

Day 21
Commitment #1
God sees me

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight." Hebrews 4:13

God sees us.

He sees things about us that we can't see.

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Hebrews 4:12

God sees our "thoughts."

Not just our thoughts about people. Our thoughts about Him. Our doubts about Him. Our fear of Him. God sees it all.

God sees our "attitudes."

He sees whether we respond to him willingly or unwillingly. He sees what lies underneath our actions. God sees what other people cannot see, what we ourselves cannot fully see. He sees our motives.

This is why we are told to "judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts." 1 Corinthians 4:5

It is not our job to judge ourselves or others. We are not equipped. We can only judge on the basis of what we can see. God "judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." These are things we cannot see. These are things we cannot judge.

God sees us . . . and yet He sympathizes with us, deals gently with us and loves us.

Believe that He loves you.

It will help you love God.

It will help you to love yourself.

It will help you love others.

"We love because he first loved us." 1 John 4:19

Day 22
Commitment #2

God sympathizes with me

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses." Hebrews 4:15

Jesus sympathizes with us.

Yeah, right!

He walked on water. Some of us can't even float.

He had dialogues with God the Father. We barely manage monologues.

He never sinned. We . . . can't say that.

How can it be that He sympathizes with us?

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered." Hebrews 5:7-8

Jesus "suffered." He chose to.

"Loud cries and tears." He didn't want to.

Jesus knows what it is like to harbor conflicting, opposing "wants." He stayed the course. He did not veer away from the cross. But . . . He knows what it is like to be pulled in different directions.

He sympathizes with us.

What do we "need" to do? What do we "want" to do? It would be nice if these paths always headed in the same direction. But they don't! And Jesus understands that. No . . . He *sympathizes* with that!

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" John 12:27-28

A "troubled heart." Agitated emotions. Jesus felt this.

He came to die.

He also came to live with internal tension . . .

. . . so He could sympathize with us.

Day 23
Commitment #3

God deals gently with me

"He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray." Hebrews 5:2

"I want to make this quick." An email or letter is fine.

"I want you to understand." Email and letters have limitations.

Why?

"How" we say something is as important as "what" we say. Body language. Facial expressions. Voice intonation. Words cannot stand by themselves. They leave gaps.

The Bible. Words on paper. Black and white communication. No body language. No facial expressions. No voice intonation. Like a letter or an email.

No wonder we come away from the Bible with so many different messages. We read so much into it. We have to. We cannot see God's face. We cannot hear God's voice.

We have to imagine.

In our world there is no shortage of people who claim to speak for God . . . and they sound so different. They look so different. Demanding. Reasonable. Angry. Afraid.

"I am gentle and humble in heart." Matthew 11:28

Gentle. This is the word Jesus used to describe Himself. We don't need to imagine.

Relaxed. Direct. Observant. Compassionate.

Not combative. Not argumentative. Not condescending. Not afraid.

Not the kind of person who makes you feel uncomfortable . . . unless you were deliberately misrepresenting His Father in order to manipulate people.

The kind of person who puts you at ease.

Remember this when you open the Bible.

Remember this when you read those words or recite them to others.

God deals gently with you.

Day 24
Commitment #4
God loves me

"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need."
Hebrews 4:12

Pick a place in the Old Testament of the Bible and begin to read. Before long you will get the impression that God doesn't like visitors!

From Mount Sinai God declared, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." Hebrews 12:20

Keep out! Beware of God!

Moses was permitted to ascend the mountain and approach God. Moses wasn't smiling. "The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."
Hebrews 12:21

No trespassing . . .

. . . or else!

God *loves* people? Approach Him with confidence?

God designed the tabernacle as a place to meet with people. God's "office" consisted of courtyards within courtyards. The closer the courtyard to God, the fewer the people that could enter. The innermost courtyard was called the "inner room" or the "Most Holy Place." This is where God "conducted His business." "But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance."
Hebrews 9:7

One person.

Once a year.

God *loves* people? Approach Him with confidence?

"The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing." Hebrews 9:7-8

The door into God's presence did not exist . . . before Jesus. Not restricted access. Undisclosed access. Jesus disclosed the "way into the Most Holy Place "

Jesus opened the door into the Father's presence.

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6

When Jesus died, "The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."
Mark 15:37-38

What are we waiting for?

God loves us.

God invites us to approach Him . . . *confidently.*

Day 25
Commitment #5

God changes me

"I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts."
Hebrews 8:10

How does God change our lives?

God changes our lives by putting His Spirit in us. "I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." Ezekiel 36:27 In order to "move you" to do what He wants you to do, God puts His "Spirit in you."

Okay . . . how does the Spirit "work"? Is His influence automatic? Any instructions? Any buttons to push? Any batteries to install? Anything we have to do? Just sit back and wait for . . . what?

God's Spirit frees us from being "fear's slave."

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." Romans 8:15-16

God does not change us by "frightening" us.

God changes us by "fathering" us.

God's Spirit changes us by telling us that we have a Father in heaven. He tells us about God's commitments to us because of His commitment to "father" us.

God's Spirit frees us to be "God's child."

Jesus said, "Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." John 8:35

Being a son or daughter of God means that we have a "permanent place in God's family." Being a son or daughter of God means that our connection with God is secure.

God's Spirit encourages us to relate to God as His sons and daughters.

"Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir." Galatians 4:6-7

God's Spirit changes us by increasing our confidence in our Father in heaven.

Focus on God's commitments to you.

You will begin to relate to God as a confident child rather than as a frightened slave.

And . . . your life will change!

Day 26
Commitment #6

God chooses me

"They will be my people, and I will be their God." Jeremiah 32:38

God chooses us.

"For he chose us in him before the creation of the world." Ephesians 1:4

God chose us before there was an "us" to choose. Before we existed. Before the world existed. Before Adam and Eve existed. Before sin existed. Before death existed. Before time existed.

Question: If God already chose us, what's left for us to do?

Answer: Believe!

Believing what God says is like redeeming a gift certificate. Not believing what God says is like not redeeming a gift certificate.

God made commitments to the Israelites before He led out of Egypt, across the Red Sea, through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. He promised that He would lead them into a good land. God's commitments to the Israelites were like valuable gift certificates. Several redeemed them. The rest never cashed them in.

Why? Why did God's commitments fail to benefit all but a few?

Failure to believe! ". . . the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith." Hebrews 4:2 God's commitments were "of no value" to those who heard but "did not combine it with faith."

Disbelieved commitments.

Unredeemed certificates . . .

. . . but not yet expired!

"It still remains that some will enter that rest." Hebrews 4:6

There is still time to redeem God's commitments by believing them. God is still honoring them. His commitments to us have not lost any of their value.

Before God created the world, He chose to include His yet-to-be-created mortals in immortal existence . . . to be part of His forever family. He chose us before we could do anything to merit being chosen.

He demonstrated His fatherly love for us "in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

There will be many who will not believe.

There will be unredeemed certificates.

You are reading about His commitments. You are making room for them in your mind. You are developing a growing faith in them.

Keep up the good work!

Focus on His commitments.

Believe in His commitments.

The value of believing?

Priceless!

Day 27
Commitment #7

Good is ahead of me

"I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them." Jeremiah 32:40

"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters,
He restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Psalm 23

Think about your life . . . about the path that you are on. There are rough roads and steep grades behind you, around you, ahead of you.

"Am I on a good road?"

Wrong question!

We are like sheep. We can't tell a good road from a bad one. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." Proverbs 14:12

We choose short-term good over long-term good. "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" Luke 9:25

Think about your life again . . . about the path that you are on.

"Do I have a good shepherd?"

Right question!

A sheep with a good shepherd will make it to a good place. *The shepherd will make sure of it.*

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11

Jesus is a good shepherd.

He laid down His life for you.

You have a good shepherd.

There *is* good ahead of you.

You can trust Him.

Day 28
Commitment #8

Good is guaranteed to me

***"I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more."* Hebrews 8:12**

What does it mean to be forgiven?

It means that the debt is canceled.

Jesus told a story.

A man owed a king a lot of money. The amount of the debt was staggering. Take the gross national product of the nation of Israel at the time Jesus told the story. Multiply it by ten. That is how much this man owed the king.

The king's representative called the man in. "Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'" Matthew 18:25-26

Not a very realistic proposal. He didn't comprehend how great his debt actually was. Based on the daily wage at the time, it would take the man over ten thousand years to pay the debt!

The king's representative did the unthinkable. "The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go." Matthew 18:27

He walked away from the audit without any debt at all. The debt had been canceled. Acting on behalf of the king, the representative pulled up the man's debt on the screen, clicked "select all" and pressed "delete."

God's forgiveness means that the debt is canceled.

The representative did not take money out of the national coffers to cover the debt. He did not restructure the debt. He did not sell it to a collection company. He simply canceled it!

There is a line in the Lord's Prayer that we say different ways. "Forgive us our trespasses." "Forgive us our debts." Which one is 'authentic'? Well, both are biblical. Luke records it one way, Matthew another. It is Matthew, the former tax collector, who records Jesus' saying, "Forgive us our debts." The same words used to describe what the king's representative did.

"Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your name
your kingdom come
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts [Literally, "Cancel our debts" – do what the king's representative did in the story.]

as we also have forgiven our debtors." Matthew 6:9-12

Let's get back to the man whose debt is canceled.

He walks away from the audit, sees a man who owed him a couple months worth of wages and has the guy thrown in prison. This did not sit well with the king's representative. "'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'" Matthew 18:32-33

Why didn't he forgive the man who was indebted to him?

Perhaps he left the audit too soon. He did not have time to consider what had occurred. It hadn't "sunk in" yet. On paper he was in the clear. In his mind, he was still indebted.

I would like to write another character into Jesus' story. He sits the forgiven man down . . . before he walks away from the audit. He spells it out for him. "Your debt is canceled." The man begins to comprehend. "The debt is canceled." "Canceled!" "THE DEBT IS CANCELED!!" The wonder of it dawns on him. As a result, he was able to cancel the debt of the man who is indebted to him.

We can't change this man's story. It is already written.

But your story is not yet written.

Reflect on what God has done for you. Make room for it. Think about it. God the Father sent His Son to represent Him. With the Father's full agreement, the Son has canceled the debt . . . your debt.

The debt is forgiven. *Canceled.*

Good is ahead of you.

Good is *guaranteed* to you.

The debt is canceled!

Day 29
Commitment #9

God gives me the power to persevere

"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak." Isaiah 40:30

To "live by sight" is natural.

Human personality development is based in the five senses. As infants, we build a sense of security from being held, touched, fed, changed, looked at and talked to. We believe we are loved because love has "approached" us through our senses.

To "live by faith" is supernatural.

Jesus likened spiritual development to being "born again" (literally, "born from above"). As children of God we are taught to build a sense of security from what God says rather than what we see, think and feel. When it comes to spiritual development, love's "approach" is not confined to our senses. "We live by faith, not by sight." 2 Corinthians 5:7

To "live by faith" is unnatural.

In the movie *The Abyss*, a deep sea diver, when diving in extreme depths, was forced to use a liquid form of oxygen. This was science fiction at the time, but "liquid breathing" is being tested on humans. It is becoming "science fact." "Liquid breathing" is unnatural. It can be done. However, it is difficult to learn to breathe in liquid after a lifetime of breathing in air. It requires perseverance.

Learning to "live by faith" is like learning to breathe in a new way.

God teaches us to base our security on what He says, rather than what we see. This feels unnatural to us.

We look around and see difficulties. We look ahead and see frightening possibilities. We become alarmed. We are hard-wired to react this way! We anxiously plot to steer clear of danger. We focus on how to either fight or flee from the threats to our well-being and the well-being of those we care for. We would like to believe that we are safe in God's care, but . . . that is not how things appear. A highly developed sense of information – our senses provides evidence to the contrary.

The challenge of learning to live by faith is that it requires that we override our existing alarm systems.

Faith is confidence in God's care . . .

. . . in spite of evidence to the contrary.

Learning to "live by faith" requires perseverance. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." James 4:1-4

When we “face trials of many kinds,” God teaches us to develop a sense of security based on what He says. This process is just that . . . a process. It does not happen quickly. As we stumble through difficult circumstances and make it through to the other side, we begin to develop a confidence in God’s ability to care for us . . . slowly . . . gradually . . . in baby steps. We begin to develop a new “ability to breathe” in the midst of difficulties.

God understands the challenge of learning to “live by faith” while living in a body wired to “live by sight.” Jesus came into our world and into a body so that He might experience it firsthand. He gives the power to persevere. Ask Him for wisdom to know how to live by faith in the midst of difficult circumstances. “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” James 1:5

Pace yourself.

This is a marathon, not a sprint.

Take things one day at a time.

Be patient with yourself.

Learning to live by faith is difficult.

God is patient with you.

Day 30
Commitment #10

God gives me the power to be content

"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Philipians 4:12-13

How do we become content?

Think about a child . . . a discontent child.

What does that child want?

A discontent child wants for the problem to "go away."

Problems come in all shapes and sizes. Hunger. Upset stomach. The toy is out of reach. When a child is able to have what he or she wants to have, or is able to do what he or she wants to do, the problem goes away.

An upset child also wants for the parent to "come here."

A child instinctively wants to be close to mom or dad when the child is upset. Removing the problem is not enough. It alone does not produce contentment. The child wants to be picked up, hugged, held, comforted, loved.

Growing up does not change our need to be loved. We still need to have someone "come here." We spend our lives trying to make problems "go away." Get what we want. Get rid of what we don't want. Do what we want. Don't do what we don't want. It's easy to lose sight of our need to be comforted, regarded, loved.

"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'" Hebrews 13:5

Money makes some problems "go away." It enables us to buy what we want and do what we want. Money also creates problems. It does not allow us to be content with what we have. We always need "a little bit more." Money cannot buy contentment.

God tell us that He will never leave us or forsake us. This is the basis of contentment. When we are upset, we need not only for problems to "go away." We also need for someone to "come here." This is why God tells us, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." He understands what we need.

Believing that God is with us enables us to be content with what we have.

Believing that God will never leave or forsake us produces what money cannot produce . . . contentment.

We still need to know that someone will "come here" when life is uncertain.

That is why God wants you to know . . .

. . . *"never will I leave you."*

. . . *"never will I forsake you."*