Journey to the Father on the Agape Road

By Bob Mumford
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Preface

This *Plumbline* is different. It is an abridged version of the original book *The Agape Road*. We were asked by a friend, Jim Yarbrough, who has an outreach in China associated with Dallas Theological Seminary to abridge the book for publication in China by the Beijing Theological Seminary. The publishing council there is the authority that provides the solitary endorsement that allows the book to be published with Chinese governmental approval for distribution in all churches all over the nation. In addition to this book being translated into Mandarin, it is also being made available for translation in many other nations including Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Taiwan. Keren Kilgore, our daughter and editor for Lifechangers, edited the original book and abridged this version with amazing skill.

We would like to ask three things of you, our readers:

*First, would you carry the publication and distribution of this abridged version in intercessory prayer?* We know of no other theme that would be of more help and significance to the emerging believers in the great nation of China as well as in other lands.

*Second, would you re-read this shorter version as if you had never read the original one?* Even after several readings, we continue to discover new and
impacting ideas and thoughts never seen the first time we embraced these concepts. I can guarantee that a fresh reading of the *Agape* theme will make it seem as if you have never read the original!

*Third, would you send this abridged version to a few friends and family?* It may be that our having been asked to abridge this book for readers in China would serve all of us in a way that we may never have considered. This *Plumbline* contains the essence of the principles and concepts of *Agape* on which we have built our very lives. It will lead readers up the *Agape* Road to intimacy with their Father.

This book was not just written, it was birthed. We have made an effort to take you on a journey called the *Agape* Road. You will soon realize that, like blind Bartimaeus, Jesus is wanting to heal your spiritual blindness so that you can walk in intimacy with Him. Thank you for engaging the nations with us on behalf of the Kingdom! May Father’s glory be revealed in the earth.

![Signature]

Bob and Eric Mumford
and the Lifechangers Family
Journey to the Father

When I was 13 years old, my father abandoned me. My parents were in the middle of an ugly divorce. I had been visiting my father in Tampa, Florida, and he was driving me home to Atlantic City, New Jersey, where I lived with my mother and five sisters. Like a typical know-it-all teenager, I was arguing with my Dad and heatedly defending my mother. We were nearing Baltimore, Maryland, when the argument became overly intense. Suddenly, he stopped the car and said, “Get out.” I thought he wanted me to see if we had a flat tire, so I walked around the car to check out the problem. When I got to his window, he rolled it down and I leaned toward him so he could tell me what he thought was wrong with the car. With rage on his face he looked at me and said, “You are no good. You never have been any good. You never will be any good.” He rolled up the window and drove away, leaving me standing by the side of the road more than 100 miles from home with less than a dollar in my pocket.

Stunned by what had just happened, I stood in the street for the longest time feeling absolutely abandoned, trying to figure out what I was going to do. My sense of what it meant to be a Mumford was severely shaken. My street-kid survival skills kicked in, and I hitchhiked home, subtly trying to let the different drivers know I had not eaten. I made it to Atlantic City about 15 hours later very
hungry. This experience left deep impressions in my person.

**Serious Consequences**

When I arrived home, something deep and unexplainable had changed in me; I felt like an entirely different person. In order to deal with my rejection, shame, and sense of failure and loss, I chose anger and superiority as a cover up. Like many young people, I remember making a childhood vow to never, ever trust another person as long as I lived. The following year, I dropped out of school, taking menial employment in order to support my Mom and five sisters in my father’s absence.

I finished my High School GED in the Navy, graduated from college, and earned my Masters of Divinity Degree, but even after several decades of successful ministry, the consequences of my father’s rejection were very much alive. Eventually, I was forced to recognize that I had deep, internal anger directed at no one in particular, accompanied by fear, more accurately *free-floating anxiety*—both without any obvious source or cause. The fear and anger revealed themselves in a *critical mouth* and false superiority. These problems were very real, and I knew they were displeasing to God, but I was unable to get free from them. Reading more Bible verses or ministering to more people certainly did not deal with the issues. I knew that
anger, fear, and a critical mouth were not normal and that these problems would always present a barrier to the intimacy with God for which my heart longed. Like many who have preceded me in this search, I felt bound in heart and conscience to find answers to these problems both for me personally and for others.

Because we must live in a less than perfect world, human failure, mistakes, and injuries, like my Dad’s rejection of me, take their toll on us, often appearing and reappearing many years later. Failure, disappointment, or betrayal from any loved one is always difficult to manage. However, if God can restore me, He can restore you. It is not magic. What I have to say is not experience oriented; it is a journey. These lessons have come at great personal expense, so have one on me! Allow me, by means of the concepts, illustrations, and diagrams in this book, to take you toward God’s Land of Promises.

The Agape Road

Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). Jesus’ job description was to bring us to the Father, restoring our relationship of love and intimacy that went astray because of the fall. God, the Father, was seeking us through the Person of His Son. Christ intends to bring us to intimacy by way of the Agape (a-ga’pa) Road.
The route, as well as the goal, is “not of our ourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). The fact that He had to come to us is proof that we could not come to Him.

The moment we are born again, we do have intimacy with God, but it is sporadic, and often interrupted. This intimacy is new and immature (see 1 Peter 2:2), needing to be cultivated into an abiding relationship. *Agape* is the Greek word for love, and the *Agape* Road is just that—a road of love that He created to bring us to Himself.

It is important to understand that heaven is not the goal. If you are a Christian and you die, you have to go to heaven, there is no place else to go! I believe in heaven—it is real and beautiful. It is everything and more than we could imagine. But, many people have mistakenly made heaven to be the goal or the object of their life. There is life after being born again. God, as a Father, wants to know us (see 1 Corinthians 8:3) and longs for us to know Him in this present life on earth. John 17:3 says, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” It is such an important theme in
the New Testament that Jesus uses the term “sent Me” 40 times. He wants us to be comfortable in God’s presence. As a Father, God wants to be known and experienced (see 2 Corinthians 6:18). Jesus was sent to reintroduce us to our loving heavenly Father.

**Intimacy**

Another way of understanding the word “intimacy” is into-me-He-sees. God’s heart cry is that we know Him and open ourselves so that He can know us. *Agape* is a way of knowing. Learning the principles of the *Agape* Road also facilitates our finding each other. He is the One who planted in us the Eternal Seed. The Eternal Seed is the ultimate source of intimacy by reason of the New Birth (see 1 Peter 1:23). When Christ is formed in us (see Galatians 4:19), intimacy between God and us becomes possible. We now seek to nourish, cultivate, and protect it until it comes to maturity and fruitfulness.

Intimacy is so important to God that He made a promise, which reveals His Father’s heart: “For all will know Me, from the least to the greatest of them...” (Hebrews 8:11). We can see His basic intent in this Scripture: “And I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me” (2 Corinthians 6:18). We do not have to wait for this intimate relationship with our Father to happen until we are in heaven. The abiding
relationship gained on the Agape Road allows God to see into us and for us to see into Him now. Out of this comes a joining or a heart relationship. This intimate relationship with God is a mystery that is difficult to define but very much the normal Christian life, which belongs to every one of us as believers.

How God Wants to Be Known

For years, my concept of God’s glory was splendor like an extraterrestrial glow or the power of God coming in some supernatural way. I never thought it had anything to do with His character or nature. When Moses asked God to show him His glory, God said He would proclaim the name of the Lord before him (see Exodus 33:18-19). God then, in self-revelation, explains to Moses the content of His glory, which is His seven hidden attributes:

> And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the Lord. Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness [mercy] and truth; who keeps lovingkindness [faithful] for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin….”

Exodus 34:5-7
God’s *character* or DNA is the content of His glory and the significance of His name. The breadth of meaning in these seven words that God uses to reveal Himself is spectacular. This is not Bob Mumford’s idea of what God is like; it is God’s personal revelation of Himself. If God had not revealed Himself, we could not know Him (see 2 Corinthians 2:8-16). God’s *glory* is the manifestation of His communicable *attributes* that are *hidden* from the world (see John 17:25). “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Romans 1:20 NIV). God is a Spirit; He cannot be known unless He chooses to reveal Himself.

Of course, the depths and complexities of God are ineffable or impossible to clearly explain. God also has incommunicable attributes: He is eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, immutable, and self-revealed. When Jesus was on earth, He laid aside the incommunicable attributes—picking them up again after His death and resurrection (see John 17:5). When sin entered the world, it released the twisted desire for us to be like God, grasping
for the incommunicable attributes and essentially rejecting the *communicable*. For example, stubbornness is actually immutability perverted. The communicable attributes consist of the image of God that is restored to us in Christ. These are the aspects of His Person that Father God wants the world to know about and share in. The only way the world can see God’s hidden nature or what He is actually like is by means of the person of Christ revealing Himself through the body of Christ—you and me (see Hebrews 1:3; John 14:9). As Christ is “formed in us” (Galatians 4:19), God’s personality becomes evident in us. Matthew 5:43-48 teaches us to love our enemies that we may be the sons and daughters of our Father. This shows us the necessity of God’s love being replicated. Without the effective and active presence of His attributes, we are not allowing His glory to come through our own person. Jesus, in teaching us the implications of this, states it clearly, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). The objective evidence that God is our Father is that His DNA is revealed in us as His very own family.

When through us people are able to see a Father who is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, merciful, truthful, faithful, and forgiving, their lives will change. This is and will be the source of society’s renewal. These things are not what Father
God does but who He is. When I rediscovered God as a Father, I stopped measuring all fatherhood by an earthly standard. After experiencing such rejection from my earthly father, I found myself wanting to know how to love and enjoy unlimited access to my heavenly Father.

Having an intimate relationship with Father God is what the Agape Road is all about. He made this clear when He instructs us to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5; Mark 12:30). God wants our affection.

**Jesus, Revealer of God’s Glory**

One of the most beautiful, unfolding insights into Christology is Jesus coming as Agape Incarnate for the express purpose of introducing us to the Father. “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Because the incarnation was for the sole purpose of allowing us to see what God was like, when Jesus said, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father” (John 14:9), we know that what Jesus really came to do was reveal His Father to a hurting world. He was
“the radiance of His glory, the exact representation of His character” (Hebrews 1:3).

Understanding the glory leads to us knowing the Father. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:8, “None of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” Jesus really is the Lord of the glory (literal Greek translation), and it is His responsibility, along with the Holy Spirit, to teach us. We are learning how to bring honor to God, our Father. The glory consists of the hidden attributes of God being revealed or replicated within His Own people. This is the essence of Jesus saying that if we follow Him, He will take us to the Father (see John 14:6). Every hidden attribute of God is revealed in the person and activities of Christ. When we see Jesus, we see God’s compassion, grace, mercy, truth, faithfulness, and forgiveness revealed in the earth.

God as a Father is an important concept in Scripture. He was a Father before He was a Creator or a Redeemer. He was the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ in eternity before the world began, and through Fatherhood we can come to know Him (see John 17:3). Nothing in society has been more twisted and damaged than the concept of Father. No one in the history of the world has been more misrepresented than God the Father. He is easy to malign, condemn, and speak against because He
does not defend Himself. However, in the damaging of the concept of Father, our whole society is bereft of security, identity, and belonging. It is urgent that we see the Fatherhood of God restored. This is what Jesus came to do (see John 14:6).

As we come to know this God, the One who revealed Himself, we start feeling comfortable in His presence. We have a wonderful Father! How I wish that when I was young in the faith someone had helped me to more clearly understand that Christ came to take me to His Father. My idea of a father was displays of male testosterone in the futile attempt to acquire, possess, and control. I knew little to none of Father God’s character or the hidden attributes of His nature.

Throughout Scripture, God’s unrelenting goal seems to be to give His glory away. Yet, in the Old Testament He said, “I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another...” (Isaiah 42:8). I always thought that meant God’s glory was unattainable, until one day, in a flash of illumination, the Lord said to me, “You’re not another, you are My body.” In John 17:22 Jesus says, “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one.” We are bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh. He gives us His glory for the purpose of His character being formed in us as His people so that a hurting world can see through us to the Father.
The Name

A child represents his father’s name. If my child is causing trouble or doing something good and someone says, “Oh, that’s Mumford’s son;” he is representing my name.

When Moses wanted to see God’s glory, God’s response was that He would “proclaim the name of the Lord before you” (Exodus 33:18-19). Then the Lord gave Moses a clear self-revelation of His seven DNA attributes. This biblical writer connects God’s glory and God’s name. The content of His name is God’s glory; His name reveals His character. When we pray in God’s name, we are using His authority, which He gave His body to use (see John 1:12; 17:22). God’s glory is seen when His hidden attributes are revealed through us. His name is His revealed character—all that He wants us to know of Him. To call upon His name is to worship Him. We need a deep, gut-wrenching reformation that can help us respond to our call to reveal His glory. Remember that God vowed that all the earth would be filled with His glory (see Numbers 14:2).
Every time we pray for someone in Jesus’ name, we are revealing at least one of His seven character traits. Apart from these seven aspects of God’s own character, there is no ministry because Agape must find a way to reach hurting people. God is Agape (see 1 John 4:16), and He is so eager to reach them that He even uses you and me! He gave us His name (His reputation) and His glory in order for us to accomplish this. When we use the authority of His name to pray for people, we are making application of His DNA. This must be done with proper motivation as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

When the Lord emphasizes physical healing and deliverance, we can sense love, mercy, and compassion flowing through us to those who are captive, sick, hurt, and injured. We can actually perceive something of the glory, the nature of the Father, reaching out from within us. God’s love refuses to remain inactive in the presence of human need.

I remember ministering with an evangelist who had been in a car accident that had crushed his shoulder. He was wearing an “airplane cast” with a stabilizing bar to keep his arm and shoulder from moving. As he laid his cast on people, the life of God flowed through him, and they were healed. The simple lesson is that our infirmity
does not lesson or obstruct the life of God flowing through us. Healing ministries are born when we touch God’s compassion and His love for a hurting world. He gives us His name so we can do something about that hurt.

God desires that we represent His name and reflect His glory to the world. However, if you finish reading this with a task list of new things to do in order to reveal God’s glory, you will have missed the point. We need simply to learn to love God. Scripture says that “to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance” (Matthew 25:29), so it is God’s initiative. Jesus is both the originator and the finisher of our faith (see Hebrews 12:2). Eternal life is when we know what the Father is really like, come to trust Him, and begin to respond to His love.

**Coming Short of the Glory**

God’s goal is that we be formed into the likeness of His Son, reflecting His glory. However, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Because the image of God in man has been distorted, people, for the most part, do not look to the Church for answers (see Ephesians 3:21). As a result, many are left in confusion and darkness.

“Coming short of the glory” is failing, neglecting, refusing, or perhaps being totally
ignorant of the necessity of our seeking to accomplish that for which we were created—to show forth God’s glory.

Two dramatic illustrations of coming short of God’s glory are Moses and David. Moses, who received the revelation of God’s character first hand, struggled with anger. He was told to speak to the rock (which was a type of Christ) and God would provide water for the Israelites. In anger, Moses struck the rock rather than speaking to it. Because his action distorted the representation of God’s glory, he was banned from the Promised Land. King David was also a human representative of God’s government. Scripture says that David had a heart after God, yet the ungoverned desires he expressed toward Bathsheba facilitated a series of events, including adultery and murder, which totally distorted the image of God’s nature. This cost him his son and a broken relationship of intimacy with God (see Psalms 51:11). Like Moses and David, we, too, have fallen woefully short of God’s glory. When people look at us as living epistles, they hope to see God through our life, but often, it is obscured or misrepresented.

The Human Dilemma

A paradigm shift is a complete change or reversal in the way something is perceived. A paradigm shift is needed in the definition of the word love.
The Greek language, from which our English New Testament was translated, has several words for “love” while the English language has only one. We use the same word when we say “I love God” and “I love my dog,” but they certainly do not have the same depth of meaning. In this book we will be focusing on two words for love—Eros and Agape.

**Agape**

God is Agape (see 1 John 4:16). The essential meaning of Agape (Strong’s #25) is an exercise of the divine will in deliberate choice, made without assignable cause save that which lies in the nature of God Himself (see Deuteronomy 7:7-8). It is God’s absolute by which He measures all things (see Acts 17:31). Agape is ultimate reality. It is used both as a noun and a verb. Agape does not love because of beauty or value discovered; it is a love that comes out of God’s own nature. While Phileo is reciprocal, Agape always reveals God’s own character. Agape, when understood, quickly reveals our need for Christ, who is Agape Incarnate.

Agape unfolds in three progressive steps:

1. **Love God** with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength (see Mark 12:30).

2. **Love myself** because God loves me (see Matthew 22:39; Romans 5:8). He has given me value and worth by pouring His Own love into me while I was yet a sinner.
3. *Love others*, even our enemies, in the same manner and degree that He loved us and gave Himself for us (see Matthew 5:43-48). This is God’s love replicated in His own.

In this book we will look at what happens when we fail to grow in our capacity to love in all three of these ways.

**Eros**

*Eros* is a Greek word, but it is not used in the New Testament because of its sexual corruption. (For more information, see *Necessity for Creating the New Word Agape* in the Appendix of *The Agape Road* book.) The essential meaning of *Eros* is the desire or intention to possess, acquire, or control. *Eros* does not seek to be accepted by its object, but to gain possession of it.\(^1\) *Eros* has an appetite or yearning desire that is aroused by the attractive qualities of its object. *Eros*, in Greek philosophy, came to mean that which is loved for the purpose of personal satisfaction. It is from this posture that the word *Eros* took on its sexual and ultimately pornographic connotation. The word is not primarily sexual, but has more to do with living for our own personal advantage. The Greek word “evil” in many places in the New Testament is “porneia” (Strong’s #4190) where we get the word pornography.

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Porne is the link that joins Eros and original sin. Moffatt translates porne, the King James word for “evil”, as “selfishness”. “If your eye is selfish, your whole body will be filled with darkness” (Matthew 6:23). Because the New Testament uses porne for its description of evil, it is saying something like, “all evil is love for God that has been twisted and sold for something else.” Paul explained evil as fallen man “exchanging God’s glory” for his or her own desires (see Romans 1:23).

Love that has personal reward and self-satisfaction as its motive (see Philippians 2:21) has the tendency and capacity to annul the Agape of God. “Self-will, that which is self-pleasing, is the negation of love to God.”² If my love is twisted, everything is twisted. This takes us to the center of all Christian truth, namely that our love for God must be accompanied by renunciation of our old self. Eros is self-referential, causing us to lose the central appeal of Jesus Christ to “take up your cross and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24). The loss of Agape and its demand for self-renunciation leads us to Cross-less Christianity (see Philippians 3:18). Christianity, apart from the Cross of Christ, has reappeared frequently in Church history.

Eros is the mother of all sins. It can be recognized because it is always self-referential. It is not only self-centered, but it becomes self-

consuming, turning increasingly inward upon itself in a tighter and tighter spiral.

There is a story of a crow that wanted to know where the center of the universe was. He landed on the highest tree he could find and looked to the horizon on his left and on his right; each was the same distance apart. Just to be sure, he flew further and landed on another tall tree and again looked at the distant horizons on his left and right. Again, they were equidistant. On the third tree, he looked around then said to himself, “Oh, I see, I am the center of the universe!”

The Greek symbol for *Eros* is actually a serpent consuming its own tail. It is a highly refined form of self-interest and self-seeking. It is a love that has become so distorted that its only purpose is to meet its own needs. When Jesus referred to religion that turned us in upon ourselves, He said, “how great is that darkness” (Matthew 6:22-23). He was talking about selfishness, which leads to a form of darkness that has deadening results. Jesus challenged the deadening effect of *Eros*-motivated religion with these words, “But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear” (Matthew 13:16). If that light reverts to darkness, we are then like the serpent who is eating his own tail.
The nature of evil is selling or sharing our love that belongs to God in an illegal manner. God jealously asks for all our love—heart, soul, mind, and strength—to the limit of our capacity because He knows it is the one force that releases us from ourselves and exerts the capacity to keep us from evil. We do, indeed, become what we love. We are faced with the inexorable truth that no one can set us free from that which we still love—especially an illegal love for ourselves!

Three Arrows

A philosopher/theologian named Cornelius VanTil lectured in the Episcopal Seminary that I attended in Philadelphia and taught the following principle: If you want to know whether the theory with which you are working is accurate, press it out to its fullest extreme. If you follow Agape to its fullest extreme, you find God. God is not faith or hope; God is love (Agape). If you take Eros out to its full end, you come to Satan who wants to possess, acquire, and control. The father of lies passed the whole package of evil desires on to us when Adam and Eve sinned against God. C.S. Lewis explained it most clearly, “When sin entered, all the world was bent.” Redemption has to do with God straightening what was bent.

Understanding this has helped me to interpret both the Old and New Testaments and has led me to three very interesting truths:

1) *There is no evil in the world other than Eros manifested as selfishness.*

2) *There is no good in the world other than Agape as God’s Own Person revealed.*

3) *All of life can be reduced to three arrows: straight, crooked, or a mixture of the hook and arrow.*

   *Eros* is illustrated by a bent arrow or hook because it is always self-referential, turning back upon itself. *Eros* is the cause and the result of the original fall. It causes us to run, hide, and shift blame. When sin entered the world, the effect was that the very nature and center of our being became self-serving and was changed from God to ourselves. *Eros* can be overtly worldly or very religious. This hook can be blatant or very subtle. There is a story of two long-time friends who happened to meet again. One of them talked about how he was doing for quite a while, then turned to his friend and said, “We’ve been talking about me, now let’s talk about you. How did you like my new book?” Can you see the hook in that conversation?

   *Agape* is illustrated by a straight arrow. If you take *Agape* out to its full end, you arrive at the seven hidden attributes of God’s own nature—His
DNA. Again, God is not faith or hope; He is love. Unfortunately the word love has semantically lost its meaning. We have to decide what we mean when we say, “I love you.”

Most of us are a mixture of the hook and the arrow, rather than a full-blown representation of one or the other. As I would read various stories in my Bible, I would draw either an arrow or a hook in the margin, depending on whether the story described Agape or Eros. For example, as I read the story of Ananias and Sapphira (see Acts 5:1-11), I drew a little hook beside it. There are hooks and arrows all over my Bible; it has been fascinating to study the Word in this way.

Jeremiah 15:19 talks about extracting the precious from the worthless. The dividing of soul and spirit is a biblical description of straightening the hook (see Hebrews 4:12). This is not easy. The separation is delicate and can be very painful. We cannot and must not attempt this separation in ourselves or for someone else. The Father has reserved the separation and pruning process for Himself. All we have to do is be willing to be brought to maturity in Agape.

As we look around, we become increasingly aware of the hooks existing in all sorts of relationships—friendships, marriage, business arrangements, social life, and Christian fellowship. If we are not careful, we can become suspicious and
so cynical that we think everyone who approaches us has a hook.

**Eros Toxicity**

When I was in Japan in 1955 as a Navy medic, I participated in a discussion with the hospital staff about the health issues of Japanese women working in factories. These women would dip their brushes first in water, then in radium, and with their mouth would make a fine point on the brush in order to paint the illuminated dials on watches. Within a short time, they developed cancer of the mouth as well as digestive and urinary tracts. Because radium does not have a taste or smell, they were completely unaware of the dangers involved. Nursing mothers would then pass the radiated poison on to their babies who suffered and died as well.

*Eros*, like radium, is odorless, tasteless, and is not easily detected, but it is lethal. *Eros* is so prevalent in our society that even “mother’s milk” of the Church (see 1 Peter 2:2) has become seriously infected with *Eros*. That which should heal and deliver us from our selfishness has the capacity to inadvertently injure us by reinforcing all that is self-referential, i.e., learning how to get things from God. Ordinarily, we would go to church for the purpose of allowing Christ to rule
our desires, learn to deny ourselves, embrace the Cross, love God, and seek first the Kingdom. As we feed from an Eros-centered Church, we will likely get a double dose of the Eros-infection that was our problem before we came to Christ. We have often been taught statements like, “Get your inheritance, get all you can from God, He only wants to bless you.” “Pay your tithe in order to gain God’s blessings.” “We are children of the King, and God intends that all His children live like King’s kids.” “You should have been at the service last night, you would have received a blessing.”

It is not wrong to make Christians aware of their inheritance (along with the conditions necessary to receiving it), to teach that God blesses us, or to encourage church attendance. What is terribly wrong is to be motivated not by our love for God, but rather by what we can get out of Him. We attend church expecting to be taught Agape, but we are taught Eros both by concept and example.

**Eros Capacity to Mutate**

Eros is the presence of an element within our heart and will that is alien to our original creation. It is universal in its presence. Every nationality from Aborigines in the outback of Australia to a proper English gentleman has one thing in common—Eros. It ever seeks to possess, acquire, and control
us in such a manner as to disturb internal and external harmony in every sphere of life and at every level of human existence. It lays dormant when undisturbed but rages uncontrollably when exposed or challenged. *Eros* causes us to betray each other for personal advantage and is identifiable as the source or cause of that betrayal, even from one we could not imagine possible (see Luke 22:48). That which is earthly, sensual, and demonic energizes it. *Eros* is capable of horrendous evil and unimaginable manipulation. It is recognizable by its incredible resiliency and metamorphosis ability for the purpose of survival. Each strain of *Eros*, like a virus that has emerged from attempts to eradicate it, becomes increasingly more lethal and resistant to countermeasures. One effective repentance or spiritual breaking should be sufficient, but it seldom is for the metamorphosis of the *Eros* strain is like any deadly virus. If we do not recognize and seek to slay this *Eros* virus, it quickly goes through the metamorphosis process, continues to develop immunity in a different form, and rapidly re-emerges in religious clothes quoting Bible verses. This is the manner in which Cross-less Christianity is explained in Philippians 3:18. Thus, we can see the necessity of the Cross because nothing in heaven or earth can meet and defeat *Eros* other than embracing the Cross of Jesus Christ.
Suppose a successful, powerful man who is full of Eros and has the need to be in control gets saved. Eros goes into the death and resurrection of the new birth with him, but it is not exterminated. This is what happened to Diotrophes, a first century church leader, who loved to be first (see 3 John 9). He used control to exert himself and maintain that position. Eros goes through a metamorphosis and reappears in the Christian life with the same need to be in control, only now it is in the Church and uses Bible verses to promote itself. This is explained clearly in James 3:14. We rejoice with Diotrophes in his salvation, but the same Eros strain has now reappeared in a different form in his life. Eros, like a deadly strain of viral infection, can only be matched by the totality of the Cross (see Galatians 2:20). We will examine this problem and the solution in greater detail.

**Eros as Lawlessness**

Lawlessness is the failure or refusal to bring our entire personality, including our love and affection, into conformity with the likeness of Jesus Christ. Eros, undiscovered and untreated, is the hidden source of atheism. Eros seeks exceptions and is determined to exploit every personal advantage. It can create plausible demands and is increasingly clever in use of Bible verses to make excuses for itself. Eros has the acquired ability to be noticed and observed. Its characteristic is to scheme
unrelentingly and without relief, depending upon its ability to outtalk and outsmart others. *Eros* is competitive and self-promoting in that it takes the credit for ideas, opportunities, and suggestions of other people. *Eros* or lawlessness is egocentric or centered in itself, even using God’s name and reputation as a means to its own end. God, the Father, is sought not for Himself, but simply to satisfy our own desires. This is the nature of “original sin” as described in Romans 5.

Lawlessness in the Old and New Testament is often translated as iniquity. Iniquity is a power, force, or spirit that must be purged, not forgiven. Matthew 7:21-23 is the pivotal text for understanding the concept of iniquity/lawlessness in the New Testament:

_Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”_

Explaining how successful ministry can arise out of an essentially lawless motivation is difficult. Paul explains this in 2 Timothy 3:5. Arthur Way
translates it most accurately, “They will wear the mask of religion, while they have denied all its influence on their character.”

The presence of Eros in the Church is not new. Paul even identified it at work among the apostolic team. He had to send Timothy to see about the conditions of the church because he had no one else to send “for they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:21).

Lawlessness includes giving other people truthful advice but not applying it to our own life. Eros refuses to give itself to the process of allowing Agape to change the manner in which we live and love. The outward form has never satisfied God. He will never rest until we have understood His intent for us to think and act in accordance with His Son. From the original Greek language, lawlessness is translated something like: I do not want to do the things that religion presents as necessary. The idea of lawlessness is quiet rebellion, a sweet refusal to do the will of God. It is desire and intent, which are determined to go their own way. We were not designed nor are we free to please ourselves (see Romans 15:1; Galatians 5:17). 1 John 3:4 says, “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.” Lawlessness reveals the inner motivations of the heart. Unless the heart and the intent are accompanying the outward obedience,
it is the same as resisting being conformed to the image of God. It is the cosmic conflict of two wills—God’s and mine!

We are capable of being *Eros* driven in our heart, even if we are not in outward actions. Years ago I read a phrase that said “I am sitting down in my chair, but I am standing up in my heart.” That same day I was trying to get my toddler to sit down in his high chair, so we could eat our evening meal. I had to repeatedly ask him to sit. When he finally gave in and sat down, he was gritting his teeth, and the look on his face told me that he was still standing up in his heart. Each of us has attempted to fulfill God’s law while gritting our teeth. Heart obedience is a realm without rules (see Romans 6:17).

Jesus, as *Agape* Incarnate, seeks to straighten our hook, turning our *Eros* into internal holiness. He reaches for the driving and motivating factors that are resident deep within our person. This is what He was conveying in the misunderstood text of Matthew 5:27-30, “everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” With this as the standard, much of the Church lives in adultery and does not even realize it. The sensuality and self-referential conduct within the larger body of Christ is a scandal that discredits the Kingdom of God. Nothing can release us from *Eros* and precipitate our willingness to embrace self-denial.
apart from the Cross. No one can free us from that which we still love.

The Nature of Agape

Love for the neighbor is love for him in all his strange, irritating, distinct createdness…. Love is eternal, leveling righteousness (Kierkegaard), because it justifies no man according to his desire. Love edifies the fellowship because it seeks fellowship only. Love expects nothing, because it has already reached the goal. Love does not intend, because it has already done. Love asks no questions, it already knows. Love does not fight, it is already the victor. Love is not Eros, that lusteth ever, it is Agape that never faileth.⁴

Karl Barth

The word Agape has to do with the nature of God. 1 John 4:8 says, “God is Agape.” God is not only the origin of the command to love; He is also the source to release that love. He does not give love as a gift; He gives Himself because He is the source of Agape. The Son is the begotten Agape Incarnate. The Holy Spirit is the manifestation of Agape proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Love is a longing and intention toward another person, object, or experience. God’s Agape creates a longing and intention toward Himself. He is the One who retains the initiative. Agape does not need to be discovered or observed. It absorbs our own failure as well as the failure of others; it seeks to be there in someone’s need or crisis; it depends upon truth and faithfulness; it functions as a team in mutuality; it seeks to build up, release, and encourage. Agape is an inner authority that is not controlling or possessive. One cannot receive God’s command to love and remain unchanged.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (Message) Agape is personified. Agape is the character traits of Jesus (see Hebrews 1:3). These are the seven hidden attributes of God’s person, now made Incarnate—the Word made flesh:

*Love never gives up.*
*Love cares more for others than for self.*
*Love doesn’t want what it doesn’t have.*
*Love doesn’t strut,*
*Doesn’t have a swelled head,*
*Doesn’t force itself on others,*
*Isn’t always “me first,”*
*Doesn’t fly off the handle,*
*Doesn’t keep score of the sins of others,*
*Doesn’t revel when others grovel,*
*Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,*
*Puts up with anything,*
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.
Love never dies.

1 CORINTHIANS 13  EXODUS 34
Patient Slow to anger
Kind Gracious
Not jealous Merciful
Does not brag Truth
Is not arrogant Truth
Does not act unbecomingly Gracious
Does not seek its own Compassion
Is not provoked Slow to anger
No account of wrong suffered Forgiveness
Not rejoice in unrighteousness Truth
Bears all things Faithfulness
Believes all things Faithfulness
Hopes all things Faithfulness
Endures all things Faithfulness
Love never fails Faithfulness

These attributes can be seen in the following eight aspects of the nature of Agape:
1. Agape loves without a self-referential bent. God’s Agape goes out to a hurting world without seeking return and comes to us from God, as a Father, without personal advantage or selfish gain. Which Greek word is used in this Scripture, “For God so loved the world…”? It is Agape, of course.
Even though the world rejects, spurns, and refuses to acknowledge God, He continues to pour out His gracious love upon us. *Agape* never disappears.

My wife and I were traveling in the car and she was reading to me aloud from T. W. Hunt’s description of the crucifixion.\(^5\) I wept until I didn’t think I could see the road. He described how Jesus had to push against the nails in His feet and slide His bleeding back up the Cross to get enough breath to say, “Father, forgive them.” I suddenly saw the hook and arrow more clearly than I had ever seen them in my life. As Jesus was hanging there, just moments from death, His concern was for others—that the two soldiers who crucified the Son of God would be forgiven before they were required to stand in the presence of God Almighty and that His Mother was cared for. He was concerned for everyone except Himself.

If I had been hanging there, everything would have centered upon me. I would have been saying, “What’s the matter with you people? Don’t you understand how innocent I am? Can’t you see how I’m suffering?” I began to see how bent upon myself I had become and felt so unworthy and incapable of expressing *Agape*.

2. *Agape requires preferential choice*. Fortunately, *Agape* is not dependent on us. We simply choose to accept God’s love or resist it. This preferential

choice breaks the darkness. Perhaps God’s intention for permitting evil at all was because He wanted to be wanted. Love that is not based on our preferential choice is not love at all—it is bought and sold, and God will not be bought. This is why salvation is a free gift; it can never be bought with good works.

3. *Agape responds first.* We love God because He first loved us (see 1 John 4:19). We respond effectively to God when, like a sponge, we absorb His love and return it to Him in as pure a form as we are capable. He instills in us the desire and then enjoys our response. Is that not what fathers are like? We give our child a bicycle and then enjoy them enjoying it.

4. *Agape controls us* (see 2 Corinthians 5:14). Paul sees *Agape* as the reins that control our desires. It is like the harness that goes out to the Clydesdale horses pulling the cart or the steering wheel of the Christian life. It is not human will-power, but *Agape* that controls and governs us. 1 Corinthians 8:3 says, “but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.” *Agape*, then, becomes the *absolute* by which a Christian is identified and is *more than a virtue.*
5. *Agape creates community.* It brings us to *being* rather than *doing.* “If I do not have love, I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2). The reason we are nothing is because *Agape* is what gives us identity, revealing us to ourselves and to each other. Because *Agape* is relational, we would have to say, “We love, therefore we are” (1 Corinthians 8:3). It is by the instrumental means of *Agape* that the body builds itself up in love (see Ephesians 4:16). *Eros* does not build anyone or anything but itself. While *Agape* covers and tells no one but the person involved, *Eros* tells everyone. The relational differences are like night and day. *Eros* says, “Look what they are doing to me!” *Agape* says, “Forgive them, Father, they don’t know what they are doing.” *Eros* seeks to be like God; *Agape* is God.

6. *Agape will never go away.* Love never fails. If I am manufacturing love, it will fail. If love is the real thing, it will stand. This helps us understand how the early church could face terrible persecution and death. I remember reading about a man condemned to die for his faith. He was in prison for about three weeks before execution and the presence of the Lord lifted from him during that time. He kept asking the Lord why he was being forsaken, but the Lord never answered. The guards came to get him on the final morning, and as he stepped into the hall, the presence of God came over him. That was all he was waiting for.
He walked through martyrdom with the real joy of the Lord.

7. *Agape* loves even our enemies. To be measured as authentic, *Agape* must reach even to our enemies (see Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:14). We are not talking about our feelings or emotions for our enemies, but our *intention* to do them good. Matthew 5:48 says, “you must be perfect [mature] as your Father is perfect [mature].” Measuring yourself by this, how far do you have to go? To love our enemies is a totally new and unique concept that Jesus is presenting about Christ’s Kingdom. *Agape* means we unselfishly seek someone’s highest interest and intend to do them good no matter what. Our first thought towards an enemy is usually to do him in. Almost every movie involves revenge towards the bad guy. Ask God specifically for a baptism in His love. It is a choice—God set His *Agape* on us, and our choice is to replicate His love. Setting our affections on someone is a learned behavior because, in general, people are unlovable.

8. “*Our God is a consuming fire*” (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29). Fire is an outward manifestation of God’s jealousy. It consumes all that is not eternal and uncreated. Thus, we can understand the importance of the fire of Acts 2 at Pentecost. The inward manifestation of *Agape* is what gives us the adjectives and verbs that describe the mystical realm the saints have talked
about down through the ages. However ineffable, this inward realm is described as repentance, tears, gratitude, vision, clinging, unsatisfied desire, light, and heat. It is an inner-penetration of His Spirit leaving the one who is seeking with an unshakable confidence and a certain kind of knowing, which can only be attributed to God as a Father. It is Agape, and no other, which has come to us. God came Himself in the Person of His Son!

**Loving Others**

After commending the church at Ephesus for its good works, its perseverance, and its ability to endure hardships for His name, God said, “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (Revelation 2:4). I was determined that this would never be said about me, so I read more, fasted more, and “cranked it up” thereby proving to Christ that I would never leave Him—He could depend on me as an overcomer. Then I discovered Moffatt’s translation of this verse, “But, I have this against you: you have given up loving one another as you did at first.” The New Living Testament says it this way, “But I have this complaint against you. You don’t love me or each other as you did at first!” This was a pivotal point in breaking my religious delusion.

The shock of this discovery continued for months as I began to understand the meaning of the verse, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates
his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” (1 John 4:20). I felt cornered, frustrated, and somewhat paralyzed. According to this Scripture, there was no doubt that I had departed from my first love of the believers God had given me to walk with on my journey. It was not my supposed love for Jesus that was the biblical standard, but my love for Father’s other children that gave Him the evidence of my love for Him. I repented deeply and unsparingly.

When we forsake or leave our first love for others, our intimacy with God severely suffers. It is interesting to note that the verb used is to send away or leave rather than lose. Scripture does not say that Ephesus had lost its first love, they left or departed from Christ’s command to love others (see John 13:34). The distinction is important, for what we have forsaken or misplaced, we can go back and find again.

Hooks and Bible Verses

Consider the Eros spin that can be put on the Scripture Jesus gave us that it is “more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). The original intent of this Scripture was to provide for our own necessities and labor to support the weak. We put an Eros spin on the verse in such a way that it is now used to get money from people for “God’s cause.” It happens every day. What was
originally given in *Agape* has been twisted to our own advantage by *Eros* in order to manipulate and control. This is an infection in the body of Christ. We distort His Word—the very thing God gave us to take the hook out is used as a hook itself. The light is in danger of turning into darkness.

*Eros* is like a pirate ship flying a flag with the straight arrow on it that says, “*Agape*—I really love you!” As the ship sails into our harbor just past the point where we can defend ourselves, the *Agape* flag is pulled down and an *Eros* flag is hoisted up. It is a form of deception, and because of our ignorance of the *Eros*/*Agape* paradigm, we often fall for it.

Paul identified Timothy as the only man he could send to the Philippian church who did not have a hook (see Philippians 2:19-20). Timothy’s mother and grandmother, two godly women who loved the Lord had raised him, and he had been discipled by Paul. In effect, Paul was saying, “When I send Timothy to you, you can trust him unconditionally because he will love you as I love you with God’s own love.”

**The Eros Prison**

Freedom involves choices. We have both the capacity and the ability to make choices and to abuse the freedom God has given us, but we are not free to choose the consequences of our choices. In the following sections, we will identify some
serious and unpleasant issues. Be encouraged that there is hope and answers to these complex problems.

C. S. Lewis said that original sin caused the entire creation to be bent. We were born with a hook. This bend is the original fall, the sin nature that we inherited from Adam. The Eros prison is very real and is the one common denominator of all humanity; it is not limited to believers or unbelievers. Eros is the one state of being that binds human beings together all over the globe, in all financial or educational levels because “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

How this Eros prison works is a very serious issue in the life of every believer. As a brand new Christian, we start our journey on the Agape Road, but we can miss the road on either side, religious or worldly. Our objective is to get on the Agape Road and stay on it, however unpredictable or uneven our journey might be. Jesus is leading us to the place of intimacy with the Father. When we move off this main road, for whatever reason, we find ourselves heading toward an Eros prison. We deviate from the Agape Road by pursuing something we love more than God.

All movement off the Agape Road starts with a choice made in the area of conflict. When we go off to the left in religious or legalistic behavior, we are trying to please God with our own human efforts, attempting to improve on all that God has given us. When we go off to the right in worldly behavior, we believe that there is something up that road that God has been withholding from us. Very quickly, we discover that neither of these deviations yields what we thought they would. After finding ourselves at a dead end, traveling in ever tightening circles, we recognize that our life
is out of whack. Anger, criticism, and anxiety are some of the fruits of this cyclical behavior.

Any human being can find him or herself in an *Eros* prison. The problem is that we do not realize we are in a prison or that the bars are stronger than iron. Each of us is capable of this kind of denial. Jesus establishes this principle when He says, “Everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin” (John 8:34). Once an addict or an alcoholic wanders off the *Agape* Road, he or she becomes a captive and five cycles through a rehab program do not seem to be able to set them free. What is scary is that the *Eros* prison is even more probable when we are given to self-righteousness and are heading up the religious road. Religion can be an addiction and self-righteousness a real danger for every believer. Once we give ourselves to the *Eros* process, it closes in on us and the walls become thicker and stronger. An *Eros* prison gets us so turned in upon ourselves that we are in an indefensible position. Unless help comes from the outside, we are unable to set ourselves free because we are trapped within the forces that are turning us in upon ourselves.

Ephesians 6:12 says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Notice there are two conflicts, not one—world forces and spiritual
forces. Both come against us seeking to provoke us toward departure from the *Agape* Road. Spiritual and worldly forces can be so strong that we feel overwhelmed. If we give into them, we circle in upon ourselves and end up in either a religious or worldly *Eros* prison. The longer we are in this prison, the thicker the walls become.

**Spiral Downward**

Once we are trapped in an *Eros* prison, we begin a downward spiral. There are three fairly clear stages in the creation of this *Eros* prison. *First*, as we are spinning down, we are heading to a place where we find ourselves alone. The nature of the *Eros* prison is to turn us in upon ourselves, creating an increased sense of loneliness. We all know that being in the presence of other people does not mean we are not alone. Each of us has experienced the feeling of being lonely in a crowd. When we discover ourselves alone, we begin to experience fear. No matter how big and bad we think we are the sensation of loneliness soon introduces us to fear and anxiety.

*Second*, we become meaner than a junk yard dog. I call it “Christian demeanor.” The further we move toward being alone, “da meaner” we become. We will hurt and injure people. We will do anything to have our own way. Paul states this very clearly when he says, “we bite and devour one another” (Galatians 5:15). The worst
place in the world to be is at the bottom of this *Eros* prison. When we miss the purpose of God for our life by reaching for something that was forbidden, we experience a form of a free-floating anxiety—the kind of fear that moves toward frustration and anger because we cannot focus on the real issue.

*Third*, comes the rage. As we continue the downward spiral feeling the increasing sense of being alone, anxiety and rage result. This can be a frightening experience, but God, in His mercy, provides a way out of this involutorial spiral.

A person in an *Eros* prison says, “Bless me, help me, visit me, show me, pray for me, teach me, work with me,”—it is truly a spiritual black hole. While we are in our prison, we cannot understand why God would possibly resist us because we see ourselves as eager to do His will. However, when the walls thicken, our light has the frightening capacity to turn to darkness. There is no one in the world harder to reach than someone in an *Eros* prison, especially a religious one (see Proverbs 18:19). We can manipulate people and worship to our own advantage and even use God and Scripture in an *Eros* manner. To continue to
Essentially, if we love darkness (see John 3:19), we may not fully recognize or desire God’s freedom. We may want our way no matter what it costs. Certainly we mix in just enough of God to sustain us but not enough to interfere with our own personally planned future. We may not actually want out of the self-referential prison because He is liable to send us somewhere we do not care to go. Jesus does not want to just sustain us, He may be coming to make war with us (see Revelation 2:16), insisting, by the release of His truth in circumstantial events, that one way or another we find our way out of our Eros prison. God wants us to choose what He wants—the Lordship of Christ.

The Eros Payoff

Years ago I went on a three-day fast. No one outside of my family knew about it and I really needed others to know how spiritual I was. During a meeting with several other pastors, I said with dignity and false humility, “Well, this is the third day of my fast. I have been only on water.” Quietly, I heard a stern Fatherly voice say, “You have just received your reward. Their recognition has just cost you nine wonderful meals.” That is an Eros payoff. All of a sudden, I understood what Jesus meant when He told us not to pray,
fast, or give to be seen of men, or we would have our reward—man’s recognition as compared to Father’s secret and intimate response (see Matthew 6). When religious activity is accomplished for the purpose of being seen, the *Eros* payoff is the reward. There is nothing more. You have chosen what you esteem as most important.

*Agape* does not seek its own while *Eros* is the opposite. The *Eros* payoff is a serious and vicious activity that injures and destroys in ways we cannot imagine. The accusation of standing and praying as hypocrites for the simple reason of wanting to be seen by men carries far more significance than we have understood. The *Eros* payoff reveals itself by the use and implementation of the most convoluted and subtle movements one can imagine. Once we begin to see the *Eros* payoff for what it really is, we understand why Jesus spoke to this phenomenon so forcibly and directly.

People are trapped, used, manipulated, and mistreated on the basis of the *Eros* payoff. When religious leaders, politicians, and salesmen become more skilled in the use of the *Eros* payoff, we suffer at their hands. Some churches use titles and false recognition (*Eros* payoff) to get you to attend their church instead of another. This can be highly motivating to the person who is lost, confused, or unrecognized.

Manipulative advertising and sales techniques are based on an *Eros* payoff. They go something
like this: “You must get yours now, for there may not be enough.” “You should be the very first to own this in your neighborhood.” “Imagine what your friends will think when you drive this car.” Appealing to the *Eros* payoff is one of the reasons these techniques are successful rather than seen as a rip-off.

The *Eros* payoff is one of the motivations of man’s cruelty to others. For someone to put you down with criticism, verbal abuse, or humiliation seems to directly contribute to his or her own sense of superiority. Abusing others with an ugly, condescending attitude allows him or her to be somebody. Thus, making a show of our religion before men for the purpose of a payoff has serious and far-reaching repercussions.

**Freedom from the *Eros* Payoff**

The freedom, which Christ promised in John 8:29-32, *must* consist of the same attitude toward life and God that Christ Himself possessed. Without this freedom, we become drones, doing things not because we choose to but because we *must*. It is normal to have seasons of feeling unmotivated to do anything, but in those seasons we must not choose an *Eros* payoff. In redemption God created us to be His very own children, and we become this by our conscious intention. The

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7This section on freedom was influenced by *An Exposition of The Bible*. Hartford: S.S. Scranton, Vol. 5, 1907. 237.
ultimate purpose of the entire redemptive process is that of restoring God’s image and dominion. If freedom consisted of anything other than this, Christ would not be the One to set us free. Freedom, as Christ interpreted and imparted it, was designed to correct our spiritual ignorance so that we were not completely unaware of our Father’s intentions.

If we could see ourselves as participators rather than being used for the purpose of another, most of us would be willing to embrace difficulty and deprivation. Utilitarianism robs us of all that constitutes personhood. Slavery is real, whether secular or religious. To labor without the consciousness that our work is part of a greater plan and really does matter is to be deprived of our share in the common cause. As redeemed human beings, to be embraced in Father’s purpose and called “God’s fellow-worker” is to be allowed the cosmic privilege of participating in God’s purpose for the universe (see Romans 8:19-21). This intimacy is most clearly defined in John 15:13-17:

13 Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known
to you. 16You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. 17This I command you, that you love one another.

This carefully worded statement contains the reasons for which we are being set free. These incentives are carefully and unmistakably held within the context of Agape (see John 15:13, 17). Friend is the same offer made to Moses in Exodus 33:11, except that now it has been opened universally to all men and women. This offer of friendship, accompanied with His determination to respond to us with answered prayer, must not be overlooked. Thus, His command for us to “love one another” is to be interpreted by John 15:9-10, “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love.”

Learning to live for the Audience of One has the ability to strip the Eros payoff of its appetite and strength. Ungoverned desires, then, are increasingly recognized for what they are and summarily dismissed. Temptation is exposed for what it really is, an Eros payoff coming to us in some unusual and deceptive attire. The Kingdom
principle of standing before the Audience of One can be defined as *never doing or saying anything for the purpose of being seen nor refusing to do anything because we are being seen.* This is freedom from the *Eros* payoff.

**Seven Giants: the Real Cause of Failure**

God led the people of Israel out of the bondage of Egypt to the border of the Promised Land. Upon their arrival at the border, Moses sent twelve spies into the land to explore it and report back to him. Joshua and Caleb were the only two who came back with a report that the land could be taken. The others reported how terrified they felt when they saw the *giants* who lived in the land and how they made them feel like grasshoppers. Because the people received the bad report rather than abide in God’s promise, He refused to allow the older generation to enter the land (see Deuteronomy 1:35). In God’s displeasure, their journey became cyclical, wandering around the same mountain in the wilderness for 40 years until the older generation perished. In order to enjoy the land of milk and honey, they were prepared to milk the cows and fight the bees, but facing the giants was another matter. The giants served to obstruct the Israelites from entering into the land God had promised them.

*When the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it,*
and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you.

Deuteronomy 7:1

These literal giants, whose job was to keep Israel out of the Promised Land, were the shadow or type of the internal and spiritual giants that oppose us from entering the Land of Promises. The Seven Giants\(^8\) we deal with today are:

- Look Good
- Feel Good
- Be Right
- Stay in Control
- Hidden Agenda
- Personal Advantage
- Remain Undisturbed

James 4:1-5, you will remember, gives us the most accurate insight into how these Seven Giants are able to confuse, hinder, put us to flight, and create desires and urges that cause conflict and injury within our marriages, families, friendships, and church relationships. After 50 years of

\(^8\)The first four Giants were given to me in an encounter with Daniel Tocchini in 1987; the last three I added for additional clarification.
ministry, I have seen more than my share of strife, discord, feuds, conflicts, quarrels, fighting, jealousy, coveting, envy, anger, etc. The source was not demonic but was the result of the presence of the Seven Giants. They are very effective in keeping us from entering and enjoying the milk and honey of the Land of Promises. Each of these Seven Giants is really bad. They are exceedingly effective especially when we are forced to face them in various combinations. The Seven Giants are pure Eros. They are the instruments by which an Eros shift is implemented in a life, a family, a church, and in an entire nation.

We are not discussing alcoholism, sexual misconduct, or other external sins; we are at the root of the problem—ungoverned desire identified as the Seven Giants. It is ungoverned desire that interrupts our abiding relationship and intimacy with God the Father, with our own spouse, our dearest friends, and with people in general. If we do not identify and clearly understand the manner in which these Seven Giants operate, we will be forced to remain in the borderland of conflict, like Moses, who saw into the land but was not allowed the privilege of entering and enjoying it.

Like Medusa in Greek mythology, it does little good to cut off the head of one of the Seven Giants. The rapidity of their reproduction and their survival rate is like a deadly virus. In an Eros climate, the Seven Giants can operate undiscovered

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for a lifetime, then suddenly manifest boldly and with great authority. These Giants cannot be taught how to behave, be domesticated, or disciplined so that they can pretend do the will of God. They can’t just be arrested or subdued; they must be exposed, disabled, and brought to death. It is within the sphere of the Seven Giants that the satanic accuser escapes and hides from the “heel” of the woman (see Genesis 3:15). The Lord promises to show us how to expose and defeat these Giants so that we may live in the Land of Promise and receive our Kingdom inheritance (see Romans 8:37; 2 Peter 1:5-11).

These Seven Giants can exist quietly and appear subdued, but they are nonetheless very resilient, invasive, and dominant. Each of the Seven Giants functions in a synergistic manner, one adding strength and compulsion to the next. They are illusive and increasingly insidious in their various groupings. The kingpin, Stay in Control, however, is the most dominant of all.
The first three Giants are motivations to possess and intimidate. When effectively exposed, the Giant of control will begin to lose its strength. The last three Giants are manifestations of the need to manipulate by acquiring. As we set our love upon God, His love fills our entire person. As a result, we will find that each Giant, with its synergistic companions, begins to lose its grip, freeing us to love God and one another. This is the meaning of Agape perfected.

James says that there is no variation or shifting shadow in the Father of lights (see 1:17). The Lord has called us to freedom and intimacy with Him, but the Giants appear as darkness or shadows between our Father and ourselves. Because of God’s covenantal faithfulness, our relationship is still intact, but our quality of intimacy is affected. When the Seven Giants exert their influence in our lives, we are tempted to leave the Agape Road. Walking in light rather than in darkness exposes each of the Giants. Because God is light and “in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5), if we are walking in His light, God will expose the Giants within us not in guilt or condemnation, but lovingly in order to set us free. God is Agape at all times and under all circumstances. He wants us to walk in His light by responding to our neighbor, our enemy, the righteous, and the unrighteous (see Matthew 5:43-48) in the same manner that He would respond.
Understanding the manner in which the Seven Giants reveal themselves and how they use the *Eros* payoff may be one insight that can save our spiritual life from irreparable damage. It is not what comes at us but what comes out of us that is most damaging. When I realized that it was not Jesus Christ and His Kingdom, but the Seven Giants that were effectively ruling my life and actions, I was shocked and bewildered. Like many others, I was calling Him “Lord, Lord,” but due to forces of which I was not even cognizant, I discovered myself captured and effectively controlled by the Seven Giants. Chapter 5 of *The Agape Road* contains a more in-depth understanding of the characteristics of each of the giants. I would recommend reading this chapter to get a better understanding of how the Giants rule in your life.

**The Giants’ Triggers**

The Seven Giants can be seen throughout Scripture. Here is just one reference:

> Cleanse your hands, you sinners *(Personal Advantage)*; and purify your hearts *(Hidden Agenda)*, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into gloom. Humble yourselves *(Look Good/Feel*
**Good** in the presence of the Lord and He will exalt you.

*James 4:8-10*

They are activated, revealed, and engaged by the following five things:

1. **Feeling Slighted.** Feeling slighted or overlooked does not have to be real, only perceived to be real. It includes feelings that we were not received correctly, given the proper seat, honored in the appropriate sequence, or spoken to at the proper time or in an acceptable manner. Others were put ahead of us, promoted, or honored before us. This list could go on until eventually we see ourselves and our responses. Some years ago, a friend visited me at a large meeting where I was teaching. He said that he did not want to be recognized because he came just as my friend. In my ignorance of the Seven Giants, I took him at his word and did not introduce him at the meeting. He was so offended that he did not speak to me for several years. This experience helped me understand the illusive strength of the Giants and the manner in which they attack and destroy Kingdom tranquility.

2. **Being Questioned.** Because the Seven Giants have successfully convinced us that we are right and need to be in control, for anyone to dare question, challenge, or even think differently than us becomes a major source of conflict. There is an
increasing type of false leadership that demands total loyalty. We must sell our soul to the company store for the privilege of being in the inner circle. Everyone I have known who has failed sexually, financially, or doctrinally surrounded themselves with people they thought were “loyal” to them—“yes-men” who would not or could not disagree or question the status quo. The Seven Giants thrive in such a climate. The Hebrew word for loyalty is faithfulness. The Seven Giants want loyalty; Agape wants faithfulness. Our faithfulness to the Lord and to one another comes in the form of support, which sometimes includes confrontation and disagreement when the issue is various interpretations of the plain meaning of Scripture. Pity the leader who does not have anyone with the strength and character to question their impulses and inclinations.

3. Revealed Prejudice. Prejudice is a strange manifestation of the Seven Giants. It has a strength that will defy God Himself. In place of the spiritual Kingship of Jesus Christ, color, social standing, education, reputation, occupation, denomination, geographical origin, etc. (see John 4:9) seek to control the Kingdom of God. The Seven Giants gather themselves in synergistic force, bringing pressure to bear on the harmony and intent of the Kingdom itself. They seek to displace the rule of Christ with cultural values, academic excellence, or denominational
preference. Challenge the Giants in the area of prejudice, and you are dead. My pastor friend lost his position for daring to feed homeless, migrant workers using cookware from the church kitchen. They were offended because he contaminated what had been dedicated to the Lord. They chose their prejudice against the migrant workers rather than the Agape of God.

4. Demand for Repentance. It does not take long to realize that the call to authentic, effective, and Kingdom-type repentance does not leave room to look good or to maintain reputations. The Seven Giants will often challenge the bona fide presence of repentance. Asking others to forgive us makes us uncomfortable; it embarrasses us in the community and strips away our Look Good image that must, at all costs, be preserved. We cannot have Kingdom humility without humiliation.

5. Unmet Needs. Only God can reveal to us the manner, degree, and depth that our needs—whether real or perceived—effectively guide, pull, demand, dictate, and govern our human behavior. When we are experiencing a perceived need, even one in our imagination, everything and everyone must stop until that need has been satisfied. Awakened and ungoverned desire has a strength and motivational force many of us do not understand. Real and perceived needs are easily taken hold of by the Seven Giants and used to create havoc in marriages, churches, and social
structures. *Eros* and the Seven Giants can easily diagnose and identify the needs that our mate is not supplying. If allowed, these will be exaggerated until they become grounds for divorce. *Agape*, on the other hand, can see the needs that are being met, even the ones that are met quietly and without fanfare. Many feel that because it is *my need*, others cannot possibly understand. When our desire, in the form of an unmet need, has been awakened, the Seven Giants rape, pillage, and plunder until that need has been supplied. This is the psychological basis for all advertising. Awaken the desire, and then the strength of the Seven Giants takes over. We *want* what we want; affording it is hardly even a consideration because it can be accomplished by 36 easy payments that are hard to make.

**Governed and Ungoverned Desires**

There is a degree of mystery in the resolve and strength of mind that is revealed in human desire once it has been awakened. A missionary doctor once described the Good News to several abandoned and desperate orphans within the darkened nation of China in these words:

*There was a home where the Father, Creator, Provider, and Sustainer placed us in perfect care. Yet our earliest relatives rebelled against Him and scorned the provision and the*
Provider. From that point on, we have, each of us in turn, raised the fist, run away from home, and preferred to live as orphans, masters of our own destinies, planners of our own tomorrows, and rulers of our own worlds.

It is enough for us to know that ungoverned desire is “good for food; a delight to the eyes and desirable to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6). This desire, awakened in the fall, caused us to raise the fist (stubbornness/rebellion), run away from home (run, hide, shift blame), prefer to live as orphans (denying God’s Fatherhood), be masters of our own destinies (little gods), planners of our own tomorrows (all we like sheep have gone astray each to our own way), and rulers of our own worlds (be right, stay in control).

The Seven Giants utilize the power of ungoverned desire to implement their Eros agenda. It is important to see that the issues are deeper than having our sins forgiven. “He shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21) means eliminating both the act and the root cause, which are the result of the Seven Giants.

Ungoverned desire directly affects the manner in which the Scriptures themselves are understood. Attempting to take refuge in what we innocently call “the plain meaning of Scripture” is no longer possible. It is not that the Scriptures have changed, but those who interpret them have.
Figures don’t lie, but liars figure. E. Michael Jones, a Catholic scholar, helped me understand the real issue. Desire, both governed and ungoverned, has the ability to change the way the Scripture is understood and explained. He essentially says the choice is two-fold:

Conform desire to the truth, or
Conform truth to desire.

This is a very important distinction because we are now facing post-modernism, and some of the most difficult conflict awaits those of us who believe that Scripture is the very foundation of society and freedom. In an *Eros* shift, ungoverned desire increases until society itself is influenced and controlled. This is evidence that the *vox populi*, the voice of the people, can become a controlling factor. We have all seen how easy it is for people to become an angry mob, insisting and demanding to the point of death or incarceration that the will of the people be done (see Exodus 32:22-23). When the majority of experts (*vox populi*) interpret the Scriptures according to their ungoverned desire, the possibility emerges to make it say anything their desire demands. When something is not in accord with their desire, it is considered radical fundamentalism and should be

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discarded or oppressed. The Seven Giants often are the source of the ungoverned desires that controls how the Bible is understood. When the voices are sufficiently confused, no one knows who to believe or who to trust.

Truth is capable of disturbing that which insists on remaining undisturbed. When our ungoverned desires (Seven Giants) are faced with a biblical challenge to yield to Christ’s government and be conformed to the image of God’s Son, our response is two-fold: Recognize that we must conform our desires to the truth if we are to be free to move into intimacy with the Father; or seek another teacher, another church, or another interpretation of that same verse that will tell us what we want to hear. This is similar to searching for a doctor who will tell us what we have already determined is wrong. The Eros payoff may cost us, but many people decide it is more than worth it. We are now effectively conforming God’s truth to our ungoverned desire (see Revelation 22:18-19; 2 Peter 2:1-3).

We can hardly understand why Esau would trade his inheritance for lentils—a pittance of an Eros payoff (see Genesis 25:29-34)—apart from understanding the nature of ungoverned desire. Ungoverned desire is why successful and wealthy people are arrested for shoplifting. It is why people are ruled by the iron yoke of addictive substances including pornography and gambling.
Ungoverned desires are deeper than they appear on the surface. To be *ruled by desire* is very real and exceedingly difficult to change. We seldom realize how controlled we are until someone asks us to cease doing something we do not want to stop doing. Remember that no one can set us free from that which we still desire.

Ungoverned desires make us enemies of the Cross (see Philippians 3:18-19). Note that we are not enemies of Jesus because ungoverned desires still need the good things He can do for us, i.e., salvation and healing. It is when He asks us to adjust our desires to His truth that we want to avoid or circumvent (deny, avoid, endure) the demands of the Cross. This is Cross-less Christianity. It is only by embracing the Cross of Christ that our human behavior can be changed.

For many years, I could not understand the need for a daily Cross. My idea was that I could call upon the Cross in times of crisis, personal need, or failure. However, the more I understood the pervasiveness of the Seven Giants and the *Eros* payoff, the more I understood why the Cross must be ever present rather than something we simply call upon. The daily need for the Cross will appear and reappear as we discover these Seven Giants operating in our own life and in the lives of others whom we know and love.

The force of ungoverned desire happened to Jesus in John 6 when the crowd tried to take Him
by force and make Him King. Father had already declared Him King, and the popular movement was appealing to the awareness of that Kingship in an illegal manner. They were seeking to awaken an ungoverned desire in Him to fulfill His destiny at the wrong time and under the wrong circumstances. If Jesus had yielded to this, it would have twisted or distorted the larger purpose of His Father. Most errors in guidance have to do with timing rather than direction because we are so eager to help God out.

Two things can ultimately defeat Eros: waiting for Father’s initiative (see John 5:19) rather than attempting to control and waiting for Father’s timing to add something to us (see Matthew 6:33). Governed desire yields to Father’s government. Many times I found myself sulking when something that was legal and clearly the will of God for me was being denied or eluded my grasp due to some human failure, capricious event, or wrong timing. A sense of depression swept over me when I was denied the pleasure or satisfaction at the time it was expected. This depression was a form of anger toward God for not only failing to do what I thought He promised but for not doing it in the manner and time span I expected. To put it bluntly, God disappointed my pleasure principle. Who does He think He is, God? Fortunately, God uses even disappointments to expose and disable the Giants.
Predator or Parasite

When the Seven Giants mature, they produce two forms of human behavior: predators or parasites. Jude 12-13 describes them accurately,

*These are hidden reefs (elements of danger) [predators, Hidden Agenda] in your love feasts, where they boldly feast sumptuously [carousing together in your midst], without scruples providing for themselves [alone] [parasites]. They are clouds without water, swept along by the winds; trees, without fruit at the late autumn gathering time—twice (doubly) dead, [lifeless and] plucked up by the roots; wild waves of the sea, flinging up the foam of their own shame and disgrace; wandering stars, for whom the gloom of eternal darkness has been reserved forever. AMP*

*A predator (see Jude 12) is the consummate user. They are out to get anything or use anyone to their personal advantage. They are determined to stop at absolutely nothing to satisfy ungoverned desire, including murder. Predators force their will on everyone and everything around them. At San Quentin prison, we learned that a predator is a very violent type of person who will do anything and say anything to acquire what he wants. In prison, this is very ugly. It is also ugly in society. There are predators in business, medicine, law, education,
and ministry. Every pastor knows what it is like to have a predator within the congregation.

A parasite, on the other hand, takes advantage of the generosity of others while refusing to make any useful contribution in return. Jude 16 describes them as “inveterate murmurers (grumblers) who complain [of their lot in life], going after their own desires [controlled by their passions]; their talk is boastful and arrogant, [and they claim to] admire men’s persons and pay people flattering compliments to gain advantage.” Parasites are becoming more prevalent in the body of Christ. A parasite uses everyone and everything for their own advantage. They are like leeches. They get on you, around you, and among you. They use you, refusing to produce anything. They con, whine, and plead to have their own way. Parasites are also discovered in business, medicine, law, education, and ministry.

Both predators and parasites feel they are entitled. Entitlement is the attitude that we expect others to provide for us. We have the “right” to claim these things. A few years ago, a lady came up to me after I finished teaching on this subject, and she appeared visibly shaken. She told me she had been a social worker for 17 years and that the sense of entitlement she was seeing within the system deeply troubled her. People would lie, falsify documents, intimidate, and cheat in order to get services. On one occasion an enraged
middle-aged man drew a small hatchet out of his coat and embedded it in her desk yelling that she better not stop his government checks!

When predators and parasites increased in early Rome, they significantly contributed to the Eros shift, encouraging those who had already broken loose to become out of control. Ungoverned desire resulted in the inevitable fall of Rome.

Entitlement has “broken loose” in our western society. It is one of the explanations for a staggering national debt that is about to push our nation toward the inevitable and consequential effects of ungoverned desire.

The Healing Power of Agape

Many of us have come too far in our walk with the Lord to try to present or even infer that the concept of Agape is some kind of cure-all. The fundamental concern of the New Testament is the preservation of the absolute Who is Christ, our foundation. Nothing can be added below this foundation. “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (see 1 Corinthians 3:11). Jesus Christ, Agape Incarnate, is the foundation. It was God, Who came to us in the Person of His Son, to reconcile the alienated world to Himself. We now need to see that Agape is also the very highest concept of the New Testament—nothing can be
added above it. This is stated clearly in Colossians 3:12-15:

12Put on therefore, as [the] elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering: 13forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any should have a complaint against any; even as the Christ has forgiven you, so also [do] ye. 14And to all these [add] love, (Agape) which is the bond of perfectness. 15And let the peace of Christ preside in your hearts, to which also ye have been called in one body, and be thankful (Darby).

We see several life-changing insights regarding God’s Own Person in this portion of Paul’s letter:

1. (vs. 12) First, Paul meticulously restates the seven hidden attributes of God. This is a New Testament re-statement of Exodus 34:6-7, God’s self-disclosure of His Own person. (These restatements occur 11 times in the entire Bible.)

2. (vs. 13-14) Paul asks that these seven attributes be present in our relationships; they are the vital content of Agape, God’s very presence and His glory. Paul says that beyond Agape or above Agape there isn’t anything else because God, Himself, is Agape. So, what brings healing to us personally, to others, and to a hurting world is walking in Agape, the perfect bond of unity. Agape
holds the Christian community together (see Ephesians 4:15-16).

3. (vs. 15) Let the peace of Christ act as umpire—call the plays and interpret the rules—in our hearts and show us how the Kingdom works.

By making Agape to be both our foundation below and our highest good above, God has set the parameters for His Bride to function in this fallen world. God uses Agape to heal us and place us in right relationship with Himself. He gives us value and worth and insists that we love ourselves as He loves us. This is healing from all internal conflict. Then, He asks that we take the same healing that we received from Him and pour it on those He allows to touch our life. These He calls our neighbors. This is the healing power of Agape in three basic steps.

To know that we are loved, that we are His beloved, and that love is what causes us to want to do the will of God contributes to our wholeness and sense of well-being.

The Wedding Feast

The story of the wedding feast (see Matthew 22:2-14; Luke 14:13-24) could also be entitled, “Two Idiots and a Hen Pecked Husband” because those who were invited to this special occasion created illogical, if not down-right inane, excuses as to why they would not be able to attend the wedding celebration. Matthew and Luke give us
a beautiful picture of who actually accepted the invitation to the wedding—the poor, crippled, blind, and lame. After the king’s slaves gathered people off the streets and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests, the king came in to look over the dinner guests. “He saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’” (Matthew 22:11-12). Those who came were not skilled in the social graces of using three forks and two spoons set at their place. The issue was not their social skills, but their wedding garment—the host of the dinner wanted to be sure everyone who came had on the right clothing. The primary reason someone would not be allowed to enter was failure or refusal to put on the wedding garment freely provided by the host of the wedding feast.

This parable is amazing in that the poor, crippled, blind, and lame were the only ones who accepted the invitation. These four categories identify every one of us in one way or another. The poor are those without means with which to pay back. They could not even reciprocate with a dinner invitation. The crippled are those struggling with physical, moral, or spiritual weaknesses, hardly able to keep up with the pressures of life. The blind, which describes most of us, are incapable of seeing spiritual things; we have eyes, but see so very little. The lame are simply unable
to walk out all of the teaching on how to live a Christian life; they struggle with internal conflicts and habit patterns that seem to impair their very walk with the Lord. If Jesus invites these people to the wedding, He had to have made some kind of provision for them because He always knew what was in man.

The people who refused His invitation were governed and controlled by the Seven Giants and considered themselves in need of nothing. As a direct result of this attitude, Jesus said that the publicans and harlots would enter His Kingdom before religious pretenders (see Matthew 21:31). The Father wants us, the Church, to demonstrate His Agape to those who are hurting and teach them how to behave (see Matthew 28:20) at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (see Revelation 19:9). Jesus does not clean His fish until after they are caught.

The Wedding Garment: Our Robe of Righteousness

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the robe of righteousness and describes prophetically the wedding feast and the wedding garment. If possible, read this Scripture aloud:

I am overwhelmed with joy in the Lord my God! For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation and draped me in a robe of
righteousness. I am like a bridegroom in his wedding suit or a bride with her jewels. 
Isaiah 61:10 (NLT)

Isaiah is giving us an important prophetic insight into God and His Kingdom. He was preparing us for the day when Jesus would come and we could embrace Christ alone for our righteousness. Christ, Agape Incarnate, coming as our wedding garment is the pivotal point of the whole New Testament. Martin Luther rediscovered this when he said “the just shall live by faith,” and it caused a world-shaking reformation that disrupted the foundations of society at political, economic, and geographic levels. The importance and centrality of faith righteousness cannot be over-stated or over-emphasized. The freedom and spiritual intimacy that we seek comes only as a result of full and undivided faith in what Christ has done in our behalf, not what we do for Him.

In the letter to the Romans, Paul carefully reasoned for nine chapters how God’s righteousness is revealed. Peace with God cannot be bought, coerced, or earned by our faithfulness to doctrinal beliefs or denominational distinctives. Finally, in Romans 10, Paul addresses the most subtle and pervasive religious trap—our zeal for God, but not according to correct knowledge. Note how direct and straightforward he states the problem in
the following verses in the New Living Testament version:

For they don’t understand God’s way of making people right with himself. Instead, they are clinging to their own way of getting right with God by trying to keep the law. They won’t go along with God’s way. For Christ has accomplished the whole purpose of the law. All who believe in him are made right with God.

Romans 10:3

If we do not understand God’s gift of righteousness as the wedding garment given to us in the person of Christ, we will continually attempt to create a righteousness of our own. God’s Kingdom does not function on a little of our righteousness mixed with a little of Christ’s righteousness. When we attempt to do that, Paul says we do not go along with God’s way of making us right with Him. The end result is religion without the presence of God.

Romans 10:4, “For Christ has accomplished the whole purpose of the law. All who believe in Him are made right with God.” Christ, as the sinless Son, without guile (Eros) perfectly (Greek telios) fulfilled all that God could expect or demand through Moses’ Law. He then gave that righteousness to us as His gift.
Romans 10:9, “For if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Our freedom is the result of faith, belief, and confidence that God raised Christ from the dead (see Romans 6:4). This is the wedding garment.

Romans 10:11, “As the Scripture tells us, ‘Anyone who believes in him will not be disappointed.’” If we have embraced Christ in this manner, Father says we will never be ashamed. The strength of this promise is shocking. Nothing can separate us from God’s Agape given to us in the person of Christ (see Romans 8:31-39).

Romans 10:20, “And later Isaiah spoke boldly for God: ‘I was found by people who were not looking for me. I showed myself to those who were not asking for me.’” The lame, the blind, the poor, the weak, the harlot, and the publican have received an invitation to the wedding by means of the Good News of the Gospel and they accepted His invitation. We were not seeking Him; He was seeking us.

Romans 10:21, “But regarding Israel, God said, ‘All day long I opened my arms to them, but they kept disobeying me and arguing with me.’” Paul states boldly that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (see Romans 10:12), but those of us who are religious have a frightening propensity to make excuses as to why we cannot
receive God’s gift of righteousness freely. We have to earn it, work for it, and we feel we must be doing something to participate. All God wants us to do is believe and receive. His request is that the righteous man will live and respond in faith.

Freely we have received from God that righteousness Christ bought for us in His death and resurrection, and freely we are able to give that Good News to others. A mixture of the two covenants, a little law and a little grace, does not produce the freedom of the gospel nor does it release God’s promise. When we have had to earn our righteousness by religious effort and human works, we are not so eager to freely give grace to our neighbors. We have the sense that because we have earned our righteousness, others should earn theirs as well. God’s love, however, is always evidenced by freedom, spontaneity, and risk.

The moment we discover Christ as our righteousness, two things occur. First is the release from guilt and condemnation that comes from Moses’ Law (see Romans 5:1). Any accusations Satan could direct toward us have already been absorbed in the person of Christ. The only way we can fail and learn from our mistakes without being buried under guilt and condemnation is by immersing ourselves in Agape. This is the healing power of Agape. This is the Good News.

Second, we have a deep and personal assurance that we have been accepted and received by
God the Father (see Hebrews 9:24 AMP). Our confidence increases because we have been invited to the wedding and have been given the proper garment to wear. Christ is the wedding garment. This is what it means to “put on the new self” (Colossians 3:10). It is Christ, Agape Incarnate, Who will see to it that we learn how to be pleasing in His sight and know how to behave at the wedding feast. We only have one garment—God’s righteousness that was brought to us in the Person of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

When I teach about the wedding garment, I often use a white handkerchief to explain the righteousness of God as the following pictures of my hand illustrate. The first picture represents the Adam Factor—each of us in our sinful state. Then, I completely cover my hand with a handkerchief just as God’s righteousness completely covers us—this is imputed righteousness or “putting on the new self.” The
handkerchief represents the righteousness of Christ given to us as God’s gift. We did nothing to deserve or earn it. It is God’s righteousness imputed or implanted within us as the Eternal Seed giving us the authority to become sons and daughters of God by faith (see John 1:12).

Third, as Christ’s righteousness begins to be worked into us, we experience Kingdom transformation.

Finally, through this process we are being conformed to the image of Christ which is imparted righteousness.

Christ gives us the wedding garment so we will be properly dressed for the wedding. Our job is simply to receive the wedding garment believing that Christ fulfilled all the laws and requirements of the Old Covenant. His careful and loving impartation of His righteousness is the cultivation of the Eternal Seed, the growth of which results in being conformed to the image of God’s Son (see Galatians 4:19). God’s intention is for us to become His mature bride, able to participate both in His provisions and in His purpose as it is being revealed in the earth.

**Practical Use of the Wedding Garment**

The white handkerchief illustration is very workable especially when pressures, condemnation, and guilt come down on us for no recognizable reason. I have, over the years, literally
placed the white handkerchief on my head for the purpose of countering, breaking, and/or releasing the barrage of thoughts, accusations, and unpredictable emotions.

On one occasion I was on my way home after an impressive and rewarding ministry trip, but because of airline delays, I missed my connecting flight. With no other flights available, the airline put me up in a hotel room at the airport. I was physically tired, emotionally fragile, and spiritually numb. Everything in me wanted to be home. Upon entering the hotel room, an unexpected and unprovoked barrage of sexual and unclean thoughts immediately swept over me. Bone weary, I tried to sleep, but the mental and emotional attack was unrelenting. I jumped out of bed, opened the drapes, and looked out the window. Then, I took my white handkerchief, the very one that I used some hours earlier to teach this concept of the wedding garment, and carefully and intentionally placed it on my head. Out loud I said, “I belong to Jesus Christ. He is my Bridegroom and I am His bride. He is my righteousness. All mental and emotional conflict must cease in Jesus’ name.” Without exaggeration, the conscious presence of God swept over my entire physical person and filled the room. Agape brought healing to the torment. My mind and emotions began to settle and I slept the rest of the night without interruption.
Putting the handkerchief over my head was a child-like faith response. It was motivated by full confidence in the finished work of Jesus Christ on my behalf. God, as a Father, will respond to each of us in a similar manner when we choose to trust, rely on, and put our confidence in the redemptive provision of God’s Son.

The word “confidence” means trust, reliance, out-spoken, and bold assurance. It suggests the absence of timidity and false or religious expressions of humility. Confidence does not mean more human courage, greater effort, or expended will-power but boldness in believing what Christ has done for me and in my behalf. Hebrews 3:6 says, “But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.” The Greek word for confidence can also imply being unusually forward, almost shameless. The absence of shame for who we are or what we have done can never come from within ourselves. The promise of Romans 10:11, “We shall never be put to shame or be disappointed,” (AMP) is totally dependent upon our being able to stand in bold confidence in the presence of God and other people, even when we have failed or missed it, simply because our confidence rests in what Christ has done on our behalf.
Nourishing the Eternal Seed

In the New Testament, everything depends upon the Eternal Seed, which is Agape Incarnate. Jesus gives us the parable of the seed in Mark 4:26-29,

26 And He was saying, “The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; 27 and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know. 28 The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. 29 But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.

There are four important lessons in this passage:

1. The Eternal Seed is the Kingdom of God that comes internally and imperceptively (see Mark 4:27).

2. The Eternal Seed is mysterious; it grows and produces what God intends, but we don’t know how. This is a preservation of the mystery of the Kingdom (see Romans 16:25).

3. The Eternal Seed determines the time of the harvest. Our responsibility is to water, nourish, care for, and protect the Eternal Seed so it may bring forth fruit 30-, 60-, and 100-fold (see Matthew 13:8).
4. The Eternal Seed is what comes to maturity and is responsible for our spiritual progress, not our own effort. “Greater is He Who is in you, than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

The Eternal Seed is the essence of the creation mandate of Genesis 1:28, “be fruitful and multiply.” This is repeated in Matthew 28:19, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations....” Because Jesus is the True Vine and His Father the vinedresser or farmer (see John 15:1), it is the Father who has the responsibility to see to it that the Eternal Seed produces the proper fruit that He is expecting. Because the Father is the vinedresser, He reserves the process of cultivation and pruning for Himself. Isaiah 5:1-6 tells us that the Old Testament vine failed in its designed intent to reveal the glory of God. When Jesus said “I am the true vine” it was His guarantee that this failure would not be so the second time.

As believers, we have a responsibility to be cultivated and to assist in the cultivating process of others. If we are cultivated and cultivatable, we are able to more fully cooperate with God’s intention of cultivating others, our own family, our neighbors, and the nations without self-conscious effort or human striving. In cultivating and being cultivated, we need to keep a biblical tension to pray for a good harvest (God’s responsibility) while continuing to hoe (our responsibility).
Cultivation is not “good works” but the process of protecting and nourishing the Eternal Seed. It is the same responsibility God required of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The concept of cultivating requires us to focus on nourishing and protecting the Eternal Seed in our own garden. Ministry, then, would be cultivating the Eternal Seed in the lives of others whom God defines as “our neighbor.” We cannot do God’s part; He will not do our part.

Paul talks about cultivating the Seed by saying that one plants and waters, but God causes the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). In his writings, Paul continually sought to present us all to the Father in a state of maturity. As the Eternal Seed continues to mature in us, we find ourselves indwelt by the person of Christ (see Ephesians 3:17) and manifesting the fruit of the Spirit. As the Seed matures, Agape is demonstrated as God’s glory—Agape perfected. As we have learned, God’s glory is His seven hidden attributes (see Exodus 34:6-7). In order to allow the Seed to mature in us, we must allow “all things” (Romans 8:28) to conform us to the image of God’s Son. To do so will infuse, nourish, and cultivate the Seed, which increases our capacity to love as Father loves.

The Wheat and the Tares

Jesus used the parable of the “Wheat and Tares” to show us an important lesson about the
Eternal Seed of the Kingdom. This parable is illustrative of the *Eros/Agape* paradigm.

24 Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. 26 But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ 28 And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ 29 But he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

*Matthew 13:24-30*

Sometimes God is unwilling to pull the tares (*Eros*) until after the harvest because He does not want to risk injury to the wheat. This principle certainly applies in our own life. Pulling tares is a difficult and delicate procedure; it demands
expertise that only the Master has. He is willing to pull the tares for us because of His love for us. Until the tares are pulled, we must learn to walk among the weeds in our own lives and in the lives of others. The weed-less field is an *Eros* driven idea of human perfection that can only be accomplished by controlling and manipulating people in wrong and injurious ways. It is not a biblical model. The leader who seeks a weed-less field is missing the heart of the Savior.

Being cultivated and cultivatable, as well as assisting others in the care and nourishment of their Eternal Seed, requires that we understand the idea of *Agape* needing to be *perfected*—brought to its full and intended fruitfulness. When this occurs in our lives, the tares cannot and will not continue to be ignored. As the tares are exposed, they reveal themselves as the Seven Giants, creating a ruckus in order to be seen and remain in control. As the believer embraces the *Agape* Road and the process of being conformed to the image of God’s Son, the tares are pulled. Uprooting *Eros* in the form of long-standing culture, tradition, family genes, religious presuppositions, personal prejudices, as well as personal preferences is not easy. The Lord provided the wedding garment for this very reason. Remember, the Father reserves the pruning and tare-pulling process for Himself—He is the vinedresser (see John 15:1).

We need to be careful of eager tare-pullers who
seek to keep the Kingdom clean from the very people the message of His love was offered. The blind, lame, poor, and marginalized are the objects of His affection, but He often cannot trust us with them. Jesus said, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:12-13).

We do not want to be tare-pullers. We need to examine ourselves to see if Eros, like tares, is wrapped around the very roots of the life of God preventing us from knowing freedom and possibly making us a stumbling block to others. We cannot see, so we will not believe that we are the problem.

**Learning to Abide**

Suppose, like the early Christians, we were required to defend our faith, perhaps even at the cost of our own lives. If everyday issues shake us, what will happen if some tyrant challenges our faith and our life is literally at stake? Much can be learned from the early Christians who learned how to stand in their love for God when they were forced into the arena with lions or assigned with others to be crucified or burned. They learned what it really means to abide in love and affection for the Father. Remember that love is as strong as death. Learning the skill of abiding is not
superficial; it is preparatory for our continued journey on the Agape Road into God and His Kingdom. This is important stuff.

Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “’For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.’” This ought not to be. His ways should be our ways; His plans should be our plans. This is the intimacy that we seek (see John 10:30). For our thoughts to be transformed to God’s thoughts (see 1 Corinthians 2:16) and for our ways to be transformed to God’s ways (see 1 Corinthians 4:17), we have to learn to abide. It is a process, not an experience.

When the Kingdom of God comes, it demands repentance and promises intimacy with the Father. He cannot and will not leave us in an Eros prison. The skills we developed of running, hiding, and shifting blame do not give God the Father an opportunity to show Himself through our own personality. We must keep ourselves in the love of God and stop religious and worldly activity long enough to hear God’s still small voice. This involves the skill of abiding—continuing to be present, to hold, and to be held in God’s love in every situation, contradiction, and crisis that is presented to us on our journey. Abiding is the skill of being able to hunker down and
effectively draw upon the “supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:19). It is the means to being conformed to the image of His Son. Like the simplicity of faith alone, the Kingdom comes to us in such a quiet and uncomplicated manner that we can easily walk right over it, missing the strength it provides us.

Abiding in the Gospel of John

The Apostle John gives us the application to abiding, the most basic of all spiritual skills. By using the word more than 80 times in his writings, he shows us the centrality of this issue. Abiding is a continued and uninterrupted relationship between Jesus and the believer. The discovery of mixture within ourselves is no surprise to God as our Father. Jesus’ disciples struggled with mixture too and had to be taught the urgent and necessary skill of abiding as Jesus prepared them for the chaos surrounding His death and departure to the Father.

John 13-17 are the consummate chapters that promise intimacy for those of us who are seeking to know God and His revelation in the person of Christ. The following verses from John 15 contain the essence of what it means to abide.

John 15:1, “I AM the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.” Jesus is using the ‘I AM WHO I AM’ of Exodus 3:14. John uses the Greek construction of I AM eight times in his gospel.
This statement is being made to the nation of Israel who was God’s vine but was in the process of being set aside because she failed to bring forth the fruit of the Kingdom (see Isaiah 5:1-7; Matthew 21:33-46, note verse 43.) Remember that the Father reserves the function of vinedresser. He is the Gardener, the One who cultivates and brings forth the fruit for which He seeks.

John 15:2, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.” Fruit is the issue. God is never impressed or satisfied with the outward manifestation of leaves without the accompanying fruit. Father will cultivate and prune by means of de-centering and re-centering until we can produce Kingdom fruit. Our vinedresser will never allow His vine to degenerate for lack of care and pruning.

John 15:3, “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.” This is the Eternal Seed given to us as the wedding garment in the new birth. The result of the new birth is fruit that brings a revelation of God’s glory as seen in the seven hidden attributes.

John 15:4, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.” Abiding involves the skill of unbroken and uninterrupted communion allowing the sap of the vine—God’s *Agape*—to flow into our
person (see Ephesians 3:17). We must cultivate the Eternal Seed until that DNA which the Seed contains is brought to its full purpose, which is the Son of God replicated in the life of the ordinary believer. Abiding results in Christ formed in us (see Galatians 4:19). Abiding sometimes appears inactive, because it is quiet and unpretentious, but waiting on God is His request (see Isaiah 64:4).

John 15:5, “I AM the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” Our union has made us one. We have been given authority to become a child of the Kingdom (see John 1:12). It is the life of Christ flowing into us that produces the fruit of the Kingdom. “Apart from Me” (meaning disjointed in union, injured or broken intimacy rather than a covenantal break) will produce nothing for which the Father waits. A son or daughter who has grasped the implications of Agape allows God’s love to be replicated within them. Matthew 5:44-45 says, “love…in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven….” The biblical evidence that the Kingdom has come and God’s will is being done on the earth as it is in heaven is discovered when God’s love is replicated.

John 15:6, “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.” If we do not learn the skill of
abiding, we will dry up and fail to yield God’s intended fruit. This is the professional Christian who does the right things without the promised results. The cultivation process, as administered by God the Father, is determined to bring forth the intended fruit of the Eternal Seed, which is Christ formed in us as believers (see Ephesians 3:17; Galatians 4:19).

John 15:7, “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” If we learn the skill of abiding, God’s Word (Christ as Agape Incarnate) will abide in uninterrupted communion with us allowing the sap to flow from the vine into the branch in preparation for the fruit to appear.

John 15:8, “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.” God’s glory and the idea of governed desires are blending into one idea. Father’s hidden attributes—compassion, gracious, slow to anger, mercy, truth, faithfulness, and forgiveness—given to us in His self-revelation are His glory. All seven of these attributes are Agape Incarnate and consist of Christ’s very nature. The skill of abiding allows the Holy Spirit to form Christ in us. Father has effectively cultivated and pruned our vine of fruitless, religious activity until we have learned to abide in faith and in rest. Father is gaining a people who can love as He loves (see Matthew 5:43-48). This is His glory. Only the solitary route
of abiding in unbroken intimacy allows God’s glory to fill the earth.

John 15:9, “Just as the Father has Agaped Me, I have also Agaped you; abide in My Agape.” Agape is the ultimate issue. We are to love in the same manner and degree the Father loves us. Abiding in Agape is a skill we must develop. Jude 21 says, “Keep yourselves in the Agape of God.” Abiding requires pure faith in the wedding garment and confidence that Father God is at work cultivating us towards His eternal purpose—to replicate His love to others. Remember that Father uses “all things” to conform us to the image of His Son “… that we may share His glory with them” (Romans 8:28-30 UBS). Uninterrupted abiding produces fruit that is slowly and carefully grown.

John 15:10, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” Notice that there are two sets of commandments here: Father’s commandments and Jesus’ commandments. Christ kept His Father’s Ten Commandments on our behalf. He is asking that we keep His new command stated in John 13:34-35 (TLB), “And so I am giving a new commandment to you now—love each other just as much as I love you. Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are my disciples.” If we keep Jesus’ command to “love one another,” we need not worry about keeping the
commands God gave to Moses because Jesus kept all of them on our behalf (see Galatians 5:14). The skill of abiding releases the sap of the vine—God’s Agape—to flow through Christ, the vine, into us, the branches, in uninterrupted union. Jesus told us He would teach us how to abide in Father’s love.

It is impossible for us to abide by faith unless and until we have understood the wedding garment; security, identity, and belonging; and God’s glory. The skill of abiding is the polar opposite of running, hiding, or shifting blame. Spiritual maturity means abiding in—continuing to be present, to hold, and to be held—in God’s love in every situation, contradiction, or crisis we are presented with on our journey.

Keeping Ourselves in God’s Love

Jude, for its small size, packs powerful insight into how to keep ourselves in God’s Agape. He is seeking to keep the believers of his day in an effective abiding relationship in the presence of Eros. Jude reminds his brethren that the Apostles of Jesus Christ had warned that in the last times scoffers will come who will follow their own ungodly desires. He then speaks to those of his own day, as well as to those of us as serious Christians, when he says:
... that they were saying to you, ‘In the last time there shall be mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts.’ 19 These are the ones who cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit. 20 But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; 21 keep yourselves in the love (Agape) of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.

Jude 1:18-21

Jude teaches about the unbroken abiding relationship by setting forth these four distinct points:

1. Building ourselves up in the most holy faith. This is consummate confidence in the righteousness we have described as the wedding garment. Without faith, it is impossible to please God (see Hebrews 11:6). Jude reaffirms that abiding is a skill that comes out of faith alone. God will work if we can believe His intent to conform us to the image of His Son.

2. Praying in the Holy Spirit. To pray in the Spirit was “speaking to God and not to men” (1 Corinthians 14:1-3). The skill of abiding is enhanced and strengthened by cultivating the capacity to pray in the Spirit. God, as a Father, loves us so much that He personally gave us a language of the Spirit so we could speak to Him
in mysteries. This is evidence that God seeks to know us and for us to know Him.

3. *Keep yourselves in the Agape of God.* Agape is God’s absolute, so departure from Agape is departure from the seven hidden attributes of God given to us in the Person of Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 1:3). To fail to keep ourselves in the Agape of God is the same thing as failing or refusing to abide. We have, for whatever reason, made a preferential choice to do something other than or more than abide in God’s finished work that was given to us in the Person of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. By departing from God’s Agape, we are trying to improve on God’s plan!

4. *Wait for the mercy.* Mercy is what triumphs over that which is critical and judgmental. Jesus said, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Matthew 9:13). Mercy is Agape applied. It is God’s glory revealed because mercy is one of the hidden attributes of God’s own Person. Mercy comes in a manner similar to the Kingdom, it comes quietly, almost imperceptibly. When mercy appears, it is symptomatic that the storm is over and victory has been assured.

**The Skill of Abiding**

Learning to remain in Christ’s completed work is an absolute necessity to our Kingdom fruitfulness. It is the only thing that will hold us in times of conflict. Abiding is a skill we must learn,
like skiing or riding a bicycle. Remember that abiding is rest in God’s ability to work all things together for good. It signifies spiritual consistency that has come from our learning to trust God in all circumstances, even when we may feel like pressing the alarm. God’s pleasure and design is that we rest in the finished work of Christ (see Hebrews 4:11) knowing that we are acceptable to God and that we do so without guilt or anxiety. God is not angry with us.

Abiding yields freedom, fruit, and releases Father’s glory. It is the clear and biblical example given to us by the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter, who witnessed Jesus’ uncomplaining endurance (abiding) said,

19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept
entrusting Himself (abiding) to Him who judges righteously.

1 Peter 2:19-23

Abiding is the only skill that allows us to rely upon the Eternal Seed, causing Agape to manifest as the fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23). Running, hiding, and shifting blame are not an option. Only when we draw upon the life of the Eternal Seed can God’s supernatural Agape rise within us allowing us to meet the demands of our present circumstances. This is how the fruit of the Spirit appears even though our circumstances have not changed. We are the ones being transformed by the Agape of God in the midst of difficulties.

The skill of abiding is needed to fulfill what God asks from each of us in the following four areas (Matthew 5:43-48):

Loving God. As we know, God loved us first. He is the very source of Agape and without Him we can do nothing (see John 15:5). He is our enabler who works His will within us (see 1 Corinthians 12:6). Our choice in compelling and unchanging sets of circumstances is to abide in His love. To do so reveals His glory. Only our love for God can enable us to stand.

Loving ourselves. We know that we are complete in Christ, lacking nothing. His wedding garment was sufficient and it is fireproof; it will hold. Love for God and for myself results in security, identity,
and belonging, which cannot be self-generated; they are given by God the Father as the direct result of the authority imparted when we believe on the person of Christ (see John 1:12).

Loving others. Only abiding in the security, identity, and belonging provided by Christ will allow us to be slappable and spitable in the midst of conflict.

*Love our neighbor.* Agape always reaches out to others. Because of Agape, we are committed to do all we can to help others who are in difficulty. Rather than murmur, we are asked to assist, nurture, and strengthen others in our sphere or those who come across our path. Jesus consciously demonstrated concern and forgiveness to the two Roman soldiers who were assigned to crucify Him. Likewise, we must exert conscious effort to express forgiveness and help to others. It is a supernatural demonstration of the Kingdom of God. As we abide, the walls of our *Eros* prison weaken and are destroyed. Our confidence is that though the circumstances may not change, we are being transformed and experiencing the freedom that Jesus promised.

*Love our enemy.* This is a stretch for most of us. We live in a fallen world and while we should certainly seek relief from personal pain and pressure, we cannot do so by wishing death or injury on those who may be the cause of our suffering. We must keep in mind that an abusive
person is controlled and driven by forces that are way beyond their control. They do not understand it any more than the Roman soldiers understood what was happening. Security, identity, and belonging give us the resources needed to forgive and release those who have hurt us. Only by abiding in what Christ has provided can we come to the place where we love our enemies. Abiding allows us to entrust ourselves to Him who judges righteously. Abiding provides us that needed ability for us to say: *Abba, Father. God is my refuge, a very present help in the time of trouble!*

**Results of Abiding**

Only in abiding can we effectively learn to reveal God’s glory (see John 15:8). Abiding is a means of grace that acts as a preventative measure toward the human propensity to establish our own righteousness (see Romans 10:3). Paul explains it to the Galatians in a similar manner, “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” Abiding is the only way we can embrace self-government that leads us to the freedom the Father has promised. As we have learned, *no one can set us free from that which we still love.* Through the skill of abiding, we can see ungoverned desires transformed into desires that are controlled by *Agape* (see 2 Corinthians 5:14). As a direct result of abiding, *Eros* is displaced and *Agape* is released at the center of our person.
Jesus, teaching on the skill of abiding said, “the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19). He also said, “apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Joining these two statements develops the skill of abiding. The solitary route to bringing glory to the Father (see John 15:8) is by learning to abide in an uninterrupted dependence on the Person of Jesus Christ whereby the life-source and the internal sap of the true vine flows into our mind, emotions, and will. In this quiet state of depending on faith comes the transformation of our personality that results in our being able to bring glory to God as our Father.

**Becoming a Father-Pleaser**

A Father-pleaser is a man or woman who has matured in *Agape* and is walking in the Kingdom of God. Being a Father-pleaser does not mean we will never do anything wrong or that we are the teacher’s pet. A Father-pleaser is someone who cannot and will not be satisfied with anything less than Father’s approbation. The following statements are what it means to become experientially what God has made us to be conceptually when He said, “It is finished” (John 19:30) and “I make all things new” (Revelation
21:5). Note that Jesus did not say He would make all new things.

- **We think** like Father thinks. We have been given the mind of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 2:16); therefore His ways are becoming our ways and our thoughts are becoming His thoughts.

- **We feel** what Father feels. We have been given the compassion of Christ (see Philippians 2:1). It may be limited, but it is real.

- **We judge**, measure, and understand the way Father does because we have been given the biblical standard of judgment (see John 5:30).

- **We approach** Father with confidence. We have been given Christ’s assurance of acceptance (see Hebrews 9:24); therefore we can go within the veil of the Holy of Holies without fear.

- **We love** as Father loves. We have taken up Christ’s burden (see Matthew 28:19-20); therefore we see Father’s love for the lost and hurting being replicated in our own person. We, too, must be about our Father’s business.

If we interpreted the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5, 6, 7) in light of Agape, we could imagine Jesus saying something like this:
So you have decided to follow Me up this Agape Road. You have chosen My cup and want to be a Father-pleaser like Me. Since I always put everything up front, let Me explain to you how you will look and act as the direct result of your following Me. I do not want you to be surprised or stumbled by the unexpected. My Father has already decided where He wants to take you and what the end result will be. There is little you can do to make any of these things I am describing come to pass, but you can delay or thwart the process by running, hiding, or shifting blame. If you learn to abide and consciously move towards Me in preferential choice, I will take you to the Father (see John 14:6). During the journey, a transformation will be taking place in your life called the coming of the Kingdom. I am explaining all of this to you so you will be able to recognize the road signs and understand more accurately what is happening.

Out of this mysterious journey and the inexplicable haze that seems to lie ahead, we can discern Christ as the I AM taking our hand and leading us out of ourselves into the Agape understanding of Himself and His Father. He, Who was totally selfless, seeks to be born in our heart. We are increasingly able to recognize Father’s person eagerly waiting for us like the
prodigal’s father; for we have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We are not stopping short on this journey. We will never be satisfied with anything less than intimacy with God as our Father. We are not looking for some spiritual experience or Eros payoff, even a good one; we are looking for Him. It should be more than acceptable to us if He decides that some particular experience is necessary for us to know Him. Our intention is to know Him for Himself, not because of what He has done on our behalf.

Father Waits for the Eternal Seed

Father does not possess, acquire, or control. He is the Farmer and He waits. James 5:7, “The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.” We are the soil into which the Eternal Seed has been implanted. We need to cultivate, protect, water, and nourish the Seed within ourselves and give others a hand in their cultivation so God’s glory can be seen in the earth. How urgently we need to see beyond ourselves and recognize that all of creation waits and depends on our discovering the freedom and the transformation God has promised. The prayer “Abba, Father” nourishes the Eternal Seed within us. At some point on our journey on the Agape Road our focus is no longer on ourselves; we begin to understand that ‘Abba,
Father’ is the freedom for which creation waits and longs (see Romans 8:16-21).

Conclusion

God is a rewarder to all who come to Him in faith. He does not tease. My personal prayer is that you will have discovered for yourself and through the content of this book, the benefits and rewards of walking the Agape Road. These concepts have been sought out and written without regard to our personal comfort or denominational distinctives. They have been stated out of the deep conviction that they are biblically true. Spiritual experience and personal testimony bear witness that each progressive step has contributed to the larger concept of the Agape Road journey.

Personally, I have lived and experienced every concept in this book and have sought to embrace each one with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength. It has transformed me. Those who have walked with me on this journey and embraced the lessons in their own lives have also been transformed. There are many who are seeking the Father and He is eagerly waiting for them. Perhaps sharing with them the manner in which the Lord meets you on the Agape Road will help cultivate and nourish that Eternal Seed which is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”
Bob Mumford is a dynamic Bible teacher with a unique and powerful gift for imparting the Word of God. His anointed messages are remembered years afterwards, because he captivates his audiences by humor in the form of word pictures, which penetrate deep into hearts with incredible authority, clarity and personal application. Since 1954, thousands of Christians worldwide have attributed their spiritual growth and determination to follow Jesus Christ to his prophetic teaching, helping them understand Father God and His Kingdom.

Bob has written for major Christian periodicals both in the United States and abroad and published several books including *The Agape Road*, *The Mysterious Seed*, *Nourishing the Seed*, *Take Another Look at Guidance*, *The King & You*, *Fifteen Steps Out*, and *The Purpose of Temptation*. He has also published numerous booklets called *Plumblines*, including *Renegade Male* and a series on *Inheritance*. Bob’s writings have been translated into many different languages.

Bob has a heart for backsliders, having come to the Lord at age 12 only to stray from God a few months later. After being away from God for 12 years, the Lord cleaned up his heart and gave him new purpose and direction, calling him specifically to “Feed My Sheep.”

After completing his High School education in the Navy and then graduating with a Bachelor
of Science in Bible from Valley Forge Christian College, Bob Mumford attended the University of Delaware and then received his Masters of Divinity degree from Reformed Episcopal Seminary in Philadelphia. Over the years, he has served as a pastor, as Dean and Professor of New Testament and Missions at Elim Bible Institute. In 1972, he founded Lifechangers, Inc. to distribute his teaching materials all over the world where he has traveled extensively to some 50 nations as an international conference speaker.

Today he is considered to be a spiritual “Papa” to thousands of Christians. His ministry has been to prophetically proclaim and teach the sufficiency of Christ Jesus and His Kingdom in a manner which promotes reconciliation and unity in the Body of Christ. Bob seeks to bring about personal spiritual change and growth in the life of every believer, regardless of denominational persuasion.

Bob and his wife, Judith, reside in Raleigh, North Carolina where they are surrounded by their children and grandchildren. If you would like to receive information on Bob Mumford’s ministry Lifechangers, or a catalog of materials available, you can write to us at:

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This *Plumbline* is an abridged version of the *Agape Road* book. The full book is available for $12.95 and can be ordered online or by phone at:

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