



being loved  
**BY GOD**

A 11-Day Plan





# ***Being Loved by God***

## **11-Day Devotional**

Featuring excerpts from

***The Heart of a Warrior***

by Michael Thompson

*Originally written for the YouVersion Bible app*

***“... and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”***

Luke 3:22

***“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”***

Romans 5:8

***“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”***

Galatians 5:1

***Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”***

Luke 19:9-10

What is in the way of our belief that God loves us? Healing the heart is our Father's first imperative work and our introduction to training. Training? Yes, training, learning how to experience being a Beloved Son. In the midst of battle, the enemy counts on a man never experiencing that he is a Beloved Son. Join us on the journey to belovedness.

# 1. Belovedness

**Along with the Spirit, a voice:  
"You are my Son, chosen and marked by my love, pride of my life."  
-Luke 3:22 (MSG)**

Every man lives in a battle over which kingdom he will give his heart to, and every man has taken hits at varying points along his masculine journey. The wounds of accusation, guilt, shame, and fear are too often left untreated. These prevent a man from both receiving and offering love, possibly for the rest of his life. That's exactly what our adversary hopes and plans for: to entangle a man in a web of wounds and lies.

The wounding experiences are so well placed and so well crafted that a man feels certain the lies are true, and as a result...he becomes engulfed and entrenched in the accumulative effect of those lies that make up his particular *false self*. Oh, he may get by, but a *getting-by life* is a far cry from an ABUNDANT one!

*Understanding* is a precious thing. If someone comes up to me and shoves me down, my initial reaction might be to get up and give him a left hook. But if he then explains that there was a snake behind the log I was about to step over, a quick shift of understanding takes place. That person turns from bully to hero in a nanosecond. Wounding moments won't be healed or relieved simply by understanding alone, but it is a huge and significant start. What are the odds a man has interpreted all the days of his life accurately?

Getting a better understanding of our past sets us up for *redemption* and our next great step forward: moving into the critical *healing and training* we need as Beloved Sons. Once we see the lies we have lived under, as well as where they came from, we can invite Jesus to treat them.

These wounded places foster false guilt, shame, fear, and even hatred toward ourselves, others, and ultimately a low-grade resentment toward God. Again, these wounding moments had "lessons" attached to them, moments in which we learned something from them, and those lessons weren't good.

***Ask yourself, what wounding moments, and the false conclusions or declarations that rose from them now stand in the way of your freedom? Of your becoming a Beloved Son?***

What lies and heavy burdens might you be carrying in your heart that it's high time you stopped toting them around? Speaking for myself, the fear of "not being enough" led me to the statement: "I'll show you."

Sometimes my false self expressed it in anger. At other times, it was more of a desperate plea: *"I'll show you I can. Please let me try. Choose me—give me another chance."* Either way, I would do anything to not ever be or feel rejected, whether it meant proving myself or pleading... neither approach displayed my True Self and neither place came from a settled heart. By walking with God, we can go back and retrace our steps to find where it hurts. We can invite God into our story to show us how to collect and then connect the dots of our past. John Eldredge wrote:

***"The true story of every person in this world is not the story you see, the external story. The true story of each person is the journey of his or her heart."***

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## ***Time Alone With God ...***

*Father, when was my heart assaulted?*

*Jesus, what were the wounding moments in my life and the messages to my heart?*

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## 2. Retracing Steps

Soren Kierkegaard said, “*Philosophy is perfectly right in saying that life must be understood backward. But then one forgets the other clause—that it must be lived forward.*” Today we say, “Hindsight is twenty-twenty.” The path every masculine heart takes in becoming a man includes significant mile markers posted during boyhood years.

Early in our story, the *enemy* of our Life gets a jump on the fight for our hearts. Before we even know we are in a fight, darkness is inflicting injury, wounding us at our core as a boy, bringing fear, guilt, and often shame. The enemy takes ground in our young heart and uses it against us, both in the moment and also in the future. Growing up, some of us had it far worse than others.

As a boy, my friend, Tom, was scolded time and time again by his father: “I would have never even thought about doing what you did.”

Another friend, Jay, heard “If you would just apply yourself.”

My friend, Jim, never truly knew what his dad felt toward him. Jim was the oldest of six kids, and there simply wasn’t time enough for Dad to get around to all of them. Maybe you are familiar with the concept that “in the absence of information, we go to the negative.”

Just as kind and loving words bring *Life*, harsh words or the absence of words bring wounding and pain. Doubt, uncertainty, negative judgments, shaming or degrading pronouncements, and even sheer silence all weigh a heart down and make us susceptible to negative interpretations and lasting emotions.

“Negative” is putting it nicely. Some of these moments were/are downright *evil*. Some are like a pebble in a man’s shoe; others are like a backpack full of rocks, while others haunt a man like some kind of infection: affecting him every day of his life. Any and all negative moments, words, or deeds will hinder and encumber a man on his journey to becoming a man.

With our hearts weighed down, enduring and “making the best of things” often becomes our plan. Even worse than carrying the pack of lies is getting our strength from its contents. Being *fueled* by our wounds and their message is a recipe for disaster in a man’s life, one our enemy loves to cook up and serve cold again and again.

The pack of lies produces the kind of man I call *disoriented*, badly motivating a man to *hide, prove, or fear*. No man escapes this condition, but every man can be freed from the presence and pain of it, the lies that bind. The weight of men’s packs may differ, but every man has an incredible amount of say as to whether he stays loaded up and weighed down with wounding messages or finds freedom.

Pausing to take off your shoe and dump the pebble or unloading your personal backpack is an act of the will. Standing firm against evil starts by asking God:

***Father, what is this held up in my heart?  
What am I carrying in me that is set against me?***

God has been waiting for you to ask, seek, and knock for quite some time. In response, He may take you into a memory, or He may take you into a current moment to bring the pain of the past to the surface again. Whichever way He chooses, He is inviting you to do some good and important redemptive work by retracing your steps. Unpacking the lies of your past and giving them over to God opens you up to the new packages he has for you: gifts of redemption and restoration that make up your Belovedness.

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***Time Alone With God ...***

*Father, what lies have I believed about myself, others, and even you?*

*Jesus, when in my story was I wounded, where, when, and from whom? What was the message of those moments to my heart?*

*Holy Spirit, give me eyes to see and ears to hear the important moments of my past that might have shaped me in a not-so-good way. What am I carrying in my heart that needs to be traded in?*

### 3. A Father's Love

***This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.***

**-1 John 4:9-10**

If eBay has taught us anything, it is that you can tell the value of a thing by what someone is willing to pay for it. And, therefore, you are worth far more than you could possibly imagine! *Belovedness* is being dearly loved—and we are (See Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:10; 1 John 3:1–2) but experiencing our belovedness often comes down to a choice.

Letting, allowing, turning, engaging, reaching up to take our Father's hand, crawling up into his lap...all of these expressions describe what we need to do again and again to receive God's love, our part in the collaboration. Doing so both fills and fulfills our relationship with the Father. His pursuit of us with love is met with our wanting to be caught.

Oh, how a man needs this kind of relationship if he is ever going to truly be a man! And it is not a once-and-done proposition. The Father is continually offering it because we will continually need it. This connecting with God brings both his heart and ours into alignment, the Father the *giver* and us, beloved son the *receiver*. Repeatedly, receiving his love produces what this world and its imitations never can accomplish—a *settled heart*. We experience the lightness and goodness of being loved! But like a cup with a lid on it, we must uncover our heart and open up to being loved; otherwise, God can't pour his love in and fill us with what we most desperately need... Him. Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

***Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that.***

**-Ephesians 5:1–2 MSG**

The Father invites a man, his image-bearer, to partner with Him, walk with Him, trust Him, depend on Him, and align with Him for *more*. First on the agenda is redeeming the man's past, which is also where the early days of training begin! God is guiding each man toward a great comeback. The Father directs the steps. Christ has set the table and much of the work has already been accomplished, while the Holy Spirit woos us on. But we are to play our part. We have a contribution to make, a corresponding choice, an exercise of our will. What God desires to do first in a man's life is to heal him mostly through initiating and validating him by pouring his love into him. Doing so settles the man's heart and, in the process, invites him to partner with God in deconstructing the explosive work of the enemy and our false-self impostor. The question is: Will you take that crucial step His way?



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## **Time Alone With God ...**

*Father, what is in the way of my stepping towards you?*

*Jesus, where does my courage and trust lie if not you? In whom or in what?*

*Holy Spirit, give me the eyes to see and the ears to hear when you are loving me, healing me, initiating me, and validating me on my comeback. Show me how you're settling my unsettled heart.*

## 4. Ransomed

***If you then, evil (sinful by nature) as you are, know how to give good and advantageous gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven [perfect as He is] give what is good and advantageous to those who keep on asking Him. -Matthew 7:11 (AMP)***

What if our heavenly Father is *always* saying that, whispering at the end of every call, “I just want you to know that I see you. You are amazing to me. I love you, bud.” This level of intimacy between Father and Son got Jesus crossways with the religious leaders. When Jesus called Yahweh “Abba”—*Daddy*—the Pharisees pulled a muscle: “Who do you think you are—someone special?” Can’t you just see Jesus smile and nod, “Yep.”

Up until that point in history, no one had ever addressed God so affectionately. It wasn’t kosher. I like what Linda Boone writes:

***“God’s desire is to not only have you experience His love, but to totally overwhelm you with His love. To have you experience it to overflowing. To have you sense, feel, taste, and touch His love for you. He really wants you to experience Him!”***

Jesus knew he was his Father’s Beloved Son, “the firstborn of many” (Rom. 8:29). Jesus wants us to align with the Father—to connect with him and know what Jesus knew (John 17) and intimacy that gives Life. I believe this is what he meant when he promised us “abundant life” or *Life to the Full*.

Just as our hearts, well into manhood, long to hear our earthly fathers deliver the packages of worth and value, “I see you and am proud of you,” so our deep masculine hearts also need this from our heavenly Father, time and time again. As his image-bearers (Gen. 1:27), we are the object of his fierce and passionate, tender and overtaking love. You are worth the price paid.

Like I wrote before...if eBay has taught us anything, it has taught us this: The value of a thing is what someone is willing to pay for it. Unlike eBay, the Father wasn’t bidding, hoping to get a bargain or steal us away in the last moment. No, the Father made a grand and glorious declaration through the Son:

***“I love them and I want them. They belong to me!”***

Through Christ we have been ransomed. The ultimate price is paid—His life in exchange for our freedom, that we might have a Life. That theme is in all the epic stories that move our hearts, because it is in our story.

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## **Time Alone With God ...**

*Father, how do you see me, what is my worth, deep within me that you would ransom?*

*Jesus, thank you for giving your life that I might have one. Where and why am I lacking in experiencing your love?*

*Holy Spirit, guide me to the Truth. Teach me through whatever means my value and worth to the Father. I invite you to give me the ears to hear your intimate whispers of affection.*

# 5. Types of Christ

***It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.  
-Galatians 5:1***

In the story *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, C. S. Lewis offers us a glorious picture of our value. Aslan, the Great Lion, has come to partner with Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy, and restore all of Narnia, which is under the curse of a perpetual winter without Christmas. A type of Christ, Aslan goes to the Stone Table (symbolizing the cross) to redeem Edmund, Son of Adam (the image-bearer who was lost). Having paid the terrible price of death for Edmund's ransom, the resurrected Aslan tells Lucy and Susan how the "deep magic" of his redemptive work was accomplished:

***"It means," said Aslan, "that though the witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know...she would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitors stead, the (Stone) Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward."***

We see this theme repeatedly in all the epic stories. In the movie *Gladiator*, Maximus, slain in the arena for the freedom of his men and of Rome, whispers as he dies, "Now Lucius is safe." In *Braveheart*, William Wallace will not compromise himself nor the mission that found him, so he fights for freedom and inspires a nation to neither settle nor compromise. At the end of the film, the narrator says of Wallace's death by torture:

***"It did not have the effect Longshanks thought it would. Instead, in the year of our Lord 1314, patriots of Scotland, starving and outnumbered, charged the fields of Bannockburn. They fought like Warrior Poets.  
They fought like Scotsmen.  
And won their freedom."***

Mr. Darcy comes for Lizzy (*Pride and Prejudice*); Nathaniel rescues Cora (*The Last of the Mohicans*); Jack dies so Rose can live (*Titanic*); Noah reads to Ally and she remembers (*The Notebook*); and because Ray "builds it," his father comes and there is restoration through a game of catch (*Field of Dreams*). All the things that move our hearts in these great stories are but shadows of the Larger Story. All of these characters, these *types of Christ* personified in the epic tales (the Larger Gospel), borrow their strength and heroic storylines from the one true Hero.

Everything we love about these heroes we find true of our Savior-King who traded places with us so we might be free (Galatians 5:1). He comes, He rescues, He heals, He defends, He sacrifices, and He dies inviting us to live. He restores all for love and in love he moves our hearts to *freedom*.

The freedom Christ purchased was a freedom from the penalty and presence of sin in our lives—freedom *from* so we can be free *to become*. Free to become more, to become who we truly have in us to be. This isn't just a good deal for us. God also benefits greatly. *He gets what he wants*. He gets back the desire of his heart, what he is most fiercely after: his image-bearers, his beloved children, and the chance to love them.

Over and over we tell tales of love and sacrifice, rescue and redemption, good versus evil, all with the hope of that great line:

***“And they lived happily ever after.”***

We don't just watch these stories. We feel them! Yet too often, this deep response of the heart is “lost in translation.” We men are unable or unwilling to see and hear these stories, which are reflections of our stories in the context of the Larger Story. The heroes in the stories that inspire us invite us to see what our hearts are made for. When we fail to connect the themes in these stories with the themes in our own stories, then we miss the larger life for which we are being called. Often we miss our moment to step up and in to play the hero's part because we don't see and hear these moments of invitation; opportunities to love well, fight well, and offer a true masculine presence with both compassion and strength. And when we miss them, they are gone...until the next opportunity comes, which is often and great. How is He preparing you for such moments?

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## ***Time Alone With God ...***

*Father, what is in the way of my training in becoming more like Jesus?*

*Jesus, where am I undisciplined, unfocussed, or unskilled (as of yet) to offer a Kingdom Love and Kingdom Life to those around me?*

*Holy Spirit, prompt my heart, eyes, and ears to engage in the moments to love well and offer patience, kindness, and grace... just as I hope others would offer to me.*

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## 6. The Joy Set Before Him

***If with heart and soul you're doing good, do you think you can be stopped? Even if you suffer for it, you're still better off. Don't give the opposition a second thought. Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy. Keep a clear conscience before God so that when people throw mud at you, none of it will stick. They'll end up realizing that they're the ones who need a bath. It's better to suffer for doing good, if that's what God wants, than to be punished for doing bad. That's what Christ did definitively: suffered because of others' sins, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones. He went through it all—was put to death and then made alive—to bring us to God.***

**-1 Peter 3:15-18 (MSG)**

The writer of the book of Hebrews states “for the joy set before him [Christ] endured the cross” (Heb. 12:2 NIV). Guess who the joy was that was set before him? You and me! We are that joy! This is to be another part of our foundation, a reality we must feel, know, and enjoy. Brent Curtis, coauthor with John Eldredge of *The Sacred Romance*, wrote:

***“We are the ones to be called Fought Over, Captured and Rescued, and Pursued. It seems remarkable, incredible, and too good to be true. There really is something desirable within me, something the King of the universe has moved heaven and earth to get.”***

We are his Beloved; the joy set before Him. Every man must experience this in a position of knowing who he is as a Beloved Son, and return here again and again. As a father of three children, I often get to see this truth in action. My kids have no idea how much I love them, nor do they know the depth and weight of what I am doing on their behalf or how I am working behind the scenes to provide for and protect them. Just as I lived for a long time having no idea of all that my father was doing for me, so my children go unaware. I don't see it as my “job” to love my kids (although there are those days when it seems like a task!). Rather, I see it as a challenging and wonderful opportunity to look out for them, to love and delight in them.

Does our heavenly Father “have to do” the same for us—or does he long to? It was Jesus who said:

***“How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?” -Matthew 7:11 NIV***

For the record, Christ's followers are Beloved Sons. Our freedom is won!

We are adopted into the Father's family, and our name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life and now we are to learn to live like it. Through Christ we are sons— sons who have been pulled from dead-end streets and orphanages and given Life: *acceptance, worth, and a place to belong.*

We have literally and *transactionally* been brought into the glorious family of God with all its privileges and responsibilities. This has always been the Father's intention (See Rom. 8, John 3:16, Luke 19:10, Matt. 20:28): Life *through* Jesus and Life with the Father. Through the work of Christ in his cross, resurrection, and ascension, we have been *ransomed, rescued, and redeemed.* Much of the heavy lifting has already been done. Now, most of what the Father is up to in our lives is *restoring* us through healing, initiation, validation, and training. We “turn in” what *isn't* us (the false self) for what *is* us ... our True Self. And in the process we move from *disoriented* to *oriented* ... from unsettled to settled.

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## ***Time Alone With God ...***

*Father, what in me (in my heart) is in the way of receiving your Love?*

*Jesus, thank you for your work on my behalf: the cross, the resurrection, and the ascension. I have underestimated my cost and your payment. I invite you to show me where I have missed your work and my worth.*

*Holy Spirit, would you settle my heart? Would you teach me how to observe my thoughts and turn in anything and everything speaking that is not from you or of you?*

## 7. Settling Our Hearts

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

**-Philippians 4:7**

***Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.***

**-Colossians 3:15**

I was twenty years old, a junior in college, and had just returned from a two-month summer mission trip. Having received financial support from friends at church and a couple of the Sunday school classes, I was now reporting in on what had happened on mission. I hit the first adult class and shared some important stories and a few of the crazy things my team encountered. I thanked the members of the class for their generous support and moved down the hall to the donors in the next class.

My hand was on the door to open it when I heard my Dad's voice. Peering through the little window on the side, I saw him standing in front of the class. He started to speak of how proud he was of me, how the trip had impacted my life, and surprisingly to me, he shared how I impacted his life. Just then, he paused and brought his hand to his face. I thought for a minute that he was laughing. Then I realized he was crying. I waited a moment, then jostled the door and entered the room. He turned, smiled, and announced, "And Here he is. He can tell you all about it." That was one of the best days of my life, because I could *feel/experience* the encounter with my Dad's love for me.

Twice recorded in the Gospels (and by no means is that the limit), the Father in heaven made a validating statement to the Son on earth and to all who were within earshot. The first time was at the baptism of Jesus:

***And the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came from heaven, saying, "You are My Son, My Beloved! In You I am well pleased and find delight!" (Luke 3:22; cf. Matt. 3:17)***

The second time was at Jesus' transfiguration:

***While he was still speaking, behold, a shining cloud [composed of light] overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is My Son, My Beloved, with Whom I am [and have always been] delighted. Listen to Him!" (Matt. 17:5; cf. Luke 9:34–35; Mark 9:7)***

In these scenes, I imagine a deep and loving James Earl Jones-type voice definitively broadcasting the profound love declaration a father wants to express to his son: "This is my son." How affirming, how validating, how loving! *Proud* might be the best word



we could use today; “well pleased” was how it came across in the first century. What son doesn't long for such words? And what good father would ever withhold them?

It isn't hard for me to imagine that Jesus had more of these moments, receiving more validation and more instruction from his Father. Quiet and private moments spent together, Father and Son. Maybe that is why Jesus snuck off so often to spend some good time with Abba-Dad. Some of my friends whose fathers have passed away tell me, “What I wouldn't do to have one more day with him.” I suspect Jesus knew this feeling as well and he connected with his Father as often as he could until He returned to His right hand and is now preparing a place for us.

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## ***Time Alone With God ...***

*Father, how do I see you? What images have I projected on you?*

*Jesus, how do I see you? What inaccuracies and false images has the enemy planted in me regarding who you are?*

*Holy Spirit, how engaged am I in this Epic Story? Do I even regard my life and yours as Epic? What is in the way?*

## 8. Engaging Our Hearts for Battle

***And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."***

**-Matthew 3:17/Luke 3:22**

***For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.***

**-Luke 19:10 NASB**

If Jesus got to hear this from the Father, perhaps even *needed* to hear it, then the effect must have been gloriously settling. Why settling? Because both times, what happened next in Jesus' life was unsettling. On both occasions Jesus went from validation into battle.

The first time, the Father validates the Son as he emerges, dripping wet, from his baptism, then off to battle. The Scriptures record what happens next:

***Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.***

**-Luke 4:1–2 NIV**

The second time after his transfiguration (Luke 9:25), Jesus comes down from the mountain and proceeds by instruction from the Father to go to Jerusalem, where at first he is greeted with palm branches but then is led to a garden, then to a crown of thorns, and finally to a cross.

These validating moments are more than pep talks; they are ceremonies...deeply significant occasions where one heart acknowledges and validates another. Jesus seems to have needed these moments, because the moments to come would question him at his core and erupt in a battle for his heart. In the desert, Satan challenged his identity: *"If you are the Son of God..."* During his trial, the crowds in the streets declared, in effect, *"You can't be the Son of God!"*

Experiencing that Jesus' Father's heart towards him was good enabled the Son to endure whatever would come his way. Jesus' heart was full and settled, and therefore his mission remained clear to the end:

***For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*** -Mark 10:45 NIV

***For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*** -Luke 19:10 NASB

***I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*** -John 10:10 NIV

If a man is going to enter into the battle for all that is dear to him, and he must... then he is going to need a settled heart and there is only one voice that must be heard and received...the voice of his heavenly Father.

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## **Time Alone With God ...**

*Father, would you validate me? Would You show me I have what it takes to enter into the fight for abundant Life?*

*Jesus, would you train me up in the ways of the Kingdom, that I might know who I am because I know who you are and that I can stand in the face of the darkness that attempts to steal, kill, and destroy everything I hold dear?*

*Holy Spirit, would you teach and train me up in Kingdom "martial arts," tactics of spiritual warfare and the strength from a settled heart?*

## 9. Being Loved

***Christ arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn't, and doesn't, wait for us to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when we were far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get ourselves ready. And even if we hadn't been so weak, we wouldn't have known what to do anyway.***

***We can understand someone dying for a person worth dying for, and we can understand how someone good and noble could inspire us to selfless sacrifice. But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him.***

***-Romans 5:6-8 (MSG)***

One of my earliest memories goes back to when I was about four years old, and my younger brother, three. At the end of every day, he and I would go on alert, listening for Dad's fan-tailed Chevy to pull into the driveway. Dad usually prompted us with a couple of pops on the horn. My brother and I would gasp, jump up, and run around yelling, "He's home ... he's home!" My mom would jump in and add to the drama with "Hurry, hurry!" as she went to the hall closet, grabbed a big blanket, and brought it into the family room. That was our cue to crouch on our knees and tuck in our arms, legs, and heads; then Mom flapped the blanket out like she was spreading it for a picnic and covered the two of us, hiding us from Dad just in time.

Into the house Dad would step, hollering, "Hi, Mom! Where are the boys?" Then he'd say, "Are they in the closet?" as he loudly turned the knob and swung the closet door open. "Nooo, not in the closet. Are they in the kitchen?" We could hear chairs in the kitchen getting resituated. By now, my brother and I were about to burst. Dad would tromp back into the family room, whereupon we would spring up and yell, "SURPRISE!" What happened next was *Belovedness*: two boys and their father, tangled up in a blanket, laughing, tickling, and hugging.

This is what it is to "*be-loved*," to be fiercely pursued with affection. I'm not sure who enjoyed it more, Dad or us boys. When we release God from the lie that he is either an angry dictator, has better things to do, or is simply a distant casual observer (or some combination of the three), and embrace him as the Father of all fathers, then we might begin to know we truly are the Beloved Sons.

The cross lavishly accomplished more than forgiveness. It afforded us, and God, the privilege to be reunited, to feel our value and worth to be ransomed by a Father who paid everything he had to set us free. (Rom. 5:8; Gal. 5:1; Luke 19:10; John 3:16; 1 Cor. 6:20) If you didn't get that kind of love from your earthly father (and far too many men didn't), then you need to circle back with your Father God. He will provide it for your heart. It is what we were made for and it is what the enemy of our hearts is hell bent on keeping us from.

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## **Time Alone With God ...**

*Father, how have I missed your Love? What have I believed about you that is in the way of me receiving your Love?*

*Jesus, what does it look like and feel like to be a Beloved Son of a Good, Good Father?*

*Holy Spirit, will you show me what Love really looks like by Loving me and getting through all the mess that is in the way to change my masculine heart ... deposit in me through experience and encounters with you "Be-Lovedness"?*

# 10. Experiencing the Truth

***History does not long entrust the care of freedom to the weak or timid.***  
-General Dwight D. Eisenhower

***So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.***  
-Jesus (John 8:36)

The role and mission of an earthly father is to walk with God in such a way as to show his sons (and daughters) what the heavenly Father is like and, at some point, invite his son to turn to the Father for continued fathering. Author and counselor John Eldredge says in *Fathered by God*:

**“We aren’t meant to figure out life on our own. God wants to father us. The truth is, He has been fathering us for a long time—we just haven’t had the eyes to see it. He wants to father us much more intimately, but we have to be in a posture to receive.”**

But count on this: The lines of *intimacy and communication*, of receiving love from our Father God, have been infiltrated, sabotaged, compromised. And so the first captive I need to see set free ... is **me**.

Partnering with God, a man can hunt down that which has previously hunted him: the agents of darkness that taunt, assault, and labor to build and use a man’s false self to entangle, enslave, and encumber (2 Peter 2:20, Gal. 4:9, Heb. 12:1). It is the wounding moments of our past that speak into our current and keep us bound though we are free. How can we be free *and* bound? Look around...it is everywhere. What Christ has done *HAS* set us free, but what the enemy has done is keep us from experiencing that freedom. It’s time to put this “spiritual bipolar disorder” to an end.

Remember, John 10:10 has a Part A: “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.*” So he has and does. And thank goodness for Part B: “*I have come that you might have Life and have it Abundant ... Full.*”

With each *reclaiming or resurrecting* of what was lost, stolen, or put to death in a man’s heart, a man becomes more and more free. Freedom to receive love results in a man becoming more and more whole, and wholeness increases the man’s freedom to then offer and bestow love to others. And that is what the battle is all about:

LOVE—a man’s ability to be loved and his increasing skill and ability to love others! The creator of our hearts knows how to treat our wounds and bring about their healing by removing the old and replacing it with the new. The truth replaces the lies. And just as each wounding moment is an experience, so it is also an experience when the truth comes and replaces the lie on our journey with God. Jesus said: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free“(John 8:32 NIV).

BUT... we must participate. We have a role to play in the exchange. We must see what is in the way-lies we have believed about God, others, and ourselves, and that these lies are operational. They are at work within.

With our acceptance of His invitation to heal, and with our participation, Jesus removes the lies and heals the broken places of our hearts with his presence and his words. We confess and repent we believed falsehoods and then turned them inward. He deconstructs the toxic and false self time bombs inside us. He sets us up to move forward freely without further injury to ourselves and, more significantly, the *others* in our life who are there in order for us to love. This is how wholeheartedness is accomplished and how we can join our King in the great turn of the tide in this spiritual battle in which we find ourselves the objects of and in the midst of doing the bidding for one of two kingdoms ... darkness or Light.

*If wounded hearts wound, then free hearts can free hearts.*

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## **Time Alone With God ...**

*Father, which kingdom have I been serving and how? Where am I compromised?*

*Jesus, thank you for Life. What intel does the enemy of my heart have on me that is keeping me from your promise of a Full and Abundant Life?*

*Holy Spirit, what lies are still operational against my belovedness?*

# 11. Advanced Training

Training is essential for the Apprentice of Jesus ...

*Now every athlete who [goes into training and] competes in the games is disciplined and exercises self-control in all things. They do it to win a crown that withers, but we [do it to receive] an imperishable [crown that cannot wither]. -1 Corinthians 9:25 (AMP) Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. -Ephesians 6:4 (NIV)*

*But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. -Hebrews 5:14 (NIV)*

*For physical training is of some value, but godliness (spiritual training) is of value in everything and in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and for the life to come. -1 Timothy 4:8 (AMP)*

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. -2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV)*

*If you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father. He loves to help. You'll get his help, and won't be condescended to when you ask for it. Ask boldly, believingly, without a second thought. -James 1:5 (MSG)*

I wonder: how many training moments I have misclassified as *inconvenient, punishment, bad luck, my fault or someone else's*? I am convinced that Jesus wants to redeem **all** such moments. Learning how to get the best out of training moments takes time. One day you don't know how; the next, you do. All the days leading up to when the old gives way to the new, **matter**. It is over time that training pays off.

There was a time when I didn't understand that much of what God is up to in my training journey. I thought it was more about policing me, waiting for me to step out of line so he could dispense the proper punishment. This false belief had **great power** in my life. It was a false gospel that made sin central and punishment primary. Those two ingredients do not make for intimacy and didn't make for a very good version of me.

Under that *old belief* system, when hardships or inconveniences arose in my life, I was certain God was using them to punish me or get even. I see it all as training now. If you understand the heart of the Father and what he is really up to in your own heart, then you also understand what he is preparing and readying you for: **MORE!** It is why the art of *living curiously* is so helpful to the Warrior in training. Asking God questions in prayer puts him in the rightful place of Teacher and us in the safest place, student.



If God is going to be *more* and do *more* in your life, then it's critical that he have greater access to your heart. Living oblivious to the heart and the Larger Story and how it works is a guarantee for being a casualty, not a Warrior.

In order to renovate your heart, Jesus will have you revisit your belief system. **What you see, hear and conclude ... what you believe in any and every situation matters... It has authority in your life!**

But that's okay. Just wait until you see the results! The Warrior cannot and does not force his way, nor can he make someone change. He only offers whom he is and what he knows—a dangerous prospect, because you never know how another image bearer will respond. You never know who is for or who will be against a man with a settled heart. Jesus didn't win them all, and neither will you.

The question for an oriented man is:

***How will you live, knowing what you know,  
among others who don't?***

The answer: Patiently. Kindly. Generously. Lovingly. And *Uncompromisingly*. This is what Jesus modeled, and this is the ***Life in which he invites us to share.***

# THE HE Art OF A WARRIOR



BEFORE YOU CAN BECOME THE  
WARRIOR

YOU MUST BECOME THE

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