

21 Days to Die



Freedom to Love

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Freedom to Love

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Jesus taught that His greatest command for His followers is to walk in His love. Yet it seems the greatest *need* in the body of Christ today is for its members to walk in love. At times, it seems we have barely scratched the surface in our understanding of this important subject and have not placed the value on this teaching it deserves in our churches. Why?

I believe it's because we have often misunderstood the love of God. God's love is a true and sincere love. His love is not the same as how man defines love. His love is more than an emotional thing, and many Christians have been stuck in a cycle of emotional pain which has kept them from both receiving and giving the love of God. You must receive His love before you can have any hope of sincerely loving others.

To walk in godly love requires that you live a new life in Christ—a resurrected life! Resurrection, of course, comes after death. This is why Jesus said that we need to take up our cross daily and follow Him. If we don't follow Him all the way through to the death that the cross represents then not only do we not experience the joy of resurrected living but we remain *wounded* instead of dead and the cycle of emotional pain, which interferes with you keeping Jesus' greatest command, continues. Really, your key to freedom and victory in life is connected to doing as Jesus said, taking up your cross daily and following Him. It sounds like a painful thing and something that you would want to avoid, but in reality, it is a liberating thing that sets you free from pain and suffering, and free to love as our Lord commands!

The Bible tells us that we are changed by the renewing of our mind. This is a *process* and not something that happens instantly. It requires you to take the time to study and meditate on the Word of God in order to change your thinking to be like His. Because this process of renewing your mind takes time and effort, this book has been prepared with the idea of taking 21 days to mediate on the process of dying to yourself, which will allow you to move on to a new resurrected life in Christ. Because this is such an important subject I encourage you to be diligent to study and meditate on each thought for the day, throughout the day, in order to change your habits of thinking to be more like Christ's. In so doing you will be keeping the greatest command of our Lord Jesus and will experience freedom from the bondage of emotional pain as well.

May God guide you in your journey!

Rose Murdock

I recommend you meditate on the Lord's great love for you each day before doing this journal. Whether it's through worship music, prayer, Bible reading, or a silent moment of receiving His love, please open your heart to receive His love each and every day!

At the end of this Journal is a section on the challenges of walking in love towards those who have been controlling or trying to assume unjust positions of authority over your life. If this is an issue with you, you may want to read that section first.

1. Facing the Fear of Loss

Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Job 13:15 NASB

I was struggling. I was trying to hold it all together, yet I thought I was trusting God to bring me through. It was difficult. Finally, the Lord got my attention. He gave me this scripture from Job and asked me a question. “Would you follow the path I have for you if you knew you’d have to lose something along the way?” That went against my “faith” thinking. God doesn’t want me to lose anything, He wants me to gain. He wants to bring blessing. I knew that Job was blessed in the end – *doubly* blessed. I had always thought about that and not about what he went through and what he lost.

It was a simple question. “Would I be willing?” Would I still follow Him even if it meant that I had to lose something? I wasn’t sure what I would have to lose and many thoughts went through my mind – mainly material things. I wasn’t even sure I would have to lose anything. The question was if I was *willing*. Was I just a fair-weathered friend to God? Did I only want to stick around and hang out with Him when He was throwing roses in front of my feet, or was I willing to follow Him and His ways even if it was difficult? I had never allowed myself to follow this line of questioning because I considered it to be unbelief. The question was still on the table. God wasn’t going any further with me until I answered the question. He wasn’t asking me to do anything just yet, but answer a question. I knew I had to be honest. Again, “Would you follow that path I have for you even if you knew you’d have to lose something along the way?” He wasn’t asking me for a theological debate. He wasn’t asking me anything but this one question. Finally, I answered, “Yes, Lord I will.”

Whew, I said it. Do you know what I felt? Instant relief. Instant pressure relief. Now it didn’t matter. I wasn’t afraid to lose anything. I wasn’t afraid to “fail.” Somehow, as odd as it may seem, by admitting I was willing to suffer loss if the path to where God was taking me led me through it, I experienced such a level of freedom my whole life changed. I wasn’t afraid. I didn’t have to hold it all together. I trusted God in a whole new way. Really, this is no different from what happens when you give something. When you give you suffer a loss. If you have \$50 in your wallet and you give \$30 away then you are left with \$20 right? You have suffered a loss. That’s what it means to give. You give it – you don’t have it any more.

That’s what God was asking me – to give. I knew He wasn’t asking me to suffer endlessly or needlessly. He just wanted to know if I was willing to go through some inconvenience for Him. Why did I hesitate? What did I think walking by faith was anyway? Hadn’t the apostles gone through tough times also? Look at all He’s given to me. God asked me this question not because He didn’t know what I would say, but because He wanted me to see where I was at, and if I would consciously become willing to trust Him and give Him my life like He did for me.

2. Shattering Fragile Dedication

Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity? *Job 2:10 NASB*

Of course we know God is good and He has no evil to give us right? Job was answering his wife here who was telling him to curse God and die. She couldn't believe that Job was staying faithful in character to God after all of the losses he suffered. However, Job knew his answer was not found in rejecting God. If someone you know very well and love dearly, were to suddenly disappear from your life and you lost contact with them, would you believe accusations against them like, "They don't care about you anymore. They've abandoned you. They told me to tell you they don't like you anymore." Probably not. Job knew God better than that. He may not have understood what was going on but He knew God was faithful and he was determined to stay true to Him.

There's an aspect of Job's character here we need to see--his willingness to stick with God even if it would have been God bringing this evil on him. That says a lot for Job's faithfulness to God. If God were to lead you down a bumpy road would you throw in the towel and say, "That's it God I'm not serving you anymore unless You only bring me down paved highways!" I hope not! I would hope your dedication to Him is less fragile than that. He doesn't give up on you that easily. How many times do we fall short of His commands and yet He sticks with us? He says He'll never leave you or forsake you, even if you make false accusations against Him. Yet if things get a little rough we rebuke the devil when it may very well be God taking us on a shortcut to get us to the place He wants us to be. Usually the shortcuts are bumpy because of something in your life that needs to be smoothed out. Or it may not even be a shortcut. It may be the long way around because there is something of eternal benefit that needs to be worked out in you. Remember Jesus said the narrow path is less traveled.

Like Job, who may have had a desire to perfect his children himself, the road may be bumpy because you have some things you need to get straightened out as well. We need to cut God some slack. After all, He is God and who are we to question Him? He really is deserving of our love and respect. There is something about the fear of the Lord that all of His people need to discover. Now of course you need to know Him so the devil can't pull one over on you and tell you some evil thing is from God when it isn't. You don't want to accept something from the devil thinking it's from God. In order to avoid that you need to have a good understanding of the Word of God and you need to know how to hear from His Spirit. In other words, you need to get to know God and become intimate with Him. When you do, you'll better understand how deserving He is of your faithful dedication.

Matthew 7:14; Hebrews 13:5

1. Is there something going on in your life right now that you are not happy with? Describe it here.

2. What are your feelings about it? (Anger, fear, boredom, frustration, guilt, confusion, impatience etc.)

3. If God asked you to accept this path in spite of your feelings would you? What does that mean you'd have to do?

4. Are you willing to remain loyal to God and still follow His Kingdom principles even if you don't understand what's going on around you? What would nurture this kind of loyal heart in you? Would it help if you knew God's love for you better? How can you know His love better?

Know that God wants you to trust Him even if you don't understand. This doesn't mean you accept everything that arises on your path as being from Him. You have the responsibility of learning to recognize when the enemy is trying to bring opposition, and to overcome him through the armor God has given you.

**"God help me to lay aside my own feelings
and remain loyal to Your guidance without questioning You."**

3. Temporary Loss-Fruitful Gain

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. *John 12:24 NASB*

Unless you die you remain alone. You can fall into the ground but that in itself isn't enough. There must be a death or else you will remain alone. Alone in the sense of feeling incomplete or lonely. When you feel lonely you'll look for someone to give you something. We look for people to make us happy and to do things for us, to bring us feelings of love and peace and comfort. However, when you feel lack in this way what you're actually doing is trying to get something out of others that isn't really going to quench your thirst. Jesus said that with the water He gives, you'll never thirst again. That's the only water that will quench. When you try and fill the void in your heart with something that other people give then you'll continue to thirst. You can trust Him to send the water once the seed of your life is planted in the ground. When that happens, your life will grow and blossom into something beautiful!

When you try to hang on to your own life too tightly you'll lose the very thing you're searching for. Don't try to save the seed. The seed was made to be planted. When you die to yourself, you'll reap a richer and fuller life in return. The things that you used to think you needed to make you happy, you realize don't make you happy anymore. When you used to think that you had to have certain people or things in your life in order for you to feel complete and fulfilled, you realize that you don't need those people or those things to feel complete. When they're there they may be a blessing—an added bonus—but your fulfillment is found in Christ. The fulfillment comes in following Him and His ways, which is what living in the Kingdom of God is all about. This way of living is far better because people and things can fail you and let you down, but in Christ you will find the fulfillment your heart longs for.

A telltale sign that you have not planted the seed and died is if you are still feeling the feelings of loneliness or lack. If the feelings are there then the seed is still trying to save itself. You haven't planted it deep enough to die. Don't keep those feelings of lack alive. They will only keep you in a place of pain. Don't be afraid to let go. It might look like a lonely place to go to the ground and die but there are things you need to go *through* in order to get to the resurrected life. God doesn't want you to be lonely, you were created for fellowship. However, He doesn't want you to suck the life out of everyone around you. Put those feelings—the feelings of the old nature—to death and allow the Lord to do the work in you. Then you will have the kind of relationships that will be fruitful and enjoyable—not fake, but sincerely joyful!

John 4:14

4. Not Failure, But Death

Save Yourself, and come down from the cross! *Mark 15:30 NASB*

Jesus was ridiculed on the cross. Not only was He beaten but He was laughed at, spit on, and mocked. He looked like a failure. It looked like everything He said and all that He did meant nothing now because He was dying a horrible, humiliating death. It looked like He had no hope of success now. However, His "failure" was only temporary. It was proven that it was not failure at all. It was necessary for Him to suffer all that in order for Him to successfully carry all of our sin. It was all part of the plan.

Just like with Jesus, God has not called you to failure, but He has called you to death. At times it may look like you are a failure. It may look like you have lost all and you have no hope, but if you die to yourself you ride the higher wave of God's glory. There is the wave of success which is man's glory, but then there is the higher wave of God's glory which comes as you die to yourself and live for Him. It's when you do things His way instead of the dark and selfish way. It's when you are railed and accused but you don't argue back. You love your enemies and bless those that curse you. It's when you're not selfishly trying to promote yourself and your cause but are willing to prefer your brother above yourself. There is a difference between failure and death. Others may laugh at you and mock you because you don't appear to be successful in what you're doing, but when you respond in love then you ride the higher wave. You prefer the glory of God over the glory of man. You don't fall for the praises of men. Your heart isn't looking for worship from men, but you are looking to worship Almighty God. You will be sincere in your worship once you see His great love for you.

They told Jesus to *save Himself*. They didn't realize that if He would have saved Himself then none of us could have been saved. He had a higher call. There is a call higher than saving yourself and looking out for only yourself. You're not called to save yourself, but to lay down your life for your brethren. The only way for each one of us to be saved is to go the way of the cross. To be crucified with Christ. To identify with Him and to follow Him to the other side of the cross and to the resurrected life we have available in Him. You don't save yourself by coming down from the cross, you save yourself by dying to yourself and allowing yourself to be crucified in identification with Him. Dying to yourself means that you don't need to defend yourself, vindicate yourself or promote yourself. How can you have the strength to live this way? Jesus did it by keeping his eye on the other side of the cross. He looked beyond the selfish and murderous people in front of Him and saw the joy and the glory on the other side. He didn't have to prove Himself or defend Himself to these people. In the end the truth would come out and the love of God would shine. The same can happen for you!

John 15:12-13; Romans 12:10; Galatians 2:20; 1 John 3:16; Hebrews 12:1-4

5. Pursuing His Plans

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. *Luke 9:23 NASB*

If you have to take up your cross daily then that shows that the old nature wants to resurrect itself. You'll need to remind yourself that you have died. You'll have to do this more than once, you'll do it every day. You'll present your body a living sacrifice to God. When you are willing to remain in a place of death, (not dying but death), God sees to it that you remain in His life. You see the wave you're riding as the wave of death and He sees it as the wave of His glory.

To take up your cross daily, doesn't mean you have a heavy burden you're required to bear. What is the purpose of a cross? What do you do with it? You die on it. You're not supposed to be carrying the cross around you're supposed to die on it. There's a difference. Jesus said His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He said if anyone is tired to come to Him and find rest. You're not to carry around the burdens of life yourself, that's not what bearing your cross means. It means you deny yourself. To deny yourself means that you're willing to live life God's way, from His perspective. It means you are no longer doing what you alone think is right but you have accepted Jesus' way as the right way. You're not looking to promote yourself but you're pursuing His interests. You're willing to look at the big picture and trust that God knows what He's doing. You're learning to live in the Kingdom here on Earth. The Kingdom of God rules in your heart.

Notice that you take up your cross and follow Jesus, not people. Denying yourself doesn't mean that you let other people run your life. You have been given the rule over your own spirit. You have to be able to make decisions regarding your own life in order for you to be able to live as God says. You love God first then your neighbor as yourself. You don't allow people to take you down a path that contradicts God's leading in your own heart. So don't think that dying to yourself means that you have no control over what happens to you and that you have to do everything for everyone else in your life. No, you have the responsibility to do the right thing with your life. You will need to do it in the Lord's strength, but you still need to do it.

God is the Master Planner. He can see so much more than you can. He sees how your life fits into the big plan. He sees how your life fits into the lives of those around you, and His plan for you is good. You can trust Him. You can follow Jesus confidently who will lead you to God Himself and will bring you into your place in the great design of life. It's a struggle and a burden when you try and live your life from just your own perspective. By dying on your cross you will gain God's perspective for your life and will live the life you were designed for.

Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 17:21; Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 5:5; Proverbs 25:28; Jeremiah 29:11

1. What has been your plans for your life? What has been your specific hopes and dreams? (I've always wanted to...)

2. When did you first start wanting these things? What was going on in your life at the time?

3. Could there have been a motive other than the desire of your heart in pursuing these dreams? (To prove something to someone, to retaliate...)

4. Realizing that the "small" choices you make today will affect your future, are you willing to change your daily schedule—even the little things—if God asks? Is there anything you think He wants you to change? How can you take a step today to start fulfilling what you think is God's plan for your life?

Know that very often the hopes and dreams you have are God-given. You can tell they are if they bring peace to your heart. However, sometimes your own dreams can become an idol in itself. You can become obsessed with obtaining these dreams, and you can pursue and seek after the idol of your dreams rather than God. Putting anything before God will bring death instead of life and keep you in a place of frustration instead of peace.

**"God help me to bring all of my plans, hopes and dreams
in subjection to Your plans for me."**

6. Dead, Not Wounded

For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. *Luke 9:24 NASB*

It's only painful if you fight it. You may think you're ready to lay down your life and then when that first nail goes in you change your mind then you're walking around, wounded, half crucified, dragging the cross around with you, and you're angry. You know that pain brings anger. (If you don't think so just pay attention the next time you stub your toe). When you walk around angry and hurt you will hurt others. You'll be focused on yourself – your pain and your problems. You will need to go back to the Lord and ask Him to finish the job.

The Bible says that Jesus was able to endure the cross because of the joy that was set before Him. Knowing the joy on the other side will help you to endure the cross of today. The cross of today involves resisting sin. The Bible tells us to resist sin to the point of blood. We think we're only supposed to resist to the point of tears but He says to resist to blood. Would you die before you'd sin? Would you cut off your hand before you'd sin? It's not enough to just cry over your situation. Don't stop there or you'll remain in a place of self-pity and won't be able to break through to the joy! You need to be like Jesus and be willing to do whatever it takes to be like Him. Look to Him – the author and finisher of your faith. Just the hope of being like Him will purify you.

If you don't allow the Lord to take you all the way through the crucifixion process then you'll remain wounded. If you are just wounded you will look to people for "healing." You will want approval and acceptance and attention from people when that is not what you really need. The reason you may think you need to be healed is because there's some kind of pain or trouble that's come up in your life. Instead of looking to go *through* the situation and see it solved God's way you may be trying to escape and avoid the uncomfortable. You may be looking for a way out – a way of escape. A lot of times it looks like you're failing or you're being humiliated, or you're losing something that you don't want to let go of.

Remember that dying to your self is not failure. It may be failure in the eyes of some but it's not in the eyes of God and He's the only one who matters. You might be afraid to lose yourself in God but that's the safest place you can be – lost in Him--surrounded by His presence. It's the only way to true life. It's the only way you can live the resurrected life that He's called you to. Remember the kernel of wheat has to fall in the ground and die otherwise it remains alone. When you try to hold on and "save" your life and save your feelings and protect your emotions and keep yourself from getting ridiculed or persecuted, then you're just causing more pain for yourself. Once you determine to identify with Him and not be ashamed of your identification with Him then you are on your way to living in the freedom and victory of His resurrection!

Matthew 5:30; James 1; Hebrews 12:1-4; 1 John 3:3

1. When do you find yourself seeking approval from people? Who are the people you are looking for approval, (or attention), from?

2. How do you react when you feel rejected by these people? Think of each one individually. How would the Lord want you to react instead?

3. If God asked you to do some things, (or not do), when you know there would be those who would not agree with you would you still be willing to do it? Can you think of a specific example?

4. Are you *willing* to identify with Jesus and not be ashamed of your identification with Him, no matter who knows about it? What is one area that you would like to be more like Jesus?

Know that God doesn't want you to walk around in pain, but in freedom. Dying to self is only painful if you don't go all the way. If you remain wounded instead of dead then you'll remain in pain or anger. You'll try to protect and defend yourself instead of being free to love, give and serve others without hesitation.

"God help me to be willing to identify with Christ in all that I do."

7. Laying Your Life

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. *John 15:13 NASB*

The death to self that you are called to is to love one another. The death walk is a love walk. The love of God compels you to lay down your life for others. What does it look like to live this way? It doesn't (necessarily) mean that you physically die for someone else, but to lay down your life is to lay down your time, your energy, your talent, your money. It means you prefer your brother above yourself. Now it doesn't mean that you don't keep any time, money etc. for yourself. It doesn't mean a total neglect of yourself or your family. Of course not because if you did that you would become a burden on others. Not only that, but how can you love your neighbor as yourself if you don't love yourself? No, it doesn't mean you neglect your own needs, although God may, and most assuredly will, ask you to give sacrificially at times.

God wants you to be able to give physically, financially, emotionally etc. to others. So of course you have to have these things yourself to give, but if you only look out for yourself and you hoard these things with an attitude of greediness, selfishness and covetousness, then you won't be walking in the love of God. The love of God lays down its life for others.

Jesus called this the greatest kind of love, and He's called you to walk in this kind of love towards others, just as He did for you. When you lay down your life for another you're not thinking about how that person is mistreating you. You're not thinking about their "sin" and how bad they are. Your focus is on what you can do to remain in the love of God and follow Jesus' example. It's very easy to want to justify not walking in the love of God because someone else isn't. When you take note of how rude someone else is being then it's tempting to feel that you have a good excuse for not loving them. Love covers a multitude of sins. By not taking account of the sins against you then you are walking the way of the Kingdom—you are truly laying your life down like Jesus said. How far do you go with this? That's something only you and God can answer together. Jesus went so far as to die a humiliating death for our sake. How much you can willingly give only you and God knows, but your hope should always be to be like Jesus. For it is this hope that purifies you and keeps your heart motives like His.

Romans 12:10; Mark 12:31; John 14:15; John 15:12; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 3:2-3

1. What is most precious to you? (Your time, possessions, skill, creativity, money, energy, etc.)

2. What can you do today to use something precious to you for the benefit of another? (Even a “small” thing).

3. When you think about doing it, is your attitude one of dread or guilt? Or is it a willing and joyful attitude? (Be honest!)

4. If you have dread or guilt then what do you think is the reason? Are you at least willing to become willing, to give cheerfully?

Know that God understands that you need time to yourself. You need money for yourself etc. However, if you *only* think of yourself and don't give any of your life to others then are you walking in the love of God? Even though He meets your needs, at times He may ask you to put others first and give sacrificially.

**“God help me to be willing to lay down my life – my time, money, gifts etc.
for my friends as Jesus did for me.”**

8. Interested in Their Interests

Do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.
Philippians 2:4 NASB

Yes you need to take care of your own things but you should also look after each other's things. You should look after the interests of each other and not just your own interests. It's not all about you. You are not more important than anyone else. You may think you are, and feel like you are, but to walk the death-love walk you need to understand that every human being is just as important as you are.

Once during a time of worship at church I felt the heart of God and I understood that even just one person's pain hurt Him. He hates to see one person in pain and yet there are millions of people in pain throughout the Earth. I realized at that moment how narrow my thinking had been. Without realizing it, I had felt that only my pain mattered because it was the only pain I felt. For a brief moment, I felt the pain of people throughout the world as if it were my own pain. I felt a glimpse of the great love that God has towards all of us. I felt His love for every person on the planet, no matter who they were. It was awesome! He wants us to care for each other like we would ourselves.

Of course you know that you only have control over your own life. You don't have control over other people's lives and in that sense, it's important for you to make decisions to do with your life what will please God. You can't control others or make their lives be pleasing to God like you think they should, but you can care for their life and their interests like you would your own. You can have that kind of love for them. This love is in your heart. It's been put there by the Holy Spirit.

People know Christianity is about loving and giving to others and that we "should" be kind and giving towards others. Of course we should, but not out of a sense of religious duty. The thing you need to pray and seek God for is for you to have the same heart-motive that He does, and ask Him to help you to be sincere in your love and not just "put in your time" so to speak.

Do you see the value in what those around you value? You know why you value what you do, but do you understand why your loved ones value what they do? When you take the time to listen to what is important to others you will learn some things. You will gain a new perspective and outlook that you didn't have before. Rather than spending time trying to get others to see things from your point of view, you now have the freedom to look at things from their point of view.

Romans 5:5; Romans 12:9

1. Take a minute to give your cares to the Lord so your thoughts are free to think about someone else. If you feel there's something pressing you must do to take care of a need of your own then write it down here and take care of it after this worksheet.

2. Do you know what the greatest needs and desires are in the lives of those close to you? Not just your spouse and children but also your friends, co-workers, fellow Christians, etc.? List them here.

3. What are the hobbies or personal interests of the same people mentioned above?

4. Think of one of the person's listed above. Are you able to take some time today and either pray for their need or spend time researching a subject they are interested in so you can show your interest in their interest? Write down what you will do here.

Know that God wants you to take care of your own needs because you can't expect someone else to do that for you. However, as you consider what your own needs are, you can expand your thinking to include the needs of others and be open for God to use you to help meet other people's needs as well.

"God help me to consider the needs of others and not just my own needs."

9. Going the Extra Mile

Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. *Matthew 5:41 NASB*

To die to yourself means that if someone asks, or even manipulates, you to do something for them, you go beyond what they've required. God is that way, He gives exceeding, abundantly, beyond all that we can ask or think. When you do this it shows that you are not carrying an attitude. It shows your generosity and your willingness to give to them. It shows that they have not forced you to do anything that you are not willing to give. You give and you are happy to do so. You have laid down your life and are happy to do so.

Now of course there will be those who may try to take advantage of you, but a dead person isn't concerned with that. You will be concerned with obeying God first. There may be times God will tell you to take care of your own needs or your family's needs before someone else's. He may tell you not to cast your pearls – your treasures – before swine or before those who devour what is precious to you without appreciating the value of it. However, there also may be times that the Lord wants you to be willing to give to someone *even though* in their mind they are trying to take advantage of you.

The key here is your free will. If you are concerned about being forced or manipulated into doing something then your giving will not be willing or joyful. God is looking at your heart – your attitude – not just your actions. Being able to give or do a favor for those who are unappreciative is the kind of willing generosity Jesus talked about His followers demonstrating. He gave us this example by dying for the sins of the ones who crucified Him. Seek to be a joyful, willing giver – sincerely from your heart and not one who gives as a sense of duty with a grudging attitude.

Ephesians 3:20; Matthew 7:6; Luke 6:29-35; 2 Corinthians 9:7

1. When someone asks you to do something for them do you normally do so cheerfully or grudgingly? What are the things that you feel might get in the way of giving cheerfully?

2. Can you think of a specific time recently when you went above and beyond what someone asked you to do?

3. If someone asked you to do a favor for them today would you be willing/able to set aside your plans to do it? What plans do you have today that would make it difficult or seemingly impossible to do it?

4. Take an honest look at your heart. Are you willing to do “favors” for others as if you were doing it for God Himself and go the extra mile?

Know that your first obligation is to God and you can't allow anyone else to run your life and control you to meet their every whim. However, those times that you do give to someone you need to do so cheerfully and willingly and when you can, do more than they ask to show the abundant love and blessing of God.

“God help me to give to others cheerfully and go above and beyond what they ask me to do when I am able to do so.”

10. Live & Die By Faith

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. *Galatians 2:20 NASB*

Here it is. You are crucified with Christ and He lives in you. The life you now live in the flesh you live by faith. You live by faith in the One who loved you and gave Himself for you. He is the author and finisher of your faith. God is the Master Designer and will make your life beautiful, interesting, alive and vibrant if you will just yield to Him.

It's not you alone any longer that is living in your body, but it's Christ in you. Christ in you is the hope of glory. Christ living in you is the hope you have of riding on the glory wave. If you're going to live and walk in the glory of a resurrected life in Christ then it happens as you die to your old self and live your new life in Christ.

Jesus lived His life always pleasing the Father. He lived a true life of faith. He said that He always did what pleased the Father and He always did what He saw Him do. Jesus was close to God the Father. They were One. They were of one mind and one heart. Jesus understood the ways of God. He understood the ways of the Kingdom. He knew that God's ways were best and trusted Him. He didn't decide to change God's plan once He was here and set up God's Kingdom a different way. He knew God's way was the best way. He lived by faith and He died by faith.

You can follow His example. To be crucified with Christ means that you will follow this same path that Jesus did. You will see the wisdom in living according the ways that Jesus taught. You'll see that His ways are the ways of God and that those who will follow His way will be living in the glory of God's Kingdom. What this means is that when you feel the need to get even with someone who has wronged you, or expose a sin in another person, or boast in yourself, that you will die to those feelings and follow Jesus' example instead. Even though you may not understand completely, and the desire for revenge may be very strong, you will choose to trust God instead and do it His way. You will forgive and love. You will be humble and sincere. You will live and die by faith. As a result, you will share in the love of Jesus and His Father. You will share in the joy of the resurrected life!

John 5:19; John 8:29; Colossians 1:27; Hebrews 12:2

11. Finding the Hidden Life

For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. *Colossians 3:3 NASB*

Your new life is found hidden with Christ in God. To die to your self doesn't mean you have no life. You have great life—true life—and eternal life. However this life is hidden with Christ in God. Jesus said that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who found a treasure hid in a field and when he found it he hid it and joyfully went and sold all that he had and bought the field. He knew the value of that treasure and was willing to give everything up for it. When you see the value of living the new life in Christ you will gladly “sell all” by dying to yourself and through your death inherit the new life—full of treasure and blessing—that God has for you.

Whatever you currently have, your own accomplishments and the things you are so proud of, are nothing compared to the life He has for you. You may think that what you've accomplished in life makes you who you are and adds value to your life, but in reality only discovering the treasures He's put in your heart will bring the joy you long for.

When you find this hidden life in Christ, it doesn't mean that Jesus is something you *add to your* current life. It means you sell all. It means you *exchange* your old life for the new life. If you just try to add Jesus to your life then you'll be looking for ways you can fit Him in. Instead of giving Him the full place He deserves. Get rid of the old life—replace it—with the new, hidden life in Christ.

The reason that this new life is hidden in Christ and not somewhere else is because He is the only way to the Father. He died and took the punishment for all of our sins. The only way to reach God is through Jesus Christ. He bridges the gap. He is the mediator. He is the advocate. He is the light. He shows you the way. He is the way. You're lost without Him because there is no way anyone can stand before the purity of God and live. God is perfect. He is true holiness. He is true justice. None of us can stand before Him in our own condition, but you can now because of Jesus. He becomes your righteousness as you believe in Him.

This new life is also a hidden life because you become willing to live a life of humility. You're not concerned with boasting in yourself or promoting yourself. You are willing to love and serve others. You're willing to take a back seat to others and encourage and support them in what they are doing. You're willing to do as Jesus said and when you give don't let your left hand know what the right hand is doing. You don't always have to be the center of attention. You've learned that the greatest joy and satisfaction comes from living this way and once you've tasted of it there is nothing anyone can do to compare!

Matthew 6:3; Matthew 13:44; John 6:44; 2 Corinthians 5:21

1. What accomplishments in your life are you proud of?

2. How do those accomplishments make you feel? (Valuable, worthy, accepted, respected, worshipped?)

3. Pick a person you will be talking to soon and think of how you can live the hidden life in Christ by not talking about yourself to them so much. How can you support them or help them instead?

4. Take some time to think about the fact that God loves you and desires to be intimate with you. Imagine yourself surrounded, (hidden), with His love and allow that feeling to consume you to the point where you will not be looking for people to fill any void in your life.

Know that God wants you to be successful but He also knows that the old nature desires to boast and exalt itself. When you seek praise and recognition from people for your own goodness you are keeping them from the message of grace that will bring freedom to their life. Only Jesus can set them free – not your own good works.

**“God help me to not boast in my own accomplishments
but show me how to become intimate with You so I can glow with Your love.”**

12. Finding Purpose and Gain Through Loss

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. *Philippians 1:21 NASB*

Paul is talking about physical death here. He's saying that he will gain something when he dies because he will be in the presence of Christ. In the meantime, his life here on Earth he lived in Christ. His life was not his own. He knew he had been bought with a price and was to glorify God with his life. When you understand that Jesus has given you a life that you could never have attained on your own, you will gladly give your life back to Him. Your life was purchased with His own blood and you have an opportunity at a fresh start. It's like if you were so far in debt that you had no hope of ever getting out, and someone came along and paid off all your bills and bought you a new house and a new car, you would now have the opportunity to start over. By taking good care of your new house and car and paying attention to how you handle your money you will never have to go back into debt again, but you have to give up your old way of thinking and your old spending habits that got you into debt in the first place.

Each one of us has specific gifts and talents placed within us. Because of the new life Jesus bought for you, you now have the freedom to live out your specific purpose. We're not all the same. We are each unique. We are all to be like Christ but unique in our expression of Him. You will not feel the most fulfilled and satisfied when you pursue recreation or entertainment, any more than living just on desserts will not sustain you for every long. Living for entertainment becomes shallow and empty. Adam had a purpose in the garden. Mankind was created for a purpose. You, individually, were created for a purpose. Your fulfillment and the substance of your life comes from doing the will of the Father. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish his work." Doing the will of the Father gives great strength and substance to your life.

Not only will you gain something when you die physically by being in the presence of Christ, but you will also gain something when you die to yourself and live in Christ here on Earth. Living your purposeful life in Christ is what will happen when you die to yourself and follow Him, and it will be a gain. It will not be a loss at all. Finding your purpose and place in Christ is something worth gaining. That's the beauty of this whole "death" process is that your life becomes beautiful, fruitful and purposeful. Life becomes meaningful. It becomes enjoyable. It's not a drudgery at all but is marked with the life, love, peace and joy of God!

1 Corinthians 6:20; Ephesians 1:3-12; John 4:34

1. In what ways do you feel the purpose of Christ is meant to be expressed through your life?

2. What are you doing to fulfil the purpose which God has called you to?

3. Look at how you are currently spending your time and money. List one thing in each category you are currently doing that is fulfilling your purpose in Christ.

4. Is there some activity in your life that is getting in the way of you fulfilling your destiny?
What can you do to quit that activity or adjust it so that it no longer interferes?

Know that God created the Earth for you to enjoy, but enjoyment and recreation was never meant to replace your purpose. Your purpose, when properly fulfilled, will actually be your source of enjoyment. The gifts and talents God has given each one of us are waiting to be discovered, developed and maintained in our lives. You will feel the most fulfilled and satisfied when attending to your God-given purpose.

**“God help me to live in Christ so that I am
fulfilling the purpose which I was created for.”**

13. True Success

I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ. *Philippians 3:8 NASB*

Paul said that whatever he had accomplished in his life was nothing compared to getting to know Jesus Christ intimately. Paul had a long list of accomplishments too. They were even things he had done while he thought he was serving God, but compared to the intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ his accomplishments were nothing. They were like waste.

Paul knew that he had always been proud of his accomplishments. People have a tendency to do that. We have a tendency to become proud of what we do. We sometimes teach our kids that they are loved to the extent of their behavior or accomplishments. It's true that you don't want to become lazy and un-motivated, but at the same time you don't want to put all of your worth and value into what you do. Paul knew that he couldn't think for a minute that his righteousness – or his right relationship with God – had anything to do with what he had accomplished as a Pharisee. The only reason he was able to think he had a right relationship with God was because of his faith in Jesus Christ. He came to realize that this relationship with Him was worth more than anything else.

To be successful doesn't mean you have to work harder. It doesn't mean that you need to participate in more church activities. It doesn't mean that you have to preach to the multitudes. It means that you seek to know Jesus Christ more intimately and the reason you do is because you have discovered that knowing Him, and coming to know God through Him, is better than any reward that might come through your own achievements. It comes down to priorities. What do you value? What do you consider to be worth a lot? Is it the possessions and prestige that comes from what you can accomplish through your work? Or is it the intimacy with Jesus Christ that brings you into the Kingdom of God? Do you condone a lifestyle where you do what you have to in order to get ahead? Or do you prefer the way of the Kingdom which teaches love and humility?

Ultimately, your heart will only be satisfied when you receive the love of God. You may be trying to substitute that love with approval and acceptance from others. There may be a time to seek the opinion of others. There's nothing wrong with seeking out wise counsel, but the purpose of that is to gain greater understanding into the ways of God and not to find out how you can gain approval from a certain person or group. True "success" may be defined very differently from how most people in your life define it. God's opinion and definition of success is the only one that really matters and the only one that will satisfy your heart!

14. Free From the Trap

For he who has died is freed from sin. *Romans 6:7 NASB*

Sin is really all about selfish personal enjoyment. At least it starts out that way and then it ends up bringing you into bondage and eventually death—both spiritual and physical. If you look at any type of sin you'll see the roots of it leading back to selfishness. Unless the Lord reveals to you the end result of that path of selfishness you will be in bondage before you know it. At the time it looks like the right path to take but all sin leads to death.

If you don't think that sin brings you into bondage or death then you are still deceived in this area. Sin is enticing, but it is a trap. The only escape is through Jesus Christ. By dying to yourself, which is really dying to sin, then you have life instead of death. Death is inevitable either way, but one kind of death leads you to true eternal life and the other kind leads you to eternal death. When you die to yourself and are crucified with Christ you are free from sin. Sin doesn't have to control you or keep you in bondage.

Right before Paul wrote this verse he said that the old man is crucified with Christ so that we no longer have to be slaves of sin. So he's not talking about being free from sin when we physically die. He's talking about the same thing Jesus meant when He said for us to take up our cross and follow Him. He's talking about dying to our self and becoming crucified with Christ. This isn't a physical death, it's one where you lay down your life like we talked about earlier. When you do this then you are not a slave to sin any longer. You are free from sin. Free to love, free to live in the ways of the Kingdom right here on Earth.

Does this mean that you will never sin? No. All of us mess up, but when you sin, Jesus is your advocate with the Father. He is the One you call out to. When you confess your sin He is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Don't think that you will be perfect and never sin, but when you do, there is a way to become free from it once again.

The question is, what is your desire? Do you enjoy doing the things that you know are wrong? Are you trying to stay free from selfishness or do you keep going back over and over against the tuggings of your conscience? You will need the Lord to give you strength against sin. You can't stay free from it on your own, but you do need to take some responsibility and ask Him to help you while you willingly follow what you know is right. Sheer willpower alone won't do it, but strength and sanctification from Him will. He is ready and waiting to help you overcome every sin that troubles you.

Proverbs 14:12; Romans 6:23; 1 John 1:9; 1 John 2:1

15. Trusting The Righteous Judge

And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; 1 Peter 2:23 NASB

Jesus was falsely accused. He was misunderstood. One of the most frustrating things you can experience is to be accused of something you didn't do, or to have your intentions misunderstood. When you do something wrong and suffer for it you may not like it but at least you feel like you had it coming so it's easier to take the consequences of your actions, (Unless you're playing the "blame game" and haven't yet learned to take responsibility for your actions) but when people lie or exaggerate just to bring shame or judgment your way, the old nature is tempted to want to rise up and defend yourself, or to sling accusations and fault findings back at your accusers. Jesus could have easily found fault with His accusers but He did not accuse them. He didn't threaten them but instead He committed Himself and His cause to the Righteous Judge. If you have died to yourself you will be content to commit your cause to God. It's when you feel the need to defend yourself or to dish out punishment that you know you have not truly died.

The key here is committing your cause to God—the Righteous Judge. A love for the truth and a desire for proper justice to be done needs to develop in your innermost being so you will be happy for God's justice to prevail rather than your own desires. God is the most fair and righteous judge you could ever hope to have. Ultimately, He makes all the rules, and He is good. He is loving, merciful and just. You couldn't hope to have a better judge. However, you must commit your cause, or your case, to Him. Trust Him to deal with the people in your life who are accusing you or mistreating you. That's what Jesus did, and He could have found plenty to accuse those people of. The way He did it, and did it right, was by committing His cause to God the Father.

When you commit your cause to God you won't need to argue with others to try and prove your point. You won't need to defend yourself to them and prove that you are not what they say you are. You won't need to blame others for the things you do wrong. You won't need to plan ways to get even. You won't need to rally a group of people together to side with you. You simply turn it over to the Lord and let Him judge the situation. Since God ultimately will judge you as well as them, it's in your best interest to handle the situation according to His ways and not yours!

1. Describe any false accusations or misunderstandings that have been sent your way.

2. How do you typically respond? (Anger, depression, sabotage, slander, blame, fault-finding)

3. In what way can you respond as Jesus did the next time you are falsely accused?

4. Think of recent accusations made from others against you. Could there be any truth to what they might be saying? If so, what areas do you think you might need to change or do something about?

Know that God understands how difficult it is when you are falsely accused or misunderstood. He doesn't want you to internalize your feelings and let them burn in your hearts, but His desire is for you to truly commit yourself and your cause to Him who will judge the situation righteously. When you do so you can walk free from all bitterness.

**“God help me to commit myself and my cause to You who judges
righteously in all situations.”**

16. Good For Bad

If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is *that* to you? For even sinners do the same. *Luke 6:33 NASB*

We praise our children when they do nice things for us—draw us a picture, give us a hug or say something kind--and rightfully so. However, we would do well to teach them to do good to those who are not nice to them as well. All of us need to learn this lesson. It's much easier to do kind things to those who are nice to you. It's good to show your appreciation to someone by giving them a gift or an encouraging note, but Jesus takes that one step further. He calls you to take all your own feelings out of it. Take yourself out of the center and do kind things for those who are not nice to you, to those who are not good to you. If you only do good to those who do good to you then you are no better than the sinners. (Jesus said it!) You'll need to put your feelings and opinions aside and die to yourself in order to do this.

If you have set yourself up in your own mind as judge then you will try and make sure that people "get what they've got coming." However, it's not your job to bring judgment on people. That's God's job. Because He knows people's hearts and is not corrupt in His own heart His judgments will be just and they will be right. You'll take a lot of pressure off yourself if you will submit to Him as the Righteous Judge and let Him be God instead of trying to take His place.

Once you decide to do good to those who are not nice to you, then you need to examine your heart and make sure you're not doing it out of a feeling of superiority or that you're not doing it grudgingly, just because you feel like you have to. It's easy to do good sarcastically to someone who you might feel is not deserving of it. By that I mean that you do something nice for them but you do so with an inner sarcasm and feeling that you are superior to them because you are being nice to them when they don't deserve it. That kind of arrogant attitude is not what Jesus meant! If you are going to walk in the love of God it needs to be a sincere love. One that is doing the right thing because it's the right thing. One that does what it does because of a love for God and a desire to do what He says. One that can see past the rudeness of the other person and see the hurting heart inside.

You also want to look into your own heart and make sure you're not holding onto any bitterness or resentment towards the person. You may be able to make yourself do good towards them but yet still hold resentment inside. Again, you want your love to be a sincere love. You will need to draw from the compassion of the Lord in order to do this. You'll need to draw from His love and mercy. It is possible! He will help you!

Hebrews 10:30; Psalm 19:9; 2 Corinthians 9:7

1. Think of someone who has not been good to you. Write their name(s) here.

2. Search your heart for any bitterness or resentment you might have against them. If so, ask God to forgive you and strengthen you so you can be Christ-like around them.

3. What good things could you do for them? (Not to show your 'superiority' and not something that you can't do willingly).

4. In what ways have you set yourself up as a judge and judged the "rights" and "wrongs" of others? How can you stop from doing this? How can you see these people as ones who need the love of God instead of ones who deserve condemnation and judgment?

Know that God doesn't want you to become in bondage to a person who thinks they can treat you unkindly and expect you to always return with a good deed. However, He does not want you to limit your goodness and kindness only to those who are nice to you. He sent Jesus before we were kind or good. Jesus died for the ungodly.

**"God help me to be willing to be kind and do good
even to those who are not good to me."**

17. Blood, Not Just Tears

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;
Hebrews 12:4 NASB

What is sin? It's not just the obvious sins like murder, adultery, stealing etc. It's also selfish behavior, criticism, accusation, gossip and slander to name a few more. Basically sin is rooted in selfishness. Jesus said if you would love God first and your neighbor as yourself then you would fulfill all the law. You keep the commands of God when you walk in love, and sin – selfishness – is something we are to resist with a passion. The writer of Hebrews said they had not yet resisted sin to the point of shedding blood. Have you? Are you willing to die resisting sin and selfishness? We think we do well if we resist to the point of *tears*, but how many of us resist to the point of *blood*? That's how determined you need to be if you are going to successfully die to yourself and walk the love walk.

We know we have to resist the devil, but are you blaming the devil when it's really your own lust that is drawing you to sin? As hard as this may be to admit, admitting it is just what you need in order to gain victory over it. Every person needs to come to a point where they admit to the sin in their own life. You need to confess your sin and *then* He is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Confessing it, admitting it, is the first step. Sometimes this step is very difficult. It's hard to admit you've been wrong.

There could be all kinds of different reasons why you don't want to admit you've been wrong. It may be pride. Or you may feel that you have to hang on to being right because your self-worth is tied up in that, and admitting to being wrong would mean, in your mind, that you are worthless. (Which of course is not true. You are priceless to God). Or you may feel that you've done the same thing wrong so many times that you can't possibly admit to it and confess it to God one more time, but that is exactly what you need to do. As hard as it may be, you need to feel the pain of that sin. Of course you don't want to hang on to that pain forever. The Lord wants you to confess it so He can forgive you and you can get on with your life free from that pain. However, when you sin you need to go through that confession process which is painful. It's all a part of dying to self.

So much of this dying process is connected to the desires of your heart. God sees your heart very clearly and you need to let Him help you to see it as well. He sees how pure your desires are, or impure. When you *want to* be like Him and live a life without a selfish motivation then you have made a giant step into the Kingdom of God. If you don't want to live an unselfish life then God is very much aware of that and you can't fool Him no matter how hard you try. You may be able to fool yourself, but you can't fool Him. Ask Him to show you your heart. Tell Him you want to have a pure heart. Just having the desire to be like Jesus purifies your heart.

Mark 12:29-31; Romans 13:10; Colossians 3:5-9; James 1:14; James 4:7; 1 John 1:9; 1 John 3:3

18. The Love Motivation

And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:3 NASB

It's not about the act of giving, it's about the heart. If you're giving without love that is simply religion. It's doing it for the purpose of seeking recognition or some other selfish motivation. The purpose of giving is not to see what you can get out of it. If your purpose and motive for giving is not out of a heart of love then there is no profit or advantage to you. It may still profit the one you're giving to but there won't be any true profit to you because of it. Jesus said to let your light shine *in such a way* that people will see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven. The good that you do is not supposed to be for your own recognition, but for bringing glory to God the Father and to accomplish His purposes here in the Earth.

Your love in giving is a result of your love for God and a willingness to obey Him and keep His commands. This heart of love comes because of your gratitude and thankfulness to Him for what He has done for you. You love Him because He first loved you. You worship Him because you are truly grateful to Him. Your obedience is an expression of your love towards Him, and when you truly love others and give to others out of a heart of true love it will be because of your love for God. When you have that kind of love guiding your actions then your giving not only blesses others but profits you as well.

God wants to have an intimate relationship with you. He doesn't want you to do all sorts of nice things for others just because you feel it's your duty or obligation. Or because you're trying to earn some sort of recognition or appreciation from Him or from others. He wants you to become so close to Him that you think like He thinks. You love what He loves and hates what He hates. He wants your heart to beat in sync with His.

When you see the goodness of God and how His way of doing things is really the best way for everyone then it becomes a pleasure to do things His way. It becomes exciting. It feels good inside. His heart has become your heart and you enjoy giving in the same way that God enjoys giving. God is not a selfish God. He loves to give. He enjoys giving. Look at the sacrifice He made when He gave His only Son, Jesus Christ, but He did it knowing that in the end the joy would outweigh the sorrow of the moment. The joy of having many people who would be able to have a heart like His far outweighed the grief of sending Jesus to die for us. Thank God He did it because having a loving and giving heart is much better than hanging on to a stingy and greedy one.

Matthew 5:16; 1 John 4:19; John 15:10-12

19. Done in Secret

When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. *Matthew 6:5 NASB*

Do you ever look around to see who's watching when you do something good? Do you think about all the people who know about what you did? Do you talk about the good things you've done for the Lord? What is your motive in doing so? Is it to glorify God or yourself? Have you ever met an "important" person and were conscious of who might be watching you speak to him or who might be aware that you were with him or her?

Selfish ambition is exhausting. It will wear you out. Jude spoke of those who are like clouds without water. Like balloons that are easily deflated you strive to exalt and promote yourself and call attention to yourself. It's hard work and even if it appears that you've gotten the recognition from people you were looking for, in the end it's all for nothing. If the reward you are looking for is praise and recognition from people then that is the only benefit you will receive for what you are doing.

You could ask yourself, what are you really looking for when you try to impress someone? The reasons for doing it could be many different ones. You could be insecure and looking for reassurance that you're O.K. the way you are. Or you could be insecure in who you are and want to be accepted so bad that you're willing to pretend you're something you're not just to get the acceptance that you need. You could be looking for acceptance from God, or being doing something out of guilt. On the other hand, you could be looking for more than acceptance. You could be looking for respect, admiration or even worship. You could be looking for people to put you on a pedestal and praise you for what you're doing. Feeling that you're "better" than others might be the only way you can feel like you're O.K.

How you were raised will have a lot to do with how you relate to people in this way, but there comes a point in time when you can no longer blame it on how you were raised. The Lord wants to help you get free from the past so you can live the best life you can. The best life is His life and it is one of humility. When you are humble, you won't care how much attention or recognition you get for doing what you do. You do it because you want to. You do it because you have the heart of God. You do it because of love. You're not looking for any other reward. When the love of God has filled your heart you won't need any other reward. His love brings a great peace and a great sense of security and you won't feel the need for anything else. If someone doesn't send you a Thank You card it won't matter to you. If someone doesn't even know that you were the one who blessed them then it won't matter to you. You won't feel the need to "toot your own horn" and be sure everyone knows that you are the one who did the good deed. There is great freedom in being able to live with this kind of humble attitude.

Jude 12

20. Room to Grow

I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. *John 8:37 NASB*

The people Jesus was talking to did not receive what He was saying. When a person hardens their heart to the Word of God by not accepting what He says then they are actually rejecting what He says. When they reject the Word of God they are rejecting Jesus Himself and will be judged by the very Word they reject. They are, in a sense, seeking to crucify Him by not allowing His Word to live in their heart. Instead we need to seek to be crucified *with* Him. We need to seek to die to our self and allow our thinking and believing to be conformed to His Word. We need to give His Word a place in our heart.

A hardened heart is unmovable, un-pliable and is not fertile ground for the seed of His Word to grow and expand in. Jesus spoke of the Word being sown in the hearts of people and the stony heart was one where the seed withered because the stones didn't allow the Word-seed to have the room it needed to grow. If a seed is not given room to grow then the root system can't develop, the seed won't receive the nourishment it needs to keep the plant strong and the plant will not have the support to be able to stand up.

When you give the Word of God place in your life then you will embrace the truths of God even if it means you have to give up some room in your heart. You may have certain opinions and beliefs that are contrary to what Jesus taught. You may think a certain way that is in contrast to the Bible. You may have a tendency to try and make the Word of God fit into your beliefs. I know there have been times I've opened the Bible in an attempt to find Scripture to support what I thought was right, but if you are going to give the Word of God place in your life then you need to put God's opinion higher than yours. You may need to adjust some of your opinions or you may need to throw some out completely. The stony ground will need to become soft if you want the Word of God to grow freely in your heart.

The people that Jesus was talking to in this Scripture became angry and were looking to kill Him. He said the reason they wanted to kill Him was because His Word had no place in them. The anger was there because they didn't want to change. If they were to receive His words as truth then that would mean that they would have to change their opinions about some things. It's an uncomfortable feeling when something you have solidly believed in becomes challenged. You've been standing on this stone and the Lord says it's time to take it out. You may feel your whole life is being turned upside down, but in the end, when you give up your opinions for His, your heart becomes softer and you're free from those stones that have been clogging up your heart. Now the Word of God has room to grow. Now you can become more like Him. Now you can live in the freedom that His Words bring.

John 12:48; Matthew 13:20-21

21. Addressing the Money Motive

Instead, *you ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” James 4:15 NASB

Once again we look at our plans. Are the choices you make concerning your life and future being made for other reasons than the will of God for you? In context, James is talking about making a decision to move to another city for a year or so for the purpose of buying, selling and getting gain. Oftentimes money (or the lack of it) is what we base our decisions on. Money becomes the great enabler and the great motivator. If you have an opportunity to take a job in another city for more money will you just assume God is for it? Will you put your paycheck and income up as a higher priority than God’s will?

Are you willing to use money to serve God with or are you trying to use God to get money? We may do this without thinking about it. We may be in such a habit of looking for money and making money-based decisions that we don’t even realize what we are doing. If you don’t pray or consider the will of God when you make money-based decisions then you need to re-adjust your priorities and move God up above your money in your thinking.

A lot of people, even Christians, have been consumed with a complex that makes them always feel they are lacking. They are not content. They constantly feel as if what they have is not enough. They’re always wanting to make more money. Always wanting to buy more things--more things for the house, or maybe a bigger house, a new car, more clothes, etc. etc. This discontentment is driving people to live beyond their means and to constantly feel they want more.

The answer is not to get more. The answer is to learn to be content. This lack and lust attitude will always be there no matter how much you have, but when you learn to be thankful for what you have and be at peace, then the feeling of discontentment is gone. You can have joy in your life. You can live in peace. You can love your job instead of despising it.

A lustful and lacking attitude is much like an addiction. It’s never satisfied. It always wants more. It’s also related to a critical attitude and being a perfectionist. If you’re one who always looks around trying to figure out how to make things “better” then you’ll never be satisfied. You’ll always be critical of the way things are. You’ll always be focusing on the negative because you’re always looking for what’s wrong. As long as you are discontent you will be trying to fix problems in your circumstances thinking that as soon as things are fixed then you can be happy. Yet that never happens. Peace doesn’t mean not having any problems, it means being content in the midst of whatever is going on around you. Learn to be content and to live within the current limitations of your life – money, time and space – and you will flourish with peace, joy and even prosperity.

Matthew 6:24; Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:17; Hebrews 13:5; James 3:17

1. Where does your source of income come from?

2. What are you doing with your time? Do you feel you are doing with your time what God wants you to be doing? (Whether you are employed, have your own business or are a housewife, mother, retired etc.)

3. What are some things you've bought recently that you felt was O.K. to buy just because you had the money to buy them? Did you find out later with any of these items that it would have been better not to buy them?

4. Are there purchases you have made recently that you really didn't have the money to buy? (Had to charge them, borrow from someone, not pay a bill. etc...) If so, list them here and ask the Lord to remove the lust and discontentment from your heart so you can avoid doing this in the future.

Know that God wants you to have your financial needs met, but God doesn't want money to be your god and for you to serve money. You can't serve both. You're to have no other gods before Him.

"God help me to not make decisions based on money but on Your will."

21 Day Summary

"I am willing to follow Your path and not be afraid to lose something."

**"I will lay aside my own feelings and remain loyal to Your guidance
without questioning You."**

**"I will choose to die to the lacks I feel in my relationships. I will give, planting seeds of love
and compassion to others knowing I will reap a harvest in return."**

"I will not look to defend or promote myself. I will pursue an interest in other people."

"I will bring all of my plans, hopes and dreams in subjection to Your plans for me."

"I am willing to identify with Christ in all that I do."

**"I am willing to lay down my life – my time, money, gifts etc.
for my friends as Jesus did for me."**

"I will consider the needs of others and not just my own needs."

**"I will give to others cheerfully and go above and beyond what they ask me to do
when I am able to do so."**

**"I lay aside the old nature and choose to be crucified with Christ.
I will live my new life by faith."**

**"I will not boast in my own accomplishments but desire to become intimate with You
so I can glow with Your love."**

"I will live in Christ fulfilling the purpose which I was created for."

"I will value God's opinion of me more than man's."

"I will not think thoughts that stir up a desire to sin."

"I commit myself and my cause to God who judges righteously in all situation."

"I am willing to be kind and do good, even to those who are not good to me."

"I will not have a careless attitude toward sin. I will do what it takes to resist it."

**"God help me to feel Your love and I will be grateful for all You've done for me.
I am willing to give from a heart of love."**

"I am willing to do good deeds in secret without being seen of men."

"I am willing to give God's Word first place in my life."

"I will not make decisions based on money but on God's will."

Understanding Authority

I've noticed that people often find it difficult to walk in a loving, giving attitude towards others if they feel that others are "taking" from them. How do you "give" what you feel is being "taken?" It's hard to feel the joy in giving if the other person assumes you must give, and therefore is not grateful when you do. When a person expects you to give to them without considering that you don't have to, you may feel you're being taken advantage of, or even forced into doing something. All of us have our own free will. When people forget that they can become ungrateful and even controlling. Dealing with selfish and controlling persons can create some difficulties for you as you try to die to yourself and walk in the love of God.

When you feel "out of control" you may resent another person's attempt to control you. Let me give you an example. I had a person who came over to my house one day and made a suggestion that we should put landscaping stones where there was no grass in our yard. We had been hauling dirt into the back yard and doing a lot of work back there. As a result we had several bare spots in the yard. I told him we weren't finished with the yard yet and when we were all done we were going to plant grass seed in those areas. This man insisted. In fact, he insisted for several months. Once, he even had us over for dinner and while we were there he showed us his yard and his stones. I told him every way I could think of that I didn't want that done to the yard. This man's persistence was beyond a mere creative suggestion. It was obsession. It was an attempt to control. Now if I would have been insecure in my position of authority over my yard I could have become fearful that somehow this man was going to force me to put rocks in my yard against my will. That fear would lead me to become angry and react in an ungodly way towards him, or to turn the anger inward and become depressed or worked up with anxiety about it. However, because I was confident that I was the one who had the authority to say what would and wouldn't happen in my yard, then instead of behaving in an ungodly way towards him I could simply remain persistent. Of course I had to become very blunt with him, and he still persisted after that! However it would have done me no good to begin to resent him. That's exactly what that controlling spirit wants. It wants you to either abdicate your position of authority, allowing someone else to overrun your life, and then become depressed at your inability to manage your life. Or it wants you to become angry and retaliate against the person.

You have authority in your life because of your responsibility for it. God owns everything and what He has given to you, He's given you to manage and govern. Since you have the *responsibility* to govern your life then you also have the *authority* to make the necessary choices concerning it. In either case of giving in to another person's control, or resisting in anger against it, you would not be acting according to who you really are. You would be influenced or driven by this person. You would be reacting by *changing your behavior* instead of reacting to the influence of the Holy Spirit in your life. His gifts are stifled in you no matter which extreme you take.

"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls." Proverbs 25:28

If I would not have had the confidence to stand up against this man, then I would be like the one who has no rule over his own spirit. That makes me like a city without walls—unprotected against the attacks of the enemy. By not being able to take control over my own life I am leaving

myself susceptible to him. I am making myself vulnerable. Now get this—walking in love does *not* mean that you give everyone else what they want from your life. It doesn't mean you never stand up for what you feel is right. It doesn't mean you always give in to everyone else. No, no, no. To walk in love you must first walk in the authority given to you over your own life and then you *willingly* choose to give, love and serve others. God is always first and what you feel is right in your heart for your life you are obligated to see to it that it comes to pass. If someone else comes along and wants to take you in a different way, (like the serpent did Eve), you have got to stand up for what you feel in your heart is right for you. This incident with the stones may not seem like a big deal, but once you compromise with the smaller things and you've developed a habit of giving in to people and not stand up for what is right in your life, then you'll get nailed on bigger issues. God has given you authority over your own life. You are responsible for it. If you love God then you need to see to it that His purpose for your life, and your area of influence or domain, is done. (Of course He will help you and has sent the Holy Spirit for that purpose). Remember the two commands that Jesus gave in Mark 12:29-31, to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and then to love your neighbor as yourself. God is first, other people are not.

God's Design for Authority

Misunderstanding God's design for authorities can cause you to be unsure about how much authority you actually have over your own life. First we need to understand there are different realms of authority. For example there are civil, family, church and workplace authorities. There is also individual authority. Each person has authority in their own personal life. This individual authority is what we call our *free will* or our power of choice.

Notice that after Adam and Eve sinned, God didn't take away their free will choice. He drove them out of the garden, not because He was taking their power of choice away but *because He continued to allow them to have a free will*. If they would have stayed in the garden they may have continued to eat of that tree. They would have lived forever in the sinful condition they were in. So God did not take their power of choice away but put limitations and restrictions on them, along with the physical enforcement of the Cherubim's guarding the entrance to the garden. Their free will, however, remained. Remember what God said to Cain after He had rejected his offering and Cain was angry. "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin crouches at your door; its desire is for you, but you must master it." (Gen. 4:7 Amplified Bible). Cain had a choice of whether he was going to do the right thing or not. He chose not to, murdered Abel, and God didn't stop him.

You can't bring true order to a society of people with sinful hearts. God established civil authority to bring as much order as possible. Civil authority is necessary in a society where there are people who do not love God and who do not willingly submit to Him out of a love for Him. The Bible says, "When a land transgresses, it has many rulers..." (Proverbs 28:2 The Amplified Bible). Civil authorities were established by God because of sin in the land. Because of the lawlessness that sin brings, God knew that restrictions and consequences needed to be imposed. If each individual were to obey God, then every family would be godly. Every church, every city and every nation would be godly as well. In the Old Testament, the Law of Moses gave a set of rules meant for a godly nation to abide by. Under the New Covenant, when the heart is changed, submission to

God and His ways will do what human authority and religious laws can't do. In a world where every heart is filled with the life and nature of God and everyone lives according to His ways, it would be like Heaven on Earth.

What Motivates?

If all people were to submit to God directly, what a world we would have! So we ask, what motivates a person—even a Christian—to obey God? Submission to authority comes when you *willingly limit your choices* either to *avoid consequence* or as an *act of love*. When the serpent came to Eve, she was focused on the *consequence* of eating of that tree, rather than on obeying God because of her love for Him. The words of the enemy made her think that the limitations she had chosen so far, (not eating of the tree), were bringing her into bondage. She had made a decision to limit her choices and not eat of the tree, but she was doing so only because she was afraid of what would happen if she ate. When you limit your choices out of a love for God rather than just a fear of a consequence then you continue in His life. A fear of consequence may get you to do the right thing for a while but it's not a lasting thing, and really, it's from a selfish motivation of self-preservation while the motive of love is self-less and giving. Didn't Jesus say if we would seek to save our lives we would lose them but if we seek to lose them we'd find it?

God designed the human spirit to rule over itself. He gave all of us authority over our own lives. He gave us the freedom to choose. Yet God's desire is that you submit to His authority and *willingly limit your choices* because of your *love for Him*. In the Garden of Eden, they had the freedom to eat of every tree, but there was a command and a consequence if they chose the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Eve focused on the consequence rather than on her love for God. God didn't stop them or force them not to eat of that tree, but they could have willingly limited their choices and not ate of that tree in order to keep His Word.

God told Eve after the fall that her desire would be to her husband and that he would rule over her (Gen. 3:16) yet we don't see a consequence if she doesn't submit to him. I believe that's because God wanted her submission to her husband to be based on love rather than consequence. He had given them a consequence for not obeying Him in eating of the tree, but in this situation He doesn't give a consequence. In Genesis 2:24 Adam said that a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh. The relationship of husband and wife was meant to be one of unity—a horizontal relationship, not vertical. However, after sin came into their hearts, what was meant to be a loving, nurturing relationship turned into an authoritative relationship.

Today we have the glorious opportunity to be born-again and to have the Spirit of God live within us. The new birth brings us into the same position that Adam and Eve were prior to the fall. We can be spiritually clean—justified by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why the Bible tells us when we walk in the Spirit there is no law against us (Galatians 5:18, 23). God's desire for us now is the same as it was then—for us to live with loving relationships, that we flourish in the gifts and area of domain that He has given to us, and that we submit to Him because we are willing to limit our choices as an act of love rather than a fear of consequence.

Consequences

Would positions of human authority be necessary if there were no sinful hearts? If everyone always walked in the law of love, that would supersede the need for fear of consequence. Yet because society is not perfected in love there is a need for consequence. We see in our society, and in various cultures, that to break a law results in punishment such as incarceration or in some cases the death penalty – these are a separation from society. (Of course, some consequences are lesser such as fines or other restrictions). The Bible gives us the guideline for this in Romans 13. We see in the Church the progressive order of discipline for one who is not heeding the Word of God and that the end result is expulsion from the church, which is separation from the believers. We see Moses giving guidelines for divorce, which is separation of husband and wife. Because of sin, these consequences – separations – occur. However, what did Jesus say? He said no longer an eye for an eye but He talked the way of love. Ultimately, God's desire is for all people to walk the way of love and when that is the case, consequences are unnecessary. The consequences placed by human authority pale in comparison to the greater law of love.

An ideal situation would be where the one in authority and the one under authority are both behaving in a godly way and both submit to the highest authority – God Himself. In that case, the one in authority will not abuse or bring pain to those under his care and will not control them against their will. The one under authority will submit to the authorities in the manner in which God intends, and their life will flourish and society will be blessed and benefit by their individual gifts as they rule in their own area of domain. We need to pray for those in authority!

God is the ultimate authority and the example for all those in positions of authority. Thank God He is good and loving. He doesn't abuse you and He doesn't control you against your will. He doesn't bring you pain and even though He disciplines you, which may not be pleasant for the moment, it's not abusive or for selfish purposes on His part. He doesn't force you to do anything against your will. There will be consequences for all the decisions you make and He will lead you to make the choices that will bring you life instead of death, but the choice is still yours to make. You will do best when you submit to Him and do it His way but the choice is still yours to make. The purer your motives are, the less you will need to think about the consequences and the fear of death, but you will submit to God because of your love for Him and then you will find true life as He has always intended for you. When you receive His Word and do what He says just because He said it and you love Him, then you will save yourself a lot of heartache and trouble. If we would just learn that God knows what He's talking about! Unfortunately, many of us were raised not to learn the value of words or the power they contain. We've learned to respond to punishment, not words. We've learned to respond to force, not words. We learn this because of a lack of understanding, or because of the sin, in the lives of those we have learned from.

The consequences of disobeying godly authority may result in a loss or a restriction being imposed on us, or a separation, and that hopefully would lead us to change. (Although wouldn't it have been better to respond to God's goodness since it's His goodness that leads to repentance?) If the authority is ungodly or abusive then that loss of freedom we've experienced may make us angry, depressed or confused, going against our inner design to rule our own lives.

Ungodly Authority

If you are a person who has been controlled in an ungodly manner by someone in authority over you—a parent, boss, husband etc. and that person has abused you in some way, then there may be a tendency for you to be so fearful of being brought back into pain that you rebel against any kind of authority in your life. You may become suspicious of everyone and judge everyone according to how much control they want to take in your life. Of course when we deal with human authority we are not dealing with an ideal situation. When those in authority are abusive then the person under that authority suffers as a result of ungodly rule.

When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” Proverbs 29:2 KJV.

The purpose of civil authorities is for the protection of the people and for the people to be able to live in peace. (See 1 Timothy 2:2 and Romans 13:1-8). Authority is meant to promote godliness and allow for individuals to have the freedom to obey God and flourish in their individual gifts or individual areas of domain that He has called them to. Abusive authority stops the person from doing the very thing the authority was established to do—promote willful submission to God because of love for Him.

A person has authority over another not because of *who* they are, but because of the *position* they hold. When one is in a position of authority he needs to know the limits of that authority. If you are an owner or in a management position in a company, a church etc. then you must understand that you have authority over the vision and direction of that organization but you do not have a right to control a person’s individual life. Your realm of authority is for the organization, not for the people. You have a right to make policy and direct people to adhere to that policy and vision but you can’t control or force them to do anything. If you don’t understand this you can end up extremely frustrated and angry, and you will put undue stress on those under your sphere of authority. Even when you are responsible for those under your care, (like parents, bosses, pastors etc.) you still cannot “control” a person or force them to do certain things.

If a person goes beyond their scope of authority and the recipient is not confident in his authority to rule over his own life so he doesn’t stand up for what he feels is right, then he may feel violated, angry and do a couple of different things:

1. He may become angry, argumentative or critical against the person, instead of just saying no.
2. He may withdraw into a depression, not feeling he has a right to disagree.
3. He may feel confusion because of not understanding why he doesn’t feel right about doing what this person is forcing him to do.
4. And then he may feel guilt or shame as a result of his feelings of anger and perceived rebellion.

If you are confident in your right to rule over your own life then you do not need to become angry, depressed, confused or feel guilty when someone oversteps their scope of authority with you. You simply need to exercise the authority God has given you over your own life. You need to make a decision to speak and behave how you believe God desires for you to. You don’t need

to feel threatened or feel guilty; you just need to trust God to enable you to stand in the position of authority He has given you. This of course may anger a person if he is trying to “control” you. If they are a humble and wise leader, they will understand.

Of course there are times when a person has a legitimate level of authority over you and you are to submit to him within the limits of that authority, whether or not you personally agree with it. I don’t want to give the impression that you have a right to rebel against authorities just because you disagree. The only example we have of the apostles being justified in disobeying authorities was when it was in direct opposition to what God had told them to do (Acts 5:28-29). Most often, we read that we are to submit to authorities and live in peace with everyone as much as possible. If a police officer pulls you over you need to stop and provide the information he requests. An employer has a right to make policy and direct his employees. You still have the responsibility to submit to those authorities over you. Of course you have the power to choose whether you will submit or not. You can choose to break the laws or the rules if you want to but then you will have consequences for that. You owe it to yourself to yearn for the proper motivation, (love) and to realize the consequences of your choices.

Whatever the reason, if a person’s free will is taken or unwillingly given away, then that person cannot make the choices necessary to govern their own lives. In order for a person to successfully be who they are meant by God to be, they have got to know that they have a right – and not just a right but an *obligation* – to walk in authority over their *own lives*. It’s only when you walk in this individual authority that you can take your life and turn it over to your loving Heavenly Father and willingly submit to Him. You can be assured that even if He corrects you and speaks truth to you that stings for the moment, it is for your greater good. God is your ultimate authority and you can go to Him if you have a lesser authority who is treating you wrong and He will show you how to handle the situation. The bottom line is that you have to be able to rule your own life before you can willingly submit to the highest authority-your Heavenly Father, or any other authorities. In order to make the choices you need to make concerning your life, you need to know you have the authority to make those choices. Look at what Jesus said when He taught us to pray. He said to say, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done...” We choose whose will will be done in our lives—God’s, ours or other peoples. The idea is for us to *willingly* submit to Him, *asking* Him to rule.

Responsible Authority

I use the term Responsible Authority to refer to the authority that you have over what you are responsible for. All of us have authority over our own lives as adults, and to varying degrees as young children. Since you are responsible for your child’s actions then you have some authority there. If you are responsible for someone else then there is someone you have to answer to in regards to their behavior. You are responsible for your children legally in our society. but you are also responsible for them spiritually before God.

We are all responsible for our own lives so we each have authority over our own lives. However, authority over another person is limited to the amount of *responsibility* you have for the person. A Pastor is responsible before God to feed his flock, but he is not responsible for whether or not each individual person obeys God. Parents have authority over their young children but they do

not decide which gifts are given to them by God. A police officer in the United States has the authority to arrest a person for breaking a law, but within the confines of the law.

Relational Influence

Even if we are not responsible for a person, we all have *relationships* with people and as a result of those relationships we have a *realm of influence* that allows us to make suggestions or give guidance. For example, if I say to my 25 year old daughter that I want her to quit her job and go work at another company, I have over-stepped my realm of authority in her life. I am no longer responsible for her and I have no authority to tell her where to work. Yet if I sense that the Lord is showing me she would do well to go work for another company, I can go to her and tell her what I feel and make the suggestion. It's up to her what she's going to do with it. I have a certain amount of influence over her because of the relationship we have. Now if she has made it plain that she doesn't want any guidance from me then I may have to take the insight I have and pray for her rather than speak to her about it. I have recognized the level of influence I have in her life.

We should also keep in mind that ultimately our influence over others should be to help them obey God, not to please us. Our relationship with a person is not going to be for the purpose of influencing them to try and change their way of thinking all the time. Of course we should always "speak the truth in love" but our relationships may simply include loving them, or honoring and respecting them. There may be times we are to honor a person even though we're not to "obey" them.

Think about your relationships with others. Don't just think about who they are to you but who *are you to them?* A wife, father, daughter, co-worker etc. Do you have any responsibility to any extent for the actions of the other person? Will God or anyone in authority over you hold you fully or partially responsible for what they do? Keep in mind that we may be responsible for the actions of another to one level, and then have an influential relationship with them to a greater level. To what level are you responsible for what they do? (If at all). Many times we feel we are responsible for people when we really aren't. Most often, we simply have an influence over them based on our relationship, but we do not have any responsibility for them or for what they do.

It's good to note here that when you are not responsible for another person's behavior, but yet you feel you are, you can feel embarrassed at their actions and try and make excuses for them. When you do this you are not being who you really are. You are allowing their actions to influence you, causing you to behave in a way you otherwise wouldn't have.

By looking at the relational positions in your life you can discover what level of influence you have, or someone else has over you. You will never have the same level of authority over another person that you do yourself. If you attempt this then you have crossed the line from godly authority to an attempt to unjustly control another person. Your level of influence is dependent on the relationship you have with a person. Look over the people in your life and think about your relationship with them and your influence over each other. When looking at your influence over a person, how much influence do they *allow you* to have over them? This is based on the type of relationship you have with them. Do you think they would agree to your assessment of your amount of influence?

To what extent do you influence them? For most people this will be the level to which they *allow you* to give them guidance or make suggestions. However, there is a certain level of influence sometimes that is not agreed upon. For example, if two employees are forced to work together even if there is tension between the two, they will have an influence over each other just by working together. If the Lord has seemingly brought a person into your life you may have a relational influence of simply praying for them. If so, recognize that, but don't go beyond the level of influence you truly have. Levels of influence may be simply *loving* them or *praying* for them. It may move up to feeling free to make a *suggestion*, make a *request* or even ask for a *commitment*. These levels of influence may change for different situations, but again, it's not about manipulating a person to do something for you or to think like you, it's about recognizing how you can help those around you draw closer to God and follow their own heart. The goal is not to get every person to rise to a level of commitment either. That will be for a very few.

Once you can clearly see who *you are* to others in your life then you will be able to more clearly define your realm of authority and influence. You will be able to identify more easily if you hold positions in your lives that the Lord really hasn't called you to. If He hasn't called you to function in certain positions then you need to identify those positions and make the necessary changes. You will also be better able to see how you are meant to serve others with your God-given gifts through the positions He has placed you in. Look at the roles in your life. Do your current roles fit what you feel the Lord has destined for you to be?

Breaking a realm of influence

You may have had a past relationship in which a person had a certain level of authority or influence over you and then you come to a point in your life where that needs to change. A good example of this is a child who grows up and begins to take more responsibility for his own life and finally becomes an adult. When that happens, his relationship with his parents changes. In a healthy relationship this transition is complete and the child takes full responsibility for his life and the parent remains in an influential position. However, in some relationships the parent doesn't want to let go, they want to remain in control or the child may be fearful or irresponsible and not want to take the reins to his life. This can happen not just in a parent-child relationship but in other relationships you've had where you realize a person's realm of influence over you is no longer godly or healthy. If this happens you need to break that realm of influence they have over you.

On the other hand, if you are the one who doesn't want to let your child grow up, or you have a friend who is dependent on you for emotional support you may encourage their dependency on you – possibly without even realizing it, (or maybe you do realize it). Their attempt to break away from you may make you angry. You may not accept their new role in life and may criticize them, their choices, or even try and sabotage their success. If you feel resentful towards someone for breaking away from you, one protective reaction may be to say that you don't need them anyway. If you really and truly don't let go of the relationship, (or at least the unhealthy portion of it), then it will continue to plague you and occupy too much of your time and your thought life.

Fear of control

A person may suspect someone is trying to control them. This often occurs when someone has been critical of them over a period of time. If that person repents and tries to change their critical attitude, the suspicion in the "victim" may continue until they have a revelation of it. Their suspicion and paranoia blinds them to the other person's repentance and change of heart. Because a person is fearful of the bondage and pain that ungodly control brings, they may be suspicious of this happening when it's really not the case.

If someone is, or has been, critical of you and/or is trying to control you it's important you understand the authority you have in your own life and walk in that authority. You don't need to feel threatened by them. You can feel assured that God has given you the authority to rule over your own spirit. When you truly do then you will be able to love and forgive the person freely without any other motives, (like trying to show your superiority etc.) If you still feel resentful towards the person then you probably do not fully understand the position of authority God has given you over your own life.

Ultimately whether someone is actually trying to control you or not, recognizing your own authority and where the limits of the other person's authority or influence is, will be the key for you to be able to be free from the fear and live at peace. Then you will be able to come to a place of godly submission to God Himself and other authorities in your life and you will be able to love, knowing that you are doing so willingly and not through force. You will also be able to make the choices concerning your life according to who you are and your God-given gifts, and be who you were really meant to be.

Summary:

1. Recognize that God has given you authority to make choices regarding your own life. (Free will).
2. You have the choice (& then the responsibility) to bring your life in submission to the will of God. Although He will help you!
3. Submission means that you willingly limit your choices in order to keep His Word.
4. A pure love motivation is greater than the motive of fear of consequence.
5. Godly authority is meant to bring order and peace and to promote godliness. It's to allow individuals the freedom to be who they are and to flourish in their gifts.
6. Godly authority will never abuse a person and will not take away or limit a person's choices unless absolutely necessary.
7. You have to learn how to rule—or walk in authority-over your own life before you can willingly love, give or submit to others.
8. Your levels of responsibility and influence over others will vary depending on your positions and relationships.
9. If you misunderstand the levels of influence and responsibility you have for others you may overstep your bounds leading to frustration and anger on both person's part.
10. You are responsible not to allow others to take "control" of your life or make decisions for you beyond their level of authority or influence (to the best of your ability).
11. At times you may need to break the influence a person has over you if it is no longer godly.
12. Fear of being abusively controlled can bring suspicion and paranoia and blind you to a person's true motive, interfering with your relationship with them.

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