 years ago, I had only the 29 words it contains, meaning this would be a very short chapter! But I am happy, or sorry, to say, depending upon your perspective, that the problem I now have is what to leave out! For the Holy Spirit, over a period of 18 months, gave me a 12 tape, 3 booklet, 30-hour course all based on this one verse. You may well think that I am verbose. Believe me, I am generally a man of few words, so no one was more surprised than I was, with the end result. Fortunately, it can't have all been bad, as many thousands of people have had their understanding grow and life change through this course.

For our purposes here, I promise you I will try and confine myself to a brief summary. This verse is so exciting though, it is really hard to! Discipline yourself David! However, we do need to spend a bit of time building a foundation to carry us through the rest of the book. So please bear with me. Trying really hard to grasp the principles involved, will increase our ability to understand the really interesting and challenging stuff that follows in 'Eagles Fly High!'

WHAT IS REVELATION 12:11 TALKING ABOUT?

The key to understanding Revelation 12:11 is to recognise that our Christian walk is a journey, not an event. Yes, maturity in God is a process, both for the individual and the church as a whole.

Not surprisingly, as we have established in the earlier table in 'The Power of '3', our walk is a three-step process. Each step builds on the previous one/s, and at each step, one member of the godhead predominates. Now I appreciate that this may differ from common understanding. But please, don't reject it out of hand, because as you will see if you persist, this truth explains the reasons for a lot of the seemingly inexplicable things that happen as we progress in our walk with the Lord. And amazingly, it is all summed up in this one short verse, Revelation 12:11.

For the verse is split into three parts each corresponding with a stage in our walk with Jesus. This is where the name "Walking With Jesus Ministries" came from, just in case you were interested. The verse starts off by telling us why we should walk, rather than

stand still, and that is to overcome Satan. Otherwise Satan is likely to overcome us! "They overcame him (Satan) by....." The "him" concerned is definitely Satan as he is clearly identified 2 verses earlier. Please check me out! Don't take my word for anything! I have been known to be wrong before today! The only way to make this truly real to you, is to confirm for yourself, that what (I believe) the Lord is saying through me is scripturally and spiritually correct. My family will tell you that I have not attained perfection yet! Probably too, that I still have a long way to go to get there!

Revelation 12: 11 tells us that Satan can be overcome through a three step process to be worked out in our lives, each step building upon the previous one and emphasising a different member of the godhead. I must emphasise the order in the building process as set out. Short cuts aren't possible! That is why it takes time as well as desire to come to maturity in Christ. So let's see how it is done!

"THEY OVERCAME HIM (Satan) BY....."

1. ...THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB" (emphasising Jesus)

This is the easiest part of the verse to interpret for all true Christians have experienced it, by definition. We all know, at least experientially, about the power of the "blood" and the "lamb", even if we are not 100% sure what they really mean. 'Christian-ese' is so very easy to fall into isn't it? When we don't understand something properly, we use a good religious word and everyone thinks that we are really with it! But then it is probably only me who has done that! But the meanings of these two words are quite clear in scripture.

a. The Lamb

The very first public declaration of Jesus' ministry by John the Baptist was prefaced with,

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

There are of course, many pictures throughout the Old Testament, of the coming of Jesus as a lamb. These things excite me, as they are ongoing proof of God's intentions and plans for mankind, right from earliest times! Really helps build my faith, Yours too?

Take Abraham, for example. Abraham lived 2,000 thousand years before Jesus. He was on the way with his precious son Isaac, to the place where his faith was going to be put to the ultimate test. He was being asked by God to sacrifice the precious son he fathered miraculously when he was 100 years old and his wife a mere ninety (even more of a miracle!). One gets the feeling that Isaac had inkling of what was going on because he asked where the sacrifice was going to come from. Abraham replied,

"God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." (Genesis 22:8)

And much to the relief of Abraham, let alone Sarah and Isaac, the miraculous sacrifice was provided, right at the last minute. God's impeccable sense of timing, once again! I am pleased to see that "last minute" doesn't only apply to me!

Then again, around 500 years later, at the first Passover, the Israelites were required to sacrifice a lamb, then put its blood around the door to avoid their firstborn sons being killed along with those of the Egyptians (Exodus 12:1-30).

Two pictures of the lamb to come, that is Jesus, 2,000 and 1,500 years before He was born!

b. And the blood

The Passover story combines the blood and the lamb perfectly – the lamb was sacrificed and the blood used to protect the Israelites houses from the final plague of the death of the firstborn sons. A beautiful picture of Jesus, who was to come 15 centuries later! Jesus, the lamb sacrificed for us, whose blood was poured out for the forgiveness of all sins, saving us from spiritual death.

For scriptural confirmation of the connection between Jesus and the blood we will go to the last book of the bible, written towards the end of the 1st century AD. Revelation 1:5

explains the relationship between sin and the blood of Jesus;

".....To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood".

So I trust it is clear to you that "the blood of the lamb" does in fact refer to Jesus.

c. A personal meaning

As indicated above, a personal experience of "the blood of the lamb" is the one and only essential qualification for becoming a Christian. The only membership requirement for entering God's kingdom. Spiritually speaking, the cleansing blood of Jesus becomes effective in our lives at the time we accept Him as our "Saviour", as the one who "saves us" from our sin and re-establishes our relationship with God the Father for us. His blood is available to everyone, but only becomes effective when we 'avail' (take advantage of) ourselves of it. These 'religious' words such as 'avail' can be difficult to understand at first but they do convey very precise meanings that other words don't.

For example, I grew up in a Christian home and knew all about Jesus and 'salvation through the blood'. But knowledge was not enough to 'save' me. It was not until I was ready to personally accept His offer (availed myself of it) that it had personal application to me. Like buying a product from the "Life" shop where only one product is traded, eternal life (the blood of Jesus) upon a trade-in of eternal death (sin). If only supermarket shopping was so simple!

When born, we all receive an inheritance gift from our parents, the gift of sin. Sounds harsh, but it is true. For it is the continuing gift of countless generations past. But on the bright side it is the only acceptable currency at the Life shop and we all have sufficient of it! No, we don't have to work at getting more! I was pretty good at that for many years! We can read the Life shop's advertising, we can even pass the shop by as I did for 42 years, but unless we enter through the door (Jesus) and personally trade in our sin, we can't receive eternal life. There is no other currency we can use, only sin, for money is no good! Good works don't work either! Nor can we send our spouse, parents, pastor or priest to trade on our behalf. We have to present the identity card of our life to make the transaction.

I walked past that door on many occasions when I was younger, looking at the advertising in the window, but reluctant to give up what I had for what seemed to me to be such a long term promise. Later I decided that the promise wasn't what I wanted, preferring to run as far away from the shop as possible. It wasn't until I became bankrupt, both morally and financially, having tried to fight with all I had and lost the battle, that I came back running, repentant, to the Life shop. I willingly entered through the door of Jesus, to trade in my, by then, considerable sack of sin, for the ultimate gift of eternal life. Now I kick myself for not doing it sooner, for it was so much easier than I imagined, nor was the cost great either. For the pleasure of my bag of sin paled against the joy of my new 'eternal' life!

FINDING GOD THROUGH THE BLOOD

Why blood? What is so special about blood?

I have had a special interest in blood over the years because it has provided food for our family! No, we are not blood-sucking vampires, but Kathy worked for over 5 years, as the full time nurse at our local Tauranga Hospital, Blood Donors unit. The blood that Kathy took from the donors literally provided "life" to patients undergoing operations in the hospital. Incidentally, Kathy then changed her job to become a theatre nurse, so she now uses the blood she used to collect!

My spiritual eyes opened wide, understanding why God attaches so much importance to blood, when I discovered this verse in the Old Testament book of the law, Leviticus 17: 11.

"For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement (oneness with God) for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."

Yes, blood is the spiritual symbol of life. So if blood represents life, the shedding of blood

represents death.

We have to add one further spiritual principle, to get a clear understanding of the real meaning and purpose of the "blood of Jesus". This spiritual principle is one we often prefer to ignore in today's world, that of capital punishment. "Old Testament, David", I hear you cry. Yes, it is Old Testament law, I know, but the Old Testament established the principles for the New. Let's look in Leviticus 24: 17-18.

"If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death.life for life."

You may argue that Jesus replaced this law with grace and love, but the spiritual principle remains. Even though it may seem gory or even old fashioned to us, whether we like it or not, God has consistently, throughout all 6,000 years of recorded history, required 'sacrifices'. The giving up of a life is a compulsory condition for restoring the 'life' or spiritual relationship, taken away when Adam and Eve sinned.

Let's have a quick look at what Adam and Eve did. Effectively they committed spiritual suicide! They had a spiritual blood transfusion, replacing the blood of righteousness (right with God), with the blood of sin (separation from God). Not a great bargain as it was to turn out! We all make mistakes though, don't we? To get back in relationship with God, mankind (and womankind too!) needed to reverse this sad situation, with a further blood transfusion of righteousness.

In Old Testament times this reconciliation with God was achieved through the sacrifice of animals, the lifeblood of the individual animal being "exchanged" for the forgiveness of an individual's unintentional sins. The sacrifice applied only from the time of his or her previous sacrifice, until the time of that sacrifice. Sins committed after the sacrifice had to wait until the next one, to be forgiven. Now this was hard on the animal population as well as on those who desired to be continually right with God! Jesus told us that God the Father didn't regard this situation as satisfactory in Hebrews 10:8 when He said,

"Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them." The writer went on to make the comment, "(although the law required them to be made)"

But God had on hold at that time a much better plan, one that was fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Jesus put the spiritual Blood Donors Clinic out of business once and for all! For He took it upon himself to give all His precious lifeblood, to enable everyone from that time on who would accept it, to have a once and for all "spiritual blood transfusion of righteousness." To have all sins forgiven, and make possible a return to the relationship that Adam and Eve had with God before they sinned.

This process is much better explained than I can, in chapters 5 of the book of Romans. Here are two excerpts to confirm this to you.

(5:12) "therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned". (5:19) "For just as through the disobedience of one man (Adam) the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of one man (Jesus) the many will be made righteous."

So at the time of Jesus death we moved from the 'Age of Law' to the 'Age of Grace' (unmerited favour from God). From there being 'numerous sacrifices for sins,' to a 'single sacrifice for all sin.' Worked wonders for the animal population too!

To summarise, blood is symbolic of life. Adam rebelled against God, sacrificing his spiritual life in order to gain knowledge. To be restored to God, God requires a life for a life. Jesus gave His life as a substitute for ours, in order that we might regain our spiritual relationship with God. Thank you so very much, Jesus. We can now overcome Satan "by the blood of the lamb".

THE THEORY AND THE REALITY

Now we know that in reality, we aren't yet walking in this intimate relationship with God. I have always had a problem here, for by nature I am a realist rather than a theorist.

You might have gathered that by now anyway! I love to have a theory, an explanation to base reality upon, but not a theory for theory's sake. So I do have problems with the blood of Jesus purifying me when I know damned well (oops – that proves it!) that I am not yet white as white. In a spiritual sense that is, for I do like a suntan. I am an awful lot better than I was 10 years ago though for the Lord has changed even me.

This book is about putting theory into practice, about experiencing that which has been achieved by Jesus positionally, what He has opened up for us. We should be perfect. Jesus has made that possible by 'the blood of the lamb'. But it is not a reality yet, in my life anyway. In yours too? Why? God showed me that day 8 years ago when He explained Revelation 12: 11 to me, that there are two further steps to the process. They are found in the last 2 parts of the verse. For God is 'triune', 3 parts, and we must accept and implement the functions of all three members of the Godhead in order to attain the perfection that Jesus provided the means to attain. For Jesus saved us, the Holy Spirit teaches, guides and empowers us so that God the Father can use and perfect us as we submit to His will. For as there are 3 parts of God, so there are 3 parts to the verse, and 3 stages in life that we must all walk through in order to reach perfection. Two of these stages have been fully revealed in Jesus and the Holy Spirit, while the third is yet to be finally fulfilled. That is why we have not yet fully attained in reality, all that Jesus made possible for us positionally, when He sacrificed His life, shed the "blood of the Lamb" on the cross at Calvary, nearly 2,000 years ago. Makes sense? I am sure it will by the time we reach the last page and you will be as excited as I am about what the future holds for us.

So let's now move on to the second part of the verse.

2. "THE WORD OF THEIR TESTIMONY" (emphasising the Holy Spirit)

a. The Power of The Spirit: I can hear you asking, David how does the word of their testimony relate to the Holy Spirit? Well, that was my question of the Lord too, when he first stopped me at this verse. And as usual, He had an answer. He took me to

Matthew 12: 34. "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."

The book of James similarly tells us that "no man can tame the tongue (3: 7)". Yes, in the end, no matter how we try to cover things up, the words we speak reflect our heart attitude. And our heart, the symbolic seat of our emotions or feelings, is the realm of the Holy Spirit. That is why, when we are baptised in or released into the power of the Holy

Spirit, our ability to express our emotions in our worship, in the adoration of our God, increases amazingly.

"so that with one heart and mouth (by the Holy Spirit) you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 15:6)

Yes, the 3 parts' of the godhead work together in perfect unity.

For someone I know personally quite well, one David Tait actually, used to sing so seriously and formally, with feet firmly anchored to the floor and hands glued to the hymnal. Now he is able to raise his hands in worship and even dance before the Lord, until he runs out of breath – in spite of the exercise regime he undertakes to kid himself that he is still 26 when he is actually twice that age! The dancing would be even shorter though, without the exercise! I can tell you, for that change to have taken place in me, a miracle needed to occur. The power of the Holy Spirit released in me was it! My life now, both vocal and physical, has been turned upside down, (right way up actually!), and is proof of the truth that "the word of their testimony", the Holy Spirit, can revolutionise your life. If He could do it to me He can do it to anyone! My pastor says amen to that!

This relationship of the Spirit to our testimony is again confirmed in Revelation 19: 10.

"At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he (the angel) said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (i.e. a gift of the Holy Spirit)

Once again the 3 parts of the Trinity working in unison, Jesus, God (i.e. the Father) and the "spirit of prophecy", the Holy Spirit. Our testimony of Jesus again comes through the working of the Holy Spirit.

b. Spiritual Gifts: Now for the controversy! If you cannot accept the contents of these 3 paragraphs, please do not bother to read any further, for you will be wasting your time. Sorry to be so blunt but that's how it is. Without acceptance of the reality, for current times, of spiritual gifts, and their application to our life, we cannot enter the exciting and challenging realms that God has for us. These spiritual gifts were a natural part of the New Testament church and there is nowhere in scripture that says, or even infers, that they are not for God's people today. We will look at the life, near death and restoration of the church later on. But for the individual, for you and I to participate in our personal restoration process with God the Father, we must understand and experience the power of the Holy Spirit in our life. Well, that has got that off my chest! I feel a lot better now!

Let's have a look at scripture to see what I am talking about. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-11. This is not the only passage that refers to spiritual gifts and is not all-inclusive, but it illustrates well what I am saying. First of all, verses 7-10 list the gifts.

"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues."

These choice gifts are still for each one of us today to experience, a generous present from a loving God through the Holy Spirit.

"All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines." (v11).

Just in the first century? My bible doesn't say that! Isn't this exciting. Birthday and Christmas all at once! Birthdays and Christmas didn't stop in the first century! Sometimes I wouldn't mind my birthdays slowing down a bit though!

b. Building our Faith: Now when I came to write this section I didn't realise the amazing relevance of the three prior verses (1 Corinthians 12:4-6) to the message of this book. God often surprises us doesn't he? Not so surprising though that the Holy Spirit should show me this at this time, as it is a 'real time' illustration of how He works!

Throughout this whole presentation we have been discussing the need to experience all three persons of the Godhead if we are to attain all that God has planned for us, in these amazing times in which we live. If I hadn't managed to get that across earlier, I apologise and trust I have now! These 3 verses illustrate the point beautifully, far better than I could.

"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. (The Holy Spirit) There are different kinds of service but the same Lord. (Jesus) There are different kinds of working but the same God (The Father) works all of them in all men."

Isn't that great? For these verses could have gone (have now been put in) our earlier table, illustrating the unity and function of the "Trinity" and the application of all three to our life. I didn't know about them initially! The bible is a bottomless source of the knowledge of God, and the Holy Spirit progressively reveals it to us. Please believe me, what I have written is true and not just a good story! I really was not aware of the application of these 3 verses until reading them again just a short time ago. God is good and I really do need His help. Thank you Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit builds our faith through our experience of His reality working in our life. This example has been another

confirmation to me that I am working in God's will and gives me more confidence to keep going when things get tough, and they certainly do at times!

The bible also tells us directly, how to build our faith

"But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit." (Jude 20)

Yes, the Holy Spirit builds us in our faith. He is there as our teacher, guide and friend, so it is logical that building our faith would be one of His prime roles.

d. Revealing the Word: You may be surprised to find a section on the revealing of the word amongst the section on the Holy Spirit. Wasn't that all done through Jesus? I know I was surprised when I first experienced it. But that is just what He did for me in the paragraph above! Many students of the word, including many theologians, feel they have an excellent understanding of the bible, having studied diligently for many years. Yet I made an important discovery when I came into the Spirit. For there were things that were revealed to me, that the 'experts' I had read and heard, had not discovered in all their many years of study. I also found that this experience was not unique to me. There were many people who had these insights into God's word and the nature of Jesus that were missing from my previous experience. All of a sudden the bible took on a new interest, a new vitality for me. How? Who better to answer that question than Jesus himself in John 16: 13, 15

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. (v15) All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you."

Jesus is right! As always actually! I know it in my 'knower'! My personal testimony is that when the Holy Spirit, who lived in me from the time of my conversion, was released to do His work inside me, my understanding of the Word of God (the bible) and The Word (Jesus) increased dramatically. In spite of arguments to the contrary from those who feel that a Holy Spirit experience is unnecessary as a part of, or following conversion, I know this to be true. Let the book 'Eagles Fly High!' be my testimony, on which my case stands or falls. For we cannot move on towards the ultimate goal of intimacy with God the Father, without first experiencing both the salvation of Jesus (the blood of the Lamb) and the "in-filling" of the Holy Spirit (the word of their testimony). Please, before I am hung, drawn and quartered, I am not condemning academics, for they do a most valuable job in researching, revealing and teaching scripture that we ordinary people do not necessarily have the time nor the ability to do. But an academic, working hand in hand with the Holy Spirit, is far more effective than one relying solely on his or her own abilities.

e. Experiencing Spiritual Realities: Writing about the spiritual dimension of our lives and existence is both easier and harder than writing about the more defined area of salvation. Easier because it is based on personal experience, how the Holy Spirit acts and reacts to our individual personalities. And we all like talking about ourselves don't we! Usually the hardest part is to get someone to listen! But more difficult because our experiences can be different, the Holy Spirit working personally in the unique situation of each life. So your experience will be different to mine. The Holy Spirit deals to you in a different way than to me. Therefore our perceptions of Him differ, depending upon our personal experience.

This is further complicated by Satan, who suddenly takes a much greater interest in us when we enter the spiritual world in a real and threatening (to him) way. For we see Christians who are walking only in the truth of salvation living good, relatively trouble free, if unexciting lives. When you move into the spirit and all hell breaks loose in your life! Sooner or later that will happen, for suddenly you are a threat to Satan, moving in the same realm as he is. It is obvious really, but so often misunderstood. And what does the Holy Spirit Do? Take us out of the battle zone? Wouldn't it be nice! But no! No! No! And again, no! He lets us fight! He uses the situation to train us, to rub off our rough edges, to make us more like Jesus. Of course we would prefer to be taken out of the situation, wouldn't we? But I know personally that that would be a copout and I would be the worse for it spiritually.

which we live. I believe that by the time you finish 'Eagles Fly High!' you will be convinced that we live at an amazingly exciting time, the approaching end of this spiritual age. Unlike nearly all other books that I know of dealing with end times', we are not going to approach them from a negative 'woe what is happening in the world (all bad, get me out!)' viewpoint. But rather a positive, 'what is God preparing for His people (in the end all good!)', perspective. A book about how we should live rather than one about how everyone else (except us hopefully!) deserves to suffer and die! For what is of most importance to God is our personal relationship with Him.

Let's get an overview of some of the key areas we explore in greater detail in the book. Hopefully just enough to titillate your spiritual taste buds!

a. The Martyrs: We can rely on God to look after us in all situations if we truly trust Him. Do you really believe this? Easily said I know! But, if we are very honest with ourselves, I suggest we would all have that wee bit of doubt as to whether we would really be prepared to pay that ultimate earthly price of martyrdom if required to, until the situation arose. However over the past 20 centuries, and interestingly, in greater numbers in this century than in any other, it is probable that millions of martyrs have done just this, so literally fulfilling the third part of Revelation 12: 11 "..... they loved not their lives so much as to shrink from death." Our preparedness to pay this ultimate price (which of course Jesus did for us) is a condition of attaining maturity in Christ. Sorry about that! No, this is not a road to be travelled by the faint hearted of the faith. If this is not for you, do yourself a favour by stopping now until you come to that place. Please don't feel condemned or rejected though, as this walk is not for everyone, the reasons for which we shall see as we continue. Need to stress again that we are all at different places in our walk, because it is a journey and not an event. A journey we start at different times, proceed along at different speeds, and rest or even stop, at different points on the way. A walk that can be exciting and rewarding, both on earth and in heaven (that will upset the "spiritual democrats" who see all Christians as being equal in reward - I used to be one until I started reading my bible more and found out the truth!). Or we can limit our exposure, both as to commitment and blessings. A top sportsman requires both ability and commitment, a top

Christian requires no special abilities (all God given) but 100% commitment (submission to God's will, even unto death) to attain what God has promised.

b. Is There a Spiritual Meaning Too? Is this verse talking only of literal death? We are still alive aren't we! I think I am anyway! I suspect there might be some who wish I wasn't though! And you probably, are alive too! I hope so anyway. For I don't think spirit beings would need to read this book. They should know it all already. Not too certain of my theology here though! Someone is bound to tell me, however.

So we don't actually wash ourselves in lamb's blood do we? No, at least I hope not, as it would now be a satanic ritual if we did. Be messy too! Sometimes in dark moments of deep penance, I have imaginings of being swirled about in an automatic washing machine full of blood to clean me out! Then comes the spin cycle! Ever known what being "wrung out" feels like? Sorry - I will move on.

For most of us then, the real meaning of these words is spiritual. And it is a meaning we generally prefer to ignore! That is why the third part of the verse is so often left out when the rest is quoted. If you inhabit charismatic circles, I wouldn't be at all surprised if you thought the verse ended at the word "testimony", for almost invariably, that is where quotations of it stop. Why? Let's be honest. Just as we don't want to die in the natural, (while we have our health anyway), so we are equally unwilling to set aside our own desires for those of God, which is death in the spiritual. For you like doing your own thing, don't you? I certainly do! You may ask, what is wrong with that? Well even if you didn't want to ask, I am still going to give an answer, because someone, somewhere will want to know, I hope!

c. Moving in God's Will: Our nature is contrary to God's nature. Full stop. To re-establish the best relationship with God, the one Adam had, before his foray into the tempting delights of the forbidden fruit, we have to discard our own inherently sinful human desires. We must submit (what a horrible 's' word!) to God's perfect desires (His - not what we see them as being!) for our life. Unnecessary? Too Hard? Let's see what Paul had to say in his letter to the Romans 8: 6-8, 16.

"The mind controlled by the spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. (v16) Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience which leads to righteousness?"

Jesus himself confirmed this in John 8:34....

"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

But Jesus set us free from our sins on the cross, didn't He? So we don't sin then? Oh, well.....! So what is happening? I wondered about this until I was shown that we have two natures battling against each other inside us. Paul realised this and his submission to God is well documented – literally unto death! We can see it by reading Romans 7:7-25. The last sentence summarises.

"So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."

And what a battle it is sometimes too! For our new, perfect nature in Jesus, still battles the remains of the old sinful nature that continues to rear its ugly head within us. Far too often in me for my liking! Dealing with the remnants of this old sinful nature is what dying to self is ultimately all about.

d. What is Sin? What a stupid question, David! Everyone knows what sin is. The 10 commandments and all that! You should have dealt with it under "the blood of the Lamb" anyway, for Jesus dealt with our sin on the cross. Well, I am going to make a radical suggestion to you. It isn't as simple as that! For there are 2 types of sin that stop us entering into the deepest possible relationship with God. You see my practical definition of "sin" is "separation from God". Short and sweet! You may argue that separation from God is really the consequence of sin. Technically you are probably correct. But my argument is that anything that separates us from God is sin. So there are 2 types of sin.

i. Sins of Commission: Things we do that are wrong. These are identified in the laws of the Old Testament. "Thou shalt not.....", to use the classic King James idiom. Plus a few "Thou shalt" for good measure to balance things up a bit. Interestingly the focus of the Sin Offering in the Old Testament was on unintentional sins. Unpremeditated sin. Even back there, it was assumed that genuine followers of God would not sin deliberately. This runs very much against the 'be saved and do what you like' theology, so prevalent in certain circles.

Also, as we grow spiritually, the Lord shows us things in our life that we have not previously recognised as being sin. Things we now, with an increased level of understanding, need to repent of. This is a positive step, showing we are making spiritual progress, part of the cleansing of sin from within us, not something to feel condemned about. For we didn't realise it was sin at the time we did it!

ii. Sins of Omission: Things we don't do that we should do! For God's positive requirements are identified in the single New Testament commandment of Jesus, as set out in Mark 12:30-31.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these."

Yes! Yes! That was the difference with my Auntie Ina! She loved the Lord with all her being. Her bible was always at her side. My favourite memory is of her sitting at her kitchen bench on a high stool. She couldn't stand there because of the pain of the arthritis. She would make what we in New Zealand call 'cheese cakes'. Not American style ones, which is really confusing! Instead, they are round, open cases of puff pastry with a dollop of raspberry jam in the bottom, filled with a sponge type mixture, topped with a small squiggle of puff pastry. Cooked in the oven for a few minutes, they smelled, looked and tasted delicious! Love my food! And of course, she was always so interested in everyone

and so encouraging of what we were doing, much rather talking about us than the obvious pain she was in. Through her beloved God, she rose above her circumstances. Can you now see what I am getting at? Of course Auntie Ina wasn't perfect, but her relationship with the Lord was so close because she was living out the New Testament commandment, rather than merely the Old. Most of us Christians are content to live by the Old Testament 'thou shalt not's', with a few of the New "affirmative actions" thrown in when it suits us. But that is not God's heart for us. For that is what Revelation 12: 11 is really saying. God wants all of us. And the more of ourselves we give Him, the more of Himself He gives us!

e. Knowing God Better: So how do I get to know my master better? By trust, acquired through experience. In Christian language, that is through faith.

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10: 17)

Sometimes bible translators add words to make a passage clearer. In this case the words 'hearing' and 'heard' have been added to make the passage read better. However I would suggest that their additions limit the meaning of the verse too much. For the bible is a living experience. To be understood, it needs to be both heard and experienced. Academic understanding is not enough. We need to apply its words to experience the results, to build up our faith. The literal translation is actually better in expressing this meaning. "Consequently, faith comes from the message and the message through the word of Christ." Or the 'David' translation! 'Consequently faith comes from hearing and experiencing the message and the message is understood and absorbed through the word of Christ.'

f. The Example of Jesus: The reality and challenge of this process for you and me, is to put the interests of God the Father above our own. In fact, to be like Jesus. The example He set in His amazing prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane was recorded in Matthew 26: 42, when He prayed for Himself before submitting to death on the cross. It is indelibly etched on my mind. ".....My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." Jesus had the option to say no to his Father but He chose to be obedient, even though it was going to cost Him his life and worse still, temporarily separate Him for the first time, from his Father. Remember those agonising last words on the cross. Were they about the physical pain He was in? No. Translated into English He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27: 46). This ultimate submission required of Jesus, is what the Father is calling all of us to, in the spirit. Don't let's kid ourselves - Jesus didn't want to go through this ultimate, horrendous experience. But He did it because of His commitment to the Father.

g. The Fire of Testing: Why Lord? Why, whyyyyyyyyy! Once we have recovered from yet another challenge (to a positivist), problem (to a negativist), or test (to a well worn, mature Christian realist) we generally have to, sometimes grudgingly though, admit that we have learned something and are a better person because of our experience. A favourite question of mine is "Am I Jonah or Job?" If you don't know these stories, look them up in your bible. Jonah was punished for disobedience, Job was tested to prove the strength of his relationship with God. Both ended up the better for their testing.

The best physical description I can relate to, to show what happens, is actually taken from the bible. As it is taken from 3 places that aren't really connected, please don't quote me as saying this came straight from the bible – or we might both be tested! For in Isaiah 64: 8 the inspiration for famous "potters" song is drawn.

If you take a lump of clay (us – should have thought of a better word for "lump" shouldn't I!), have it moulded into the desired container shape by the potter (God), the container will not hold water for more than a short time before collapsing. Why? For the pot needs to be fired (tested) before becoming watertight. For when we overcome trials and testings, our faith is strengthened and we become more useful to God and others. Does that help?

While walking through Pentecost, we are targets of Satan's wiles and our old human nature, but as we move towards maturity, our testings come more and more from God himself. It is comforting to know this, as it helps explain otherwise seemingly inexplicable situations, often softening the pain a little. Anything for that! Thus Job's trials weren't

just a game God wasn't playing with him, or the result of Job doing something wrong, but God's means of preparing him to cope with the additional blessings that He had for him in the future. I am afraid that the ups and downs of life don't disappear with maturity but our means of coping with them improve. Therefore my Auntie Ina was able to cope with her pain through the unswerving faith, experience, relationship and trust she had in her God. Job too, did not lose faith, in spite of all that happened to him.

h. The Fruit of the Spirit: ".....But the greatest of these is love." (1 Corinthians 13:1-13) The love chapter. One of the best known portions of the bible, probably because it is read at so many funerals! A bit late then, in so many cases! For that brings us right back to the New Testament commandment of Jesus. David's paraphrase – 'Love God totally and your neighbour as yourself.' For love is the first and most important fruit of the Spirit.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (Galatians 5:22)

They are the standards of Jesus we are to aim for. When we have attained all these, we will have come to perfection, which none of us have as yet – particularly me! But I am giving it my best and God and I together are becoming a great team! By myself – a disaster! But we have to have a goal to aim at, don't we. For no one ever won a race by determining to run second! The beauty of God's spiritual race is that everyone who has sufficient commitment to Him can be the winner – a "multi-million way tie" for first place! That's the sort of race I like, particularly in a race with Australians, who in 1999 have won just about everything! (2000 too!)

i. A Male Problem: It saddens me to write this but I must face reality. In the natural, girls generally relate to fathers more easily than boys, whose natural affiliation is to their mothers. When it comes to man expressing love to a man, a father to a son, a son to a father, there are many problems. Unfortunately this seems to be the case in the spiritual also. Not that God has any difficulty in relating to men. But we, as men, generally have much more difficulty in fully understanding His love and returning it to Him. For we view "God" as being a man, even though He in fact is a spirit without bodily form.

".....God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see....." (1 Timothy 6:16-17).

This inability of man to relate to a god perceived of as being "masculine" exists in most cultures throughout the world. This has resulted in there being more women than men in the church and, in turn, generally more women than men seeking a deeper relationship with God. Yes, I know from personal experience, it is harder for us men to break down these natural and cultural barriers. Yet it is possible, for most of God's breakthrough revelations over the centuries have been given to His church through men. Perhaps this is because we do have to try harder, to allow God to take us and change us, even if it is through the fiery furnace that we all love so much!

OUR COMMITMENT: Throughout the ages the full re-establishment of Adam and Eve's "pre-sin" depth of relationship, has been God the Father's ultimate desire for His followers. We will have a look later at the special place accorded to those who have died for their beliefs over the years. But the call to die to self, as proclaimed in Revelation 12:11 is stronger today than at any time in history. We will see how this is all part of God's amazing plan for His people and His church at this special time in history.