



**Glenn Brown**

441 ½ Lark Drive  
Grand Junction, Colorado 81504

Telephone 970-434-1377  
Email [casabrn441@gmail.com](mailto:casabrn441@gmail.com)  
Website [www.glennbrownministries.com](http://www.glennbrownministries.com)

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**FOLLOWING JESUS IS HARD!**

Jesus said, "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matt. 16:25)

Why did Jesus make it so hard? Because the first step on the path of life is to give up our selfish, self-centered life, and then to die to self every day! "Take up your cross **daily** and follow me.": (Luke 9:23) That is terribly hard for us to do. It's like dying...dying to self. Many people try to make the Christian life easy. It's not easy.

And.....we must decide to believe that the Bible is God's word. The first temptation of Eve was when she questioned something God had said. That's the temptation for you and me also. Is the Bible really trustworthy? Did God say these things or are they the words of men? You and I have to choose to believe the Bible, and then we have to choose to do what it says.

Paul said to the Philippians, "Fight the good fight." It's a fight, a war, to be a Christian but it's a good fight because God promised to be with us and to help us win. He even provides armor for us to wear. (Ephesians 6)

Let me challenge you today: Is there something in your life that is more important than Jesus Christ? Is there an idol in your life? Is it security and money? Is it a person - perhaps your family, or a celebrity or a political leader? Is it some addiction that you love/hate?

Ask the Lord. Say, "Lord, is there an idol in my life?" Then listen. He will tell you. Then renounce that idol and choose to put Jesus first ahead of everything. He loves you. His plan is to set you free and to restore within you the "image of God" in which man and woman were originally created.

**OUR ENEMIES: THE WORLD,  
THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL**

1 John identifies three enemies that confront us as we walk out our journey as Christians, - the WORLD, the FLESH and the DEVIL. (1 John 2)

What is the WORLD? The world is other people: government, academia, the media, our friends and sometimes even our own families. They will disagree with you, argue with you, get angry with you as you start taking Jesus seriously. They will tell you that you're a fanatic, that you are being simple-minded and ignorant, that you're unrealistic, that you are going to ruin your life. And they are right according to the values of the world.

You have to make up your mind: Will you believe the Bible? Will you believe that still, small voice that tells you that this is real, that there is a God and He loves you. You, personally. You are loved and God has a good plan and purpose for your life. The world will fight you. It will use a thousand strategies to convince you. Will you believe the world, or will you believe Jesus?

And then there's the FLESH. Our flesh acts just like the devil. It is hard to tell them apart. Our flesh is where our biggest battle is. We are by nature self-centered, selfish. We want our way and we want it now. We don't want to wait. But the Bible says again and again: "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him. Don't fret when men carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and don't fret - it leads only to evil." (Psalm 37:7) When the Bible says, "Don't fret" it is telling us to take control of our fear thoughts. And did you notice that it says, "Refrain from anger?"

God wants us to put to death that terrible selfishness that deceives us into believing that some addiction will bring satisfaction and fulfillment to our life. The Bible says that "Alcohol is a robber.:" By inference, that includes other addictions: drugs, gambling, sexual sins. They promise so much, but they are robbers. Ultimately, only God can satisfy: "He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness." (Psalm 107:9)

And then there's the DEVIL. If you don't believe that there is a literal devil, you are deceived. If you believe what the world says instead of what the Bible says about this subject, you are deceived and in danger. There is a devil. He is real according to the Bible and according to Jesus Christ who is the Truth.

But the devil is hidden. He is subtle. He comes as an "angel of light" putting thoughts in your mind and promising you fulfillment and blessing. He tells you that you don't have to go the difficult way of following Jesus. You can have everything you want another way, the easy way.

But Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that: "There is a broad, easy path that leads to destruction and a narrow, difficult path that leads to life." (Matthew 7)

Which path have you chosen?

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## **STOP CONDEMNING YOURSELF! AND OTHER PEOPLE!**

"My children make a pastime of judging one another and themselves, but I have forgiven you through the sacrifice of my Son. So I am very offended when I hear my children judge one another or when they indulge in self-hatred and self condemnation. I want you to stop this terrible habit. Believe me: You are loved, and you are forgiven."

from Jesus Calling by Sarah Young

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## **IMAGINE HEAVEN - Part 2**

In this book, John Burke compares a number of Near Death Experiences (NDEs) with what Scripture tells us about heaven. NOTE: Anything anyone tells us about heaven that can't be substantiated Scripturally is suspect and may be deception.

"What is my purpose? How am I supposed to know what God created me to do? I think we have it backwards. Men nearly always identify themselves by their careers. The first question we ask when we meet someone is, 'What do you do?' or 'Where do you work?' But God intends for it to

work another way. Jesus said that the "Great Commandment," which is our purpose, is to love God first and, second, to love our neighbors - those he puts in our lives - as much as we love ourselves.

(Stop! Think about this for a minute.)

An art professor named Howard Storm had a Near Death Experience. He said that God showed him that He had brought him and his wife together for one specific reason - to learn how to love. He said that he now understands that our main job on earth is to love the people we are with. It might not be our only job, but it's our first job.

Steve Sjogren, the pastor of a large Vineyard Church in Cincinnati, had a near death experience while he was in surgery. He said, 'God got me good. I was hovering over the operating table close to the ceiling and I heard God speak to me in an audible voice, for the first and only time in my life. It was like the voice of a hundred friends talking in harmonious unison. It was a voice that was familiar and comforting and true. God was communicating with me not just with words but also with memories and images. He let me know how much he valued me, and it is impossible to describe the sense of acceptance that surrounded me.

While the doctors were working feverishly over my body, God was calmly quizzing me:

'Do you know the names of your children's friends? What a crazy, untimely, inappropriate question! God wanted to know the answer. But I couldn't name a single one. I was caught dead to rights. The realization struck me like a bolt of lightning: I had not taken the time to get to know my children's best friends and long-term buddies. These friends often visited our house. They were always welcome, but I was anything but hospitable. When they came, I was usually fixated on one project or another. Many times I just wasn't there. My job, my ministry, was important after all.'

How do we know our unique purpose? It always starts with loving and seeking God, and then following His lead to love the people closest to us..... and then using the gifts and passions He has put in us to serve humanity. You don't need to worry about not fulfilling your purpose. If you seek God and His will you will live it. But we can't forget: it's all about love."

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## THE POWER OF MUSIC

Music is magical. Music has the power to draw people to great good or great evil.

There are only three ways to create audible music:

- (1) strings
- (2) wind
- (3) percussion

The human body itself was created as a musical instrument, by our vocal chords, voice, and hands and feet.

Every human culture has loved and created music. Music goes past the mind to the heart. Science has found that: “When we sing or create music, we use all of the parts of the brain: left, right, front and back. This is unique. Music is complex.”

Music therapy is used to bring healing and calmness. Andrea Bocelli said: “We use music to say things we could never say in words.”

Music affects the brain and touches our emotions. It affects us psychologically. Music can increase depression or anxiety. Some music popular with adolescents has been shown to release a flood of dopamine and to promote aggression. Country Western music commonly glorifies adultery.

Be careful about the kinds of music you listen to or that your parents introduce to your children.

Movies use music to tell the audience how to feel. Music sets the tone, mood, and atmosphere. It gets the audience subconsciously prepared for what is coming. It can create tension or relaxation.

Great, swelling songs can be used to bring a rush of emotions. Think of the beginning of Star Wars.

God created music. He created man’s body and soul as a musical instrument to glorify Him. All through the Bible, God’s people are exhorted to sing and make melody to the Lord. When David was king, he invented musical instruments and had trained singers and orchestras as a part of the temple services. Musical cues were used in the introduction to many of the Psalms. They were to be sung to God.

As we worship God with music, we are lifted to new levels of experiencing the majesty of our great God and Father.

I love the powerful hymn composed by Martin

Luther, “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” And the great hymns of Charles Wesley, “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing,” “Crown Him with Many Crowns,” “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” and so many more.

But some of my favorites are the simple songs written by John Wimber and his worship leaders: “‘Isn’t He?”, “Change my Heart, O God,” “Spirit Song,” “Sweet Perfume.” “I Love you, Lord.”

John taught the church to sing songs to God, not just songs about Him. I don’t have a musical bone in my body, but I still can sing this song:

“I love you, Lord,  
and I lift my voice,  
to worship You,  
O, my soul, rejoice.  
Take joy, my King,  
in what you hear,  
Let it be a sweet, sweet  
sound in your ear.”

I hope you will sing this little song of praise to God with me. If you don’t know the melody to this song and the others I mentioned, you can find them in Google.

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Bless you,

Glenn