PURGING YOUR HEART FROM THE LEAVEN OF LEGALISM

FROM SERVANT



31 DAY DEVOTIONAL

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Introduction

Legalism. No one is exempt from it! We all deal with it on some level because of the system that this world is built on. It's a system of performance that Galatians 4:9 refers to as "the weak and beggarly elements" that hold people in bondage. It's a never ending cycle that has no peace and no rest.

From birth we live in a world that programs us to perform for acceptance. "Santa Claus rewards the kids who are good" we tell our children. The best performing student gets recognized. The best athlete gets the trophy. The best looking girl gets the most popular guy. The best employee gets the raise and the promotion. Religion even tells us that in order to be blessed by God, we must strive for righteousness.

Jesus warned us about His arch enemy that opposed everything He did in His life and ministry. One might think that this enemy would be identified as Satan himself, but it wasn't. Jesus' greatest enemy that opposed Him was the legalism of the Pharisees and Sadducees. We read in Matthew 16:1-12: Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed. Now when His disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said to them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees."

And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have taken no bread." But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "O you of little faith, why do you reason among yourselves because you have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, or remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets you took up? Nor the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many large baskets you took up?

How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

It's interesting that Jesus uses leaven when describing the Pharisees and Sadducees' legalistic beliefs and ways. Leaven is something tiny, and in the beginning affects something in a small way, but ends up affecting it in a huge way. Leaven infiltrates a small lump of dough and causes it to get bigger and bigger. It works like the proverbial frog in a kettle. It is slow, secretive, unnoticed and very dangerous.



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On the surface, legalism in a believer's life can look noble, and resemble a person who loves God and is faithful to Him. It is a heart issue that is innocent in it's motive, but dangerous in it's effect. It starts out as a desire to please God and gain His favor. It begins the same way so many religious sects and cults start out; wanting to gain the favor of a God they neither know or understand. Add to that ignorance a plethora of ideas gained from the beggarly elements and the system of the world, and voilà: the religions of man!

Jesus did not come to bring a religion called Christianity. He came to set us free from the power of sin, and to bring us into a life that He Himself called "the abundant life." (John 10:10; Romans 5:21) He came to bear our sin and to give us His righteousness as a gift, a righteousness that would cause us to reign in life. His desire and His design is for us to reign, and what He gave us in His death, burial and resurrection is more than enough to enable us to do it. He gave us an abundance of grace, and He gave us His very own standing with the Father; not a standing to be earned, but one that's a gift.

For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through

the One, Jesus Christ. - Romans 5:17

For thousands of years man has attempted to be righteous by his own efforts and by keeping laws, rules and regulations. Laws that came from the 10 commandments and laws that came from other systems of performance like the weak and beggarly elements of the world. When a person is ignorant of the righteousness of Jesus that is given to us by faith, it's only natural to allow the leaven of legalism to creep in by creating a righteousness of their own. They use their own ideas of what it takes to be righteous, and what it takes to please a God that they do not know. Paul wrote about this very thing in Romans 10:3: For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

Submitting to God's righteousness means accepting righteousness on His terms, and not trying to legalistically produce it by your efforts. So what are His terms? His terms are what He accomplished in Jesus on our behalf, and receiving those terms by faith.

Romans 10:9-10 says:

That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Have you accepted salvation on God's terms? Have you accepted the payment that Jesus made on our behalf, or are you trying to pay for, or earn God's favor with your good behavior? If you have repented from trying to earn His favor and you have accepted what Jesus has done as they only payment that can be made, then you have been given righteousness as a gift, and you are as righteous as Jesus Himself. You have His

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righteousness, and you can stand before God with no shame, no guilt, as if sin never existed, and fellowship and receive from Him based on the merit of Jesus!

The purpose of this 31 day devotional book is to take the reader on a journey of discovering the subtle ways that legalism affects our lives like leaven, and robs us of the true and intimate relationship that God desires for His sons and daughters. The Father's desire for us is to enjoy His presence, His blessings and for us to allow Him, by the grace of His Spirit, to transform us into what He has purposed; a fruitful and powerful life that knows Him intimately, enjoys an inheritance from Him and advances His kingdom on earth. No more lies of religion and bondage from legalism! May the words of this devotional help to bring you into a freedom that you never knew was possible!

"And you shall know the truth,

and the truth shall make you free." Jesus in John 8:32

Introduction For The Reader

This 31 day devotional is not intended to take up a lot of time with extensive study, but to provoke a thought and create a meditation that you ponder throughout your day. Start your day off with each daily reading and spend some time meditating on how that day's teaching affects your heart and life.

Each day starts a specific way, or "sign" that can reveal a legalistic belief that might be in your heart, followed by a short teaching that explains how to overcome it. Don't condemn yourself if you recognize that a legalistic belief is there. Rejoice and be thankful because you've identified something from which you can now be free!

Following the short teaching is a thought that begins with "Today." This thought is one of the most important parts of your day because this is where you apply the truth to your life. When we act on truth that we have heard or discovered, it gets our emotions involved, and it writes that truth on our heart. Be diligent to act on the truth you discover and it will pull down the strongholds and lies that legalism can build in us.

The last part of each section is what we build our life on...the Word of God! Read this scripture out loud several times to get it established in your heart. Use your imagination and see this truth alive and working in in you.. Visualize the difference it is going to make in your relationship with the Father, see it working in you, and make declarations and confessions of it throughout your day.

One final word of encouragement: Keep a journal during these 31 days so you can go back and remember how truth has affected you. Email your testimonies to our ministry (see back page for address) and share them with your friends. We'd thoroughly enjoy knowing the impact it has had in your life.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart Your spiritual disciplines define your relationship with God

DAY 1

Prayer...reading the Bible...worship...they're all great things that can help you in your relationship with God. But if you miss a few days, or haven't done them in a while, do you feel emotions of guilt, shame or a lack of confidence? It could be a sign of a legalistic heart.

Discipline is good. Great results can come from discipline and consistency. There are some great disciplines that can benefit relationships you're in, like cleaning up after yourself, taking a bath and brushing your teeth. Those kind of disciplines might help a marriage, but they don't define the relationship. What defines a great marriage

is the love, honor, respect, passion, and selfless giving that each partner has for the other. Disciplines like taking a bath and brushing your teeth are physical things that you do, but love, honor and respect are all issues of the heart.

Your spiritual disciplines define your relationship with God What defines your relationship with the Father is, first of all, the issues of His heart that are toward you. His love for you, His honor for you, His passion and His selfless giving to you. As you believe this and begin to reciprocate these things back to Him, the relationship thrives. He's not demanding anything of you. His heart toward you isn't based on your performance, but it is based on you being in Christ. He wants to bless you because you are in Jesus!

Today, believe that something good is going to happen to you because you are in Christ Jesus! Believe that you are qualified to receive what God has for you, not because you do things that qualify you, but because Jesus already qualified you in His death, burial and resurrection. Spend some time in worship, receive His love and His passion for you by faith!

1 Corinthians 1:30 (NKJV)

But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You only feel comfortable when you're around saved people

DAY 2

The Pharisees in the bible looked down on sinners. Jesus was just the opposite. He loved to be around them. He went to their houses and hung out at their tax collector parties. (Mark 2:15) A legalistic heart might fear that sinners affect them in negative, sinful ways. They also may pride themselves in being much better than them, and shun being around them. Perhaps some of their "holierthanthou" friends might see them hanging around the sinner.

However, a heart filled and empowered by God's grace knows that the power of Jesus living in them will positively affect sinners around them. When we know the love that God has for sinners, and that God is not holding their sins against them, it causes us to do the same. We don't hold their sins against them either. A grace-filled heart won't fear the judgment of others as they reach out to what the religious societies call 'the untouchables."

The Pharisees called Jesus "a friend of sinners" in attempt to ridicule Him. They didn't realize that it was actually a compliment. Pharisees wouldn't darken the door of the homes where Jesus hung out. He let a prostitute wash His feet with her tears, and He ate meals with tax collectors, who were the mafia of His day. He touched the unclean lepers and sent them away healed. He was secure in His sonship, and He was unafraid to rub shoulders with the so called worst people that society had rejected. Why? Because He loved them and had something they needed. His truth made them free!

Today, realize that no matter what environment you find yourself in, the grace of God in you will attract people to Jesus, and His power will flow through you to bring forgiveness and healing. The power and the anointing that you have is designed to work in an environment of sin and sickness!

Luke 15:1-2 (NKJV)

Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You live in constant condemnation for your mistakes

DAY 3

The Old Covenant is a system based on our performance. Every mistake made came with the probability that something bad would happen. You were blessed if you did everything right, and you were cursed if you did something wrong. You can see how easy it would have been to have a daily sense of condemnation. Questions would continually fill your mind, like "What am I doing wrong? ...Have I done enough? ...What did I do to deserve this?"

Condemnation means to expect punishment because of your actions. The New Covenant that we have today has NO CONDEMNATION in it because it's not based on our performance, like the old, but it is based on the performance of Jesus! Jesus did everything right for us! He did enough on our behalf. All the punishment that our actions would ever deserve fell on Him on the cross. We are NEVER supposed to feel an expectation of punishment. When our faith is in Jesus, and Him performing on our behalf, we can have a continual, abiding sense of something good always in our future. Because of what He did on our behalf, we have His righteousness and we stand before God as if sin never existed.

Today, realize that your mistakes don't disqualify you from enjoying God's best. You deserve to be blessed because of the obedience of Jesus! Realize that you don't stand before Him in the power of what your flesh can do, but you stand before Him in the power of what the Spirit has done, is doing and will continue to do. That's grace!

Romans 8:1-4 (NKJV)

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart It frustrates you when others aren't doing what you do

DAY 4

You're on your way to church and you pass people who are not. They're pulling boats and campers instead. It frustrates you! "All these people can't give God a couple hours a week!" You show up for the Sunday night prayer meeting and think "Where is everyone?" After church you go out for dinner with church friends, and what really makes you angry is when people start eating their food...without praying over it first...like you always do.

It sounds like the time some Pharisees came to Jesus and asked Him a question in Mark 2:18:

"The disciples of John and of the Pharisees were fasting. Then they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do

not fast?"

This is a typical attitude of a legalistic heart. You're trying to live up to the model of what you think a Christian should do, and when other's aren't living up to your model, it frustrates you. Religious, legalistic strongholds in our minds are the very source of our judgements and frustrations that bring us pain. The thing you must realize is your model is wrong. It's not the standard model for a good Christian that everyone must live up to. It's not even the model that you should be trying to live up to. Don't put yourself and others in bondage by focusing on what YOU are doing, that others are not. Your righteousness doesn't come from what you do or don't do. It comes from God the Father as a gift (Romans 5:17 and 2 Corinthians 5:21). It is given to you when you believe that Jesus' finished work was and is the payment for your sin.

Today, focus on who God says you are and how much He loves you, not on how much you're doing to try to show your love for Him. Rest in that love, and let everything you do be done out of a desire for Him, not an obligation. Release people from unhealthy expectations of what you think they should be doing for God, and love them too. Just relax, chill out, and love people while you're loving Jesus!

Romans 14:22 (NKJV)

Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You think you are doing ok when you compare yourself to others

DAY 5

All of us seek and yearn for one basic need at a heart level...the need to be declared right. The question for each of us is "from what source will this need for justification be met from. For thousands of years mankind has been trying all kinds of things to satisfy this need for righteousness. When Jesus showed up, He bore all of our unrighteousness and gave us His righteousness as a gift. A gift we receive when we put our faith in Him. Once you're in Jesus, the need for righteousness is satisfied forever, if you believe it. The problem is, many people don't know that, or they have never established their heart in that truth.

For the person who still has a need to be right, they must find temporary satisfactions, much like a drug addict does. The most popular "self righteous drug" out there is comparison. "I'm

not so bad...look at all these other people who are doing worse than me." A legalistic heart thrives on comparison because, like a drug, it makes them feel better for the moment. Like a drug addict that keeps coming back to the drug for temporary satisfaction, a legalistic heart will keep coming back to comparison. They will meticulously look for things that are wrong in other people's lives because it gives them a temporary satisfaction. The scripture tells us that when we first come to God through Jesus, He makes us "holy." The word holy doesn't mean that we don't ever make mistakes. It means to be separate and unlike any other. He stands alone. There is no being like Him that exists. Because He stands alone, it is foolish to try to compare Him to any other so- called god. Nothing, and no one compares to Him!

Well, you are made holy by God! There is no one like you, and just as it is foolish to compare our Father to anyone or anything, it is foolish to try and compare yourself to any other believer. We are holy children of a holy God. Never compare yourself to anyone else...ever!

Today, realize that if you are in Jesus, God has declared you righteous apart from anything you can do, or have done. You are holy! The striving to be right is over! You are as righteous as God, because He has given you His righteousness. (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:1-2) There's no need to compare anymore!

2 Corinthians 10:2 (NKJV)

For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You see God's blessings only as a reward for doing good things

DAY 6

A legalistic heart is like a freed slave that never really gets the fact that they are free. "Earning their keep" is so ingrained in them, that they can't break away from it. In this New Covenant we are sons, not servants. A servant has to work hard and skillfully in order to please the master. He never has a sense of belonging to the family. A sense of value and self worth are only achieved when the servant has performed up to the standards of the master.

The story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 is a perfect illustration of this. When reading this story, most people only focus on the part of the younger son returning home after going astray from the father and wasting his inheritance. The father restored the younger son, forgave him and threw him a great party to celebrate his return.

Then the story begins to focus on the older brother, who was busy working in the field. As he returns he finds out that the noise and dancing from the party was a result of his brother returning home. The son is furious, and his response when confronting the father locate exactly where his heart was. "I've been serving you all these years, and you never threw me a party or gave me anything!" The father, taken aback by his response, shows the older son how crazy his thinking is..."All that I have is yours!" The older son had a servant mentality, and was working for something that was already his by inheritance.

God's blessings cannot be seen as rewards. They are our inheritance. A reward is something for which we must work hard or be qualified. An inheritance can only be believed and received, never earned. In fact, the moment you try to earn it, you fall from the grace that works in you to bring it to you.

Today, realize that it is impossible for God to reward you with something that is already yours by inheritance. Stop striving, working and acting like a slave instead of living like a son. By faith, receive what is yours! Take it! It's your inheritance. All that the Father has belongs to you!

Luke 15:31 (NKJV)

And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart When bad things happen, your first thought is "What did I do wrong?"

DAY 7

A legalistic heart always believes that life is good as long as you're doing good, and life is bad when you're missing it somewhere. If this was true, then it would be tantamount to old covenant living. When a person believes this, it propels them into a sin conscious cycle. Instead of an abiding awareness of their righteousness in Jesus, they are always trying to find out where they've missed it to make this happen to ME!

You see this attitude in Jesus disciples when they encountered the blind man in John 9. They asked, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Their thinking was if this man is experiencing a curse, it had to be because he had sinned, or possibly his parents had sinned and brought this curse on him. Jesus' answer was "Neither!" Jesus was telling the disciples not to focus on the reason, but rather focus on the works of God working in him. Although sin's curse causes disease and bad things to be here in the earth, never let your first thought be "What did I do wrong to cause this to happen?" Rather, let your first thought be "What did Jesus do to make healing and provision available to me apart from my performance?" Our life is not a balance scale that tips in our favor when we do good, and to our despair when we do bad. The obedience of Jesus forever tips the scale in our favor! Even while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

Today, be aware of how righteous you are in Jesus, even when you miss it. Receive from the Father based on His righteousness, not your own. Even when you aren't doing everything perfect, step beyond your performance and receive from God based on Jesus performance on your behalf. You deserve to be healed, whole and free today because of Jesus!

Romans 3:21-22 (NKJV)

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart When other people's sin disgust you

DAY 8

When Jesus saw sinners, compassion moved Him and the result was always forgiveness, healing and deliverance. What flowed out of the heart of the legalistic Pharisees was judgment and disgust. They thought that if Jesus was a true, holy man of God, He wouldn't even get close to them. The crazy thing is, they really thought they knew God and represented Him with their looks of disgust.

The greatest thing that disgusted Jesus was the legalism of the pharisees. Paul talked about this very thing in Galatians 5. He said that when people strive for righteousness by working hard to achieve it, the fruit always turns out looking like evil instead of good. (Gal 5:19-21) Here Paul compares the fruit of the flesh to the fruit of the spirit. You're either living like a Pharisee and working hard to achieve righteousness, or you are allowing the grace and mercy of God to work in you by receiving Jesus' righteousness by faith.

Many people believe that God is a merciful God, but they don't believe that He enjoys giving mercy. The Father loves being merciful! In fact, Jeremiah 9:24 says He "delights" in giving mercy. It thrills His heart! For some reason, we have believed the lie that if we show someone acceptance and mercy, we are approving of their sin. Jesus never showed any approval of someone's sin, yet He was able to show complete mercy to the worst of sinners. The result was they were set free.

Today, think about how you can exercise mercy to someone who seems far from God. Find someone that at times has moved you to disgust, and do something merciful for them. In doing so you are imitating your Heavenly Father. After you do this, examine your heart and identify how it made you feel.

Jude 1:21-23 (The Passion Translation)

Fasten your hearts to the love of God and receive the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gives us eternal life. Keep being compassionate to those who still have doubts, and snatch others out of the fire to save them. Be merciful over and over to them, but always couple your mercy with the fear of God. Be extremely careful to keep yourselves free from the pollutions of the flesh.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You believe that God loves you, but you don't believe that He likes you

DAY 9

Some parents communicate their disappointment to their children by giving them "the look!" The reason they gave us "the look" was because they wanted us to change our behavior. Whenever we got "the look" we knew that they loved us, but we weren't sure they liked us.

When we begin a relationship with God, we tend to transfer many of our experiences we had with other authority figures over to Him. A young girl may have grown up with a father that was not loving and affectionate to her, and she tried hard to get his approval. She can become a Christian and relate to God as someone who doesn't want to be close and affectionate, and someone who is hard to please. A young boy can grow up with a mother

that was not nurturing, and he can see God as someone who doesn't love him enough to take care of his smallest, basic needs.

Without realizing what is happening, we can assume that God is like our parents, our teachers, our bosses, etc. Don't ever make the mistake of thinking God's love and desire for you is similar to other earthly experiences. It's far greater than we could ever imagine! It is more intimate and caring than you could ever dream! "The look" is designed to make you focus on your behavior and what needs to change. Focusing on what's wrong doesn't empower us to change. Grace empowers us for change by focusing on what is right because of Jesus. Our Heavenly Father doesn't just want to modify our behavior...He wants us to experience real victory that comes from a changed heart, heart that's persuaded that He loves us, even when we don't act right.

God has no "look" that He gives us. He pursues us in love even when we don't behave. He doesn't lose His joy when we miss it. He is more secure than that! He loves you when you miss it...and He likes you when you miss it. Believing, knowing and experiencing the love He has for us changes us at a heart level, and heart change will effortlessly modify our behavior.

Today, imagine God smiling at you with pleasure and delight...even when if you mess up!

Isaiah 62:5 (NKJV)

And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So shall your God rejoice over you.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You compare your righteousness to other people's righteousness

DAY 10

When the leaven of legalism gets in the heart of a person, they enter into an unending cycle of striving to get themselves into a better place of performance. Nobody has to teach you to be performance driven, it happens by default. This world's system is built on the performance driven life.

The best athlete gets the trophy...the best employee gets the promotion..the best yard in the neighborhood gets noticed, and we even teach our children that Santa Clause will only come to your house if you're good. Performance is all around us, but the kingdom of God isn't built on this system.

That's why Jesus said people have to repent to experience His kingdom. Repent means to have a change of mind, turn and go a different way. The chief thing people must repent of when coming to Jesus is dead works, or trying to relate to God by performance. The reason Jesus came was to perform on our behalf, and give us a righteous standing with God, not based on what we do, but based on what He did. You have the very righteousness of Jesus given to you as a gift when you believe.

Knowing this eliminates comparing yourself to other Christians, because our righteousness is the same. No one that is in Christ can increase, or decrease in their righteousness. We can grow in "the knowledge" of it, but we cannot grow in righteousness.

You're not any more righteous than any other believer, and you're not any less righteous either. Quit striving to be better than someone else. Don't have some unhealthy, unreal model of righteousness that you're trying to live up to. You have Jesus' righteousness, and that is as much as you can get. Rest in it!

Today, endeavor to see everyone that you know who is in Christ as righteous as Jesus Himself. See yourself that way too, and watch the comparison end.

Romans 5:17 (NKJV)

For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You believe God favors you more when you are behaving well

-DAY 11

One of the key indicators that a person is living by faith is what Hebrews chapter 4 calls "the rest." Hebrews 4 compares the "rest of faith" to the same rest that God entered into in Genesis after he had created everything on earth. Once He created something, it worked without anyone or anything having to help it. An apple tree produced apples with no striving. There is a rest and a rhythm to an apple tree. It doesn't have to try to be a good apple tree in order to persuade

God to help it. God already gave it what it needed to thrive. The finished work of Jesus provided everything we need for life and godliness to turn out in our favor. Like creation, it's

a finished work, therefore, there is a rest and a rhythm that we must enter into in order to partake of it. We must cease from trying to "be" right with God in order to somehow persuade Him to be good to us, and receive "right-ness" as a gift and settle into the rest and the rhythm of His finished work.

Your behavior doesn't keep you right with God. Righteousness is a gift God gives you that qualifies you for all He offers us. Righteousness is given to you the moment that you put your faith in the finished work of Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that Jesus became our sin in order that we would be made the righteousness of God.

You can rest because righteousness has been attained by Jesus and given to you as a gift. You can cease from striving to live a life that is pleasing, and know that you are pleasing to God because of Jesus. Rest in His favor. Settle into His goodness and just receive from Him.

Today, dwell on your gift of righteousness that you have because of Jesus. Stop trying to earn His favor. He already favors you because you are in Christ. Meditate on this place He has brought you into until a holy rest fills your soul, and just receive and take from Him whatever you need by faith.

Hebrews 4:9-10 (The Passion Translation)

So we conclude that there is still a full and complete "rest" waiting for believers to experience. As we enter into God's faith-rest life we cease from our own works, just as God celebrates his finished works and rests in them.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You feel at times that God is avoiding you due to things you have, or haven't done

-DAY 12

Avoidance is a form of relational punishment. A person might avoid their spouse after an argument. You might have had a friend avoid you after a disagreement. When you are aware of others expectation of you, you might avoid them because you haven't fulfilled their expectations. We can punish ourselves and others by avoidance.

So often, when we aren't aware of God's love for us, we think our relationship with Him is based on expectations He has of us, instead of His great desire to simply meet with us. Ask yourself the question "Why do I think God wants my attention?" Is it because I believe He loves me, or is it because He wants to correct me? Am I conscious of His love, or am I

conscious of perceived expectations He has of me? When we don't meet those perceived expectations, we become afraid, afraid that He might punish us with avoidance.

The remedy for overcoming these type of feelings is to understand how righteous He has made you apart from your performance, and how outrageously in love with you that He is... apart from your performance! That's right! His love for you, and what He has done for you is totally apart from your performance. He simply wants to meet with you, and if correction needs to take place, it will always be done out of His love for you. He just needs you to understand this and open your heart to receive it. That's grace!

Today, eliminate the lies that try to drive a wedge in your relationship with God by understanding and meditating on His great love and desire for your fellowship.

1 John 4:18-19 (The Living Bible)

We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us. So you see, our love for him comes as a result of his loving us first.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You feel pressured to prove your love for God

-DAY 13

True intimacy can only be achieved when a man and a woman know and believe the love they have for each other. Without knowing, believing and resting, there is only striving. Striving NEVER produces anything good. Striving is a fruitless and endless attempt to reach something that cannot be reached.

When you are trying to prove your love to God, you have entered into an endless cycle of "doing enough." But how much is enough? The more you do, the more you are conscious of how you could have done more. These kinds of works are what the scripture refers to as "dead works." Dead works are the first thing for which we must repent of when coming to

Christ. (Hebrews 6:1)

The truth is, you cannot ever properly love God until you have believed and experienced His love for you. We love according to the love we have experienced. Maybe you're trying to love God on a level of toxic, codependent love that you experienced from someone else. Stop trying to prove your love, and just begin to abide in His love.

For a while, whenever you think about your heavenly Father, don't tell Him how much you love Him, but declare how much He loves you. Get established in His love for you and rest in that love. Watch how quickly your faith rises, because faith works by love!

Today, see the Father telling you that He loves you right where you are, with all your imperfections. As you do, sense that need to prove your love for God come to an end. Rest in His love. Now your obedience to Him is not out of obligation, but out of true desire!

1 John 4:16-17 (The Passion Translation)

We have come into an intimate experience with God's love, and we trust in the love he has for us. God is love! Those who are living in love are living in God, and God lives through them. By living in God, love has been brought to its full expression in us so that we may fearlessly face the day of judgment, because all that Jesus now is, so are we in this world.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart No matter how much you do, you always feel like you should do more

DAY 14

Under the old Mosaic covenant, God's people had to do everything that God required through the law in order for them to have God's provision and protection. There was only one problem...They couldn't do it. The more they tried, the more they failed. Hebrews 10 tells us that one thing that they never could get rid of was a consciousness of sins.

Anytime you have to perform in order to be qualified, the very act that you're performing condemns your heart. What you tell your heart is "the reason I'm having to do these things is because I'm not right." That's why Romans 3:20 says "by the law is the knowledge of sin." In other words, doing things to be right produces a sin consciousness. After all, If you weren't wrong, then you wouldn't have to be doing these things!

That's why, in the new covenant, God doesn't give us a list of what we have to do or don't do. He gives us righteousness as a gift, up front, before we do anything. He removes our sin, makes us righteous and puts His Spirit in us. So now, we should never have an awareness of what we need to do to be right, or qualified for His blessings. We should only have an awareness of how righteous and qualified we are through Jesus. The cycle of never doing enough is over. You are free! You are righteous! You are qualified!

Today, because of Jesus' blood and God's love for you, see yourself able to stand before the Father as if sin never existed, without the sense of guilt, shame or insignificance. See yourself qualified and worthy of all of God's blessings because of His finished work on your behalf!

Hebrews 10:19-22 (The Passion Translation)

And now we are brothers and sisters in God's family because of the blood of Jesus, and he welcomes us to come right into the most holy sanctuary in the heavenly realm—boldly and with no hesitation. For he has dedicated a new, life-giving way for us to approach God. For just as the veil was torn in two, Jesus' body was torn open to give us free and fresh access to him! And since we now have a magnificent King-Priest to welcome us into God's house, we come closer to God and approach him with an open heart, fully convinced by faith that nothing will keep us at a distance from him. For our hearts have been sprinkled with blood to remove impurity and we have been freed from an accusing conscience and now we are clean, unstained, and presentable to God inside and out!

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You never feel like you deserve to be happy, or enjoy nice things

-DAY 15

One of the most dangerous enemies you will ever face is an enemy called guilt. Guilt is an inner sense of having done something wrong that deserves some form of punishment. A guilty person expects things to go wrong. And when things begin to go right in a guilty person's life, they don't believe it will last long. Guilty people are always trying to get better, do better and have better circumstances, but deep in their heart they don't believe they deserve it. If you feel like no matter how hard you've tried, you just cannot break out of lack, sickness, depression, anxiety, bad relationships, and such things, you are probably dealing with a root problem of guilt. You can desperately try to fix the fruit, but freedom comes from dealing with the root.

God has a remedy for guilt and condemnation. In fact, a believer who understands the

power of the new covenant will NEVER experience guilt and ALWAYS expect and enjoy a blessed life. Here's a question you need to think on...If God loved you enough to send Jesus, take your sin and give you His righteousness, why would you ever feel guilty, condemned or unworthy. He is not holding your sins against you. If He doesn't, then you shouldn't hold your sins against yourself. That's what a guilty person does. They continually see themselves in light of what they have done wrong, or haven't done right.

You deserve to be healed and blessed because of what Jesus did. He has made you worthy! You deserve to live an abundant life, full of nice things. He is ready to bless you if you can receive it. True freedom is when you begin to see yourself like He sees you. True peace is when you begin to love yourself like He loves you.

Today, look in the mirror, call out your name, point to yourself and tell yourself "(your name)...I am in love with you! I'm crazy about you, because that's the way God feels about you. You are righteous, and qualified to live in God's best!

Romans 8:31-33 (The Passion Translation)

So, what does all this mean? If God has determined to stand with us, tell me, who then could ever stand against us? For God has proved his love by giving us his greatest treasure, the gift of his Son. And since God freely offered him up as the sacrifice for us all, he certainly won't withhold from us anything else he has to give. Who then would dare to accuse those whom God has chosen in love to be his? God himself is the judge who has issued his final verdict over them—"Not guilty!"

Signs of a Legalistic Heart So called "spiritual" people make you feel insignificant

DAY 16

People that struggle with legalism usually have a picture, or a model in their mind of what they think spiritual people are like. That model looks like someone who seems to be doing things that they are not. They appear to be experts at knowing the scriptures. They appear to be strong people of prayer. They also appear to be people that don't make many mistakes and don't have many faults. What the person struggling with legalism doesn't realize, is they have arrived at their model from doing two things that God's word tells us not to do.

One... Don't judge! It's just as wrong to judge someone spiritual by their appearance as it is to judge someone a sinner by their appearance. You don't know people's hearts, and it is the heart that God looks at. Two... Don't compare! Comparison will either make you look good and the other person bad (which leads to pride), or it will make you look bad and the other person good (which leads to intimidation and condemnation).

The truth is, in Christ, there is no difference. You are neither inferior, nor superior to anyone. Love is the true metrics of spirituality, and love always prefers other people and lifts them to a higher place. True spiritual people will endeavor to make you feel great about yourself, and never say or do things to intimidate.

Today, realize that people that seem very spiritual are no different than you. They are real people with habits and hang ups, just like you. Show them mercy and love. Today, lift people to a higher level and make them feel great about themselves!

Galatians 3:28 (The Passion Translation)

And we no longer see each other in our former state —Jew or non-Jew, rich or poor, male or female— because we're all one through our union with Jesus Christ with no distinction between us.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart Things like Bible reading, going to church and prayer seem like a chore

-DAY 17

Think about the person that you love the most in life, maybe a spouse, a child or a friend. Now, imagine if you couldn't see or talk to that person for 30 days. What kind of emotions would you feel when you thought about them? Longing? Desire? Passionate impatience? Why would you feel emotions such as these? Because you're in a love-relationship with them.

Now think about God and your relationship with Him. What if you went 30 days without praying, reading His word, or going to church. What kind of emotions would most Christians feel? Guilt? Condemnation? Lack off confidence? Why? Because they are not really in a loverelationship with Him. Their relationship with Him, and the things they do to maintain that relationship, are out of obligation, and not out of love for Him. A relationship with God that is based on obligation produces strongholds of legalism in the heart. But, you can be free!

You need to understand two important things: First, you need to understand that your heavenly Father knows your heart. He knows you're not really in love with Him...and He still loves you regardless! His love for you is not contingent on your love for Him. Second, in order to experience His grace, you need to humbly admit the truth. This is true repentance: With confidence that He loves you, admit to Him that you don't really love Him, and tell Him that you do want to love Him. Realize that your obligational relationship with Him is going nowhere, and ask Him to help you truly fall in love with Him. Ask Him to reveal His love for you both in the scriptures and by His Spirit.

Today, stop doing things because you think you HAVE to, and start doing them because you GET to. Pray because you want to spend time with Him! Read the Word because you want to know Him! Go to church because it's an opportunity to gather with your family!

Galatians 5:5-6 (The Passion Translation)

But the Holy Spirit convinces us that we have received by faith the glorious righteousness of the Anointed One. When you're placed into the Anointed One and joined to him, circumcision and religious obligations can benefit you nothing. All that matters now is living in the faith that is activated and brought to perfection by love.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart Ministers, preachers or clergy intimidate you

DAY 18

There's only one reason a minister can do what he or she is doing...Grace. Grace enables us to do what we could never do in our own strength or power. It empowers us to be what we could never be. Many times the apostle Paul referred to his office as "the grace given unto me."

Do pastors have a special calling? Sure! Do apostles and prophets stand in a holy office appointed by Jesus Himself? Absolutely! But that doesn't mean they're better or more righteous than any other believer in Christ. The grace that empowers us should make us humble when we realize that we are nothing in and of ourselves.

Our righteousness is a gift that is given to us when we have faith in Jesus' finished work. Because it is that way, it makes it impossible to boast. What you have, you received by faith. You did nothing to earn it or qualify for it. Romans 3:27 says "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith." The law of faith eliminates boasting, therefore it destroys any form of hierarchy in God's kingdom.

We can respect the office and the grace that people stand in, while understanding that we are all one in Christ. You can show a pastor respect without putting him on some kind of holy pedestal. We are all partakers of God's grace, and grace makes us able to do what He has called us to do.

Today, let the grace that has been given you in Jesus humble your heart to a place of thankfulness. Rejoice when you see the amazing grace of Jesus in others!

1 Corinthians **4:7** (The Passion Translation)

For what makes a distinction between you and someone else? And what do you have that grace has not given you? And if you received it as a gift, why do you boast as though there is something special about you?

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You feel that God is hard to please and very demanding

-DAY 19

The most important, and critical belief that you have is your image of God. Sadly, so many Christians don't get their image of God from the right place. Some get their image of God by various authority figures they have known and experienced. Some get their image of the Father from false, religious ideas about Him. Some get it from different Bible stories that they vaguely understand. They read old testament stories, and without rightly dividing the scriptures, they come away with an image that's hard, austere, short-tempered, unforbearing and merciless to sin and mistakes.

So what is He like, and where can we get an accurate picture and image of who He is? It can only come from the life and ministry of Jesus recorded in the gospels. Jesus Himself said "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.

Listen to Hebrews 1:3:

"The Son is the dazzling radiance of God's splendor, the exact expression of God's true nature—his mirror image!"

His mirror image! If your image of the Father doesn't look like what Jesus modeled in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, then you have the wrong image. In fact, if your image of the Father doesn't come from Jesus, you probably have an image of a God that has demands that are hard to live up to. Those perceived demands will wear you out and frustrate you.

Jesus said that His burden is light, and If we come to Him, He would cause us to rest. In fact, Hebrews 4 describes faith as a rest. Are you resting in God's grace? Sure, there's work to do in the kingdom, but when you are walking in God's grace, it won't wear you out.

Today, see the Father inviting you to climb into a spiritual "hammock" of His enabling grace, as you rest from all the demands that you used to think He was holding over you. Hear Him say to you "Rest and sleep my child, as I take care of all that concerns you!"

Matthew 11:28-30 (The Message Bible)

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You are afraid to truly open your heart to God because He might want you to do

-DAY 20

Being taken advantage of is one of the worse things a person can experience. Have you ever befriended someone and found out later that they had an underlying motive of wanting to get close to you? They didn't want your friendship, they wanted something that you had. The world is full of cons and swindlers, so much so that you find yourself not wanting to trust anyone.

Here is something you need to know about God...His only motive in pursuing you is because He is outrageously in love with you! He doesn't want you because of what you can do for Him. He just wants you to flourish, succeed, and overcome in life. No strings attached. No underlying motive. Just a pure, never ending love for you!

He knows, better than you do, what will satisfy your life. In fact, before you ever showed up on the scene, He made plans for your life. He anticipated the day that you were born so He could start unfolding His great plan for your life. 1 Corinthians 2:9 tells us His plans that He has in store for us are beyond anything that we could ever dream or imagine!

You see, a legalistic heart is the way it is because it doesn't truly know God's love and intentions. A legalistic heart believes "God wants something out of me, and if I don't give Him what He wants He will punish me." They think "Because He wants more out of me, if I truly submit my life to Him, He might send me to Africa!" (I've been to Africa many times, and it's pretty awesome!)

Today, understand that God knows what would fit your life perfectly. His plan for you will only be good. You can trust Him. Throw caution to the wind and give Him the reigns to control your destiny. He really is in love with you!

Proverbs 3:5-6 (The Passion Translation)

Trust in the Lord completely, and do not rely on your own opinions. With all your heart rely on him to guide you, and he will lead you in every decision you make. Become intimate with him in whatever you do, and he will lead you wherever you go. Don't think for a moment that you know it all.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You think that truly selling out to God would make life boring

-DAY 21

A person with legalistic beliefs sees God as a taskmaster. They think the main reason God's there is to tell them what to do and what not to do. They see living for Him as a life-long "honey-do list." They end up feeling rejected and abused because they only feel valuable to the degree that they are obedient to His demands.

They also feel more like a servant than they do a son. A servant always feels a sense of distance from the master. He never feels close and intimate. He always feels like he must earn his keep. He only feels important when he has done something significant that he feels would please the master.

A son, on the other hand, feels like he belongs in the house. He feels the father always has his best interest at heart. A son's serving is never out of obligation, but out of love for the father and love for his domain. A son never feels that he has to earn anything. He only is aware of what is rightly his by inheritance, and that inheritance is his birthright!

You are not a servant of God...you are a son who loves to serve! God isn't waiting on you to show up because He has a heavenly honey-do list for you to take care of. Like any good father, He just wants a great relationship with His son. He only wants what is best for you, and His correction is always a result of Him wanting your future to be as good as it can get. He's your Father...not your master!

Today, change your perspective from one that sees relationship as "living for God" to one that sees it as "living with Him." Living in Christ is an exciting, supernatural journey of walking with the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:14-16 (The Passion Translation)

The mature children of God are those who are moved by the impulses of the Holy Spirit. And you did not receive the "spirit of religious duty," leading you back into the fear of never being good enough. But you have received the "Spirit of full acceptance," enfolding you into the family of God. And you will never feel orphaned, for as he rises up within us, our spirits join him in saying the words of tender affection, "Beloved Father!" For the Holy Spirit makes God's fatherhood real to us as he whispers into our innermost being, "You are God's beloved

Signs of a Legalistic Heart Tithing or giving an offering soothes your conscience

DAY 22

Here are some HUGE questions that we must ask ourselves concerning our relationship with the Father...What makes you confident towards Him? When do you feel the most confident? What gives you the greatest confidence God is working on your behalf concerning your financial needs and desires? Why would God even want to work on your behalf?

Confidence always rests on a platform of peace. Peace is that amazing, abiding sense that the Father is okay with you. Peace is a knowing that God is pleased, and that you're standing in a place where He favors you. If you want to have true confidence, you must have peace. If you want to have true peace, then it must come as a result of what you believe about your relationship with God from His perspective, and not from your perspective. How does He see your relationship from His perspective? Look at what His word states:

Our faith in Jesus transfers God's righteousness to us and he now declares us flawless in his eyes. This means we can now enjoy true and lasting peace with God, all because of what our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, has done for us. - Romans 5:1 (The Passion Translation)

You see, our confidence for prosperity cannot come from our giving or tithing. He chose to prosper us in Jesus' finished work long before we ever arrived on the scene. Tithing and giving to God should not make us more confident that He will meet our needs. We should be confident before we give, because of the righteousness He has given us. He wants you to be blessed because He loves you. It is His delight to make you rich before you ever give a dime in an offering.

Does that mean we shouldn't give? Absolutely not! Giving is part of our new nature in Christ. For a believer not to give is like a cat trying not to be a cat. A cat meows and purrs effortlessly because it is in it's nature. A Christian gives because that's their nature. We don't give so we can be blessed. We give because we are already blessed in Him.

Today, see yourself rich. Use your imagination to see yourself having more than enough. Believe that you're rich because of Jesus and start giving and being generous like you believe it!

2 Corinthians 8:9 (The Passion Translation)

For you have experienced the extravagant grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that although he was infinitely rich, he impoverished himself for our sake, so that by his poverty, we could become rich beyond measure.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You feel that God's blessings are maintained by doing everything right

DAY 23

As a kid, if you were raised in a family that believed in Santa Claus, then every Christmas you faced the "Santa Dilemma." We were taught as small children that Santa was the determining factor of our Christmas blessings, and that our behavior that previous year would determine how good he was to us. You probably remember how old you were when you found out that it was all a ploy to get us to maintain good behavior! If you maintained good behavior he would bring lots of toys. If you were so- so then he would only bring a few. If you were really bad, then he would bring you a bag of switches and ashes. (I still don't have a clue what the ashes were for!)

The foundation of this made-up story is exactly how life was living under the law of Moses. If you maintained a behavior that was obedient to everything God had said in the law, you could expect to be blessed. If you didn't, you expected the curse to come, and it was much worse than switches and ashes. It was sickness, disease, poverty and even death.

The good news for a person living under the law was that God gave them a remedy to escape the curse. The remedy was a lamb. They could take a perfect, spotless lamb, bring it to the priest, and the priest would examine the lamb and sacrifice it on their behalf. The person could then enjoy the blessings of God on the lambs behalf.

God's blessings are ours today, only because of the Lamb! Jesus is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. Just like the priest, God doesn't examine us to see if our behavior is worthy, He examines the Lamb! The Lamb is worthy! Our Father is not like Santa Claus. When He forms an opinion of us, He looks at Jesus. He gives us the worthiness of the Lamb. That worthiness qualifies us to enjoy an inheritance in God, and it empowers us to live a holy life.

Today, spend time worshipping the Lamb, realizing that He has given you His worthiness. He has placed you in a position of standing with the Father that is righteous before Him. It's not your righteousness, it's His! Say it out loud, "I have the righteousness of the Lamb of God...Jesus! That righteousness empowers me to live a holy, obedient life before Him! That worthiness qualifies me to receive from My Father what I need!"

Colossians 1:12-14 (The Passion Translation)

Your hearts can soar with joyful gratitude when you think of how God made you worthy to receive the glorious inheritance freely given to us by living in the light. He has rescued us completely from the tyrannical rule of darkness and has translated us into the kingdom realm of his beloved Son. For in the Son all our sins are canceled and we have the release of redemption through his very blood.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart When you ask God for something, you feel that you have to make Him certain promises



Legalism always carries with it a sense of debt. It causes good deeds to be done with a sense of obligation. Because a legalistic heart is so engrained in debt and obligation, when they need something, payment is always attached to it in some form. It's very difficult for a legalistic person to experience the true grace of giving and receiving. Have you ever done something good for someone and they insisted on paying you? Payment may have been the furthest thing from your mind, but it's not from theirs.

Legalism causes the heart to be rooted in rejection. It believes that ultimately God and people have motive attached to their giving. They think "Surely they want something or expect something from me if they are willing to give this to me." They cannot relate to grace and pure kindness without a sense of debt or payment, or some kind of string attached to the kindness.

What belongs to us because we are in Christ is not a reward; it's an inheritance. God moving on our behalf doesn't put us in debt to Him. He does it out of love and He does it by His grace. If He expected us to pay or work for it, then it would not be a gift, and it would not be because of grace. John Sheasby said it best in his book Son! ; "It is impossible for the Father to reward us with something that is ours by inheritance!" You cannot earn a gift and you certainly cannot pay for your inheritance. Gifts and inheritances can only be received. Nothing more, nothing less.

Today, stop thinking that God is going out of His way to help you. Stop thinking that if He healed your body that you would owe Him some kind of act of service. Jesus said it is the Father's great pleasure to give you the Kingdom (Luke 12:32). His love is set on you, and He is ready to move on your behalf with no strings attached. Today, get good at receiving something that you did not and could not earn. Let the Father love you and bless you, not because He wants to in debt you to Himself, but because you are His son!

Romans 11:6 (NLT)

And since it is through God's kindness, then it isnot by their good works. For in that case, God'sgrace would not be what it really is —free and undeserved.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You think every bad thing you do opens up a door for the devil to bring bad things into your life DAY 25

So much of what people believe about the devil just isn't true. Some have said he was originally the worship leader of heaven. Some believe he can suddenly make you sick, or steal your money. Some believe that you can make him pay you back 7-fold if he steals from you. All of these beliefs are not found in the scripture, but are twisted versions of what the Bible really says.

To hear some people talk, the devil is a powerful, omniscient, omnipresent being perched outside your door, waiting for you to make a mistake. They believe if you give him an inch by disobedience, he will come in with a mile of destruction, sickness and poverty. The truth is, the only power he can have is what a person will give to him by believing lies. His only tool is deception. His weapon of deception comes in the form of thoughts, suggestions and ideas, aimed at deceiving you from the truth that is in Jesus.

Think about it, if every wrong thing you did opened a door for his destruction, wouldn't we all be worse off than we could ever imagine? If he had the control over the world that some say he has, this planet would be more wicked than we can stand. Mistakes don't open the door, wrong believing does. When you make a mistake, you have the choice of opening a door for God's love, mercy and forgiveness, or a door of fear that will lead to destruction.

Does this mean that we won't reap what we sow? Absolutely not! The scripture is clear, if you keep sowing to the flesh, destruction will come, but that doesn't mean that God, or the devil is behind the destruction. It just means if you keep walking in the dark, you're bound to run into the destruction that darkness has attached to it.

The devil was defeated by Jesus, and now we can enforce his defeat by using faith in Jesus name. The truth is, he is terrified that you will believe the truth of being in Christ, and learn to put him in his place, which is under your feet.

Today, receive mercy, forgiveness and grace in the areas where you've missed it. Don't give the devil place by fearing that he has access to your life. Rise up in the power of Jesus name, resist him, and as James 4:7 says, he will flee! Sin, sickness, lack or any other power of the enemy shall not have dominion over you, for you are not living under the legalism of the law, but you're living in the power of God's grace. (Romans 6:14)

Hebrews 4:16 (The Passion Translation)

So now we come freely and boldly to where love is enthroned, to receive mercy's kiss and discover the grace we urgently need to strengthen us in our time of weakness.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You always feel the need to say something when you see something wrong DAY 26

What is the metric, or measuring device, that is used to determine how spiritual a person is? For the legalistic mind, the metric is how many things the person is doing right. They look at all their presupposed requirements that they think God is expecting us to live up to, and then look at how many of those things they are doing right. But is that how God sees being spiritual?

The Pharisees in the gospels were experts in their own eyes at being spiritual. They endeavored to do all that they thought was expected. All the laws and rituals performed exactly the way they were supposed to, made them boast in their own spirituality. They washed when they were supposed to, ate only what they were supposed to, tithed of everything they were supposed to, and so on.

What did all their modified behavior produce? It produced mean-spirited, judgmental, unforbearing and extremely critical people. They corrected everything they saw that was wrong. Why? It was their standard for spirituality. Whenever Jesus encountered the Pharisees, it was never a pretty situation.

Listen to what he said in one encounter: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. (Matthew 23:23-27)

Legalistic people find it hard not to correct everything they see wrong. They find it hard to be merciful and forbearing because they think God is that way. There is a place for correction, and the scripture tells us that God's word is profitable for rebuke, but it is always done in a spirit of meekness and love. God doesn't correct our every wrong, but He, with forbearance and patience, waits for the time to help us and teach us. We need to be that way with people too.

Today, seek to be patient with people. Think about the kindness and patience the Lord has shown you. Show people mercy and forbearance and perhaps God will give you an opportunity to help them. If you have an unhealthy standard that you think others should be living up to, get rid of it. Realize your goal is not to correct everything and make it right, or fix it. Your goal is to represent the kingdom of God, and the kingdom is about people experiencing His reign through an encounter with Jesus.

Matthew 9:13 (The Passion Translation)

Then he added, "Now you should go and study the meaning of the verse: I want you to show mercy, not just offer me a sacrifice. For I have come to invite the outcasts of society and sinners, not those who think they are already on the right path."

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You find it very difficult to forgive people DAY 27

I've always heard that the greatest fear of a con artist is that they'll be conned themselves. The reason for this is that we tend to project who we are, and what we are experiencing at a heart level, on to others around us. Cons fear being conned because that is what their heart is experiencing. Liars fear being lied to because of the same reason.

This is the reason that it's so vital that we not only know about the outrageous love that God has for us, but we also experience it daily. Experience is the difference between reading about ice cream, and tasting ice cream. One is about intellect...one is about intimacy!

It's difficult for the legalistic heart to forgive others because they're not experiencing forgiveness themselves. They might know about forgiveness, but they are not experiencing it, therefore, they are not feeling it. Even though we walk by faith and not by our feelings, if we really are experiencing the things that we believe, they will affect us on an emotional level.

For example, the scriptures tell us that because of the righteousness that God gives us in Jesus, we will reign in life as kings. You will never reign consistently in life unless the knowledge of your righteousness in Jesus penetrates past your mind, to a heart level, and begins to positively affect your emotions. In other words, you will never reign consistently as a king unless you consistently feel like a king. Likewise, you will never find it effortless to forgive people, unless the Father's forgiveness for you reaches the seat of your emotions, because you are "experiencing" it.

You will always struggle to consistently, and effortlessly give away anything that you're not experiencing. This is why First John 4:8 says "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." Read it this way: "He who does not love is not experiencing God…" It is impossible to eat something good, while at the same time, despise it. In the same way, it's impossible to experience God's love and mercy, and at the same time not be loving and merciful to others.

Today, spend some time thinking about how much God has forgiven you. All the sins...all the mistakes...everything! Think about how He has promised never to hold those against you, and never to remember them again. When you add up all the weight of what you have been forgiven of, notice how easy it becomes to forgive others.

Ephesians 4:32 (The Passion Translation)

But instead be kind and affectionate toward one another. Has God graciously forgiven you? Then graciously forgive one another in the depths of Christ's love.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart Happy sinners make you angry — DAY 28

A typical tantrum that you hear children throwing is the "It's not fair" tantrum. That can be because a brother or sister is getting to do something that they aren't. It's just not fair! When our hearts contain legalistic ideas, and when our spiritual life consists of all the things we feel we can or cannot do, then we can experience the same kind of feelings that those children are experiencing. Have you ever wanted to tell God "God, it's just not fair! Look at those people doing those things...and they are happy and enjoying life! Here I am trying to serve you, and they look like they're enjoying life more than I am!"

The truth is, they probably are having more fun, but it doesn't have to be that way. People who are not under law, experience peace and joy. A sinner is not under law. They sin and enjoy it, while their lives eventually are filled with destruction. Jesus did not come to give us laws to live under that we have to obey in order to be right with Him. He came and He gave us righteousness as a gift, up front, before we ever do anything. See, the legalistic mind thinks they have to do, or don't do, in order to be right and have peace and joy.

Under the law, life's equation works like this:

OBEDIENCE = RIGHTEOUSNESS = PEACE & JOY Since Jesus gives us righteousness as a gift, apart from anything we could do to earn it, life's equation under the New Covenant looks like this: RIGHTEOUSNESS = PEACE & JOY = OBEDIENCE!

The legalistic heart never has joy because they always are trying to attain to a place of righteousness. The New Covenant believer can't help but be joyful because they don't have to earn righteousness, it's already theirs because of Jesus. Sin, the bible says, has pleasure for a season. It's only a temporary pleasure that people have to keep running back to in order to experience the pleasure again. Just like the drug addict has to keep running back to the drug. There is no drug, or sin, that can give permanent satisfaction. Only God's love can do that, and He has given us that love in Jesus.

Today, don't see your life with God as bondage that is keeping you from having fun. Enjoy the "high" of being free from the power of sin and take a big dose of love and pleasure, knowing that the Father loves you and has given you a perfect righteous, one that for which you never have to perform for!

Romans 14:17 (NKJV)

For the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You are always more aware of what you need to do for God, rather than what He wants to do for you

DAY 29

There was once a young girl who grew up and married Grumpy. As they began to live their married life, Grumpy was never pleased about anything. All he could do was demand and expect his wife to wait on him and serve him. No matter what she did, it never seemed to satisfy Grumpy.

She would get up early before Grumpy would awaken and get everything ready for him. She would have all his clothes washed and ironed. She would clean the house. She would have his coffee ready as soon as he would wake up, and soon after, she would prepare a big breakfast for old Grumpy. He was so hard to please!

She would make sure to have a lunch prepared for him as he left for work, and it had to only be the certain kind of lunches that he preferred. If it wasn't, Grumpy would sure let her know when he returned from work. And, when he got home from work, she waited on him hand and foot, until bedtime, and then she would always let Grumpy have his way in bed.

She was married to Grumpy for many, many years, until one day...Grumpy died! Several years went by, and the woman fell in love again. This man was much different than Grumpy, for he was truly in love with the woman for who she was, not for what she could do for him.

They married, and the first morning of their new life, the woman's eyes popped open and she jumped up to get out of bed to begin to make sure things were right. She thought "I must rush to make sure his clothes are ironed, and the coffee is fixed, and the breakfast, and the lunch"...but all of a sudden the new husband pulled her back in bed and said "Wait! Just lie here for a while and let me love you. Let me just spend time telling you how special you are to me. Let me describe how beautiful you are and how excited and lucky I am just to have you. Just lie here and let me prepare a beautiful breakfast feast for you before I have to leave for the day. And when I return, let's just hold each other by the fire and dream of our future together."

This story perfectly describes how we feel when our relationship is based on legalism. We must do for Him so that He is pleased. We must meet all the demands of a holy, angry God! The problem is our image of God is so distorted; He never seems pleased no matter how much we try. That's just not true.

Romans 7:4 says

"Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God."

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You are always more aware of what you need to do for God, rather than what He wants to do for you

Guess what? GRUMPY IS DEAD! That old system of trying to please God with our works is over. Law is gone...and we are free! Our new husband is incredibly in love with us. His value for us is never based on our performance, and all the things we do for Him. We no longer have to try hard to please Him. He favors us because of the finished work of the cross.

DAY 29

CONT.

We have to get used to this new love relationship. No longer do we serve out of obligation, but now everything we do is because of the love we have showered on us. He is romancing us into a relationship based on His value for us. As we experience this love He has for us, we become more aware of what He longs to do for us, rather than what we MUST do for Him

Today, evaluate your image of the Father. Do you see him as old Grumpy, or as the romantic lover of your soul. Grumpy is dead, and you are married to Jesus. Let a new hope and expectation of good things happening to you flood your heart and bring new life into your relationship with Him! (The story of Grumpy is Dead comes from a teaching by John Sheasby of Liberated Living Ministries)

Matthew 11:28-30 (The Passion Translation)

"Are you weary, carrying a heavy burden? Then come to me. I will refresh your life, for I am your oasis. Simply join your life with mine. Learn my ways and you'll discover that I'm gentle, humble, easy to please. You will find refreshment and rest in me. For all that I require of you will be pleasant and easy to bear."

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You are afraid to admit to God how you really feel and ask for His help DAY 30

Sometimes, without realizing it, we try to hide things from God. Think about how ridiculous that is! Why would you be afraid not to admit something to someone who knows everything about you and sees everything you have ever done, everything you are doing and everything that you will ever do. He knows everything about us, yet He loves us and accepts us.

Think about the person on earth that you love the most. Let's say you had to move away from them, and you could have no contact with them for a month. No phone calls, no internet, no letters...nothing. Think about the emotions that you would experience while away. Emotions like longing to see them. Feeling the void of not having them around you. Emotions of strong desire to get back to them. Great anticipation of the day you see them again. You might smell the smell of a perfume that they wore and your heart would begin to race with excitement. You would feel emotions of passion and longing for them. Why do you feel this way? It's because you have a real, loving relationship with them.

Now let's say you went thirty days without reading the Bible, no tithing or giving, no prayer and no going to church. What kind of emotions do you think the average Christian would feel? Maybe emotions of guilt or shame? Maybe feelings of fear or punishment? Perhaps a lot of condemnation? Maybe God doesn't care about me anyway. Why would a Christian feel this way? It's because they aren't really in love with God! What they think is love is just a lot of service to Him out of obligation, but it's not true love.

Here's the question...Why don't they admit to God they're not in love with Him? It's because the legalistic heart finds it hard to tell God the truth about reality. They think He might not take it very well! What should we do when we have a problem like this? We should be humble and honest with our heart, and with God. He already knows, but He's waiting for you to come and admit your weakness, to experience His love and mercy, and receive His grace to help you.

Today, come to the throne of grace! Admit to God the very issue or sin that with which you are struggling with. Tell Him the truth. Tell Him the only reason you struggle is because you like doing it. If you have an alcohol problem, tell Him "Father I like drinking and getting drunk, but I know the end result is just destruction. Work in me by your grace and Your delivering power." If you're truly not sure you're in love with Him, just tell Him, "Father I don't know if I'm in love you…but I want to love You. Would you please show me your love for me in a way that would cause me to be in love with you, too?" He really does give grace to the humble! (James 4:6) And, He really is in love with you.

Hebrews 4:16 (The Passion Translation)

So now we come freely and boldly to where love is enthroned, to receive mercy's kiss and discover the grace we urgently need to strengthen us in our time of weakness.

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You feel that life is not fair

DAY 31

I think we have all heard the statement, and even said it ourselves... "It's just not fair!" Most of the time, it comes when we see other people doing something, or enjoying something that we have been working hard to get. Someone gets the promotion before we do, or you see someone you know driving the the car you have had your eye on for some time now. Perhaps it's heard in an even more serious situation, like the loss of a loved one, or the diagnoses of a serious disease. When something happens to us that we weren't expecting, we can tend to get into the syndrome of "It's not fair!" or "Why me?"

Think about where this attitude of unfairness comes from, and what it actually means. Do you really want to live in a legal system of getting what you earn or deserve? When a person says "It's not fair" what they're saying is "I deserve better!" or "What have I done to deserve this?" The truth is, if we were to get what we deserve, we would get a lot worse than we actually have. Because of sin, we should get punishment. We deserve hell, but because Jesus paid for our sins, we don't get what we deserve. We get to live in His favor, the very favor that Jesus Himself deserves. We get to escape the punishment and condemnation that we deserve, and we get to live a life that Jesus is worthy of. Thank You God and thank you Jesus for He redeeming us from the legal system of getting what we deserve!

Self pity is one of the most dangerous traps a person can get themselves into. It's a trap because you're deceived and blinded from the blessings you have in Christ, and you begin to become aware of having or experiencing something that seems unfair. You begin to feel that circumstances are out of your control, and you begin to feel powerless.

All of these feelings are a lie when it comes to a believer who is in Christ. No situation can render you powerless or be beyond control if you are in Jesus. You have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ (Ephesians 1:3), and you have been given authority to use the name of Jesus to remove mountains and to calm storms. You are an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ! No weapon formed against you can prosper, and nothing can separate you from His love (Isaiah 54:17 & Romans 8:37-39)

To feel life is unfair, or to move into self-pity is to become blind or short-sighted to the truth that is in Jesus. It's to lose sight of who you are and what you have in Christ, and to move into a place of thinking you deserve better because of what you have done, or because of how you are living. You don't want that! You want to rise up and claim what Jesus deserves. You want to demand circumstances to move and lay hold of the inheritance that you have because of Jesus' finished work that has redeemed you!

Signs of a Legalistic Heart You feel that life is not fair

DAY 31

CONT.

Today, take authority over thoughts of self-pity and feelings that life hasn't been fair to you. Claim the favor of Jesus, and in His name, demand mountains that are trying to stand in front of you to move in His name! Let thankfulness arise in your heart as you become more aware of what belongs to you in Christ. Begin to thank God in faith that all your tomorrows are going to be filled with God's goodness and His blessings! Let hope arise and put any sense of pity away from your thinking. Life can seem unfair, but you have already been blessed because of what Jesus did for you! Receive His blessing by faith. It's yours NOW!

2 Peter 1: 3-4 (The Passion Translation)

Everything we could ever need for life and complete devotion to God has already been deposited in us by his divine power. For all this was lavished upon us through the rich experience of knowing him who has called us by name and invited us to come to him through a glorious manifestation of his goodness. As a result of this, he has given you magnificent promises that are beyond all price, so that through the power of these tremendous promises you can experience partnership with the divine nature, by which you have escaped the corrupt desires that are of the world.