

Lifebyte 50

Marriage As A Covenant Lifestyle (Part 4)

Living Righteously In The Days of Chastisement



*Jesus must remain in heaven
until the time comes for God to restore everything,
as He promised long ago through His holy prophets.* (Acts 3:21)



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Dear Friends,

In **Lifebytes 47** and **48** we discussed the four levels of needs that we're all driven to satisfy because our Creator made us that way: *physiological, safety, love and belonging*, and *esteem needs*. These four levels of need are part of your humanity. Your body and soul actively pursue meeting your physical needs as well as the needs of your mind, will and emotions.

Lifebyte 49 examined the spirit of *cold love* and the various ways that people develop this duty-motivated substitute for the intense *agape* love of the Holy Spirit. Cold love is like the spirit of anti-Christ in that it's *anti* the love of Jesus.

When you live by this counterfeit, whether intentionally or not, your relational interaction is from a sense of obligation rather than a pouring out of Jesus through you. You're unable to experience His devotion to you nor can you extend that love to others from your heart. When cold love has a strong hold on you, you dwell within a cave of self-protection. The authentic love of Christ isn't allowed to penetrate you nor can it be lived out with others.

We'll be discussing in this Lifebyte a **spiritual growth** need. Your need for Christ-like love comes about after you're born again. The indwelling presence of

the **Spirit of Jesus** produces this need in your heart.

When you're born again you need to stop being controlled by your soul so that you can willingly yield to His Spirit. If you want to meet your need for Christ-like love, you can't go on trying to satisfy your sin nature-controlled mind, will and emotions. We'll address this shortly.

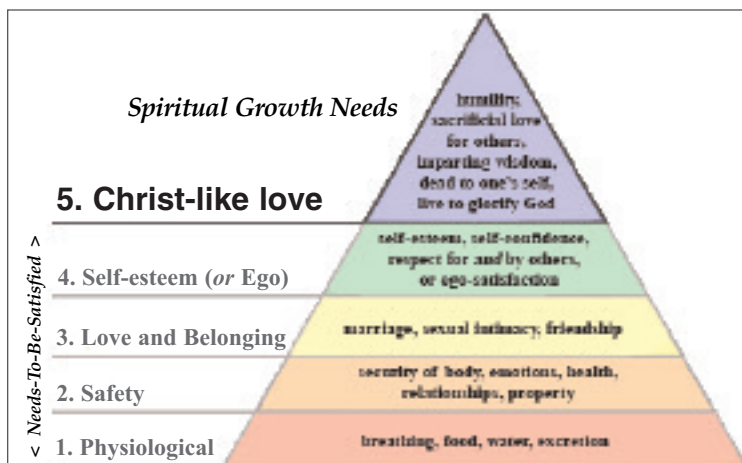
Love of Jesus and for Him is an internally empowered motivation indicating the indwelling Spirit of Jesus is accomplishing His work in you.

Our Spiritual Growth Need — Christ-like Love

It's important that you understand this. The sign that you're truly born again in a Covenant relationship with our Father is that you are conforming more and more to the love-based motivation of Jesus. By His loving grace He's enabled you to do this by His Spirit at work in you! In fact, because of the Spirit of Jesus in you, your need to grow in Him is so powerful that you're never complacently satisfied; you want *more* of His gracious transformation.

The Spirit of Christ in you both draws and empowers your spirit to be progressively transformed in character and love like that of Jesus. As a result, you increasingly live as if our Lord Jesus is *living through you*.

As strange as this sounds to your mind, the love of Jesus in us is satisfied **only** as we demonstrate it to others. It's in giving His love to others that you really experience the satisfaction of Christ's love. Yes, it's true that our Lord *loves you completely*, and as you cry out to Him, His Spirit



allows you to experience His love for you. But, if you want to exude the aroma and wonder of His love, let it flow through you as you *give it to others*.

- 1) Trust in His promise that the love of Jesus from His Spirit rests in you.
- 2) Then share that love. As Christ-like love goes forth from you, your spirit finds joyful satisfaction and peace.

This spiritual reality isn't an original idea! Note the interconnectedness of *loving our God* as His chosen vessel and being *poured out as that love* onto those who are near us:

'Love [agape] the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: 'Love [agape] your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments (Matthew 22:38-40)

The *agape* love our Lord commands us toward both God and toward one another is produced by the Spirit of Jesus at work in us. Don't gloss over this important call because "*all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments*." He has graciously shown us His way of living that pleases Him *and* has given His Spirit to empower us to do it His way. What a privileged responsibility!

Paul hammered home how essential *agape* love is in our every action and aspiration:

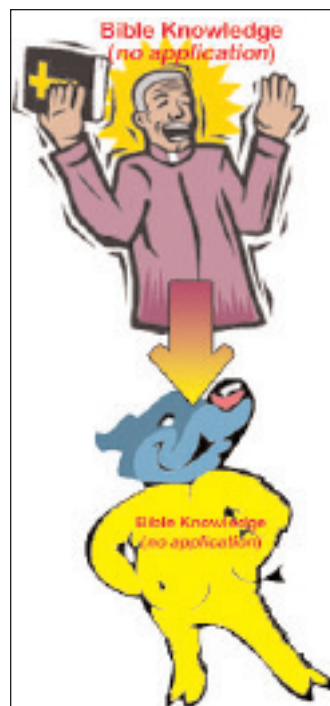
If I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2,3).

- What do you think the Apostle means by "*I am nothing*" and "*I gain nothing*"?

- Earlier we wrote, "The sign that you're truly born again in a Covenant relationship with our Father is that you are conforming more and more to the love-based motivation of Jesus." Is this your earnest desire? If not, in what areas of your life are you resisting change? Ask others close to you for feedback.

Bible Knowledge Without Life Application Is A Trap

Are you among the many Christians who are hindered from pouring yourself



out in love as the Spirit of Jesus would use you? A contributing factor to your reluctance may be your addiction to **sermons** and **Bible studies** which fill up your mind but bring about *no change in your heart*. Both of these unbiblical forms were adapted from pagan Hellenism which

“taught at” hearers but prompted no course correction in their lives.

Neither sermons nor Bible studies for the sake of *broadening your knowledge* have a Scriptural basis. Indeed, they are the *opposite* of the Hebraic framework in which truth demands *change* in the hearer.

Do you recall all those times our Lord Jesus called on people to have “*ears to hear*”? That meant that those who were receptive to His words would *apply that truth* by some sort of *response*. You have only to look at the worldly people around you who have vast “Bible knowledge” to recognize that information in and of itself changes no one.

[For more on the demonic source to sermons and formatted Bible studies, we recommend “*Pagan Christianity?*” by George Barna and Frank Viola. The book expands on the evil influences of Hellenism that we presented in Section 2 of our book *Restoring The Early Church*; also see Section 2, Lessons 15 thru 22 of *Discussing How To Restore the Early Church*.]

Teaching the Bible without discussion *and application* only feeds the mind, not the spirit. Remember: knowledge alone produces arrogance (1 Corinthians 8:1).

Bible knowledge that your mind has filed away into its “religious facts” compartment will never enable you to press on into the character of Jesus. Over the years you may *know* more, but you’ll find to your sorrow that you’re no more like Jesus than you were at the beginning of your journey.

In fact, you may discover that you’ve grown in the *cold love* we warned you about in Lifebyte 49. You’ll go through “Christian” motions but realize that you haven’t the *heart of Jesus* for people.

The painful torrents of life WILL come against you. But only the truth that has

been important enough to you to *apply* will endure:

*But the one who **hears my words and does NOT put them into practice** is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its **destruction was complete*** (Luke 6:49).

We want to make very clear your vital need to *internalize* the Word of God! A born-again person is indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus and uses the Bible as a *powerful resource of life application* that is pleasing to our Lord. Without hesitation, the words of Jesus translate into a trust that *obeys* their Master’s voice:

*I will show you what a man is like who **comes to Me and hears my words and puts them into practice**. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was **well built*** (Luke 6:47,48).

Keep in mind that it isn’t the extent of your Bible knowledge that makes you pleasing to God, but what you put into practice because of the *love-based motivation* behind your actions. If you’re attuned to the Spirit of Jesus in you, you come to recognize this: He gives you opportunity to apply the Scripture you *do* implant in your heart.

For example, say that you’ve just read that as a follower of Jesus you must forgive others. How often we’ve observed that within 24 hours you’re put into a situation in which you can exercise that truth you’ve just learned!

Perhaps an event will occur that will hurt your feelings. One of the ways Christ-like love grows in you is when at that moment you *choose to forgive* rather than

harbor unforgiveness. When you choose to obey because of the *love of Christ* at work in you, you become pleasing to our Lord and become more like Him.

Our Lord doesn't commend you for your knowledge of the Word. Rather, you please Him when a situation occurs in which you can lovingly apply a specific truth in the Bible. Through that obedient availability you become more like Jesus.

- Please, train yourself to be attuned in obedient awareness when you encounter a new truth in the Bible. See for yourself if it takes more than 24 hours before our Lord gives you an opportunity to apply it. You may want to keep a journal. Write the new truth you learned and the date. Then write down when the opportunity to apply that truth occurred and how you responded.
- On the scales below evaluate yourself as to your level of Bible knowledge vs. the love of Christ you have for others. (Be honest with yourself; solicit feedback):

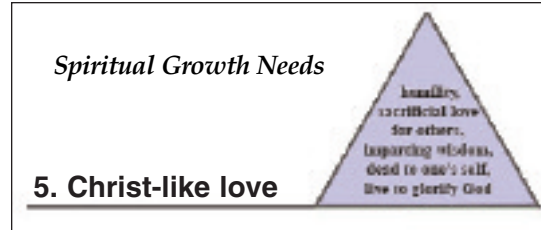
Bible knowledge:

very little a fair amount a lot
 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Christ-like love for others:

very little a fair amount a lot
 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

- If your Christ-like love is far less than your Bible knowledge, how does this make you feel? Really, does it hurt your heart at all? If it does, describe your feelings. If it doesn't, why is this so?



Sanctification Is The Process of Christ-like Growth

In our Hebraic Article, *The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*, we share the two critical parts of your pilgrimage to salvation: justification and sanctification.

Justification—placing your trust in, and continuing to trust in, the shed blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

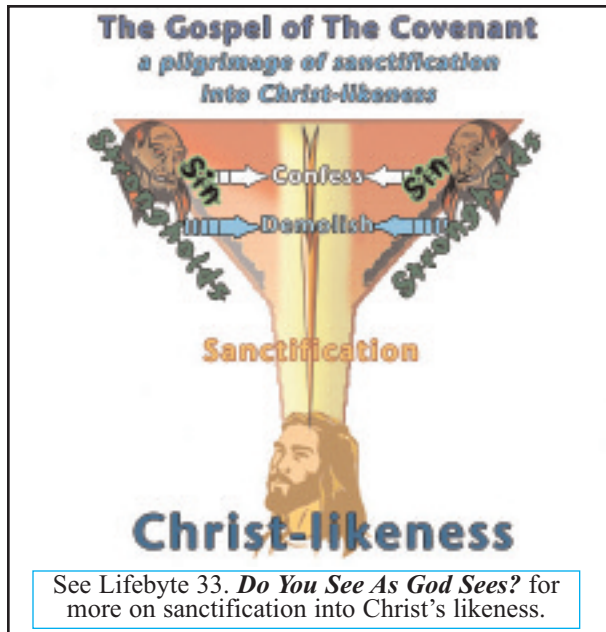
Sanctification—the lifelong purifying process of the Spirit that enables you to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

The pilgrimage of a Jesus follower:

- Begins with Justification, your Spiritual Rebirth;
- Continues a lifelong process of Sanctification;
- Culminates ultimately in Salvation before the Throne of Christ.

In Lifebyte 33, *Do You See As God Sees?* we use an illustration of progressing down a funnel to depict sanctification into the likeness of Jesus (top of next page). The sides of the funnel represent where people cling who hold onto unconfessed sin or entertain strongholds in their soul.

To grow in Christ-like love they must *confess their sins* and *demolish their strongholds* in order to return to the center of the funnel. Only in the *center* of the funnel does sanctification occur, drawing



them downward to increasingly become more like Jesus through His Spirit at work in them.

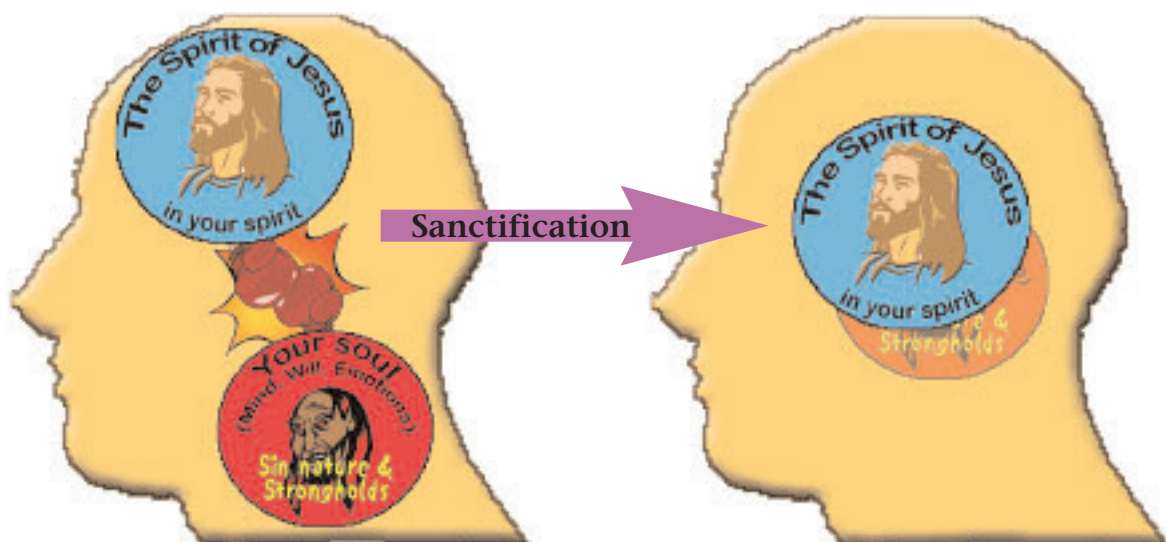
Sanctification is a crucial spiritual element that's overlooked by many Christians today. Quite often Bible knowledge *without application* dulls them to their real need of becoming more like Jesus and serving His Kingdom purposes. This is especially true when it comes to experiencing and reflecting His love to others.

Christ-like Love Is Supported By Mutual Encouragement

Throughout most of our lives we've have been accustomed to the impulse of our sin-nature-dominated and stronghold-controlled soul. But after we're born again, we receive the Spirit of Jesus in our spirit. We're no longer vulnerable to that old way — IF we walk according to the way of the Spirit.

When the Spirit of Christ takes up residence in you, a battle begins over who will rule your life (see diagram below). How does the *Spirit* rule? By your ongoing obedience to confess your sins to God and demolish strongholds as you *take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ* (2 Corinthians 10:5). In essence, this is what the Bible calls being "*filled with the Spirit.*" The Spirit of Jesus now is preeminent in not only guiding you but transforming you to be like Him.

The Spirit of Jesus in you makes you part of the FAMILY of Jesus: "*Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother*" (Matthew 12:50). And one of the loving parts of being in His family is our desire to *encourage* one another. His love in us causes us



to both refresh and spur each other on in our journey in Him (Hebrews 10:24).

As extended spiritual family in a home fellowship, we must continually encourage each other so that we not only grow in Christ-like love but help others move up the pyramid. Remember, just because we're born again doesn't mean our sin nature has totally left us. But we *can* keep putting it to death as we yield to the Spirit's work in and through us.

In fact, when you're at the top of the pyramid you may experience greater assaults by your sin nature and even demonic forces for that matter. Why? Because you have become *Jesus-in-the-flesh* to others. When you're motivated by love *for* Him and *from* Him, you are a loving, Spirit-empowered threat to the demons. Christ-like love makes you enemy #1 to Satan and His hoards, and they will try even harder to trip you up.

The top of the pyramid is not some sort of "Christian Nirvana" where you can be comfortable and live at ease. Far from it! It's your arena of wholehearted loving service to our Lord. It's a life of such humility that your heart's desire is to do whatever will bring your Father the greatest glory!

Again, as overlooked as this subject is in Christendom, recognize that at this level—Christ-like love—people need *encouragement*. The person whose motivation is Christ-like love is responsive to those with whom they share intimate load-bearing relationship:

Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (Hebrews 3:13).

Sin's deceitfulness not only tempts you to sin but also labors to pull you

down the pyramid, focused solely on your own physical and soulish needs.

Sin's deceit causes you to be discouraged and hopeless. We've met many who used to experience Christ's love and share it with others but had descended back to Security needs because others failed to encourage them. We've found them in emotional prisons of self-protection. Did Jesus fail them? No! Others who neglected to encourage them did.

Yes, we must take our thoughts captive and bring them into obedience to Jesus, but we're also commanded, "encourage one another daily".

- **On the scales below evaluate yourself as to your level of bringing your thoughts into obedience to Jesus, and your actions in encouraging others in your fellowship. Be honest with yourself; solicit feedback.**

Bring your thoughts into obedience to Jesus:

very little a fair amount a great deal

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Daily encourage others:

very little a fair amount a great deal

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

- **If you're not a '100' on "taking captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ", why are you this way? If you're not a '100' on being a daily encourager to others in your fellowship family, why aren't you?**

Christ-like Love Produces The Dignity of Belonging To Our Father

The indwelling Spirit of Jesus kindles your heart to appreciate more and more the reality of being your Father's child. Through His Spirit you understand your holy purpose as His precious one: that you are called out of the world to fulfill your part in the Kingdom of God.

The Spirit of Jesus in you yearns for you to fully sense your dignity as our Father's child, rejoicing in your *ongoing Covenant union* with Him. When this sinks into your spirit as His living truth, you're able to respond with willing determination in your heart to live with HIS purposes as YOUR purposes.

As you meditate on this passage, hear in your spirit the longing of our Lord Jesus for the fullness of union for you with *Him* and with *one another* in Him.

*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that **all of them may be one**, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also **be in Us** so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.*

*I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that **they may be one** as We are one: **I in them and You in Me**. May they be **brought to complete unity** to let the world know that You sent Me and **have loved them** even as You have loved Me (John 17:20-23).*

[It's important to note that the **union** Jesus is seeking is NOT about *ecumenical cooperation among denominations*. A man-made amalgam overlooks creedal differences in order to perpetuate an unscriptural organized system. This "wide net of middle ground" has no basis in the Covenant love which only the Spirit can produce in those He indwells.]

Before we can walk in unity with one another as family in Jesus, we need that initial reconciling work of the Spirit of Jesus in us: a love-based unity *first* with our heavenly Father through Jesus:

*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the **Spirit of sonship**. And **by Him** we cry, "**Abba, Father**" (Romans 8:15).*

Out of this wealth of sonship that we experience with our Father we can then share authentic biblical unity with others. Unity with our Father brings an *internal peace* that's derived from the confidence you have in your Covenant relationship with Him.

Remember, your connectedness to our Father is through the Spirit of Jesus in you. Seek intently for the Spirit of Jesus in you to fulfill this work of unity that's grounded in *agape* love. Pray, sing, and cry out to Him!!! Don't be satisfied until you're confident of the love and unity our Lord promises you in His Word.

Intimate confidence with your Father produces a dignity like no other. "**Abba, Father**" is a heart-felt expression of your assured realization that you are our Father's child. Receiving this promise with full trust that *His Word has said it and that settles it* is the launch pad for you to share His love with others. Because of the reality of His Spirit at work in you, you want others to intimately know your Father as you do — from the heart.

We've written many times about God's relational command in the Older Testament — *to love Him*. The Hebrew word for the love He commands is *ahav*, a passionate devotion for Him which yearns to be in His presence and is dedicated to pleasing Him in obedient trust.

The Hebrew letters for *ahav* mean "a window into the Father's heart." When

you choose to lovingly relate to Him as the Spirit of Jesus enables you, our Father reveals Himself to you in a dynamic and intensely personal manner.

Such intensity of God's love in and through you pictures the heart of a martyr. A person who empties himself of dependence on human attachment because of their love for their ever-faithful God is able to be poured out for His praise and purpose.

This is neither mental acceptance of whatever happens nor a fatalistic "whatever God wills". Rather, endurance of suffering on all levels of needs-deprivation, whether physiological, safety, or social, can only come about through reliance on the love God has shed abroad in your heart.

The work of Satan is overcome by a martyr's trust in the covering of the Lamb's blood, by their assured testimony of His unfailing work, and by their willingness to forsake love of their earthly life in order to gain that which they can't lose (Revelation 12:11).

How can anyone do this, you ask? Because their *loving unity with the Spirit of Jesus* in them empowers them to experience *belonging to their Father*. And, when you know you intimately belong to Him, you have dignity and courage as no earthly means can generate, even unto death...

- **On the scales below, evaluate yourself as to your sense of belonging to our Father, and how much of His heart He's revealed to you. (Be honest with yourself; solicit feedback.)**

Belonging to our Father:

very little *a fair amount* *a great deal*
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Knowing our Father's heart:

very little *a fair amount* *a great deal*
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

- **If you're not '100' in your sense of belonging to our Father, what is hindering you? If you're not '100' in seeing into our Father's heart for you, why aren't you?**

Recognizable Characteristics of Those Who Live In Christ-like Love

Below, we've listed particular character qualities and attributes we've observed in followers of Jesus who are motivated by Christ-like love. As you go through these observations, put a number between 0 to 100 indicating how much the characteristic applies to *you*. Then discuss your answers with your spouse or close friend, as appropriate.

___ **They are fully mindful of the depravity of their own sin nature. But rather than focus on their darkness, they maintain a repentant heart and pour themselves by His grace into growing into a loving representative of their Lord. (See 2 Peter 1:5-11)**

___ **They are readily available to obey any prompting or guidance from the Spirit of Jesus. It isn't a battle of will for them, but loving and yielded submission to the will of the personification of love, Jesus. (Philippians 2:13)**

___ **The more they mature in the way of their Lord, the more eager they are to share Godly wisdom to help others. [Biblical wisdom is seeing life's situations from God's vantage point.] As they age, they grow in the love of Jesus, and find that solving problems with wisdom becomes a key focus in their lives. (Job 32:7, Proverbs 16:31)**

— Because the love of Jesus bathes their motivations, they feel a closeness to others who are also bent on sharing the love of Jesus with a humble heart. They are Spirit-compelled to purposefully participate with others in service to Jesus. People who experience and share Christ-like love have matured in spirit. They don't look to satisfy their own needs, but to represent the love of Jesus in meeting the needs of others. (Ephesians 6:7)

— Their lives demonstrate convictions that are fully internalized as part of their character. Their hearts are motivated to live a Bible-based life which pleases their Lord. Their grateful love for their Lord impels them independent of any desire for reward or fear of punishment. (1 Thessalonians 4:1)

— They judge experiences, people and situations in accordance with the internalized Word of God. As a result they can detect the counterfeit and the dishonest. While generally kind and patient, they confront boldly the hypocritical, pretentious, pompous or self-inflated individual, desiring to lead them to repentance. (Matthew 21:31,32)

— Because their trust in their Lord is so complete they're not afraid of the unknown and refuse to entertain doubt or uncertainty. They're not tentative when facing new or unfamiliar situations or circumstances. (Isaiah 41:10)

— They're not dismayed by the ongoing battle to crucify the influence of their sin nature. They can accept their human frailty, realizing that they're absolutely dependent on their Lord's grace. (2 Corinthians 12:10)

— Because they're both experiencing and sharing Christ-like love with others through His Spirit, they don't rely on the soulish comfort of organized religion and the vicarious spirituality of others. They don't give way to conformity, nor are they anti-conformist for

the sake of being so. While they may live a rather conventional life, they don't allow convention to keep them from doing anything they consider important in service to their Lord. (Romans 12:2)

— They're neither externally motivated nor even goal-directed; rather, out of love for their Lord they're "obedience-based". Instead of focusing on a perceived outcome, they're motivated by a loving willingness to obey as the Spirit of Jesus guides. Undergirding their motivation is their loving trust in Lord Jesus and their desire to grow in His likeness to express that love for Him. (1 John 3:23,24)

— Because of their love *for* Jesus and His love *in* them, they can identify with and share sympathy and affection for those with whom they have close relationship. They're also able through His Spirit to show empathy and compassion for people in general. (Philippians 2:1,2)

— Out of *agape* love they can extend deep interpersonal relationship to others. Through the Spirit of Christ in them they're able to extend great affection and encouragement because ego gratification isn't an issue. While caring for many, they may have especially deep ties with rather few individuals. Their small circle of intimate friends may be like that of Jesus with Peter, James and John, and then the other nine. (Mark 5:37)

— Because of Christ's love they've cast down any innate prejudices. Nor are they judgmental about the spiritual darkness in other people, since they realize they themselves once walked in darkness. They're friendly toward all regardless of religion, education, political beliefs, race. They're humble in their childlike status before their heavenly Father, and respect everyone as beings who are made in God's image and for whom Jesus died. (Matthew 18:10)

**Resist Both The Devil and
Your Sin Nature With
ALL Your Strength—
Cry Out To The Spirit of Jesus
Within You**

If you've gleaned anything from these four Lifebytes on Covenant marriage, we hope it's this: You're engaged in a transformational process that doesn't come easily! You can't sit idly by in a pew while someone else spoonfeeds you knowledge. Nor, if you want to grow in Christ's likeness, can you read a few verses each morning, then set your Bible aside without applying it in His Spirit.

Individually *and collectively* you and your spouse must be diligent and persistent if you're ever going to experience and share Christ-like love. You've got to want it with everything in your being!

Put to death the control of your sin nature-controlled soul. Its guidance will never serve the interests of our Lord, nor will it bring praise to His Name. Your guidance and power to do the will of our Father are appropriated as your spirit

yields to the Spirit of Jesus in you. Learn to have confidence in the presence of Jesus within you. Don't rely on signs to point the way when He's faithful to reveal His love and presence within you (1 John 4:17).

You have a wonderful privilege and responsibility as you experience Christ-like love and share it with others: to daily encourage each other in Him (Hebrews 10:24)! Your responsive obedience to the Spirit at work in you is wonderful protection against any foothold either the devil or your own sin nature might try to lodge to keep you from continuing down the funnel of Christ's love.

Work together as a couple and as extended spiritual family in Jesus to encourage each other and walk in communal righteousness with obedient trust in Jesus. What glorious wonder as you hear together that heavenly proclamation:

***"Come, you blessed of My Father,
inherit the kingdom prepared for you
from the foundation of the world!"***