

THE DOOR OF HOPE

“I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know you have little strength, yet you have kept My Word and have not denied My Name...” (Revelation 3:8)

THE DOOR TO HOPE

I've cried so many tears, Lord... when will this suffering end?
I need you, Lord, to help me understand... and help me mend.
My heart is bruised and battered; I lay here bare before Your Eyes.
I've been left for dead by those who claim to know you as The Christ.

So destitute and lonely, fearing shadows in the wind...
The doors that I have opened, have left me pain and bound to sin.
I know Your Ways are higher, that there is a purpose and a plan;
So I offer my broken heart, reach down and take it from my hand.

Remold it for Your Purpose, give it Life that I may live...

To testify to Mercy... unencumbered by my sins.

My soul aches for understanding, for a simple loving touch...

To behold Agape Love ... to feel the joy of simple trust.

Unlock the door to understanding, Lord; give me the key that opens souls;

Let me see beyond the Veil... walk me through the Door of Hope.

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Doors, they're everywhere. Some are wide open, some are locked, but doors exist for one purpose... so that we can walk through them. God places doors before us, and so does Satan, the enemy of our soul. Which doors we choose to enter will determine our final destiny, and how much pain or peace we will have along the way. Before us, we have doors that lead to opportunity, to romance, to success, to personal empowerment; doors that promise a world without pain, doors that promise financial security and the accolades of men. There are revolving doors, automatic doors, doors that require a pass-key, doors that lead to elevators, and then there are the doors that lead men straight to hell. When we look at doors from God's perspective, they can become gateways of opportunity that serve to launch us to higher levels of faith, building character and integrity along the way.

There isn't a day that goes by where people don't walk through some sort of door. Many people that claim to be Christians – that is, having accepted “the Christ” – along with those who have rejected Him, are headed to the elevator to hell and they won't even know it until they get to the ground level. If you wonder how that's possible - that “Christians” could be going

to hell - just read on; there's proof right in the Bible. It's all about looking beyond the veil, and finding that Door of Hope that leads to Unconditional Love. Once we find it, we need to have the courage to walk through it without succumbing to the fear of men.

Looking back over the last twenty years of my life in trying to serve the Lord, I've had many doors of opportunity. Walking through some nearly killed my flesh, while others nearly condemned my soul to hell for an eternity, although I didn't know it at the time. As I pondered the doors I walked through out of ignorance over the years, God reminded me of a recurring dream I would have month after month; year after year for several years. It began when I wasn't "saved", and remained in my mind even as I sought the Lord. I didn't know it then, but God was revealing my failed attempts at finding unconditional love through false doctrines, through personal relationships, walking through thresholds of darkness that I thought would bring me happiness and contentment. I would dream the same dream on and off for years. This dream involved mirrors, like you would find in an amusement park fun-house. I remember it vividly, because the same dream would always occur right before another life-

changing event took place in my life. I didn't know what it meant at the time, but I knew God was trying to convey some message to me.

I remember a long corridor of mirrored doors, that had a hallway no wider than about three or four feet. It felt very narrow, almost claustrophobic, because each door would reflect the other, and whatever was in the middle of them. As I stood at the entrance of the corridor, I could see a dozen doors, perhaps more, to my left; the same number of doors to my right. Straight ahead, about 20 yards, was a single mirrored door. Under each door was a measure of light, in varying intensity from the other. As I walked toward them, when I would reach the point of approaching the door, or just as I tried to open each unlocked door, the lights would go out. Within each door that I successfully opened, there would be utter nothingness. Pitch black, eerily cold and total darkness. It felt like a bad Twilight Zone episode.

In my dream, I would calmly go to each door, one after the other, in nearly perfect succession. I would approach them first to the left, then to the right, and back again. Each door would have a more intense light

emanating from the bottom of the door frame. I would get to a point, after repeating the motions in each successive dream, where I would only need to touch the handle to the door, before I would notice the light going out. Other doors, I wouldn't even have to open, but with the motion of my hand, it would open anyway... to pitch black nothingness. With each successive dream, I would find myself stepping ahead in the 20 yard corridor, and I would invariably open another four or five doors before I would awaken to the frustration of its interpretation.

By the third dream, I didn't even have to touch the handles, I would just walk by the doors and the lights would go out, blinking one to another, then to another, as I passed by them. Oddly enough, each time this same dream would occur, I would begin the dream exactly where I left off in the previous one. I was coming close to the one door at the end of the corridor. After the fifth dream, still not having had reached that last door, I begged the Lord to stop the frustration. Abruptly, the dreams stopped, and I never had another one... until I had a conversation with someone about twelve years later. I was in the middle of telling this person "how to walk the walk of faith". When I think back at how ignorant I was, and the grace

God gave me because of my naiveté, I laugh at myself. But God knew my heart. He knew I was only trying to lead this person in the right direction, toward His Throne of Grace. When I went to bed that night, after talking to this person for hours, God gave me the same dream. I used to call it my “doors of horror.” All this dream meant to me at that time, was that my life was an exercise in futility, and I was constantly making the wrong decisions. Thinking the light was an indicator of a right move, only to find that it led to darkness and confusion. I didn’t understand why God would bring it up again after trying to “get someone saved”. It would take me a few more years to discover it’s meaning, and just how prophetic these “doors” would be in relationship to my many storms in life.

In my sixth and final dream, I found myself in the middle of that same dreaded corridor. This time I was prepared. I was bound and determined to get to the last door at the end, but in my dream, the satisfaction of that illusion was short-lived. Instead of the peaceful stride I’d had approaching the same doors in previous dreams, my legs were now like dead weights dragging my body along; I became exhausted. It felt as if I were stepping into cement that was hardening with each step, yet it never solidified. The

end of the corridor kept moving, as one would see an object move further away in a tunnel. It was very frustrating. Finally, I got on my knees and prayed, right there in my dream. I begged the Lord to get me to the end of the corridor, because I had a sense that this particular door, was the door to wisdom and understanding. If only I could get to the end, I reasoned, and bypass all the wrong doors, I would finally see the “light”, so to speak. Little did I know at the time, how prophetic that mindset was to become.

The Lord answered my prayer. Immediately, I was whisked away to the end of the corridor, and the light that shone under the door frame was indeed, brilliantly bright; much brighter than the others. I reached for the handle to open the door, and it appeared to be locked. Struggling out of frustration, I finally jostled it open. Just as it opened, I woke up. Two more years were to pass before I discovered what was on the other side of that door. God had to prepare my heart for what I was not yet ready to receive.

Satan will do everything in his power to prevent us from opening up the right doors in our life. His goal is simple: to slowly and methodically ebb away at our psyches so that we will quit trying to open the doors that reveal

wisdom. He plays tricks on our minds, placing light under doors that we assume are pathways to righteousness and security and tranquility; when in fact they are illusions in his amusement park “fun house”. The enemy of our souls toys with us, and uses our ignorance, innocence, intellect or just plain arrogance to lead us to frustration and utter darkness. He knows that the longer we search for wisdom, the harder we push through to perseverance, Eternal Wisdom will reveal Himself. To prevent that from happening too soon, Satan provides us with flashy lights that flicker on and off under doors that promise abundance, prosperity and a life with no ills or consequences. He knows that if he can cater to what our flesh wants, we will be like moths to a flood light. He gives the illusion that the wisdom we seek is just within reach, but always beyond our grasp. The mirrors reflect back and forth to make it appear that the door to True Wisdom is unattainable, always moving further from our reach; when in fact, it is as close as the beats of our own hearts. Our human natures and fleshly desires cannot resist the seduction of Satan’s pleasures, but if we choose to enter a threshold in which darkness prevails, we soon discover that it only leads to storms that try to destroy the very core of who we are. Whether we walk through those doors out of ignorance, or arrogance, the

consequences are always the same. Though we may experience temporary pleasures for a time, we are always left wanting more. Satan's tactics are subtle, not obvious. He knows, based on our actions and interactions toward others, which door to open first. He knows that we will be drawn to others, if he can just get us to open the first one that appears to have the right shade of light emitting from the bottom of the door frame. Once we turn the knob, he presents the illusion of the pleasures we seek, when in reality, it's nothing but utter darkness, leading to a black hole of confusion and nothingness. Once we enter in, he allows the illusion to continue, until he decides to turn out the light and lock the door. From the beginning of time, he's tried to deceive, and has been successful ... to a point. That point would be the Cross.

God finally revealed what was behind the last door in my dream, but not before I had learned more valuable lessons in the desert of affliction where His Sword divided my flesh from His Spirit. God doesn't reveal anything before we're ready, before we've been tested and tried in the fire; before we've been cut by the Sword of His Word, lest we move in our spiritual ignorance and delay His plan by our own devices.

The lessons I would learn were many, and my heart prayed that prayer above many times, mostly when became misunderstood by those I cared for; the ones nestled comfortably within the Christian community, the ones who were supposed to understand. I work with several non-profit ministries, all very different in their approach, but all going in the same direction; eternity. One day, I had a conversation with someone who, out of nowhere and for no good reason, lashed out at me. I had apparently done something “too good”. I remember laughing because I thought it was a joke, but this person was quite serious. I had given 300% to a project we were working on, and I finished well before deadline. God had made a way for me to finish my part early, but unbeknownst to me, my efforts translated to making someone else look unprepared. I had upset the status quo; I didn’t follow the plan; I raised the bar too high. Even though the project received rave reviews, and this person was fully prepared, I got hurled with insults and my motives were questioned, for simply doing the right thing with excellence. I learned some valuable lessons on how to react in humility instead of pronouncing judgment. I learned that the enemy will stop at nothing to cause strife, for the sole purpose of dividing and

conquering. When God is in the middle of doing a great work that will have an eternal impact - leading souls to Christ - the enemy will use whatever “door of ignorance” we allow to remain open to his best advantage. When I walked through that door, I got blind-sided by the arrows of others insecurities and spiritual arrogance and they pierced right through my soul. It hit a spot that revealed my own insecurities, and while that’s incredibly painful while you’re in the middle of it, it’s always a good thing. It causes us to grow and keeps us clinging to The Vine. This was a case where I was sincerely just trying to offer the unconditional love of Christ the only way I knew how, and it back-fired miserably. I chose to grow from what I learned, but after the falling out, the work of this particular ministry stopped altogether. I learned that sometimes God puts people in each others’ lives for a season and a reason, and it’s never about us; it’s always about the Master’s Divine Plan.

When I became a Christian, I took very seriously the verse in Philippians 2:3 that says we are to esteem others higher than ourselves. Hard as I tried to live by that edict, it would always come back to bite me in the bum at some point or another. It reduced me to tears many more times than I

can recount. I thought about giving up, but I could never seem to harden my heart enough to guard against the pain. With so much disappointment following that precept, I knew I had to have misunderstood it's true meaning somewhere along way. I reasoned that if I only searched for the key to understanding that principle, that my life would be so much easier. My prayers from that day forward were for discernment and wisdom so that I could eliminate the pangs of rejection. Elimination was the goal, but God never eliminates that which will cause us to grow in Him.

One day, God revealed wisdom as I pondered Philippians 2:3, ***“Let nothing be done in strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mine, let each esteem others better than themselves.” (KJV)*** It wasn't that I misunderstood the concept, it was that I found myself attracted to people who didn't know what Real Love looked like. Real Love is benevolent, even when you least deserve it. When you don't know what Real Love looks like, you have a hard time reacting to it. And the gut reaction, misguided by either ignorance or arrogance, is that you either run from it, or you think others' kindness indicates some sort of agenda. Either way, you reason that there will be a price you have to pay in the end; if the personal payoff

isn't worth it, you kick it to the curb. It's sad how we jump to conclusions. Discussing this ministry with a friend, trying to figure out what went wrong so I could avoid repetition in the future, it was suggested to me that I was naïve in all the good ways. Hard to tell if a comment like that is an insult or a compliment. Nonetheless, it's probably true. He said he noticed that when I decided I loved someone, and opened my heart to them, I would offer a "buffet of everything I was". He hit the nail right on the head. That is, indeed, who I am. I make no time for pretense, it's a waste of energy and an insult to the Lord. What you see, is what you get with me, and I'm not exactly the politically correct type. If I have something worth saying, I say it. I try to do it in love, but that doesn't always happen; after all, I'm human. My friend went onto say they were probably overwhelmed by mercy, and they didn't know how to react to it, so they pushed it away; it was their way of running. He suggested, perhaps, that the ones on the receiving end felt obligated to return the favor, but weren't in a position to offer a buffet, only a sandwich. At first I took offense at the way my intentions were twisted to make it look like my fault, but then I took it to the Lord, and He revealed a Kingdom Principle. If understanding is truly the key to wisdom, then this conversation would prove to not only help guard

my heart in the future, but seal the wounds that were so deeply inflicted.

Christianity is all about reflecting the Image of the One Who gave it all. It's about serving others with excellence, and loving them unconditionally. It's about extending mercy - even to those who don't deserve it - and then not complaining about it when we discover their shortcomings. It's about forgiving offenses, and giving freely, that which we have been given, not thinking about the personal rewards or the consequences of our benevolence. We say we want to serve others, but how many of us really serve with genuine sincerity, and how are we on the receiving end? Do we accept it as a free gift the way God intended, or do we feel obligated to repay out of some sort of guilt? Do we take and demand more like a spoiled child, or do we receive with open hearts of humility not expecting more, but grateful when it comes? Word on the street was that I intimidated them by my gift. At first, I thought that laughable, but then I thought about it. Jesus, and the Gifts He offers can be rather intimidating to people who don't care to get to know His heart either. God was in the middle of teaching me a life-lesson. I wasn't expecting returned favors in this venture, I was just hoping for simple mutual respect, and develop

friendships that would last through eternity. I certainly didn't expect to be thought of as intimidating or insulted for doing a job well done. The verse in Philippians where we are commanded to esteem others higher than ourselves, is meant to have a reciprocal effect in its true interpretation. And in my life, sometimes the "process of esteeming", comes with sowing seeds; that is, doing for others what they are not capable of doing for themselves so that they can fulfill God's plan and purpose for their lives. This principle is found in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "***Each man should give what he has decided to give in his heart, not reluctantly or out of compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.***" Esteeming others higher than yourself has nothing to do with material things, but it is a form of love, and giving is a natural expression of love. It's how we're all supposed to live in harmony.

I was born with a benevolent heart, it's just something I can't change no matter how much I try. I don't think I should have to. There's got to be people out there just like me, although I haven't met many; still, I'm hopeful. One of the desires of my heart is for people to see me for who I am, and love me anyway. There is more to me than the skills I possess. I

hate pretense, it's such a waste of time. And while I strive to be Christ-like in character, I have a human side like everyone else. I grow weary when I find myself in a place where I'm forced to live up to others' expectations of what they think I should be. It's been said that you train people how to treat you, so by that logic, I am the only person who can hand over the key to lock myself up in that box of expectations. It's not something I consciously do, it just happens once in awhile. Sometimes, when you allow others to stuff you inside that box, compromise can follow. I discovered that compromise is never a good thing, especially in ministry; another valuable lesson I would learn the hard way.

People will always fall short of others' expectations, it's just a given in life. We will never be able to measure up to what others think we should be, so it's best just to be ourselves. Another fact of life is that people judge one another. We shouldn't do it, but yet we do. It's just a gut reaction to our flesh when we are wronged, or see a wrong against another. I've been judged plenty of times, and I've also been the judge. I'm learning, like everyone else, there are consequences to pay for judging others. When other's judge you by your seeming inadequacies based upon their own

spiritual prowess, God opens the door to judgment on them. Likewise, when we judge, we fall under judgment. I've learned the hard way, that it's better to pray mercy, and not gloat over those who are being "paid back", because you never know when the shoe will be on the other foot. God takes care of His own.

Matthew 7:1 clearly warns that we are not to judge another, lest we be judged by the same measure that we judge another brother or sister in Christ. We are to discern motives but we are not to judge people or circumstances surrounding them, as if we have some authority to understand all the whys and wherefores. Matthew 7 paints a pretty clear picture of how we, in Christ, are to treat one another, and there is a big difference between discernment and judgment. **Discernment** means we have the power to see beyond what is not evident with the average mind, and it stresses the need for accuracy to reading the character or motives of an individual. It is the seventh of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit as outlined in 1 Corinthians 12:4. It is also referred to as "distinguishing between the spirits". We are to test every spirit, (1 John 4:1), and test all things, holding onto the good, and avoiding every kind of evil, (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Judgment is more like a sentence or final decision, reserved specifically in the sense of calamity to be sent by God.

Let me give you two scenarios. If we angrily say, *“Lord, there is just NO good reason for this person to be so insulting toward me, they are cruel and uncaring!”*; we are judging this person, based on their outward response to us, we turn a hard heart toward them, and we give no room for understanding. However, if we say, *“Lord, I am insulted, but I’m asking if You would reveal the reason behind this person being so nasty to me, and if I’ve done something to cause offense, help me to fix it”*; we are exercising discernment through humility, keeping our heart open by checking our own accountability: doing so opens a channel of communication whereby the Lord can reveal true motives. Their insults or nastiness may not be directed toward you at all, you may have just ended up in the line of fire. If you take a close look at that chapter, you will see that God clearly defines that we are all a work in progress, and God through the pen of Matthew, clearly outlines a pattern we would do well to follow.

We are not to look at others' personal faults without first looking at our own; our futile attempts at taking out the proverbial speck of sawdust in another's eye when we can't see the plank sticking out of our own. He tells us to take care of our own business before we get into the business of others. He calls people, who don't clean out their own closets first, hypocrites. Then he says right after that comment, not to cast pearls before swine - speaking of the hypocrites - lest they trample (your pearls) under foot, and turn to tear you to pieces. Been there, done that, have the battle scars to prove it.

Secondly, Matthew warns us to "ask, seek, and knock". Why do you suppose that command follows directly after the one above? It's because we are to ask *God*, to seek *Him*, and knock on the door to *His Heart* when we encounter people that don't jell with our interpretation of "holy fruit". We are to go directly to God and ask Him to reveal the heart of the person we are having trouble understanding. God is the only One Who understands the motives and heart intent of every individual on the planet, and if we truly want the truth, He will reveal it. God is the only True Authority. He tells us, that if we ask, seek, and knock, that He will answer, help us see

and understand. In order to hear the answers God is willing to provide, all He asks is that we first get into position to hear Him, through an attitude of forgiveness. Sometimes understanding comes through seeing our own inadequacies, but because that rubs against the grain of our flesh, we would - more often than not - rather jump to conclusions, than do the work of asking the only One Who can clarify things. Inherently, we know it might require more patience than we're willing to have, so we tend to base our opinions of others on our own head knowledge, instead of knowledge that's hidden inside the heart of God. Matthew warns us, ***“in everything. we are to do to others, what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets”***, (Matthew 7:12).

Matthew continues to say that the gate (the door) to destruction is wide and broad, and many enter through it. But the Door to Life is narrow, and few find it, much less walk through it. When those of us in ministry look at others through the eyes of arrogance or spiritual pride, we walk through the door to destruction, and we're in the same boat as the sinners we profess to want to save. We become the blind, trying to lead the blind. When we don't do as we are commanded, we are ushered through that door to

destruction by one of the worst enemies of God; spiritual pride. God doesn't take kindly to pride, especially of the spiritual persuasion. He will maim or kill anything that gets infected by it, and doors of opportunity will slam shut and lock, for our own good. God clearly warns us that pride comes before destruction, (*Proverbs 16:18*), and that we fool ourselves if we think we are so spiritually attuned that we will become immune by the deception of pride, just because we preach the Gospel of Christ, (*1 Timothy 3:6*). Knowledge puffs us up, but humility - understanding that sawdust-plank scenario - keeps us on the path that leads to the Door of Hope.

The next thing Matthew addresses, after he tells us how our conduct should be toward fellow believers, are the false prophets. We are to discern - that is, to recognize by their fruit - the false prophets, the ones who preach *another gospel*. We are to make sure that the teachers we learn from, are teaching us truth. At this point, there is a clear distinction between the sheep, and the shepherds who are supposed to care for their flock. It's all about accountability. Over the years, I have seen many shepherds kill their wounded sheep, and many more abuse them with the

Letter of the Law, instead of nurturing them by the Spirit of the Law. Shepherds are supposed to guide their sheep with the gentle staff of patience and the rod of understanding, as Christ does. They are supposed to be mature enough in the Lord to understand that negative circumstances they see surrounding one's life, is a clear indication that God is doing a deep work, refining them through their wilderness; yet I've seen many who adopt the attitude that God is punishing them out of their own rebellion. When people are in crisis, and they go to clergy for help, if they are told their crisis is stemming from rebellion, it surely will lead them away from the Throne of Grace. We can never be sure of the reasons people go through trials, only God knows why they exist, and for what purpose. We would do well to stay clear of guess-work, for our own good. In reality, sheep don't qualify to be "judged" until they reach the same level of accountability as the shepherds, and then they are to be rebuked in love, and shown the same mercy that God extends. There is a big difference between someone who is confused and blinded by sand storms in the desert, one who is learning to submit to God; and that of the character of a self-righteous false prophet who is well-versed in disseminating scripture.

False prophets have no desire to speak the truth that sets people free. They probably start out well-intended but then they allow people to put them on pedestals of authority that God never intended them to have. Instead of esteeming others more highly, they think others should esteem them more highly. They seek the accolades of men, trample true humility under foot, while displaying false humility to gain the allegiance of those they seek to devour. They only speak partial truths that serve their own flesh and puts people into bondage. False prophets have one agenda: self-exaltation. They are easy to discern. They are the ones who preach the feel-good gospels that promise a life with no pain, no financial troubles, no personal heartache. They use scripture to entice you to walk through doors that have one exit at the end of a very painful valley; one that leads to the gates of hell. They tell you about all the testimonies in the Bible but they ignore the hardship that brought the people through to victory. God clearly says in Psalm 34:19, ***“Many are the afflictions, (troubles), of the righteous, but the Lord delivers them from them all.”*** 2 Timothy 4:5 encourages us to ***“keep our heads in all situations, (use the wisdom set forth in the Word), to endure afflictions, (hardships); to do the work of an evangelist and discharge the duties of the ministry.”*** False

prophets skip all the heartache and go straight for the blessing, using the Name of Jesus, and the debts He has clearly paid for us, to justify their doctrines. Even Jesus said we needed to take up our own cross, and daily, (*Luke 9:23*). Taking up your own cross means you push through and persevere, overcoming trials that are placed in your path. That you risk being misunderstood by the charismatic mainstream society, and you follow the narrow path, even if it makes you look like a fool. The way you overcome trials, is to lean on the Lord, the wisdom of His Word, and learn from your experiences. Trials will either become brick walls for you, or they will become launching pads, but they will never disappear just because you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. God doesn't promise a life with no storms, He just promises that you will never walk through them alone. And when you're in the middle of one, you know how important that is. Even if everyone else in your life leaves, God will never abandon you.

False prophets tell you that you must give sacrificially to their ministries so that the "work of God" can continue, and that God will bless you if you bless Him. What they mean is that they don't want to give up the status

they've acquired. They manipulate the Word until your finances and health are sucked dry, and the only one who is left profiting from your faith... is them. They are spiritual pimps who use and abuse you and take everything you work for, all to support their god of mammon. The enemy mimics signs and wonders, making you think it's a God-thing, so that you'll give more. God warns us there will be such deception in Matthew 24. He tells us not to be deceived by false signs and wonders because many will come in His Name to perform them. God *does* perform His wonders and the miraculous, He definitely heals, I've seen it first-hand. I believe that God looks on the heart of the person who needs the healing, and even if they are led to His Throne under the guise of deception like I was so many years ago, God Himself will intervene. It's the only way I can explain my own healings, and I've had many in my life. I give God the glory, not man. I don't know why God chose to heal me, but I'm grateful He did. God uses man, but He despises when His innocent children are led astray by what amounts to stage hypnotism and good old fashioned magic. The reason I can say that is because that is what the Bible says. Exodus 7:22 says that the magicians and sorcerers were able to perform the same signs and wonders that the prophets of God, Moses and Aaron, performed. But when

they did, as in the account of Exodus 7:12, the snake the Egyptians threw down, got swallowed up by the staff of God. Pretty cool. God always reveals deception, and He always swallows it up with His Righteousness! When you are told you must give to God, to get something - like your healing - that's just wrong. God *needs* nothing from you; what He *wants* is your heart. God already gave The Only Sacrifice you'll ever need, and that happened two thousand years ago, at The Cross - through His Son - Jesus Christ. Any other "sacrifice" denies the work of The Cross and is an abomination to God.

I think it's sad, how the enemy sets us up to judge one another so that we cause offense to God. There are some, reading this now, who might think I'm judging; I assure you, it's not judgment, it is discernment. I have learned to pray for men of such depraved minds, the false prophets; my own husband became one of them. He got so wrapped up in the signs and wonders that he forgot about his own responsibility. He would've rather taken "dominion over the elements; call down fire - and rain - from heaven", than mow the lawn; laughable, but unfortunately true. And based on my own observations and experiences, I know that it could happen to the best

of us. Choosing to sit under false doctrines opens doors that manipulate your mind in such a way that what we consider delusions of grandeur, are reality for the person succumbing to their teachings. I watched him ebb away to a shell of a man, and there wasn't a thing I could do except pray. When it became dangerous for our children, God removed us. Until I came to realize that he was a victim, I couldn't fully forgive him for the pain and anguish his antics put us through. There was one big difference between him and me; he chose to remain a victim and I chose to overcome, by the Blood of the Lamb - the Real One. My marriage ended because doctrine got so twisted, that it nearly ended four lives, in a very literal sense. Depression gave way to Apathy, and under the wrong gospel, we were torn asunder. He joked around about suicide with our children; that "to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord". You don't say that to a child who doesn't have the life experience behind them to be able to process such a thought. I had a responsibility to help my children live, and not die, so that they could declare the works of the Lord, and fulfill their destinies. A very difficult lesson I would have to learn in order to survive. Until I came to the understanding of why God allowed us to leave, I wasn't able to forgive myself. Marriage a covenant between God and man, it is

never something to take lightly, but when there is abuse, and it stands in the way of your relationship with God, He makes a way. I learned a whole new level of God's Grace through the destruction of my marriage; a level, by that same Grace, I don't intend to repeat.

Those of us who are called to minister to others, can fall prey to his tactics if we allow pride to enter our hearts. When we think we know it all, and our hearts turn a deaf ear to understanding, Satan uses Matthew 7 in such ways that we seem to forget our own desert experiences. It is in the desert where we were given the choice to learn humility and live, or rebel and die. When we forget where we came from, and begin to exalt ourselves to those positions of authority that God never intended us to have, we're headed for trouble. Without true repentance, a true turning from sin, God will eventually knock us off our pedestals. He tries to deal with us in private, but if we refuse to listen, He goes public. I've learned not to judge, because God is always there to remind me of one verse, "**He who is without sin, cast the first stone,**" (John 8:7). We need to steer clear of deception, this much is true; but the whole point is to pray and stop gauging others by their outward appearance. We need to recognize them

by the real fruits of the Spirit, (*Galatians 5:22*). We need to remember that there are reasons behind every attitude and every circumstance, and we need to seek God for their repentant hearts, starting with our own. The sooner we realize that, the better off the Body of Christ will be. Not one of us can stand exonerated, we are all guilty of judging others to one degree or another. I believe God would have us *draw out* the gifts hidden within the hearts of people; to encourage and exhort them to refine the love, and the joy, and the peace; along with every other gift God has given them. One day we will be held accountable, and God will ask us how we helped our fellow brethren. Did we teach them how to use those gifts, or did we heap loads of condemnation on them for not “walking the walk“, the way we think they should’ve? Did we try to educate them by rightly dividing the Word of God so that they would recognize deception, or did we just turn a blind eye, thinking that God wouldn’t notice our negligence?

Anyone who knows me, knows I’m not the type to fit into mainstream Christianity, at least not the “take care of yourself first and become your best life” brand that is being preached these days. I recently watched one of the most beloved televangelists, and I actually heard him tell the people

that “for everything bad you go through, God will pay you back double”. Oh really? Where does it say that in scripture? He went onto preach about Abraham and Lot, and how Abraham got the short end of the stick, but because he sowed seeds to God, God ultimately turned the tables and made Abraham the father of many nations. Made me sick to my stomach. Abraham was faithful, period.

I always thought benevolence was my best quality, but it has brought more pain than pleasure, especially among believers. God spoke to my heart one day, while revealing more of this “esteeming others higher” principle, and told me that I was in good company. I was one who could empathize with Jesus, even if only in some small way. When Jesus decides to love someone, He also offers a buffet of everything He is. He poured out everything He was in the hope that we would understand why. Yet His unconditional love toward others continues to bring Him pain and grief every time we reject Him and His goodness. We think He’s got some hidden agenda and our allegiance to Him will cost us more than we could ever imagine; more than we are willing to give... and if we use that twisted logic, we will certainly run as far from Him as we can.

I used to think that way. I had a problem understanding Real Love because no one had ever shown it to me. I had no model by which to follow. I grew up in a family of very selfish, self-serving individuals. And when I got older, I ended up in one bad relationship after the other. I learned, at an early age to pay for anything I thought would bring me happiness; to work for what I thought was real love, in some way or another. When I got saved, I followed gospels that taught me twisted versions of “faith without works is dead”, (*James 2:20*); and “give and it shall be given unto you”, (*Luke 6:38*). Most of the doctrines I was taught used those two verses liberally in relation to “sowing seeds”, (giving money), to their ministries. Do you realize that the verse in Luke 6:38 has *nothing* to do with money or sowing seeds, at least not in the sense we would think. The verse before that is talking about *forgiveness*. And that entire section is talking about not judging others. If you don’t believe me, in fact... don’t believe me, look it up and let God show you something. When I discovered the truths behind those verses, and how I had been so severely manipulated by them, I remembered a conversation I had with the Lord, early in my Christian walk. I was driving along the street in a seedy

part of town when I saw a couple of prostitutes trying to flag down some “work“. I simply whispered under my breath and said, “I know just how they feel, God“. I heard a thought come back to my mind “you’re closer to them than you might think, child.” It would take years for me to figure out what He meant by that, but when I discovered it, it was a truth that would serve to set me free, (*John 8:36*).

When I made that comment to the Lord, I wasn’t referring to my succumbing to lusts of the flesh, so much as was referring to the mentality I had adopted over the years. God defined it to my heart as The Prostitute’s Mentality. It made perfect sense. Sometimes people sell their dignity just to feel loved, if only for a moment. I knew that feeling well. Sometimes I would sacrifice my dignity, sometimes I would sacrifice gifts or talents God gave me. Inevitably, it would end up costing me something priceless, and the fleeting moments of “love”, (acceptance), I felt were hardly worth it when all was said and done. When you are accustomed to following a prostitute’s mentality, searching for unconditional love is like trying to fill a heart filled with holes; it’s a bottomless pit you can never fill, no matter how much you try. The only way to fill such a heart, is to lay it at

the Altar, and let God repair the holes. Only when He seals it, can it be filled with the love you seek.

A prostitute gratifies the flesh of men who will pay her something in return. They are all about personal payoffs; “what can I get if I give?” It might be cash, it might be shelter, it might be food, it might be drugs... it might be for simple companionship stemming from a romantic relationship she thinks is based on real love. Real love shouldn't cost that much. In fact, it shouldn't cost anything. We live in a society of revolving doors where we expect to receive personal payoffs with every revolution. I used to be one of those people, until one day I met Real Love face-to-face, or more accurately – His Holy Spirit connected with my human spirit. On that day, God reminded me of the prostitutes I saw on the street that day, and He revealed His Word to me. Hosea 2:14-15 says, ***“Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.”***

The door of hope - those last few words meant something to me. It was in

my prayer, and now I found it in scripture. And then I discovered what the “Valley of Achor” was. Achor, oddly enough, means “troubles“. I had been through that valley many times, and now God was “alluring me” by His Word. I was intrigued by the romance of it all. I remembered my recurring dream and I wanted desperately to find that “door of hope“ at the end of the corridor; the one that seemed just within reach, but always just beyond my grasp. The book of Hosea details the unhappy life of a prophet of God, and his unfaithful wife. Hosea, is a prophet in the Old Testament, and Gomer is the woman God told him to marry. Gomer was a prostitute, and after having three children with Hosea decided she wanted her old life back, so she left him. This story is a vivid parallel of the loyalty of God and the spiritual adultery of Israel - of Jesus’ love toward His unfaithful Bride. With empathetic sorrow, Hosea, whose name means “salvation”, exposes the sins of Israel and contrasts them with God’s holiness. At this time, the children of Israel were also playing the harlot, putting other gods before the One True God. God left them to their sin, to follow their own desires, for awhile.

Gomer, had hit rock-bottom. She was tired of being used and abused, sold

like a piece of meat, but knew that going back meant certain death by stoning for having cheated on her husband. God asked Hosea if he still loved his wife, and his answer was yes. So the Lord told Hosea to forgive her, to find her, buy her back from a slave-trader, clean her up, and take her back as his own. Hosea is a model of Who God is. God had to buy back His own children through the Blood of His Own Son. Hosea has been referred to as the prophet of restoration, and the book that bears his name depicts God's willingness to restore the unfaithful. Gomer, means "complete"; in it's root form, it means "to perfect", or "to finish". God will never abandon us in our troubles, He will be faithful to complete us, and fulfill His Purpose in us, (*Psalm 138:8*).

How many of us, whether we are male or female, can identify with Gomer? She was only searching for unconditional love, and going about finding it in all the wrong places. She was conditioned by society to pay for anything of worth, because she thought that's the only way she could get it. She allowed men to use and abuse her and she would exchange her dignity in hopes of filling those gaping holes in her heart. When she met a good man, she couldn't handle it, didn't know how to react to his love, so she

eventually ran. Gomer's problem was that she had the wrong perception of what a husband was supposed to be. She could only see through the eyes of her past, and she couldn't forgive herself for her mistakes; she didn't feel worthy of forgiveness. She thought she was beyond redemption. And because she looked at her husband through her past, she could only see Hosea as her master, not as her lover and husband. When we see people as our "master", we tend to resent the one we feel enslaved to, and when we inevitably leave, we end up enslaved in another prison. This is how most of us view God before we get a clear revelation of Who He really is. We see Him as a Master, so we tend to run, and become "enslaved" in another prison. Yet God waits patiently.

I would imagine Gomer was very confused by Hosea's kindness; she was probably expecting death the minute she saw her husband come for her. She was probably waiting for retaliation. She had learned to get love through cheating, seducing and manipulating, but what she was *not* expecting, was to receive love through mercy - undeserved, and freely given. God, through her husband, gave Gomer everything she'd ever desired and had never experienced: unconditional love. God allured Gomer

in the desert through her husband, and it was there that he romanced his wife. He took her to the desert so that she wouldn't have any of what was familiar to her; there would be no distractions to get in the way of his quiet time with her. It was there, in the desert, that he spoke tenderly to his wife, explained his love for her; forgave her, and held her close. God sealed her wounded heart so it would no longer be filled with holes, and for the first time in her life, God made her complete, just as her namesake suggests.

When we shower people with gifts they don't deserve, when we forgive their offenses, especially when they don't deserve it, their hearts melt in gratitude, and God seals up the wounds we can't see with our natural eye. When Gomer felt loved for who she was, not for what she could offer her husband; when she didn't feel condemned for whatever sins she committed, but was pardoned from all of them, Hosea won his wife over by his unconditional love. And this was God's "door of hope" leading Gomer out of her old way of life, out of her valley of troubles, into His Mercy where she was set free to be the bride God designed her to be; a complete and finished gift given back to Hosea for his faithful heart.

God had a master plan in this little story. He was showing us a type and shadow, making available to us a Kingdom Principle of His Love for us, through His Son, Jesus Christ. We are the Bride of Christ; yet we commit adultery everyday against Him. We crush His heart, have affairs with everything that offers to cater to our flesh, including false gospels. Yet the Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. He poured out His Life for us, and He died a brutal death. He rose and bought us back through His Blood, all in hopes we will turn from our wicked ways, and reconcile to Him. He longs to take us into the desert, eliminating all the distractions of what is familiar to us, all for the purpose of intimacy... to romance His bride and tell us how much he loves us in spite of ourselves.

We live in a buy and sell society. Real Love gives itself away for free, not expecting anything in return. Love, in its truest form is really foreign to us. The love we are accustomed to finding these days is more like the relationship between a prostitute and her pimp. We don't tend to do things for people unless they are going to do something in return for us. And we certainly gravitate toward gospels that promise we will get something in

return for our “sacrifice” of time and effort. All the quick-fix theologies, all the “give and it shall be given unto you” gospels; they are all promoting the wrong kingdom. When we live by this principle, we enslave ourselves to a prostitute’s mentality. When we follow false gospels, when we demand to “live our best life now”, and manipulate the Word of God to promote our own agendas, when we allow ourselves to be used and abused by spiritual pimps, we prostitute ourselves to the god of mammon, to Satan himself. Greed is a bottomless pit, and when we feed into it, we will never be satisfied. We will always be driven to give more today, so we can get more tomorrow. Think about it; tomorrow never comes. God warns us that we cannot serve both God and mammon, (*Matthew 6:24*). We will love one and hate the other, and there is no middle ground.

Satan doesn’t want us to realize that we’re in a prostitute’s mentality, so he sugarcoats it with just enough truth to make it easy for us to swallow. As long as we see God through the eyes of a prostitute... as our master... we will always run away. But when we see Him as our Husband, we will be so grateful for His compassion toward us, that we will want to serve Him, we will long to fellowship with Him. When we realize that God doesn’t want our

money, that we don't have to buy his affections through offerings...when we find His love, undeserved and given freely, we will be made complete. We will want to spill our lives out for other people, as we become His likeness and character. Giving gifts is a natural expression of love. Any gift that we are told we need to buy through tithes and offerings is an attempt to manipulate God and His Gifts. When we preach the gospel with human wisdom, it empties the Cross of it's power. (*1 Corinthians 1:17*). That is how false doctrines are started, when we try to simplify the gospel in our own words. We need to stick with what the Word of God says and let it do it's job. God's ways will always be higher than our ways, and He has already picked the right words to describe what we could never describe. We are commanded not to go beyond what is written, (*1 Corinthians 4:6*).

Many of us, out of our own ignorance and arrogance, make Real Truth a casualty of war in our efforts to promote what we believe, even to the perversion of Biblical text in order to tickle itching ears. We justify our own lifestyles and our self-serving existence. God confides in those who fear Him, who come to Him in humility, instead of demands. The only gift you need to give God in order to enter into His Presence, is a broken and

humble heart. Many translations say a “contrite” heart. A contrite heart is one that has been crushed and reduced to powder. God can resurrect our ashes, He formed us from the dust of the earth; He hasn’t forgotten how. All He wants is for you to come to Him sorry that you sinned against Him, and recognize that you’ve walked through doors out of disobedience and ignorance. You need to ask Him to show you the way into His Truths. And when He comes to you, you need to accept the Sword that He comes to you with; to divide your allegiance between your flesh and His Spirit. To understand the what the desert is, is to understand what it means to be circumcised, and baptized by His Holy and refining fire.

When I started this chapter, I began with a prayer for understanding, and a dream, that up to this point remained a mystery. God did reveal what was behind that last door, and He recalled it to my mind in the form of a vision. God brought me to the entrance of the door. The light emanated through the frame in an almost blinding light. I touched the handle, and it swung open. As I stepped over the threshold, I stepped into a desert. There was no vegetation, only white sand. The heat I felt enveloping my body was all consuming, it felt as though I were burning from within. I turned around to

look at the door I had just walked through, and it disappeared from sight. I was, indeed, in the desert with no way out. I looked around, and saw hundreds of skeletal remains scattered everywhere. Some were scattered just inches from where I stood. It looked as though a battle had taken place, and the desert winds and scorching heat had eaten away at the flesh of an entire battalion. Some were clearly dismembered, some remained intact. I looked to my right and saw a dust storm, like a tornado, and then I saw another, and yet another, whipping by in the distance. It carried the debris of more human remains and scattered them across the land. I couldn't believe my eyes. Then the Lord led me to Ezekiel 37:3-6, *The Valley of the Dry Bones*. My eyes read what my mind was seeing, ***“Son of man, can these bones live?”*** Ezekiel answered, ***“O Sovereign Lord, You alone know.”*** ***Then he said to me, “prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones hear the Word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you and you will come to life. Then you will know that I AM the Lord.’”***

This was a word of hope that God spoke to the prophet Ezekiel, concerning Israel. At the time this was written, Israel was in exile, Ezekiel had been held captive and taken to this foreign land called Babylon. God used Ezekiel to give the people of Israel a message, but they were obstinate and would not listen. They were completely disconnected from God, their community, their worship, and from one another. They were pushed to their limits by oppression and alienated from everything they once knew. They had given up. They were caught in the grips of death. They had lost all hope. Their spirits were crushed and they were as dead and hollow as surely as these dry bones. This is a metaphor of a life without God. Just as God spoke hope to Israel, that they would one day be restored, God speaks a word of hope to us. We are the dry bones; His children in desperate need of life. We may have blood pumping through our veins, our lungs may inhale and exhale the air around us, but without the Spirit of God, we are not truly living; we are merely a shadow being thrown about by the winds of adversity. We have the potential of life, but only when the breath of God breathes into our flesh, do we fully come alive. God doesn't call us to merely exist. There is a Master Plan. He

wants us to walk by faith, through the door of repentance so that we can accept His Grace. He knows we're mere flesh, that we have little strength. He's fully aware of all that consumes us apart from Him. He desires to release us from bondages we recognize and from those we don't even know exist.

I asked God why He waited so many years to finish the end of my dream. He told me that I had to walk through the desert, taking up my cross daily, crucifying my flesh, through lessons learned in the valley of my troubles. That I had to come to understand what the prostitute's mentality was, and then let God free me from it; I had to learn to recognize what Real Love looked like and how to react to it so I wouldn't panic and run. He said I had to come to understand the fine line between discernment and judgment, and recognize false doctrines and the subtleties of their deception. My "job" was to minister to those who were battered, shattered, and ready to leave their call; but I couldn't do it without first having to walk through those same doors, and come out on the other side to victory.

I asked God why He would use a mortal man like Ezekiel to prophesy to

the dry bones, instead of just resurrecting them Himself. His response was that it was Ezekiel's job, as it is mine; just as it is for every believer. He expects that we live together in community to help out the oppressed, the broken, the tired, the outcast, the lonely. We are here to fulfill the Great Commission, to go into the world and preach the Gospel, and bring a message to the people that God can breath life in that which has no life. We are to take them by the hand and usher them into the Presence of Almighty God; to help them understand that they will only be able to leave their Valley of Troubles, if they press in and persevere toward the Gateway called Yeshua. Yeshua, which is Hebrew for Jesus, means salvation, deliverance, total health and wholeness. We need to unlock the Door of Hope, help others to see what lies behind all the other doors and spare them from the deception, the ravenous wolves in the dark that are waiting to devour them. Satan doesn't want us to find the dry bones, he would rather that we die in the desert, hollowed out and hopeless. When we discover Jesus is the Door of Hope, that He is the only Way, the Truth, and the Life, and we cannot come to the Father, except through Him, (*John 14:6*), is it then, our dry bones will live.

God answered my prayer, and He took me by the hand to unlock the door to understanding. He gave me the keys that opens souls: forgiveness and unconditional love. He let me see beyond the Veil, where I could see the battered and shattered in need of restoration; and He walked me through the Door of Hope, that I might lead others into Life eternal.