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Glory Magazine

share good news



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RECIPROCITY

In the Bible, 1 John 4 is known for declaring Jesus as God in the flesh and describing a relationship of true love with Him. However, it also instructs us on how to know what His love looks like. It begins by revealing that we must examine what people tell us because not everyone is in reciprocity with His Spirit.

Simply put, reciprocity in our relationship with Him means it has a healthy foundation (faith in the Word of God), a mutual exchange where both parties give and receive (action based on that faith), and a balance in the level of effort given to strengthen the relationship. When these are not enacted in our own personal relationships, someone will feel taken advantage of, and it may even lead to resentment.

Jesus put it this way after those in the synagogue at Capernaum murmured because He said He was the bread that came down from heaven, and He had just left a multitude who were there only for His miracles. They questioned, isn't that Joseph's son, and we know His father and mother. How can He say, "I came down from Heaven?" (see John 6:41-70). He declares His divinity and rebukes them, "...Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood you have no life in you." That is reciprocated love.

Let's entertain the thought that He admonished them for having no faith in His words yet had faith in their actions of performing the Law. Their faith was misplaced, and the relationship of everlasting life with the only One who could provide it was imbalanced. His New Testament, after His death, would usher in the Law of Liberty and

fulfillment of the Law, and they could not understand by the Spirit what He was there for.

Who should we listen to then? Let's consider that there are currently more than 200 Christian denominations in the U.S. and a whopping 45,000+ denominations around the world. So who's got it right? Who are false prophets sitting in the synagogue of sin, whether in a church, online, with our family members, in the arts and entertainment industry, the media, or anywhere there is a spirit of influence? Only the Spirit of God has it right, and 1 John 4 tells us how to ensure we are under a voice being led by His spirit. Test them by seeing if they openly confess their faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came down as an actual flesh-and-blood person. That He was from God and belongs to God. If they talk in the world's language, the world will love them. However, a person who has nothing to do with God will not listen to those under the Spirit of Truth and are under the spirit of deception.

God is love. If we love Him, we will experience a relationship with Him, but are we meeting the expectations of Jesus? Can we say, "I love God," and still hate our brothers and sisters? No. We must forgive them for what they do, strive to better ourselves and our relationship with Him, and thank Him daily for His grace and mercy that triumphs over all. He is a merciful King and must be granted all glory and honor as our first love because He first loved us!

Blessings and honor,
Angela Errett

"MY DEAR FRIENDS, DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU HEAR. CAREFULLY WEIGH AND EXAMINE WHAT PEOPLE TELL YOU. NOT EVERYONE WHO TALKS ABOUT GOD COMES FROM GOD. THERE ARE A LOT OF LYING PREACHERS LOOSE IN THE WORLD.

HERE'S HOW YOU TEST FOR THE GENUINE SPIRIT OF GOD. EVERYONE WHO CONFESSES OPENLY HIS FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST—THE SON OF GOD, WHO CAME AS AN ACTUAL FLESH-AND-BLOOD PERSON—COMES FROM GOD AND BELONGS TO GOD. AND EVERYONE WHO REFUSES TO CONFESS FAITH IN JESUS HAS NOTHING IN COMMON WITH GOD. THIS IS THE SPIRIT OF ANTICHRIST THAT YOU HEARD WAS COMING. WELL, HERE IT IS, SOONER THAN WE THOUGHT!

MY DEAR CHILDREN, YOU COME FROM GOD AND BELONG TO GOD. YOU HAVE ALREADY WON A BIG VICTORY OVER THOSE FALSE TEACHERS, FOR THE SPIRIT IN YOU IS FAR STRONGER THAN ANYTHING IN THE WORLD. THESE PEOPLE BELONG TO THE CHRIST-DENYING WORLD. THEY TALK THE WORLD'S LANGUAGE AND THE WORLD EATS IT UP. BUT WE COME FROM GOD AND BELONG TO GOD. ANYONE WHO KNOWS GOD UNDERSTANDS US AND LISTENS. THE PERSON WHO HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH GOD WILL, OF COURSE, NOT LISTEN TO US. THIS IS ANOTHER TEST FOR TELLING THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH FROM THE SPIRIT OF DECEPTION."

1 JOHN 4:1-6 (MSG)

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*That I may publish with the voice
of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy
wondrous works. Psalm 26:7*

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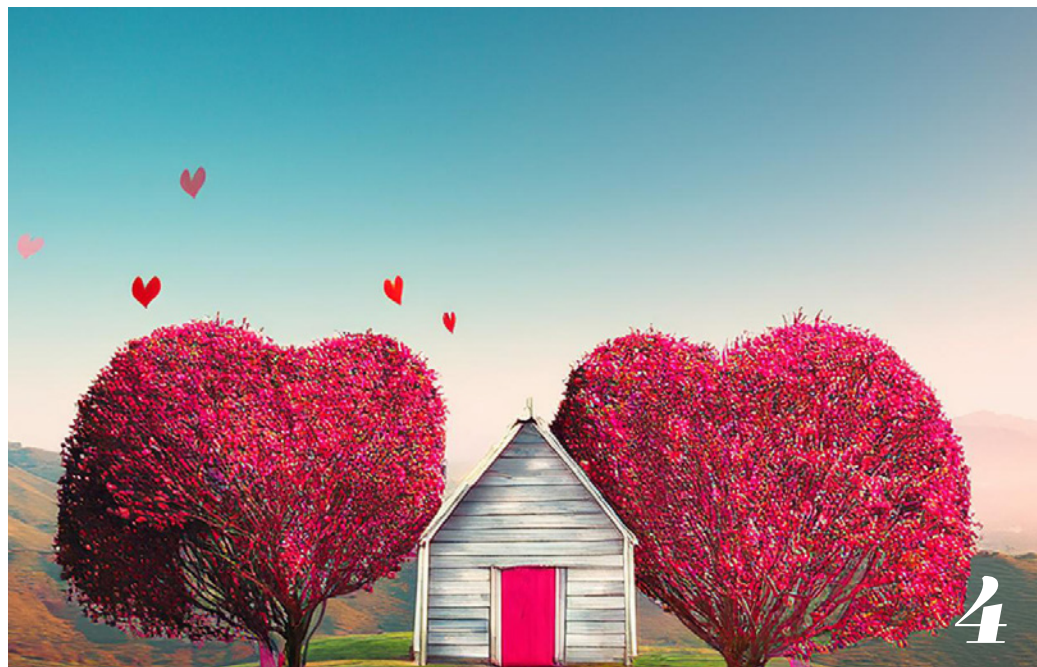
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Content in each issue is inspired. We do not know what will be on the pages until it is completed.

The Living Word, The Spoken Word, and The Written Word

Language is a rich and complex marvel that allows humans to communicate, express ideas, and share emotions. It is the basis of relationships in the world among humans and can be most fragile. The word “word” can embody various meanings that depend on its context, especially in the Bible. Consider The Living Word, The Written Word, and The Spoken Word. Understanding the distinctions between the use and meanings is crucial for comprehending the depth and richness of biblical revelation.

Living Word.....

The term “Living Word” refers to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is introduced as the Logos, the divine Word that became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). This concept emphasizes that Jesus is not merely a historical figure but the eternal, living presence of God. He embodies the fullness of God’s revelation and serves as the ultimate mediator between God and humanity.

Please note that The Written Word also has a living nature, as highlighted in Hebrews 4:12, where it is described as “living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword.” This passage underscores that the Word of God, manifested in Jesus, is dynamic and transformative, capable of penetrating the human heart and spirit. The Living Word is not confined to the pages of a book or to a limited definition. Still, it is an ever-present reality that speaks into the lives of believers, guiding, comforting, and challenging them.

God's Living Logo

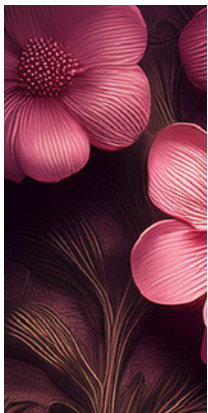
“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

John 1:14 (NIV)

Written Word

The “Written Word” refers to the Scriptures, the acknowledged texts of the Bible. These sacred writings are considered the inspired and authoritative record of God’s revelation. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to Timothy, asserts that “all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV). This affirmation underscores the divine origin and enduring relevance of the biblical texts.

The Written Word serves multiple purposes within the Christian faith. It provides a historical account of God’s interactions with humanity, offering lessons and principles for living a life that aligns with God’s will. It also preserves the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, ensuring that successive generations can access the foundational truths of the faith. Furthermore, the Written Word functions as a standard against which all doctrinal and ethical claims must be measured, safeguarding the integrity of the Christian message.



The Inheritance

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.”

1 Peter :3-4 (NIV)

Another way to understand the Written Word is from the viewpoint that it is a legal document. It fully records in public view promises made to individuals, nations, and the realm of humanity. It is the written last Will and Testament of the Most-High God, which became sanctioned at the death of the Son of Promise, Jesus!

Since it is impossible for the eternal God to die and leave an inheritance, He laid out the mechanics of such a transaction in a written document. A rock-solid artifact of who He is and His desire for people.

Spoken Word

The “Spoken Word” refers to the proclamation of God’s message through preaching, teaching, prophecy, and personal testimony. In the Bible, the Spoken Word is a powerful instrument for conveying God’s will and purposes. The prophets of the Old

Testament, for instance, were chosen vessels through whom God communicated His warnings, promises, and instructions. Though spoken in specific historical contexts, their words often carried timeless truths that resonate across the ages.

In the New Testament, the Great Commission stresses the importance of the Spoken Word in the mission of the church. Jesus charged His disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20 NIV). This directive highlights the significance of verbal proclamation in spreading the gospel and nurturing the faith of believers.

The Spoken Word is also intimately connected with the work of the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit. They began to speak in various tongues, declaring the wonders of God (see Acts 2:4-11). This event signifies the empowerment of believers to communicate God’s message effectively, transcending linguistic and cultural barriers. The Spirit continues to inspire and guide those who speak God’s Word, ensuring it remains relevant and impactful.

Interconnections and Implications

While the Living Word, Written Word, and Spoken Word represent distinct facets of divine communication, they are deeply interconnected. Jesus, the Living Word, is the ultimate revelation of God, and His life and teachings are recorded in the Written Word. The Written Word, in turn, provides the content and foundation for the Spoken Word, equipping believers to share the gospel and teach others.

These three dimensions of the Word of God complement and reinforce each other, creating a holistic framework for understanding and experiencing divine revelation. The Living Word brings God’s transformative presence into the world; the Written Word preserves the truth of God’s message for all generations; and the Spoken Word actively communicates that truth, making it accessible and applicable to people’s lives.

In conclusion, the distinctions between the Living Word, Written Word, and Spoken Word in the Bible reflect the comprehensive nature of God’s communication with humanity. Each dimension offers unique insights and plays a vital role in conveying the divine message. Together, they form a rich tapestry that reveals God’s character, purposes, and will, engaging believers in a deeper relationship with Him.

by Angela Errett

Love Your Neighbor

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:30-31 (NIV)



Do you have a favorite book? Or a favorite outfit, venue, or holiday? We all have favorites; however, when it comes to justice, equality, and love, and you are a believer in the finished works of Jesus Christ, we are not to show favoritism. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. The second of the great commandments. This instruction is found in Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37-39, Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:27, Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14, and the book of James. James' chapters one and two bring the passage to life and explain it so that anyone can understand it, whether a believer or not. A person is considered in right standing with God not by deeds alone but by their actions, along with faith in the Word of God: all of it.

THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT

James chapter two speaks to believers and explicitly states they "must not show favoritism." An example he gives is when a man comes to the meeting with fine clothes and a gold ring on, and a poor man wearing dirty clothes. Do you respect one over the other? Then you have decided and become "judges with evil thoughts." God is the only righteous Judge. He chose those seen as poor in the world to be filled with great faith in His works to inherit the promise of His kingdom because they love Him. But the rich of this world, not operating under the Word of God, have dishonored the poor and despised their existence. This is not a blanket statement but declares what the Lord knows as truth when He spoke to the rich young ruler (see Matthew 19:16-30, Mark 10:17-31, and Luke 18:18-30).

"But you have dishonored the poor. It is not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?" James 2:6-7 (NIV)

The poor are brought before the judgment seat by the rich. How one treats the rich is seen just as much as how the rich treat the poor. You are doing right before God if you keep the foundational "royal law" according to scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself." According to the Word of God, respect and honor takes no account and is no respecter of persons. It literally says it this way, if you favor or show partiality to the external condition of a man, "you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers."

No man can keep all of the law. If one fails at just one of them, he is guilty of all. If one says don't commit adultery and do not kill, yet commits

adultery, he is a transgressor and judged by the law.

Believers are to speak and act like someone who will not be judged by this world but by the mercy seat of God, "judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment," (James 2:13 NIV) every time.

THE FIRST GREAT COMMANDMENT

The first great commandment must be implemented for the second to occur.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." Mark 12:30 (NIV)

For true mercy, a person must be willing to love God and give ALL of the battles to Him. From money, station in life, struggles, proclivities, job, and everything under the Sun, He has made a way to endure for a time and overcome. But it is not for ought...a person must also love Him as He has loved us. Is it right to take the blessings bestowed upon us and keep taking and taking without offering something? We must offer a sacrifice of praise. Give ourselves as a living sacrifice, leaving our own fleshly desires, not doing anything out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but valuing others above ourselves in humility (see Mark 8:34; Philippians 2:3). It is more blessed to give than to receive (see Acts 20:35), yet all of this is void if someone performs these deeds without faith in His Word or has faith but has no deeds. (see James 2:14-17). Faith in His Word must cooperate with action to complete the two great commandments.

"You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone." James 2:24 (NIV)

Abraham believed in God and offered Isaac (see Genesis 22). Rahab believed in God and sheltered the spies, sending them in a different way (see Joshua 2:6). By faith, they received from God and took action. They didn't just take; they gave, and in so doing, they honored Him. It is a relationship of both parties participating, and that, in turn, reveals true love.

Be willing to participate in what the Lord wants for your life. Give yourself, your heart, soul, body, and mind, and be filled with the Spirit who was given as a gift to help us all perform the will of the Father. May you always feel God has love for you and bless and minister to the Lord your confession of love for Him. Amen.

by Jason DePoy




*Love Powers Our Faith
And Unlocks Our
Victory*

When we think of February, many of us think of the celebration of love during Valentine's Day. Billions will be spent on exchanging gifts as an expression of one's love for another. The premise of giving as an expression of love can be highlighted in 1 Corinthians 13:5 and John 3:16.

1 Corinthians 13:5 (NCV) states that "Love is not selfish," and John 3:16 demonstrates that the ultimate expression of love is giving. God gave His very best during a time when many didn't care about Him, believe in Him, or want anything to do with Him. He loved all the world's past, present, and future generations so much that He

was willing to be constant in the demonstration of His love and express it through giving. God not only gave His best, but He also gave Himself. When He gave His Son, Jesus, to pay the price for the sins of humanity, He was giving a piece of Himself since He (the Father) and Jesus (His Son) were One (John 17:21) so that mankind



“GOD LOVED THE WORLD SO MUCH THAT
he gave his one and only son
SO THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM MAY NOT BE
LOST, BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.”

John 3:16 (NCV)

would reap the benefit of that gift. Now, that is the God-kind of love.

Although the world may not fully understand the God-kind of love, those who decide to love like that prefer others and seek to put their needs and wants ahead of their own. Depending on our mood and situation, this can be easy or very challenging. Have you ever found yourself feeling good, full of joy, and seeking an opportunity to be kind and help someone with some extra resources you may have at the time? In those instances, it's easy (and even enjoyable) to put someone else's needs and desires ahead of yours. But how do we respond when money is tight, our schedules are jammed, and we feel like crawling into a hole and having a pity party? It's during those times our love walk is tested. Can we continue to walk in love like God does?

You see, since the God-kind of love is constant, is not selfish, and gives, we should strive to live our lives in a manner that emulates that. We should try to live our lives each day in a manner that puts others first and gives them our very best especially when it's inconvenient and even costs us to sacrifice some time, money, and

even our perspective so that they can benefit from the gift of our love.

Again, this is much easier said than done. As we follow Jesus, we spend our days here on earth growing and developing His love lifestyle.

Oh, but if we could only grasp the power available when we choose to live this way consistently. You see, Galatians 5:6 reveals that our faith works by love. That means that our ability to live by faith on this side of Heaven requires that we walk in biblical love.

In other words, love powers our faith. It's what causes our faith to work. Romans 1:17 tells us that “the just shall live by faith.” God calls us to navigate our lives by the power of faith. Faith is not only just believing in God and believing His Word, but it's also acting on the Word of God to release the power that's in that Word and bring that Word to pass. Did you catch that?

The Word of God is alive and full of power. When we choose to not only believe that Word but also be doers of it, to put it into practice, and to make it our lifestyle, our faith releases the power of the Word of God to bring it to pass.

Faith can be powerful, and God gave it to us to help us overcome

the problems we face in life. 1 John 5:4 tells us that as God's people, we are designed and destined to overcome the challenges of this world; however, that verse goes on to say our faith gives us victory.

We see several instances in the Bible where Jesus explained that it was ‘according to their faith’ that they received their healing and victory. Notice He didn't say that it was according to His desire, His power, or even His deity that caused the power of God to be released into their lives. It was their faith!

Faith can be powerful and it can completely change your life, but it's how we choose to love (prefer) others that determines how powerful and effective our faith can be.


Love is the power source of our faith, and since victory in this life requires faith, and faith is powered by love, then we can see that our love walk plays a significant role in how much victory we'll get to enjoy.

This is so significant that I believe it's necessary to state it again but in a more simplistic way.

***Our victory requires our faith.
Our faith is powered by love.***

Therefore, our victory is determined by how we walk in love.

Not coincidentally, though, we



need victory the most when we are tempted to be the most selfish, withhold aid and assistance from others, and withdraw and isolate to focus on our own problems.

We see this demonstrated in 1 Kings 17. There was a drought and famine in the land, and the Lord instructed Elijah to go to Zarephath, where He had instructed a widow to supply him with food. When Elijah arrived, he saw her at the town gate gathering sticks and asked her for a drink of water and a piece of bread. Her response is very telling. She explains that she doesn't have any bread and was gathering a few sticks to build a fire to make one last cake for her and her son from the last of the flour and oil that she had; after that, her expectation was that they would both die from starvation.

Now, most of us have plenty of problems and difficult situations in our lives, but I would venture a guess that very few of us have found ourselves in this dire of a circumstance.

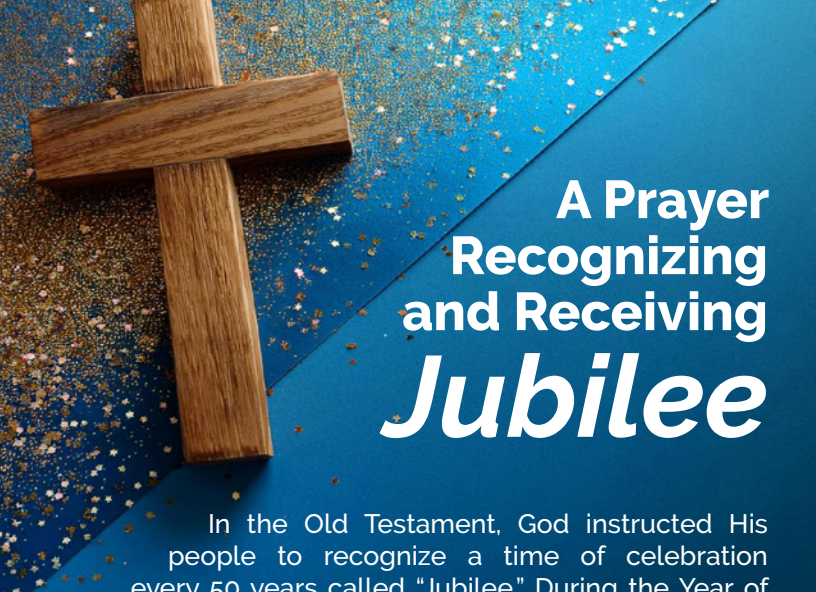
Based on her response, she's clearly lost all hope, and her perspective is that this is her and her son's last meal, and they're about to die. Would you agree that she needs victory in this moment? Since she requires victory, we know that she needs faith based on 1 John 5:4. Also, it's clear that she needs her faith to be powerful and effective to overcome this seemingly impossible situation. Therefore, she must walk in love and prefer others for their benefit. But she's afraid and in self-preservation mode, trying to hoard what little bit she has left. That's not love; therefore, there's no faith at work in her life, so victory isn't possible as long as she remains in this mindset.

Elijah recognizes this and addresses it. He needs to get her out of fear and self-preservation and into faith, so he instructs her to go ahead and make the meal but makes one minor adjustment; give him a little bit first. Notice the word "first." By getting her to put others first, he gets her to resist the fear and operate in love. Now, he also needs to get her to change her perspective and perceived outcome so she can be in faith. To do so, he speaks a Word from God that not only presents a different outcome than the one she was planning but also makes faith available since Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. Elijah

tells her that if she resists the fear and chooses to put the prophet first, then God will multiply the flour and oil. This combination of putting others first (love) and believing that God could change her expected outcome so she'd respond to the Word of God (faith) would cause the power of God to be released and manifested in her life. She did just that, and her act of love and sacrificial obedience caused the Word of God to come to pass, and she, Elijah, and her house did eat for many days. Talk about a complete turnaround! This victory stemmed from her choosing to overcome the fear that caused her to operate in selfishness and to walk in love by acting on the Word of God and putting someone's needs first.

I can relate to the widow woman in this passage. I experienced something similar during Hurricane Milton this past October. Typically, our family chooses to hunker down and ride out the storm. However, this particular Hurricane was predicted to be a Category 5, and the eye of the storm was set to make landfall right over our neighborhood. As you can imagine, fear tried to flood our hearts and minds with images of death and destruction all around us. For this particular storm, we decided as a family that we should evacuate to the panhandle of Florida. Stores around us were running out of supplies, gas stations were out of fuel, and we had a 4-6 hour drive on jammed-packed highways to get out of the path of this hurricane.

Thankfully, we had prepared with several gas cans of fuel, a generator, and an extra supply of food. When we returned home, we were beyond grateful to the Lord that our home didn't sustain any damage when so many around us had experienced devastation. Even after our electricity returned, many of our friends and neighbors were without power for a week or more. This means they needed fuel to keep their generators running (if they had one), but gasoline was hard to come by, and lines were hours and hours long. The temptation was great to hoard the resources that we had. The doubts, fears, and questions flooded our minds. What if our electricity went back out and we needed our generator? If it did, we'd also need the extra cans of fuel that we had stored up. What if the stores didn't re-stock, and we needed all our

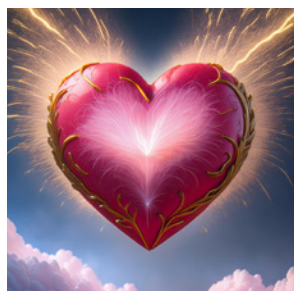


A Prayer Recognizing and Receiving Jubilee

food? I was stunned at how strong that temptation was for us to be selfish and stay in self-preservation mode.

Thankfully, we had been walking with the Lord long enough to recognize and resist this tactic of the adversary and that we needed to do the opposite of how we felt. We resisted those thoughts, images, and emotions. We chose to lend out our generator to a family that needed one, along with our cans of fuel, to a couple of families so they could keep their generators running. We made space in our fridges/freezers for a family who needed to store some food to keep it from spoiling since their electricity hadn't been restored, and we invited another family to do their laundry at our house. October is still extremely hot in Florida, so we asked our daughter's teenage friends to hang out, sleep over, and shower since we had air conditioning. I don't share this to brag about what we did but rather as an attempt to paint a picture of how we, too, were tempted to focus on ourselves and our own needs in a desperate time and had to overcome the fear and thoughts of self-preservation so we could do our best to demonstrate the God-kind of love with the resources that God had given to us.

God has designed love to be the source of power to our faith, which causes the Word of God to come to pass in our lives. We can't afford to dilute love to a fickle emotion that waivers based on circumstances. God is love (1 John 4:8), and love chooses to put the needs of others first, even when it's inconvenient. It's not always easy, but it is always possible with God, and that type of love consistently working in our lives will bring transformation and lasting change in our lives and in the communities around us.



What would our world look like if everyone chose the biblical lifestyle of love? We'd all be walking in victory and living our best lives possible. I believe that is God's will for each of us, and it sounds like Heaven to me.

In the Old Testament, God instructed His people to recognize a time of celebration every 50 years called "Jubilee." During the Year of Jubilee, the Lord directed the people to neither sow nor reap their farmland and leave it fallow for the year to rest and rejuvenate. In addition, they were instructed by God to forgive any debts they had toward others and free any slaves so they could return to their families. During the Year of Jubilee, the people were also to return any property to its original family owners so that it remained in that family's lineage. This is an exciting time to be in the Kingdom because 2025 is the Year of Jubilee! Most people only experience one of these in their lifetime, and this year is the year! As with anything in the Kingdom, we must receive God's promises by faith, so we at **Glory Magazine** wanted to lead you in a simple prayer to prepare your hearts to be full of faith and expectation of what God wants to do for you in this special Year of Jubilee.

Would you pray this with us?

"Heavenly Father, I turn to you during this very special time in our history when we recognize the Year of Jubilee. You are a God of design and purpose, and I know that everything you instruct me to do has a Divine Purpose attached. Just as you instructed Your people in the beginning, I, too, want to prepare my heart for all that You have designated for me during this year of celebration. Just as Your people had to leave their farmland fallow, I ask You to help me lay down the busyness and toiling that causes distractions in my life so that I can receive the sabbath rest that You have designed for me to receive. As Your people forgave their debts against others, I ask You to help me lay down every ounce of bitterness, resentment, unforgiveness, worry, and weight so that my heart can be clean and renewed, open and receptive to receive Your Word in greater measure this year and receive a greater harvest of revelation, peace, joy, power, and purpose like never before. And Heavenly Father, as Your people set free those that were enslaved to them, I release those that I believed owed me something and were indebted to me. You are my Savior, Healer, and Provider, and I rely on You to take care of me. So, during this Year of Jubilee, I empty myself of everything hindering Your Will in my life. I ask You for Rest, Recovery, Reward, and Revival in me, my family, my community, my country, and the World. All for Your Glory. In Jesus' Name, I believe I receive it, Amen!"

By Al Tucker

REVEALING God's Glory



Above: Mingo Presbyterian Church, Mingo Flats, Randolph County; right: Uncle Arthur & Auntie Beat in the front yard (front row) of the four row houses in the late 1960's

As I remember, the anticipation was overwhelming for my three brothers and me as we rode to my Auntie Beat's house, wondering if that wonderful aroma of fresh homemade bread would permeate the air as we entered their tiny row house. Both my parents had several siblings, so we had lots of aunts and uncles, all of whom were close relatives who lived in nearby villages when I was a young boy growing up in rural South West England. Fortunately, my dad owned a car as part of his business. Otherwise, we would have had to travel by bus or train. Dad's car allowed us to visit relatives on a Saturday or Sunday. Of all the relatives, Auntie Beat's was always our favorite destination as she and Uncle Arthur always made such a fuss over us. Our visits would always involve staying for mid-afternoon tea time, during which

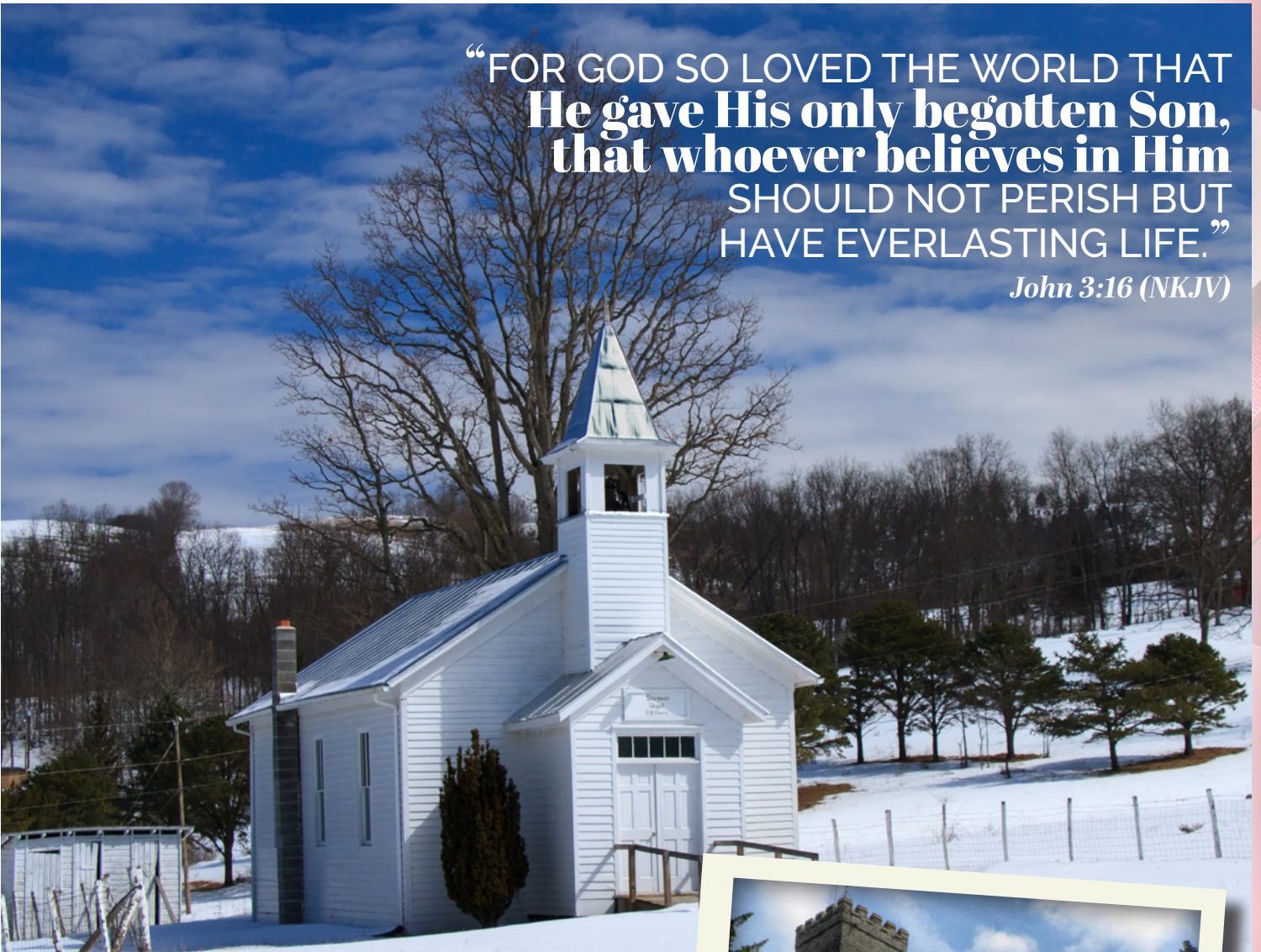
my aunt would prepare tiny sandwiches for the adults and some sweets (desserts)



for the boys, but only after some homemade bread, which she knew we loved. My mum often cautioned us not to ask for an end piece. We didn't have to because, with a twinkle in her eye and the biggest, kindest smile, she would always say, "Who wants an end piece?" She knew what we craved, and we would, often in unison, blurt out, "I do, I do!" Smothering our warm piece of

“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT
He gave His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him
SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT
HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.”

John 3:16 (NKJV)



Above: Solomon's Chapel, Pendleton County; Right: St. Paul de Leon Church, Staverton, Devon County, England



bread with delicious Devonshire (clotted) cream and a dab or two of homemade strawberry jam, we were momentarily carried away into Auntie Beat's delectable land of ambrosia. I can see her now, sitting there smiling, with a knife in hand, just waiting to ask who wants another piece. She would keep offering end pieces until only one or two tiny, rectangular white chunks of bread were left, much to my mum's chagrin. I don't know who was the happiest; Ted, Bill, Derek, and me, or if Auntie Beat and Uncle Arthur were, who so loved to spoil us. Years later, I realized what we experienced was Auntie Beat and Uncle Arthur's form of *extravagant love* for us.

They were poor economically, much poorer than my family and the rest of our relatives. Uncle Arthur was a farmhand, primarily summer work, and he did odd jobs for villagers. They lived in a meager government row house called a Council House in a tiny village,

one they rarely left as there was little money for any extravagance in those difficult post-World War II days. But when Ted and Jessie visited with their boys, it was their opportunity to pour out their love and affection in a special way. I now understand why Mum cautioned us not to eat too much, as she didn't want to cause any hardship to them. My mum was so wise as she also knew that they were thrilled to be able to put on a show for us.



I only saw my favorite Auntie Beat one more time after leaving England in 1954. That was twenty-four years later, in 1978, when I took Liva back home to visit where I spent my childhood. It was grand! We visited all my relatives who welcomed us so graciously. But the highlight was visiting my Auntie Beat and Uncle Arthur, who had recently moved into a small one-bedroom cottage with a brand-new indoor toilet. They were so proud of what we consider an everyday necessity. Not them, who by then were well into their 70s; this was a luxury in every respect. To our silent amusement, dear Uncle Arthur was so proud to demonstrate it by flushing it several times. As Auntie Beat was ailing at the time, recovering from a stroke and early dementia, it was left to Uncle Arthur to fix tea time. While there was no homemade bread, he had been to the baker's shop and must have bought some of everything there. It was a feast of delicious baked goods. He was so proud of the extravagant table he had set before us, as was Auntie Beat sitting there with that same twinkle in her eye and beautiful smile. How wonderful it was to experience them pouring out their love, their *extravagant love*, on us a quarter of a century later. The rest of the story of our visit is at the end of my testimony. But now, let's take a closer look at this concept of *extravagant love* and its recent impact on my walk with Jesus.

If you follow my testimonies, you know I belong to a group of Christian men from various churches in Upshur County who call ourselves the Band of Brothers. We meet weekly at 6:30 a.m. to study the Word and call it Fellowship Friday. We have used Max Lucado's book *They Walk With God* for the past few months as our study guide. Using his words, it is about "40 Bible characters who inspire us." As only Max can do, he shares how God shaped the lives of these mostly simple, everyday people for His purpose and then explores how their stories can be used by God to help guide our own paths of serving Him. I find the stories to be powerful influences on me, and I am so grateful to study them with a group of men with such biblical insight. Recently, we studied the story of Mary, who "*took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard (a perfume), anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil*" (John 12:3 NKJV). Max and various Bible commentaries explain how expensive a jar of this perfume would be in today's money, a year's wages. The disciples who were present didn't get it as usual. They considered Mary's act foolish and exorbitant, with Judas even admonishing her: "Why was this expensive oil not sold and given to the

poor?” As if Judas cared for the poor anyway, he soon would betray Jesus for far less. Jesus promptly rebuked them, “*Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me*” (Matthew 26:10 RSV). Jesus knew that Mary had taken the most valuable thing she had, something she had saved, for the right moment to demonstrate her love for Him. He knew that whenever He spoke about loving God, Mary was listening.

“Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Matthew 22:37-39 (NKJV)

Jesus knew that Mary was living out His greatest commandment by doing something unique and extravagant for Him, not irrational, rash, or unwise, as the disciples thought. This was a divine appointment for Mary, an opportunity to show how much Jesus meant to her and how much she loved Him! I love how Max, in his book, emphasizes ‘we all have opportunities for extravagant gestures’ where we will have an opportunity to show how much we love Jesus by pouring out our affection on someone else. He calls this type of opportunity a divine appointment. He writes, “Seize it, don’t miss it.” Mary didn’t! She didn’t care what anyone might say; she grabbed that jar of oil and went about pouring her love for Jesus on Him. We should all be so bold, so extravagant!

This story resonated with me on several accounts. It made me think of my Auntie Beat and Uncle Arthur, who were very poor, but they always made our visits as fit for a king as possible. It took Mary’s story to make me realize, in later years, that they were being extravagant towards us because they loved us so much. That aroma of freshly baked bread from Auntie Beat’s kitchen left such an impression on me that it still lingers today. Whenever I smell bread fresh from an oven, just for a moment, I am reminded of a time 75+ years ago when my precious Auntie Beat and her excited nephews filled with anticipation. I cherish that memory, and I always will. I wonder if, times after Jesus’ resurrection, whenever the disciples would get a whiff of the oil that Mary anointed Jesus with, they were reminded of the time when she poured out a jar on Jesus? And I also wonder if they finally realized Mary’s extravagant act wasn’t foolish after all. I want to think so.

Mary’s story has profoundly affected how I perceive the Bible, the greatest story of *extravagant love* ever written, and how it impacts my walk with Jesus. The timing of



Left: Moon over an Upshur County sunset; from top: Historic Pringle Tree, Upshur County from the late 1960’s; Canaan Valley Wildlife Refuge, Tucker County; Pastoral Southern Pennsylvania scene, Susquehanna County

that lesson was perfect as I began to think of growth areas for 2025. Since I was saved, two scripture verses have played a huge role in my journey. The first is, *“Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. All glory to him, both now and forever! Amen”* (2 Peter 3:18 NIV). In times past, parents often would have their child stand against a wall and mark how tall he or she was and then repeat the process to see how much growth took place. Peter’s words tell us we must do something similar regarding our spiritual growth. We should routinely measure our growth to determine where more focus is needed to grow in “God’s grace” and in the “knowledge of Jesus.” Why? Scripture tells us we must. What must we do then? *“If ye love me, keep my commandments”* (John 14:15 KJV). I don’t know about you, but that’s very clear to me, there is no wiggle room.

Like Mary, I try to pay attention and listen to what Jesus is saying. I’m always looking for that takeaway or nugget from a sermon, a Bible Study, a devotional reading, etc., that can help me grow. I can only work on one or two things at a time, and when I do, I can often feel and see the growth taking place. This has to be an ongoing process, just like an athlete prepares for events. There are no shortcuts to growth; it requires dedicated time and effort. Ask yourself, “How did I grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus in 2024?” Are you satisfied that you lived His greatest commandment and the second one that requires pouring *extravagant love* on others, not ourselves? Do you think God is satisfied? How you answer these questions can be helpful to how you approach 2025. That is if you are serious about growing. Just like athletes, get yourself a coach or personal trainer. I personally recommend Jesus (see John 15:5) so that nothing impedes your development.

“If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5 (NIV)

My second overarching verse is from James 1: 22-25 (NIV). *“Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says...not forgetting...but doing it... and be blessed in what (you) do.”* Mary didn’t merely listen to Jesus’ words; she acted on them and was blessed for it: Jesus said, *“Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her”* (Mark 14:9 NIV). I love this verse because it reminds me that being a Christian isn’t passive. It is about putting love into action: It’s about doing, it’s about repetition, it’s about assessing how effective you are and adjusting. Simply,

it is about extravagantly loving God and others...every day. Whenever I find a biblical takeaway, I try to apply that verse or piece of scripture to my life by doing it. Otherwise, it is just in one ear and out the other. I have found that applying His word to my life is the only effective way for me to grow in my walk with Jesus. This is nothing more than the definition of obedience, hearing, and doing. The rewarding thing about being obedient is you get to experience God working through you. If that isn’t *extravagant love*, I don’t know what is!

Recently, around the start of the New Year, another scripture verse, *“Behold, I will do a new thing,”* (see Isaiah 43:19) came to my attention. Initially, it didn’t register when used in a New Year’s devotional I read. Then, on Sunday, January 12, we had a speaker presenting his first-ever message/sermon at a morning worship service. He began with Isaiah’s words, “I am doing a new thing.” He did a nice job explaining what that verse meant to him. The next day, I opened the first of the five devotionals I am currently reading. You guessed it, it was about Isaiah 43:19, the NIV version this time: *“See, I am doing a new thing!”* The more I read the devotional message, the more I felt like God was saying to me, “Behold Al, I need you to do a new thing.” I think God likes the word “behold.” He uses it 1,298 times in the King James Version to say PAY ATTENTION. Through prayer, my Bible reading, while at church, during our Fellowship Friday meetings, and during my daily walks with Jesus, I am trying to discern what, if any, new thing He has for me to do.

It is an exciting time trying to discern how I’m growing in grace and in the knowledge of my Lord and Savior and how effective I am at pleasing Him and bringing Him glory, all to try to find what new thing He has for me. I think about my wasted pre-saved years being indifferent to what God wanted of me. I believe back then, if someone asked me, “Did I follow Jesus,” I’m sure I would have answered, yes, absolutely! If the follow-up question was “how?” What a gotcha question that is! If I had been truthful, I would have quickly realized that I wasn’t and that I had kept Him in the background of my life. How little did I know? You can’t live a selfish, worldly life and be a faithful Christian simultaneously. I have learned that God not only extravagantly loves me but also loves you the same amount and desires a close relationship with each of us. That’s why God sent Jesus to die for us and raise Him from the dead to give us eternal life. Jesus affirms that act of *extravagant love*: *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love”* (John 15:9 NIV). Now that I am saved, I want Him to work through me so He can share His *extravagant love*



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Photo © Backyard Photography, Alan Tucker

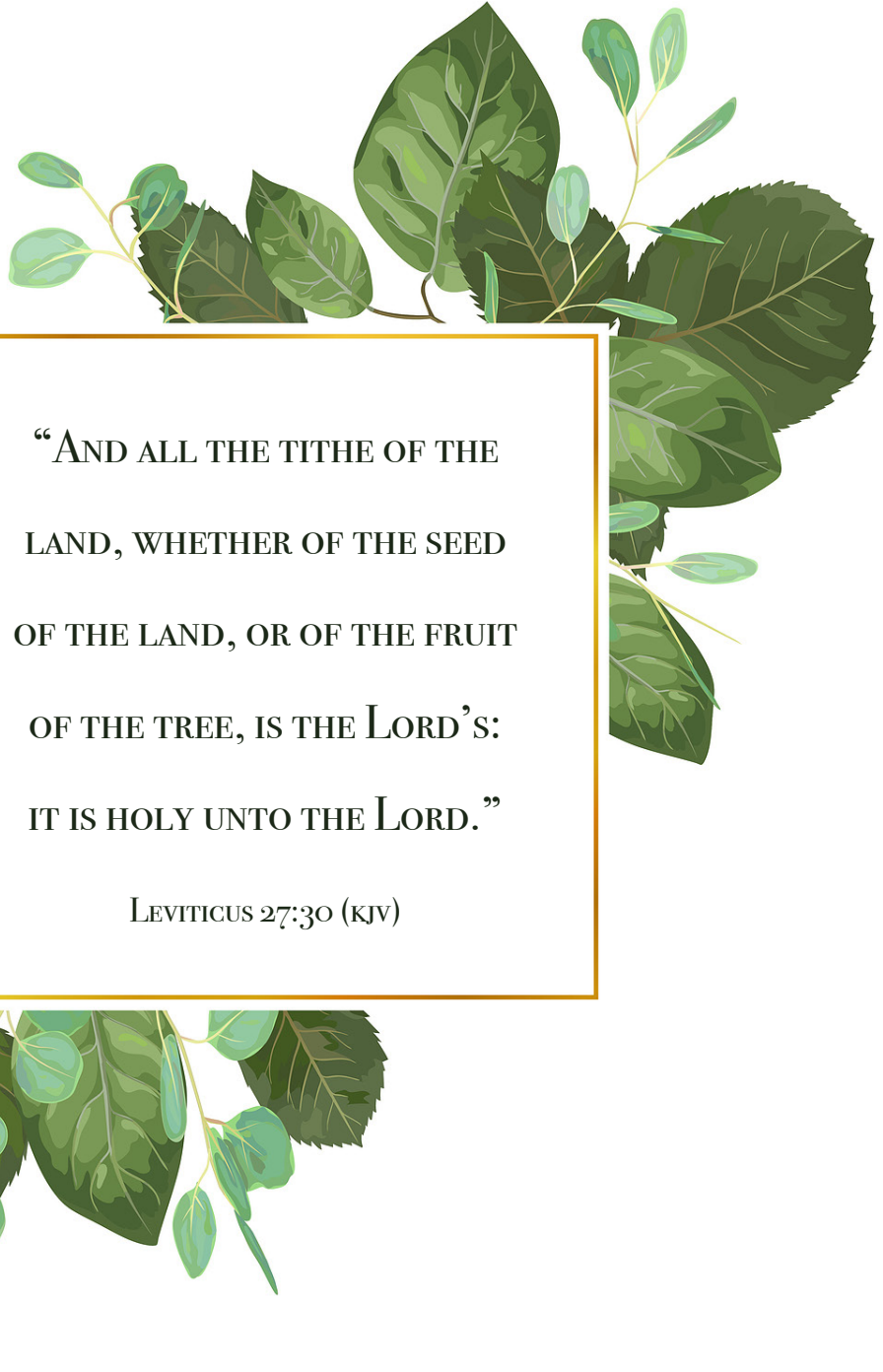


with others. I'm hoping my new thing is that he wants me to do things more extravagantly on His behalf. That's what I plan to focus on until I hear otherwise.

Before I close, here is the rest of my Auntie Beat and Uncle Arthur's *extravagant love* story. Uncle Arthur was the bell ringer for his village church. Every Sunday morning for decades, no matter the weather, he would walk a narrow lane to the country church to ring the bells, alerting the villagers it was time to come and worship. In 1980, Liva and I revisited Uncle Arthur, and he took us on that stroll down the lane and through a little gate into the churchyard. In the middle of the graveyard stood a beautiful old church much larger than I expected. For ten centuries, there was a church located there. This one was last restored in 1744. Before entering, we stopped to pay our respects to my dear Auntie Beat, who had passed away a year prior. Then we moved on and entered the bell tower, where he lovingly discussed his routine. What a simple gesture, yet extravagant in its own way, that he performed for decades, and how those church bells had to have been such a comforting sound to all who could hear them ring and the message they conveyed: 'Come start your Sabbath by worshiping Me, and I will refresh you.' Those bells still ring the same loving message on God's behalf today as they have for centuries. Those who truly love Him and put Him first travel their own path to their church to worship Him and praise Him for the *extravagant love* He pours out upon us.

God is still inviting people to come to not only worship Him but also to serve Him by loving others. And I firmly believe that Mary must have also thought that we should do so extravagantly as there is nothing indifferent about loving and serving "with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind." If you are not saved and desire to have someone extravagantly love you from now and throughout eternity, ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins and believe in Him so that you can have everlasting life. Do that with haste, and then find a Christian friend or a pastor to ask for their help so you can begin your walk with Jesus. Do that with a willing heart, and you will start the most *extravagantly loving* journey imaginable. You will become a Child of God and a friend of Jesus, who will send His Holy Spirit to help you. I pray that blessing for you.

Until next time, Godspeed, Al



“AND ALL THE TITHE OF THE
LAND, WHETHER OF THE SEED
OF THE LAND, OR OF THE FRUIT
OF THE TREE, IS THE LORD’S:
IT IS HOLY UNTO THE LORD.”

LEVITICUS 27:30 (KJV)

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