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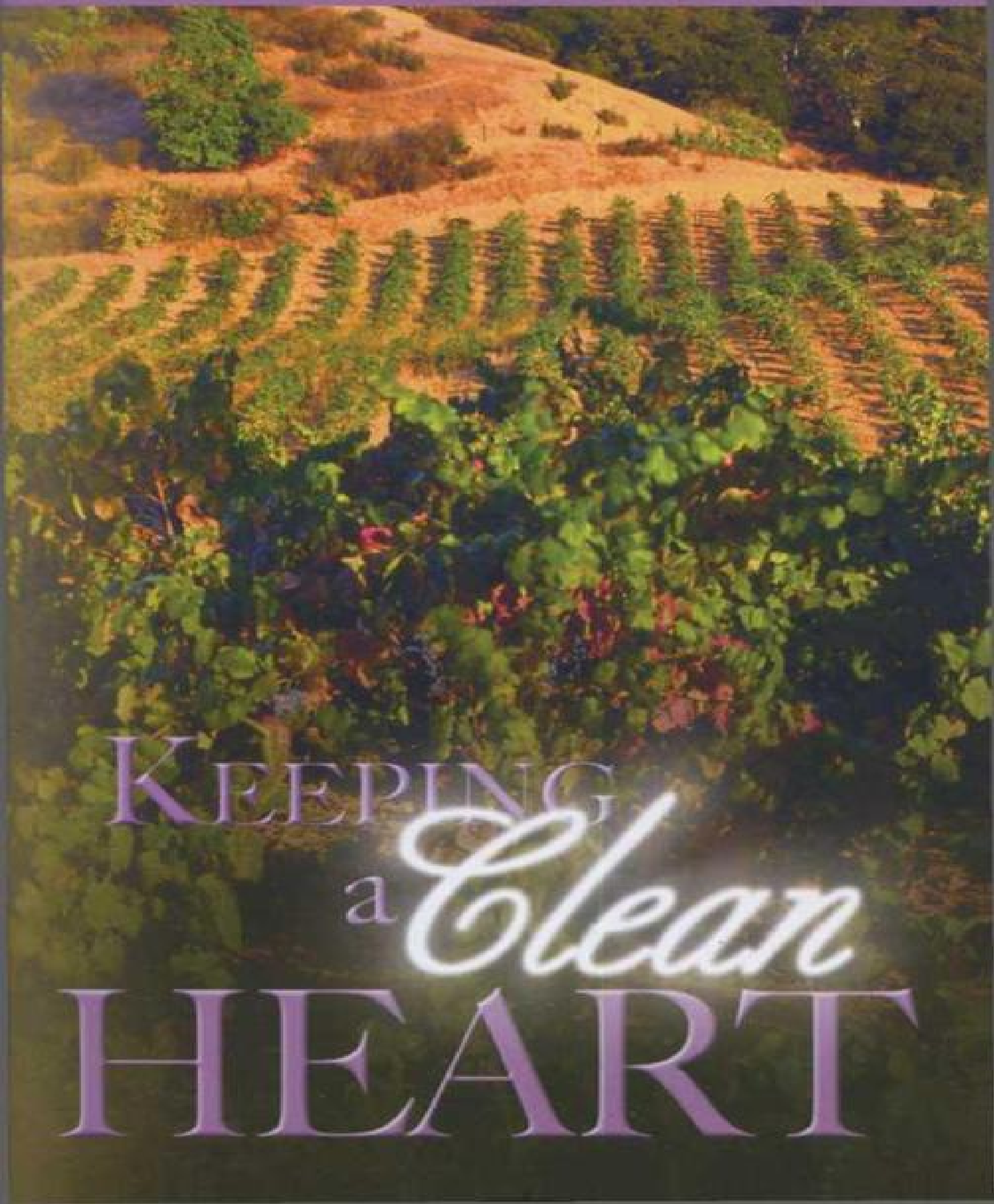

KEEPING a Clean HEART

Keeping a Clean Heart

I don't remember when I was "awarded" the job of maintaining the flower beds around our home, but I would gladly step down from my position. This stuff is work! I don't claim to be an expert, but over the years, I have learned a lot about cultivating, spraying, weeding, trimming, pruning and fertilizing. I know how to keep things growing the way they should.

I have also learned that if I neglect my garden, weeds will rise up, bugs can invade and fungus may sabotage my dream of the perfectly landscaped home. However, if I daily **examine** every plant, **eliminate** wrong things and **enforce** right things, I will consistently produce results. Every hour spent on my knees *will* pay off.

This same principle will help anyone who desires to keep a clean heart. Now, I am not talking about the physical heart that pumps blood to your brain and legs. I am referring to your inner self—the part of your character that thinks, feels and decides what your body will do. King David was a man who made serious mistakes in his life, but he discovered how to turn away from sin and get his heart right with God. In Psalm 51:10, he wrote, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right, persevering, and steadfast spirit within me."* The word "create" in this verse is used to describe a work of God, not something you do yourself but something He does!

The precious blood of Jesus that was shed on the cross has power to wash away your sin and present you blameless before the Father. His death and resurrection has creative power to transform every person that calls upon Him in faith.

Because if you acknowledge and confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and in your heart believe (adhere to, trust in, and rely on the truth) that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:9

For with the heart a person believes (adheres to, trusts in, and relies on Christ) and so is justified (declared righteous, acceptable to God), and with the mouth he confesses (declares openly and speaks out freely his faith) and confirms [his] salvation.

For everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord [invoking Him as Lord] will be saved."

Romans 10:10, 13

You may be the worst sinner on the planet, but the moment you call on the name of Jesus, you are born again into the family of God. The instant you repent and ask Jesus to forgive your sins, you are saved. *"Old things are passed away and all things become new " (2* Corinthians 5:17)!

Although this new life was totally created by God, you have a part in this process. As you made the decision to believe in your heart and confess with your mouth, God supernaturally birthed you into His kingdom. In the same way, you will have a part in maintaining this new life. Each day you will have the opportunity to either strengthen your new relationship with God or neglect it.

Your rate of growth will be determined by what you feed your newly created spirit. Daily prayer, study of God's Word and regular attendance at a Bible-believing church are essential to your spiritual development.

Neglect in any one of these three vital areas will generally produce dysfunctional Christians. You may have met people who could only be described this way. They may have been born again at one time in their life and started out with a clean heart, but somewhere along the way, they allowed things like offense, opposition or disappointment to stunt their growth. They may have stopped reading the Word, praying regularly or going to church. Before long, their newly created heart was overtaken with the "weeds" of life, eventually choking out God's Word.

This reminds me of a home in my neighborhood that was beautifully landscaped until the owner put the house up for sale and moved out. It didn't sell for a long time, and although someone was hired, to cut the grass, the plants and flowers were totally ignored. When new owners finally moved in, they had to start over. They hired a landscape company to create entirely new flower beds which must have cost them a bundle of cash. That is what neglect will do. It will cost you—big time.

If your heart is allowed to become overgrown with the cares of life, it can cost you.

However, if you turn to God in prayer instead of yielding to fear and worry, the peace of God will be a guard over your heart and mind.

Do not fret or have any anxiety about anything, but in every circumstance and in everything, by prayer and petition (definite requests), with thanksgiving, continue to make your wants known to God.

And God's peace [shall be yours, that tranquil state of a soul assured of

its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and being content with its earthly lot of whatever sort that is, that peace] which transcends all understanding shall garrison and mount guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

Adam and Eve were warned by God to *"guard"* their garden. They didn't. Genesis 2:15 says, *"And the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and guard and keep it."* The devil came in one day when their guard was down, and seeds of doubt were sown in their heart. They listened to his lie, instead of God's Word, and lost their home.

The only way that you will be able to guard and keep your heart clean is through daily study of God's Word. It is the most powerful force in the world. This same power that created *the* world is able to transform *your* world and keep everything in order.

Hebrews 4:12 says,

For the Word that God speaks is alive and full of power [making it active, operative, energizing, and effective]; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the dividing line of the breath of life (soul) and [the immortal] spirit, and of joints and marrow [of the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and sifting and analyzing and judging the very thoughts and purposes of the heart.

As you study, expect God to speak to you though His Word. Allow Him to penetrate the deepest part of your nature and expose the thoughts and purposes of your heart. You don't have to live a life that is tormented by fear, guilt and hate. God's peace, virtue and love can consistently flow out of your heart.

1 Peter 1:22 says,

Since by your obedience to the Truth through the **[Holy]** *Spirit you have purified your hearts for the sincere affection of the brethren,* **[see that you]** *love one another fervently from a pure heart.*

No matter what you have gone through in the past, you can purify your heart through the Holy Spirit. You can love others from a pure heart. When you apply these three basic steps, you are well on your way to keeping a clean heart.

Step #1: Examine

Mirrors are wonderful things. If you take the time to use them, they will reveal what needs to be fixed and save you from embarrassing situations. You will be able to see the lettuce in your teeth, the ketchup on your cheek or

the stain on your tie. Most important of all, the mirror will reveal the hem of your dress tucked inside your pantyhose. But, you will have to *examine* the mirror or you will be exposed.

Years ago, I attended a meeting with my husband, Jesse. The bathroom of the church we were visiting did not have a full-length mirror, which would have allowed me to inspect my backside before heading out of the door. So, I just moved my hand down the back of my skirt to make sure everything was in place. The skirt that I was wearing had a lining and two layers of peach chiffon, and I assumed that everything was in order. What I did not realize was that everything *except* one sheer chiffon layer of my skirt was tucked neatly in the inside my control top pantyhose. I walked all the way up the aisle of the church to the front pew before someone told me what had happened. Since that time, I have come to understand how important it is to take one last look in the mirror before heading out the door. I don't take things for granted anymore!

You may have examined yourself in a mirror or photograph and said, "This doesn't look like me!" If you have heard that coming out of your mouth, it may be time for a quick reality check. You may not recognize that side of yourself, but it is definitely you.

One day after taking a good long look in the mirror, I had to confront my back fat and big arms. I had gained more weight than I had dared to admit, and suddenly, I could see where all the donuts and ice cream splurges had gone. Although I had managed to steer clear of the bathroom scale, I knew my mirror did not lie. Suddenly, I had a decision to make. I couldn't ignore the obvious. If I really wanted to conquer that newly acquired fat, I knew I would have to eat right and exercise. Every hour on the treadmill would pay off.

Most of us know that a mirror is necessary for a thorough self-examination of our natural body. However, few of us truly realize that the only thing that can effectively examine the depths of our heart is God's Word. It's like a mirror, reflecting and revealing our innermost thoughts and purposes.

As close as you may be to your mother, sister or brother, they do not know what is in your heart. In fact, you probably don't fully understand your own heart. The only way to comprehend the deepest part of your heart is through diligent study of God's Word. Nothing is more revealing or more penetrating than the living Word of God.

The following verses clearly reveal that we must examine *ourselves* in the light of God's Word:

For if anyone only listens to the Word

without obeying it and being a doer of it, he is like a man who looks carefully at his **[own]** *natural face in a mirror; For he thoughtfully observes himself, and then goes off and promptly forgets what he was like.*

But he who looks carefully into the faultless law, the **[law]** *of liberty, and is faithful to it and perseveres in looking into it, being not a heedless listener who forgets but an active doer* **[who obeys],** *he shall be blessed in his doing (his life of obedience).*

James 1:23-25

Examine and test and evaluate your own selves to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it. Test and prove yourselves **[not Christ].** *Do you not yourselves realize and know* **[thoroughly by an ever-increasing experience]** *that Jesus Christ is in you -unless you are* **[counterfeits]** *disapproved on trial and rejected?*

2 Corinthians 13:5

Let a man **[thoroughly]** *examine himself and* **[only when he has done]** *so should he eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*

For anyone who eats and drinks without discriminating and recognizing with due appreciation that **[it is Christ's]** *body, eats and drinks a sentence (a verdict of judgment) upon himself.*

That **[careless and unworthy participation]** *is the reason many of you are weak and sickly, and quite enough of you have fallen into the sleep of death.*

For if we searchingly examined ourselves **[detecting our shortcomings and recognizing our own condition],** *we should not be judged and penalty decreed* **[by the divine judgment]**

1 Corinthians 11:28-31

Step #2: Eliminate

After close examination of your spirit, it is vitally important to eliminate anything that is not like Christ. Once the Holy Spirit has revealed an area in your life that must be crucified, it is your responsibility to eliminate it from your life.

Hosea 10:12 tells us:

Sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness; break up your fallow ground. For it is time to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness on you" **(nas).**

Fallow ground is that which has been plowed but not sown, not in use. It represents idle ground that is crusted over and hardened. Nothing will grow in that type of ground. No matter how much is sown, it will not produce a harvest. That fallow ground has to be broken up again in order to receive the seed.

Has your heart become crusted over and hardened in life? Is it difficult for you to get beyond that last disappointment? Perhaps the Word of God was

real to you in the past, but you have allowed the distractions of life to pull you in the wrong direction. Maybe you are starting to notice the effects of moving away from God's plan for your life. If this is true, it can easily be corrected by seeking God. He can soften the hardest heart and create an atmosphere that promotes strong, healthy growth in every area of life.

The above verse says, *"...it is time to seek the Lord until He comes to rain righteousness on you."* God promised to reward those who diligently seek Him in faith (Hebrews 11:6). He is not looking to hold anything back from you!

In fact, the total opposite is true. God is looking for you! Psalm 14:2 says,

The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any who understood, dealt wisely, and sought after God, inquiring for and of Him and requiring Him **[of vital necessity].**

Isn't it wonderful to know that the Creator is looking for you? Even though you may have lost your way, God knows where you are and is always ready to direct your path. He wants to shine a light on your path so that you will not fall again and again into the trap of the enemy. Seeking Him will keep your heart pure and uncluttered, and enable you to hear His directions.

The highway near my home is riddled with potholes. Two of our tires have been demolished by them, so I am especially watchful when driving to the store. Since I know just where the really bad potholes are hiding, it would be crazy to roll my tires into them. I wouldn't get very far if I did that.

God knows exactly where all the traps of the enemy are placed. When we pay attention to

God's Word, we will know just when we need to move to the right or left to avoid the ugly potholes of life.

My son, attend to my words; consent and submit to my sayings.

Let them not depart from your sight; keep them in the center of your heart.

For they are life to those who find them, healing and health to all their flesh.

Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life.

Put away from you false and dishonest speech, and willful and contrary talk put far from you.

Proverbs 4:20-24

Notice that when you pay attention to God's Word and keep them in the center of your heart, it will affect your health and bring healing to all your

flesh. That is why your heart should be guarded with all vigilance. You are the watchman over your own heart.

Don't allow the wrong things to enter in and steal God's promise from you. Recognize those situations that are designed by the devil to sabotage your spiritual growth. Refuse to listen to talk that is contrary to the Word of God and put it far from you! If you are determined to eliminate the wrong things, they will not be able to take root in your heart.

Step #3: Enforce

Although it is important to daily examine your heart and eliminate the wrong things, it is equally important to daily enforce the *right* things. Keeping a clean heart is a lot like keeping a clean house. It will not just happen. Someone will have to work very hard to make sure things get cleaned up and put in the proper place.

If your idea of housework is to sweep the room with a glance, the dishes will never get washed and the floor will never be mopped. The same thing is true about keeping a clean heart. It will not just happen.

Song of Solomon 1:6 says,

[Please] *do not look at me,* **[she said, for]** *I am swarthy.* **[I have worked out]** *in the sun and it has left its mark upon me. My stepbrothers were angry with me, and they made me keeper of the vineyards; but my own vineyard* **[my complexion]** *I have not kept.*

How often have you allowed the demands and cares of this life to keep you from taking proper care of your "vineyard?" Have you become so busy doing godly things that you have neglected to cultivate your own relationship with the Lord? Have you ever had to say, *'...But my own vineyard...I have not kept?'*

After you examine your heart with God's Word and eliminate the "weeds" of life so that they can't take root in your heart, then it's time to start *enforcing* God's Word. You *can* keep your heart clean and pure. You don't have to be dominated by bitterness or despair.

During the Last Supper, Jesus told His disciples a parable that compared our relationship with Him to a vineyard that had to be kept clean, pruned and watered in order to bear fruit.

"I Am the True Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser.

Any branch in Me that does not bear fruit **[that stops bearing]** *He cuts away (trims off, takes away); and He cleanses and repeatedly prunes every branch that continues to bear fruit, to make it bear more and richer and more excellent fruit.*

You are cleansed and pruned already, because of the word which I have given you **[the teachings I have discussed with you].**

Dwell in Me, and I will dwell in you. **[Live in Me, and I will live in you.]** *Just as no branch can bear fruit of itself without abiding in (being vitally united to) the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you abide in Me.*

I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever lives in Me and I in him bears much (abundant) fruit. However, apart from Me **[cut off from vital union with Me]** *you can do nothing.*

If a person does not dwell in Me, he is thrown out like a **[broken-off]** *branch, and withers; such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, and they are burned.*

If you live in Me **[abide vitally united to Me]** *and My words remain in you and continue to live in your hearts, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.*

When you bear (produce) much fruit, My Father is honored and glorified, and you show and prove yourselves to be true followers of Mine.

John 15:1-8

The above verses reveal Jesus' formula for a fruitful life that honors and glorifies God. When you abide in Jesus and His Words remain in your heart, you can ask whatever you will, and it shall be done. Now, that is an awesome promise from God! Answered prayer is the right of every believer who stays vitally united to the Vine, Jesus Christ. When you pray according to the Word, you are enforcing God's will in the earth.

God is concerned about every detail of your life, large and small. Through diligent study of the Word, you can *know* that it is God's will for you to continually walk in divine health, favor, protection, prosperity, wisdom, peace, love and joy in the Holy Ghost.

I have discovered that it is not enough for us to know the will of God. As born-again Christians, our daily lives must also enforce or prove the will of God. Romans 12:1-2 challenges us with this bold statement:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God

Romans 12:1-2 KJV

The New American Heritage Dictionary says that the word *prove* means "to establish truth or validity of by presentation of argument or evidence." As a believer, you have the opportunity and responsibility to establish the truth of God's Word and enforce it in your everyday life. You can be *living* proof, evidence in the earth, that it is God's will to heal the sick, deliver the oppressed and abundantly bless all His people.

However, if you are serious about proving the will of God, it is vital that you get busy changing your old ways of thinking. You can entirely renew your mind according to the Word of God. *"...but be transformed (changed) by the* [entire] *renewal of your mind* [by its new ideals and its new attitude], *so that you may prove* [for yourselves] *what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect* [in His sight for you]" (Romans 12:2). God has a good, acceptable and perfect will for you, just waiting to be enforced or proved in your life.

Several years ago, my daughter Jodi and I travelled together to a ladies conference at which I was invited to speak. From the beginning of the trip, we had embarked on an experience that we would never forget.

Jodi booked our flights and made it clear to the ticket agent that we wanted to go from New Orleans, Louisiana to Carlsbad, New Mexico. However, when we arrived at the airport and tried to check our bags, the porter said, "Lady, you have a problem. Your final destination is Carlsbad, California, not Carlsbad, New Mexico." We had never heard of Carlsbad, California! By mistake, the airline had issued us tickets to California instead of New Mexico.

Both of us knew that it was God's will for me to preach His Word in Carlsbad, New Mexico, and we were determined to enforce His will! We prayed in the Spirit as we quickly made our way to the ticket counter to change our ticket, believing in faith that we could make connections in time for the service that night.

We refused to allow the devil to stop us and prayed for a miracle as we told the ticket agent the situation.

We praised God as she told us that the flight we needed to catch was leaving in five minutes, and she radioed ahead to the gate to tell them that we were on our way. As we ran to the gate, we thanked God for divine intervention and protection.

Although we didn't expect more problems, things really got interesting at our next connection in Dallas, Texas. Since it was a long distance to the gate for our next flight, Jodi and I were advised to take the tram shuttle to save time. We did not have food on the previous flight, and when we checked in for the next flight, we found out that there would not be food on that flight either. We thought we had enough time to grab a quick bite before boarding the plane, but we were wrong!

As Jodi and I approached the gate, we noticed that no one was around.

We stared at the locked door in disbelief and screamed "NO! We can't miss this flight!" Immediately, we began to bang on the door, praying for someone to hear us. The agent at the next counter yelled sarcastically, "Ladies, it doesn't do any good to bang on the door. You've missed the flight."

Jodi and I refused to listen to her and continued banging away and praying for the favor of God. Suddenly, the agent for our flight unlocked the door, and we told him our situation. He told us to wait there while he checked to see if the plane had pulled away. We didn't just stand there; we were right on his heels, running down the jet way to the plane and praying in the Spirit the entire time.

The door to the plane was shut and the jet way had pulled away a few feet to allow the plane to back away from the gate. Making eye contact with the pilot, Jodi saw a reassuring nod and knew we had been granted favor once again. The agent quickly re-attached the jet way to the airplane and the stewardess opened the door so that we could board the plane. There was no way anyone could have wiped the smiles off of our faces once we stepped onto that plane. We had made it!

It is awesome to see God change impossible situations to fulfil His plan for your life. It may not be a cake walk, but you can enforce God's will and obliterate the devil's tactics to keep you down. This is not the time to get discouraged and give up.

Jesus shared a parable in the book of Luke that I'd like to share with you.

And he began telling this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it, and did not find any.

And he said to the vineyard-keeper, 'Behold, for three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any.

Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?'

And he answered and said to him: 'Let it alone sir for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer; and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.'"

Luke 13:6-9 (NAS)

Maybe the enemy has told you, "You are useless to the kingdom of God. Why do you even use up the ground?" Don't listen to that lie and walk into the devil's trap to keep you in a constant state of despair and fear of failure. He is the useless one. He is the one that has been banished from God forever.

Jesus has not given up on you! You are important to God and useful in

His Kingdom. Although your heart may have been damaged by the pressures of life and you've stopped bearing fruit, the great vineyard-keeper has an awesome plan that will restore you to full production.

Fruit can grow, but you must first begin with an honest examination of the current condition of your heart in the light of God's Word. Don't be shocked when He reveals some wrong things that need to be eliminated and some right things that must be enforced. Jesus is ready, willing and able to help you break up your fallow ground, put in fertilizer and create a clean heart within you. There is no better time to begin than today!

Prayer of Salvation

If you don't know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, I'd like to take this opportunity to pray with you. All God asks is for you to come to Him with a sincere heart and accept His plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. Right now, go to Him in prayer. Speak from your heart. The Bible says in Romans 10:9-10 that *if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with your heart and confess it with your mouth, you will be saved.* Your sins will be washed away when you accept what Jesus did for you. Pray this prayer right now:

"Lord Jesus, come into my life. Forgive me of all my sins. I believe that you are the Son of God and that you died on the cross and rose from the dead to make a way for me. Thank you for loving me enough to die for me, for thinking that I was worth it. Today, I accept you into my heart and give myself totally to you. I'm tired of living my own way, and I want to live your way. I need your help. Lord, create a clean heart in me right now and guide me from now on. I love you, Jesus, and I accept you as my Savior. You are now the Lord of my life!"

If you just prayed this prayer, Congratulations! You're starting a new life! 2 Corinthians 5:17 says when you accept Jesus as your savior, *"Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. "*

Friend, you have a whole new way of life to look forward to. You've been given a clean slate —you are righteous now because of what Jesus did, and nobody can take that away! You're saved and starting a brand new life in Christ.

Please write to my ministry and let us know of your decision so that we can bless you with some more information and pray for you. God bless you as you start your new life with God today.