

LYNN'S STORY

"What is your problem?" asked her mother in an angry voice.

Sixteen year old Lynn was fighting hard to hold back the tears. She couldn't even answer, but stared at the ground.

"I know your stepfather is hard to get along with."

Lynn, running her fingers through her long, blond hair, muttered in a contemptuous voice, "That's an understatement!"

Finally, when her mother saw she wasn't going to have any meaningful dialogue with her daughter, she turned away from her and headed toward her bedroom door. Unable to hide her irritation, she exclaimed before she exited, "You two had just better learn how to get along!"

After shutting the door, Lynn threw herself on her bed and buried her face in her pillow crying, "Never, never!"

When Lynn was seven her mother and father had divorced. Her father had remarried soon after and hardly ever came to visit Lynn and her older brother Raymond. Because child support payments were few and far between, Lynn's mother had to work to support them.

But that changed when her mother married Charles. Lynn was twelve at the time and at first they were a happy family. Unfortunately their happiness was short lived.

Charles was a reformed alcoholic and had been free of his addiction for almost three years. But he had read some new findings which stated it was seemingly possible for some alcoholics to go back to drinking moderately.

One drink was all it took for the former "nice guy" to become a monster.

It started with verbal abuse. The dinner hour, which had been an enjoyable occasion, became vexing ordeals. Charles was miserable when he drank, and when he was drunk it seemed like his only joy was making the people around him miserable.

Many times Lynn's brother Raymond would leave his half-finished dinner and storm out of the house in a fit of rage. Raymond was eighteen and he had his own car so he had the luxury of being able to get away. But that left Lynn and her mother to take the brunt of Charles' drunken fury.

One night, after an especially bitter argument between Raymond and Charles, Raymond slammed the door behind him when he left. Charles, looking half-crazed, demanded his wife tell him whose side she was on concerning the previous argument between himself and Raymond.

In defense of Raymond, she responded, "Why don't you just leave the boy alone?"

Her answer only infuriated him more and he took the back of his hand and slapped her across the face. Both Lynn and her mother were shocked. Charles had never shown any tendency toward violence.

As her mother got up from the table in tears, he yelled after her calling her vulgar names.

Lynn sat in her chair, paralyzed by fear, terrified that she might be the next object of his wrath.

In a scornful voice, he asked, "And what about you? What do you think?"

Her heart was pounding. Her palms were sweaty. In a very quiet voice, she answered, "Raymond was wrong."

"Well, I'm glad there is one person with some sense in this family."

"May I be excused?"

"No, you may not be excused. I want to finish my dinner and I don't want to finish it alone. Look at your plate, you haven't touched a thing on it. Eat up!"

It was a colossal effort to get down the next few morsels of food. She was hoping so much he would let her go. Instead he started talking and the more he talked the more uncomfortable she became.

Lynn was an extremely pretty girl who looked much older than her twelve years. Charles made it clear to her that her physical maturity and attractiveness had not escaped his attention.

At that point he got up from his chair and walked behind her, putting his hands on her shoulders.

That night as Lynn lay weeping in her bed, she wished she could die. She felt so dirty! How could he have done that to her?

Unfortunately, this incident was not to be her last. Many times Lynn became the target of her stepfather's abuse.

Finally when Lynn was fifteen she tried to tell her mother, but instead of the response she wanted, her mother stopped her from talking when she could see where the conversation was heading and she said, "Lynn, I know your stepfather is unbearable when he drinks too much, but he is my only source of income. My arthritis bothers me so; I couldn't bear the thought of having to go back to work." Then with a "please-understand" look on her face, she said, "I am going to talk to him."

Lynn knew that talking was not the answer. Who had pleaded with him more than her?

Lynn spent another sleepless night crying her heart out. She had no one to turn to, not even her mother!

Soon Lynn's thoughts were filled with ways to do away with her stepfather. But in her heart she knew she could never bring herself to do anything violent. And she couldn't turn him into the authorities because that would leave her mother without anyone to support her.

The only real solution she saw was to run away. But she knew if she ran away, she might be opening herself up to even more pain and heartache. She knew that a lot of teenage girls had to turn to prostitution in order to survive and Lynn would rather be dead than do that. It was one thing to be forced to do something and it was another to do it voluntarily.

She felt she had no choice but to wait until she was sixteen and then try to make it on her own.

When she did turn sixteen, things seemed to be going smoothly and she was hoping maybe her stepfather had changed. She really didn't relish the idea of facing the world on her own.

But one night after a particularly verbal exchange between her and her stepfather, she had gone to her room in a rage. Her mother followed her and tried to fix the blame on Lynn for their disagreement. When her mother left her room in an huff and exclaimed, "You two had just better learn how to get along!" it was just too much for Lynn to bear.

With her face buried in her pillow, amidst an ocean of tears, she determined to run away just before daybreak.

She packed everything she could into her knapsack and anxiously waited for the clock to say 5 o'clock.

At 5 o'clock sharp, she quietly snuck out of the house and headed to the Greyhound station. She had only \$65.00 to her name, but she knew she had enough to leave Miami and go to Fort Lauderdale and at least get a room for the night. After that she didn't know what she was going to do.

After having breakfast at a small diner in downtown Fort Lauderdale, she decided she had better start looking for a job. She was thankful that she looked eighteen or nineteen because no one would question her about why she wasn't in school. She figured that she could work as a waitress and that way she would have immediate money from tips.

Finding a job was a lot harder than she thought. She only had so much money and she wanted to conserve as much as possible. Walking from one restaurant to another soon wore her out both mentally and physically.

Life seemed so difficult!

After six hours of searching, she finally landed a job at a Denny's. The manager was happy to hire her when he found out that she wanted to work the night shift. She was thankful that at least for the time being she would be in a safe place at night.

Things were going smoothly for a while. She rented a room in someone's house for \$75.00 a week and was making ends meet.

Then the manager at Denny's approached her and informed her that she had accidentally put down the wrong social security number on her job application form and asked her for the right one.

Lynn could feel her face flushing and she was trying very hard to act innocent. "Oh," she said, "I don't have my card with me, I'll bring it in with me tomorrow night." Of course she knew there would be no tomorrow night.

As she left work in the morning hours, she left with a heavy heart. She knew the drudgery of looking for a job would repeat itself over and over again until she was eighteen. She was

aware that the false information she was putting down on the job applications would be detected in time so she knew she would only be able to stay at a job so long.

But then she thought about what she had left and knew it would be worth it no matter how much she suffered.

Her search for a new job became more of a nightmare than she could have imagined. After six days of fruitless effort, she ran out of money and wasn't able to make the weekly payment on her room. As she walked down Federal Highway with all her belongings in her knapsack, she could no longer contain her emotions and started crying. Two young women approached her and asked her if she was okay. She tried hard to stop crying, but the more she tried the more she lost control. One of the women, who introduced herself as Sarah, asked if she was a runaway.

When Lynn didn't answer, the woman said, "Look, my friend and I work for a place that helps kids like you. Do you want us to take you there?"

Desperate for help, she agreed. That night she was in a safe place with kids just like herself. She couldn't believe how many kids had also suffered at the hands of an abusive parent.

It was while she was there that she decided that she wanted to finish high school and become a nurse.

It was so exiting for her when she enrolled at Broward Community College and started the process of becoming a nurse. One day after class, one of her classmates, Elaine Parsons, was talking with her and asked, "Do you study the Bible, by any chance?"

"No, not really. Why do you ask?"

"I go to a Bible study in Pompano and I thought you might be interested in going with me sometime."

"Maybe."

Elaine then asked, "Have you ever wondered if you're going to heaven."

"I hope so. Doesn't everyone?"

"I used to wonder too, but now I know."

Lynn looked at Elaine, surprised she was so self-righteous. Funny, she had never struck her like that.

Elaine, sensing Lynn's reaction, explained, "The reason I know I'm going to heaven is because it has nothing to do with how I've lived my life. In fact, if I got what I deserved, I'd end up in hell."

Now Lynn was totally confused. On one hand Elaine said she knew she was going to heaven and on the other hand she said she was worthy of hell. All Lynn could say was, "I don't understand."

Elaine continued, "The whole reason Jesus died on the cross was to pay for our sins. We don't go to heaven because of what we do, but because of what He did for us. Eternal life is not a reward we earn by our good deeds, it is a gift that Christ purchased with His life."

"I never looked at it that way before. So what do we do to go to heaven?"

Elaine pulled out a small New Testament from her purse and showed her a verse from the Gospel of John. It was a quotation of Christ's which said, "He who believes on Me has eternal life."

Lynn read it over a couple of times because she couldn't believe He really said faith in Him was the only requirement for heaven. Then she asked, "Is it really that simple?"

"Yes. If you were drowning and someone saved you, it would be hard work for the person pulling you in to shore, but easy for you. The reason Christ is called a Savior is because He did all that was necessary to get us to heaven."

"Gee, that does make sense."

Elaine continued, "Did you realize that if a person is believing in Christ *and* is trying to get to heaven by being good, he'll never make it?"

That sounded really strange to Lynn, but she simply responded, "Really?"

Elaine explained that as long as a person thinks he has to do more than believe in Christ then that person is putting his faith in himself, instead of Christ. Lynn could see that.

"The reason to be good," explained Elaine, "is so that you can be rewarded by God on earth and in heaven."

"God promises to answer your prayers and make you happy if you serve Him."

The thought of being happy really peaked Lynn's interest. She had thought up to this moment that the only place she could ever be happy was heaven. As she studied Elaine's face, Lynn could see that talking about the Bible was making Elaine happy. There was a brightness in her eyes that she had never seen in anyone else before.

Elaine opened up her Bible again and showed her a verse from Psalms which said, "Delight yourself also in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart."

Lynn had no greater desire than to be happy and she was interested in doing whatever it took to get happiness.

After they had finished their conversation and Lynn had the same confidence that Elaine did that she was going to heaven, she accepted Elaine's offer to go to a Bible study with her the following evening.

The Bible study was an informal gathering which met in a home. The teacher was a young man named Tony. Lynn had gone to a lot of different churches, but she never had met a group of people like this. It was so obvious that they were genuinely happy.

Tony explained that trusting Christ as your Savior changes your destiny, not your life.

Having a changed life was conditioned upon the obedience of the believer. Even though eternal life is a free gift, the abundant life is a reward.

Tony explained, "Once you know you are going to heaven, you are left here on earth for the purpose of doing work for God. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

"Now whether you chose to do anything for God or not cannot affect your eternal destiny since the moment you trusted Christ you were saved from hell, not put on probation. But God wants you to have a meaningful, happy life. Jesus said, 'I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.'

"There are certain things that God commands all His children to do such as read the Bible, pray, and tell others how to go to heaven."

Lynn had been listening intently up to this moment and had been enjoying listening to Tony, but she had no idea that serving the Lord entailed talking to people about the Bible. She was a shy, reserved person; she really didn't think she was cut out for that.

It was just like Tony had read her mind. He said, "Now I know some of you are thinking you really aren't cut out for the work of spreading the Gospel - but you know what? None of us are.

"When you placed your faith in Christ, He not only saved you from hell, but He also put within you His Holy Spirit. It is only because believers have the Holy Spirit that they have the power to be witnesses for Christ."

After he showed in the Bible where it is the responsibility of all those who know they are going to heaven to tell others the Gospel so they can also believe in Christ and go to heaven, he showed where it says that God empowers His children to carry out His work.

It was then that Lynn determined that she was willing to do whatever it took so she could have the same happiness these people had and if that meant approaching total strangers and explaining to them how to go to heaven, she was willing to do it. After Bible study she asked Elaine if she could accompany her when she went to talk to people about the Bible.

After classes the next day, Elaine drove to a park and together they approached children playing, teenagers who were hanging around, and a few adults. Lynn was taken back by how many people really did want to hear about how to go to heaven and how many believed. Even though she only listened, she felt like she was involved in something really important. By the time they left the park, she felt wonderful and told Elaine how she felt.

Lynn exclaimed, "That was so neat! Can we get together tomorrow too?"

"Sure, but you may feel differently tomorrow."

Confused, she asked, "Why do you think that?"

Elaine smiled, "I just wanted to warn you. I remember how I felt the first day I went out to talk to people. I felt great and expected those feelings to last. But it doesn't work like that"

Slightly disappointed, she asked, "How does it work?"

"Lynn, everyone of us have a nature which we inherited from Adam and Eve. It is a nature which is opposed to obeying God; it just doesn't want to submit to God. And as you know from last night's Bible study, when you trusted Christ to be your Savior, God gave you His Holy Spirit who now lives within you. He is our only source of goodness. So a Christian is a person with two natures; an old nature and a new. When you want to serve the Lord, your old nature will fight against your doing the right thing. But if you determine to obey God, no matter how you feel, then you are allowing the Holy Spirit to control you and you will experience the kind of feelings you have today.

"I'm just warning you that when tomorrow comes, you will have a battle to face."

After saying that, Elaine opened her Bible to Galatians 5:17, and let Lynn read it for herself. She read, "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh: for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would."

After Lynn read it aloud a couple of times, trying to understand it, Elaine said, "It's saying that the flesh, meaning our fallen human nature, wars against the Spirit controlling our lives and the Spirit wars the old nature controlling our lives. "Imagine two people living within you fighting to have control of your life. If you were to starve one and feed the other then it would just be a matter of time until the strong one would be the dominating force in your life.

"When I first started serving the Lord two years ago, it was a real struggle to obey God, but the more I obeyed, the easier it became until now it's no longer a struggle, but a pleasure. I just want you to know that the key to victory is obedience."

Lynn was soon to discover for herself first hand the struggle which Elaine had told her about.

The following morning when she awoke all the excitement and the enthusiasm of the preceding day had disappeared. She knew that it was important to spend some time reading the Bible in the morning, but she had absolutely no desire to do so and the thought of going out talking to people about the Gospel seemed completely unappealing. Oh well, maybe she'd feel differently later.

She didn't, and as the school day was coming closer and closer to ending, she was trying harder and harder to think of a way to get out of going with Elaine that day.

When Elaine approached her after class, she could tell by Lynn's expression that she wasn't dealing with the same young woman she had the previous day.

Lynn, feeling very uncomfortable, said, "Elaine, I'm really sorry, but I'm not going to be able to go with you today."

"Is it because you don't feel like it?"

Lynn had hoped so much that Elaine wouldn't question her. She wasn't quite sure how to respond, but before she had a chance, Elaine asked, "That is the reason, isn't it?"

“Well, yes.”

“Didn’t I warn you that you’d feel this way?”

Lynn answered, “Why don’t we plan on getting together tomorrow?”

“Lynn,” she pleaded, “please trust me. If you don’t go with me today, you’re going to feel even less like it tomorrow.”

Lynn made a face and Elaine continued, “Didn’t you tell me you were willing to do anything to be happy? Come with me today and you’ll feel completely different than you do now.”

Lynn really didn’t want to go, but Elaine was persistent enough to convince her to come for just an half hour.

After an half hour at the park, Lynn said, “I feel like such a fool. Everything you said about how I would feel this morning was true and what you said I’d feel like if I came with you is true. I really do feel different.

“Let’s talk to some more people. I do want to stay with you longer.”

As they finished their time at the park, Lynn was even happier than she had been the previous evening. She told Elaine and asked how long it would take until she would feel like this all the time. She wondered when she could expect the struggle to subside.

“Don’t get discouraged, but it could take months. Just remember, the more you obey God, the stronger your spiritual nature becomes. And as it gets stronger, the old nature gets weaker.”

Lynn sighed, “I can hardly wait.”

Elaine smiled and said, “Be sure when you get up tomorrow to spend some time reading your Bible. That’s how you feed your new nature.”

“Don’t worry, I will.” She then laughed and said, “I guess I shouldn’t be so emphatic. Let’s just say I plan on doing it, no matter how I feel in the morning.”

“I’ll be praying for you.”

“Thanks.”

Even though Lynn got discouraged at times and felt like a real failure, with the love and support from her new friends at Bible study, she kept plodding along, hoping and praying for the day when she didn’t have to go through these battles.

As the months went by, not only did the intensity of her battles diminish, but her happiness reached new heights that she didn’t even think existed. One lady she was witnessing to, said, “You’re in love aren’t you? I can tell by your face.” Lynn got a kick out of that, considering she didn’t even have a boyfriend.

Lynn knew she was having a little taste of what we’re going to feel like in heaven.

She was thankful she had chosen nursing as a career because she figured she would have ample opportunities to talk to people at the hospital. After graduating and starting work at

North Broward Hospital, she had many opportunities to talk to patients about the Gospel. But work at the hospital was very exhausting, both physically and mentally. She felt drained. Sometimes she would come home and sink into the couch. Normally she would spend time reading her Bible, but she felt like escaping without having to use her mind. The T.V. was an obvious outlet.

She felt guilty at first, but considering how hard she worked, she figured God would understand. But other things began to slip in her life. She knew that it was important to start the day with prayer and Bible reading, but instead she was using the time she normally spent for morning devotions sleeping.

And then Tim came into her life. Tim was an intern at the hospital. He was 6'2" with dark wavy hair, blue eyes and a mustache. All the nurses had a crush on him.

One day Sophia, the charge nurse on the floor Lynn worked on, said to her, "You know, I've noticed Tim looking at you. I think he's interested."

Lynn could feel herself blushing and she muttered, "I doubt it."

"Lynn, why wouldn't he like you? You're gorgeous."

Lynn was extremely embarrassed and laughed nervously.

Sophia was correct about Tim liking Lynn. Shortly thereafter he approached her and asked her out for dinner.

Lynn felt flustered. Ever since she had started serving the Lord, she had dated only other believers. She knew the command not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

When she hesitated in answering him, he said, "How 'bout we just get together for coffee?"

That suited Lynn just fine. This way she could present the Gospel to him and if he believed and was interested in serving the Lord, then perhaps a dinner date was in the works.

As they sat in the coffee shop together, Lynn felt very comfortable with Tim. He was much more than just a good doctor, he really cared about people and was consumed with doing everything in his power to help alleviate human suffering.

Lynn felt drawn to this young man as she had never felt towards anyone before.

Lynn concluded that their conversation wasn't really conducive to the subject of God, so she decided to wait for another opportunity. She figured there would be plenty of time for that.

She agreed to have dinner with him and they had a wonderful time, but again she put off talking to him about the Gospel.

It became a chore to read and pray. She was consumed by her feelings for Tim. When she wasn't working she found it hard to think about anything besides him.

It was Lynn's regular habit to spend her days off with Elaine so they could reach people with the Gospel. As Lynn offered one excuse after another, Elaine knew her friend was slipping further and further away from the Lord. Elaine tried to talk to her, and so did Tony, but to no

avail.

Lynn started to feel badly about not having shared the Gospel with Tim so she determined the next time they were on a date, she would broach the subject. After dinner she asked, "Tim, have you ever wondered if you were going to heaven or not?"

"No, as a matter of fact I haven't. My interest is in the here and now. I want to make this world a better place for my having been here. I've found a lot of religious people are so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good." With those words he reached across the table and put his hands on her hers, gazed into her eyes, and said, "Lynn, you are so beautiful."

That was the first and last time she ever brought up the subject. It was obvious he had no interest in religious matters and at this point in Lynn's life she was more concerned with what Tim thought of her than what God thought of her. Her love for him became her consuming passion.

Almost a year passed when Tim asked Lynn to be his wife. She was so happy she was crying when she accepted. Fairy tales do come true, she thought.

The next day at work she was anxious to tell the other nurses the news of their engagement. Lynn's joy was tempered by one of her patients, a young woman who was dying of cancer. Maria was only twenty-five years old and for the last year she had been on chemotherapy. She just recently had come under Lynn's care. Lynn was especially fond of Maria; she was so brave and never complained in spite of all the suffering she was enduring.

When Lynn went in her room to change her I.V. bag, she told her about herself and Tim. Maria expressed her happiness and smiled. How it hurt Lynn to see this woman trapped in a body which was slowly squeezing the life out of her. Maria was only two years older than Lynn, but chemotherapy treatments made her look twenty years older. Lynn could see that time was running out for sweet Maria.

Lynn knew that Maria was going to be facing eternity soon and even though it had been several months since Lynn had shared the Gospel, she consider doing it now.

But she lacked the courage to bring up the subject of heaven to this dying woman.

Everyday, Maria's strength diminished and Lynn's guilt intensified. The thought of her going to hell really bothered her. Lynn knew she had to tell her the Gospel.

On her day off, she got a call from Eileen, a nurse who told her that Maria was fading fast and she was asking for her. Lynn quickly got to her side and Maria was barely able to speak. Lynn put her arms around her and put her ear to her mouth. In labored breathing and barely audible, Maria said, "You have been so good to me. Thank you."

With those words, she expired.

Lynn's grief was magnified beyond belief, knowing she had let Maria slip into eternity without telling her the Gospel.

When Tim called Lynn that night to get together, she told him she was sick. She was so consumed with guilt she couldn't eat and just wanted to be alone. She cried herself to

sleep that night and many nights to follow. She knew she couldn't explain what she was going through to Tim, so she was forced to suffer in silence.

He kept inquiring what was bugging her and her only response would be "nothing".

Finally Tim told her, "Lynn, you're not the person you used to be. You always have excuses not to get together. I feel like we're growing apart." Sighing deeply, he said, "You're not the person I asked to marry me."

In a pleading voice she responded, "Tim, believe me my feelings for you haven't changed; it's just that I have a lot on my mind. Please be patient with me."

But Tim's patience ran out. The month before their scheduled wedding day, he came over to her apartment and told her that he wanted to call off the wedding.

She cried and pleaded with him to reconsider, promising him that things would return to the way they were.

Then he dropped the bombshell. "Lynn, he said, it's too late. There's someone else."

Lynn couldn't believe her ears. Never in a million years would she think that Tim would get involved with someone else while he was engaged to her! She wanted to die. She buried her face in her hands and began sobbing uncontrollably.

He said nothing for a while, then finally said, "I'm sorry."

Lynn felt like this was a nightmare and was hoping and praying she would awaken soon.

Finally he said, "I'm leaving now."

Before he left she blurted out, "Who is she?"

In a low voice he said, "Sharon Winters," then left.

Sharon Winters was her friend! Or so she thought. Lynn felt anguished as she remembered all the times she had shared things with Sharon about Tim and herself. What a mockery! How could she do this to her? Over the next few agonizing days, Lynn's grief smoldered into anger and she began comforting herself with doing away with both of them. But as she was seriously contemplating murdering them, she knew she couldn't do it, and her rage turned inward and she began thinking of suicide.

At work, which was torture for her in her state of mind, she began taking a pill here and there and saving them for the "big night" in which she planned on ending her misery. When that night came, she emptied the pill bottle she had next to the glass of water on her nightstand.

As she stared at them, knowing she would be in heaven before morning, she decided to read her Bible one last time. "Oh God," she cried, in an anguished voice, "I am so sorry. I'm sorry I fell away from You. I'm sorry I didn't talk to Maria. And I'm sorry I'm doing this. But God, I can't live with this pain. It's too much too bear!"

She buried her face in her pillow and wept so hard and so long, she had to sit up to catch

her breath.

After she was breathing normally, she reached over to take the pills, but then she remembered she was going to read the Bible first.

She pulled her Bible from the draw in the nightstand - it had been months since she had opened it. As she leafed through it, she began remembering how things were before she slipped away. She really had been happy and she had been at peace with God and herself.

What a fool to have thrown it all away! For what?

And then her mind turned to the eternal. She knew because of what she was about to do, she would be facing the Lord in shame. And her rewards - what about them?

She turned in her Bible to Second Corinthians, chapter five, and read verse ten where it speaks of the judgment for all believers. Only works done for Christ will be rewarded.

As Lynn thought of the time she had spent serving the Lord, she knew her rewards would be few. That bothered her. The more she thought about it, the less she wanted to go to heaven with so few rewards.

In a tortured voice, she cried out, "please God help me!"

After crying some more, she prayed, "Lord, if you can still use me after all that I've done, then please help me endure the pain. I feel like I just can't take it."

At that moment, Lynn had a feeling that everything was going to be alright and she felt compelled to start reading the book of Psalms.

She couldn't help but be amazed by how many verses applied to her situation. She found herself reading certain verses over and over again.

As the hours passed, so did her feelings of hopelessness and depression. With the rising of the sun came a day of rejoicing for Lynn. Her heartache and sorrow had been replaced by a joy and peace which passes understanding.

Lynn had no idea that what had happened to her this night was even possible. A few hours earlier she was ready to take her own life, but now she was looking forward to a future serving God. Who wouldn't want to serve a God who comforts the brokenhearted, strengthen the weak, and helps the despairing?

Although Lynn's circumstances had not changed, she had.

She had come home to her heavenly Father. Heaven rejoiced and so did she!

"Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

(Luke 15:10)

Lynn finally fell into a deep sleep. Several hours later, she was awakened by the ringing of her phone. Groggy, but still elated from her experience of restored peace and joy, she happily fumbled for the phone.

"Hello," she said in a sleepy voice.

"Sorry to get you up Lynn."

Lynn immediately recognized the voice of one of the nurses she worked with.

"Oh, hi, Rhoda, how are you?"

"Well, I was OK, but my mother-in-law made an unexpected visit. Thank goodness she's only staying the night.

"The reason I'm calling is to ask a favor. Is there any way you could cover for me tonight?"

Lynn hesitated for a few seconds and then decided she would.

As she drove to work that night, she started thinking of all the changes she needed to make in her life. She had to go back to the way things were before she fell away. That meant getting back to her daily Bible reading and witnessing, and of course she had to return to Bible study. She determined the following day to call Elaine and Tony.

When she drove into the hospital parking lot, she prayed to the Lord for help for what lay ahead.

Everything was really going well until she crossed paths with Sharon Winters. Lynn had hoped so much the intense pain she had previously felt in her presence would never return again. But here it was in its full fury.

With an artificial smile on her face, Sharon asked Lynn how she was doing. It took everything Lynn had to answer. She then hurried away and went to the nearest vacant room where she could be alone.

After shutting the door, she raised her arm and rested her head against it, leaning her body against the wall. She cried for a few minutes. "Oh, God," she prayed, "please take these feelings away from me."

She had gotten such comfort the previous night when she read Psalms where it said God heals the brokenhearted. She was confused by her feelings. Why did she feel brokenhearted again, if God had healed her?

Then like a flash it hit her and she almost laughed out loud. Countless times she had changed bandages and seen horrific wounds gradually heal. Those wounds didn't heal overnight - there was time involved. Now she understood.

After work she started thinking that perhaps she should consider working at a different

hospital. That way she wouldn't have to face the painful reminders of her disobedience; namely Sharon and Tim. It seemed like the logical thing to do. In a very real sense she was starting over and it seemed reasonable that her new beginnings should include a new job. She decided the next day she worked, she would give her notice.

But within seconds of her decision, all the feelings of peace she had were gone. Discouraged and disheartened, she asked the Lord what was going on.

She prayed and she read her Bible, but to no avail. "Lord," she asked, "why do I feel like this? Have I done something wrong?"

She then mentally re-traced her steps. She had been at peace before she made the decision to quit her job. It was when she determined to get a new job that everything changed.

"Lord," she prayed, "I'll do anything to have my peace and joy back. I'll stay where I am if that's what You want."

The moment she finished praying, she sighed a sigh of relief. She felt like a ton of bricks had been removed from off her shoulders; her peace and joy were restored.

The next day she contacted Elaine and Tony and they wanted to meet her for lunch. Any apprehension she had about how they would feel about her soon vanished when she saw the love and joy on their faces. Elaine's eyes kept welling with tears as she kept telling Lynn how happy she was to see her.

There were no words of condemnation; not once did they reprove her or put her down in any way. They didn't even ask her what it was that had made her want to serve the Lord again.

But she felt she should tell them about what had happened in her life since they had last seen her.

With much shame and a few tears, Lynn shared her story.

She also explained what had transpired the preceding evening when she had planned on quitting her job at North Broward Hospital.

Tony, who was listened intently, said, "It may not make sense to you now Lynn, why the Lord would want you to stay there. But He obviously has a reason and probably in a short time you'll understand.

How true those words proved to be.

About three months later, when Lynn was having lunch in the hospital cafeteria, Suzanne, a nurse who worked on the same floor as Lynn, asked to join her at her table.

Lynn had presented the Gospel several times to her in the past, but Suzanne had been like a brick wall.

As Suzanne sat down, Lynn was praying about trying to talk to her again, hoping for a more receptive audience.

Before Lynn had a chance to broach the subject, Suzanne said, "There's something I want to tell you."

"Sure, go ahead."

"Lynn, remember when you tried to talk to me about the Bible before? As you know, I really wasn't interested in hearing about it. But I feel differently now.

"When you broke up with Tim and got religious right afterwards, me and a lot of the other nurses thought it was just your way of finding comfort. But after observing you for the last three months, we've changed our minds. You seem happier now than you ever were when you were engaged to Tim. It's obvious that you really do have something from God. Only God could make a person as happy as you are...so what did you say I have to do to go to heaven?"

After Suzanne believed in Christ to get her to heaven, Lynn explained to Suzanne how she could have the same happiness as she had.

As she lay in bed that night, she marveled at the wisdom of God. Oh, that she might always trust Him and never lose sight that God promises to work all things together for good for those believers who love God.

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Before we trusted Christ as our Savior, it made sense to us that good people went to heaven and bad people went to hell. At that time what we didn't understand was that from God's viewpoint there is no such thing as a good person. Romans 3:12, says, "All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one." If we could have made it heaven by being good then Christ's death would have been unnecessary (Galatians 3:21). It is because we can do absolutely nothing to get ourselves to heaven that God came to earth and paid our way. Because all the work needed to get us to heaven was accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ, the only condition to go to heaven is to believe in Him. He said, "...he who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47).

When a person understands and believes this message then he sees the wisdom of God demonstrated in the death of Christ. But to those who reject this message of salvation by faith alone, God's wisdom is nonsense. To them it makes sense that only people who are worthy should be allowed to enter heaven.

So you see, the world has a way of looking at things that is completely contrary to the way God sees things. And the way we are to determine what is God's wisdom is to look in His Word, the Bible.

In the Bible, God not only tells us how to go to heaven, but He also tells us how He wants us to live our lives after we have become His children. His will is for all those who have trusted

Christ as their Savior to become His servants. And if you are going to serve the Lord you are going to have to govern your life by a whole different set of principles than those who aren't serving the Lord. Because of that you'll think and behave in a way foreign to this world's way of thinking and behaving.

For instance, it is a common assumption that everyone is God's child, but if a person desires to serve the Lord, he must agree with Scripture that the real truth is that everyone by nature is a child of Satan (Ephesians 2:1-3). And because every person is born into this world as a child of the devil, there has to be a new birth in order for someone to become a member of the family of God. If a person is never born again, he is headed for an eternity separated from God in the lake of fire.

The Bible also explains that there are two spiritual kingdoms that exist; the kingdom of God and the domain of Satan. When a person trusts Christ as his Savior, he is removed from the domain of Satan into the kingdom of God and while this truth guarantees a change in one's destiny, it does not guarantee a change in one's lifestyle.

In other words, although all who trust Christ as their Savior are children of God and thus assured of going to heaven, all are not assured of experiencing a changed life. The reason for this is because having a changed life is conditioned upon the works of the believer, whereas having eternal life is conditioned upon the work accomplished by Christ on the cross. Going to heaven requires nothing from the receiver; the gift of eternal comes by having faith in Christ. But those believers who wish to experience a changed life must respond to God in obedience. If a believer fails to obey God, his life will never change.

Rather than teaching that a believer's life will automatically change, the Bible teaches that there are some great obstacles to be faced by all those who wish to experience a changed life. In other words, becoming a godly person doesn't come naturally. The reason for this is because the fallen nature that we were born with was not changed or eradicated when we trusted Christ as our Savior. You see, the believer is a person who has two natures - a carnal nature and a spiritual nature. We were born with our carnal nature and it is this nature that is responsible for our sinful desires. But we are given a spiritual nature when we are born into God's family and this nature is perfect.

Every believer has a choice of yielding to one nature or the other. When a person lives for himself and this world, then he is yielding to his carnal nature. But if a believer lives his life for God, then he is yielding to his spiritual nature. Even though one's eternal destiny can never be affected by what the believer does, he must live with the consequences of the choices he makes. It says in Romans 8:6 that "to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." When it says the consequence of being carnally minded is death, it isn't speaking of physical death (even though ultimately it could result in that), but rather spiritual death. You see, the word "death" means "separation." And although a believer can never be separated from God in hell, he can be separated from God's fellowship here on earth.

God longs to have a close, intimate relationship with His children. But a friendship with God can come only as a result of obedience to God. Jesus said, "You are My friends, *if*

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you do whatever I command you.”

The Lord not only wants what is best for us but He knows what is best for us, and He has told us in the Bible how to live our lives so that we can experience an abundant life filled with joy and peace. But this comes only as a result of yielding to God. He said, “to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”

On the other hand, we can choose to reject God and His plan for our lives and follow our own pursuit of happiness. There is much in this world that looks very attractive but in reality is very ugly because it pulls us away from our devotion to God.

So what may appear good and harmless in the world’s eyes can in fact be a delusion of Satan. To understand this, let’s look at the first mention of Satan in the Bible.

When Eve was in the Garden of Eden she had been warned by God not to eat from a certain tree because if she did she would die. You may question then, why did she eat from that tree since she was fully aware of what would happen if she did?

The answer is that she listened to Satan’s lies.

And what exactly were his lies? That if she ate from the tree she wouldn’t die and she would be like God because she would know both good and evil.

Let’s look at these lies more closely. God had told her that she would die if she ate from the tree, and Satan had told her she wouldn’t, so Satan’s first lie was that God was a liar.

The second lie was a bit more deceptive. Satan told her, in essence, that God was trying to hold something good back from her and Adam by not letting them eat from that tree. It was true that they would gain a knowledge of good and evil by eating it, but what Satan didn’t tell them is that untold heartache and grief would come into their lives as a result of having that knowledge.

Unfortunately, Eve listened to Satan and, with his lies in mind, she took another look at the forbidden fruit. What had once been considered “off limits” became to her a legitimate means of gaining wisdom. She fell for the lie that she could gain something good apart from God. It says that “when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her: and he did eat” (Genesis 3:6). And the human race hasn’t stopped suffering since.

Oh, if only people could realize that sin always has a price tag! For Adam and Eve the price tag was having a perfect body which was not subject to sickness or death becomes a body that was subject to pain and disease and finally death. It meant the end of a perfect world, a world in which unhappiness and suffering didn’t exist.

And the plan of Satan to wreck havoc with God’s creatures didn’t end there. Satan was not

cast into hell after he had deceived Adam and Eve. According to the Bible he is presently working in the lives of both unbelievers and believers.

Satan knows that his final destination is hell, but apparently his goal is to take as many humans with him as possible. There is only one message that can save a person from this fate: it is the Gospel of our salvation that the Lord Jesus paid for our sins and offers any who would believe in Him the gift of eternal life. According to the Bible, Satan is blinding men's minds to this message. Satan wants people to think they have to be good to go to heaven.

Any believer who decides to serve the Lord will be working against Satan, because in order to serve God a believer has to be sharing the message that being good will not get a person to heaven. For this reason Satan is trying to keep those who share the Gospel from doing so.

One of his main methods of alluring believers away from the Lord is to appeal to their desires for the things of this world. Just as Eve listened to Satan and ate the forbidden fruit, we can also listen to the lies of Satan and eat of a forbidden fruit.

The "forbidden fruit" for the Christian is the world and for many it is too tempting to resist. Let's look at the Bible to see exactly what the "world" is.

First John 2:16, says, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Let's look at these three things more closely so that you can determine whether you are of the world or of God.

LUST OF THE FLESH

This not only includes immorality, witchcraft, hatred, and the misuse of alcohol and drugs but also anything that appeals to our sinful nature.

Some good questions to ask yourself to determine if you are living to fulfill the lusts or desires of the flesh are:

- . How much time do you spend watching T.V. and reading magazines rather than studying the Bible?
- . Do you spend all your income on yourself or do you devote part of it towards furthering the cause of Christ?
- . How many people are you reaching with the Gospel?
- . Do you consider anything more important than serving God?

If you think anything is more important than serving God and if your life is not devoted to

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doing His will, then you are a person who is fulfilling the lusts of the flesh.

LUST OF THE EYES

This is what appeals to our visual senses. The tenth commandment is “Thou shalt not covet..” (Exodus 20:17). When you desire something that belongs to someone else then you are guilty of the sin of coveting. But coveting has a much broader definition than this. It is the desire for anything that is outside the will of God.

You should ask yourself these questions to determine if you are a covetous person.

- . Is it important to you to have “things?”
 - . Do you envy people for what they have and are you living your life with the goal of getting the things they have?
 - . Are you satisfied with what you have?

The Lord says “Let your manner of life be without covetousness and be content with such things as ye have..” (Hebrews 13:5). So if you are not content with what you have or if you are living to have what appeals to your visual senses, then you are a covetous person and are of the world.

PRIDE OF LIFE

This is what appeals to our vanity. If you are wondering if you fit into this category, please ask yourself:

- . Are you always trying to please yourself?
- . Is it your concern to look good in people’s eyes rather than in God’s eyes?
- . Is your goal in life to be famous and/or popular?

If you answered “yes” to any of the above, then you are motivated by the pride of life.

But being worldly isn’t restricted simply to those who chase after the things of this world. Did you realize that you could be religious and still be of the world? If a person thinks well of himself and likes others to be impressed with how “good” he is, then his motive in doing good is not to bring glory to God but rather to himself. That is the pride of life.

There are so many things in this world to distract us from our true purpose in life so that

God has very little, if any, place of prominence in our lives.

If this is your situation, I ask you to pause and reflect on the choice you have made. Before you buy Satan's lies I plead with you to look at the price you eventually are going to have to pay. If you live for this world you are cutting yourself off from God's help, blessings, direction, and friendship. You are forfeiting eternal rewards for that which is fleeting and temporary. And you have placed yourself in a position where the Lord will be forced to bring some sort of disciplinary action into your life.

God wants you to "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2).

Maybe you have never looked at it this way before, but if you choose the world above God then you despise God. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other: or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (riches)" (Matthew 6:24).

When a person serves God then he hates the world, but if he loves the world then he hates God. First John 2:15, says, "Love not the world, neither the things of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

If you have ever suffered the heartache that comes from loving someone who didn't love you in return, then maybe you have an idea of how much a child of God can hurt his Heavenly Father with his infatuation with the world.

I pray that all who are reading these words would choose to have the love of the Father in their hearts rather than the love of this world.

So you see it is only those who make the choice to turn away from the world and live for God who will have a changed life. In virtue of what God has done for us and all that He offers us if we do serve Him, the reasonable decision is to dedicate your life to God.

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may discover what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Roman 12:1,2).