

## “The Castle Of Your Heart”

### Ephesians 5: 15-20

([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+5:15-20](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+5:15-20))

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### Checking the map is important!

When Jamie and I left Chicago headed for Branson, Missouri several years ago, I suggested that we might stop in St. Louis and ride up the arch. Partway through Illinois Jamie pulled out the map. She found that Branson was not just an hour away from St. Louis like I thought. Rather it was clear across the state. We did not stop in St. Louis. We didn't have time. Just this past July I again forgot to check the map. I thought it was a short journey of several hours from Calabash, North Carolina to Williamsburg, Virginia. Of course, a Map Quest would have told me differently, but I didn't take the time to check the map. We arrived late, without time for the grandchildren to swim in the pool because I didn't check the map. Checking the map on a journey is important.

Checking the map on your spiritual journey through life is also critical. Have you ever wondered what God wants of you in your life? Have you ever felt lost? Do you wonder sometimes if your life has taken a wrong turn and you are stuck on the back roads of the world? Whether you are 8, 18 or 89 years of age, checking God's map is one of the most important activities you can do.

OK, you ask. Where's the map? You agree that a map is important, but where do you find God's map? If you are holding your Bible in your hand, then you have your map. But, I know that the Bible is difficult to understand at times. So you need some pointers, some clear pictures, and some metaphors for reading the Bible.

### St. Teresa of Avila provided the world with a Map for the spiritual journey.

St. Teresa lived in Spain from 1515 until her death in 1582. She lived during a time when practicing contemplative prayer could get you hung from a tree or burned at the stake. Yet, all over Spain, she was considered a church leader who was joyfully in touch with God. In a church anxious for reforms, but at war over who should direct them, St. Teresa started her own reform through the establishment of new Carmelite convents throughout Spain. In a male-dominated culture, she was a woman who could read; a writer who published books; and a theological gadfly to the church hierarchy. In a society anxious about reputation, proper blood lines and orthodoxy, St. Teresa, who was born of a converted Jewish family, managed to neutralize all her detractors and be elevated to the Roman Catholic sainthood only 40 years after her death. One of her four books, *The Interior Castle*, provides a map for understanding how to live a faithful life with God.

St. Teresa wrote that all of life is a spiritual journey. That journey is like a trip through an interior castle of the heart. We begin at the front gate and choose to proceed through seven mansions. Contrary to popular opinion, St. Teresa pointed out that the journey becomes harder and our choices more difficult with each mansion that we visit. The more of our interior castle that is inhabited by Christ, the more we will fight to hold onto those portions we consider our own. The greater our awareness of God's grace, the greater will be our sorrow for our personal shortcomings and sin. St. Teresa identified that the goal of the journey is one of joy and moving toward greater joy. The journey through the castle of the heart is one of choice. We choose to move toward God's light with each step.

Using Biblical wisdom, St. Teresa points out seven signposts on the doors of the Interior Castle. The journey is predictable! The map is available.

The first mansion is your willing reception of your identity as God's child.

- The second mansion is your overcoming the questioning and doubting of God's direction for your life. (Can't I do it my way?)
- The third mansion is your victory over the struggle with evil, suffering, sin, and death.
- The fourth mansion is facing the temptation to focus upon yourself, your wants, and your comforts while ignoring God's great blessings.
- The fifth mansion is defeating the slide into negativity, grumbling and complaining.
- The sixth mansion is obedience to God's direction and purpose for your life.
- The seventh and final mansion is living within the circle of inward joy of union with Christ Jesus no matter what the outward circumstances might be.

Let's quickly look at each portion of this spiritual map of our interior castle. In Ephesians 5:15, ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+5:15](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ephesians+5:15)) Holy Scripture teaches us to watch our steps, use our heads, and make the most of every day God gives us. St. Teresa's spiritual map of your interior castle can help you choose wisely each step of the way.

## **Mansion One: You are God's beloved child!**

God teaches you through the Bible that *"In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith...there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."* (Galatians 3:26-28) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=galatians+3:26-28](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=galatians+3:26-28)). God invites you to live in Grace land. God accepts you just as you are as a beloved child. And, God encourages you to grow into the wonderful mature person that God envisions you to be. Through Christ Jesus you are able to live within the circle and under the influence of God's great and amazing grace.

What does all that mean? God loves you with a total and complete no-strings-attached love. Your heritage does not matter to God. You could be born into an aristocratic family, a union family, or no family. No matter what your nationality, you are one of God's children. Your economic status doesn't matter with God. Whether you are as poor as a slave or as wealthy as Bill Gates, God loves you. Your gender does not matter. You can be a woman, a man, both of the above, or none of the above, and God still accepts and loves you. The Ethiopian eunuch, the married Peter and the single Paul were all God's children! Your fundamental identity in this world is only one thing; you are God's child. You belong to no one else. Your primary family is God's family. Your primary identity is one of God's beloved children.

Tom Benjamin captured the reality of this portion of God's life map in an oral liturgy.

I am God's child.  
I am God's child.  
I may be rich.  
I may be poor.  
I may be exciting.  
I might be a bore,  
But, I'm still God's child.  
I may be black.  
I may be white.  
I may be free.  
I might be uptight.  
But, I am still God's child.  
I may be yellow.  
I might be brown,  
Once was lost,  
But now I'm found.  
Mistreated,  
Unseated,  
But never defeated.  
Because I am,  
God's child.  
I am,  
God's child!

## **Mansion Two: God has a task for me, but can't I do it my way?**

Excuse-making is a favorite human pastime. We want to live by our rules. We want to do what pleases us no matter who it hurts. In Genesis, Cain wanted to offer sacrifices to God his way. In Exodus 3, ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=exodus+3](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=exodus+3)) God appeared to Moses and told him to go to Egypt and free the Israelite people. Moses didn't like the idea at all. First Moses said, "Who are you?" Next, Moses replied that he was a nobody and the people wouldn't listen to him. After that, Moses said I am not strong enough or gifted enough. Finally, Moses said he couldn't talk before people because he stuttered and stammered. To each excuse God replied with an affirmative statement. God would be with him. God would provide. God would take care of the opposition. You see God had a job for Moses to do.

Dr. E.V. Hill preached a sermon on this Scripture entitled, "You are God's Answer." Moses going to Egypt was God coming down and answering the prayers of God's people. Moses going to Egypt was God's answer. The answer to the dilemma for your loved ones, the answer to the problems and difficulties of this world is not somebody else. You are God's answer to your world! God has a task for you to do that will make this world a better place. Doing your task is God's answer to the prayers of others. God has a task for you and no amount of excuse-making will change that fact. Listen to God's gentle nudging of your spirit, stop all the excuse-making, and you will know what God wants you to do with your life for the sake of God's kingdom.

### **Mansion Three: Confront the evil, sin, suffering, and death of this present age.**

Every one of us is challenged by God to live in the real world. Our media-oriented society sells us a virtual reality where we are all powerful and invincible. The Bible teaches us the truth that we live in a fallen world that is inhabited by evil where all of us are limited, finite creatures who will die. Some of us will suffer greatly. Some of us will be hurt over and over again. Some of us will face enormous temptations. All of us will die.

In Romans 3:24 ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+3:24](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=romans+3:24)) we read, *"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."* We can expect to miss the mark. We can expect to be indebted to God. We can expect that we are not perfect. We can expect that we will face trials, tribulations, suffering, and death.

Brothers and Sisters, we need to adjust our thinking to the real world. When some problem comes to us we wonder why God let that happen. When some disease afflicts us, we question why God allowed that to happen to us. When we face death we are surprised that God does not reach out and save us. Brothers and Sisters, the spiritual road map is clear all through the Bible. We will face difficulties in this life, but the good news is truly good news, in and through Christ Jesus death is defeated, suffering will be relieved, faithful living will be rewarded. Christ has already overcome this world and death itself! Christ is alive and with us every step of the way.

St. Teresa teaches us the reality of this truth. She traveled all around Spain establishing convents. The story is told of one of her travels through very difficult terrain and harsh unforgiving weather. She was worn out from travel and work. It was cold and raining. The road was muddy and hard to travel with an ox cart. In the middle of a storm-swollen stream, the oxcart became stuck and the driver asked everyone to get out and help push. St. Teresa was frustrated and angry with Jesus. She began to call out to him with great gusto telling Him about her good works, her love for Him, her desire to share His love. Then she worked herself up into a wild frenzy, complaining and asking why this was all happening to her. Jesus then replied. "My sister, I love you. Don't you know I treat all of my beloved friends this way?" To which Teresa replied, "That's why You don't have many friends!"

### **Mansion Four: Stepping out of my comfort zone.**

Jesus directed His followers to take the journey of faith leaving everything behind them. He told them to walk in faith letting go of anxiety because their Heavenly Father would care for them (Matthew chapters 1-10) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+1-10](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+1-10)). The first Christians were known as people of the "Way". They followed Jesus' directive and stepped outside all that was familiar to them. Peter went to Cornelius' home and stepped foot in a Gentile home for the first time in His life. If the early Christians had stayed within the legalistic system of the Jews, they would never have had to face the problem of eating meat that is detailed in I Corinthians.

A part of the Biblical map is the reality that God is a God of Surprises. God will keep you learning. God will keep you growing. God will keep asking you to give up something so that you can be blessed with something new.

Psalms 96 ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+96](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+96)) encourages us to sing to the Lord a new song! When you capture the reality of this part of the castle of God's grace you can sing. Every day is a new day. Yesterday is gone. Whatever happened yesterday is over. You can let it go. Did you fail yesterday? Never mind, today is a new day. Living in God's grace is what singing a new song is all about. Each day is a new day with God!

### **Mansion Five: Defeating the negative and rejoicing in God's blessings.**

The Evil One will attack you with negative thinking anytime and anywhere. That is a road sign on the life map that you can count on. God blessed the people of Israel with freedom from slavery in Egypt. God blessed them with life over death when the Egyptian army came after them and the Red Sea was opened and the people of Israel were spared. God blessed the children of Israel by making an eternal covenant of presence and love with them at Mt. Sinai. God blessed them with food and water in the desert. God blessed them with a Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. But, these children of God turned negative. In Numbers 14 ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=numbers+14](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=numbers+14)) when the spies return from Canaan with good news and bad news, the people did not trust God. The good news was that the land was just what God promised. The bad news was that the people in the land were strong and well fortified. Listen to what these blessed people say to God: *"if only we had died in Egypt or in this desert."*(vs.1)

What happened to these God-blessed people? What could cause them to falter and fail at the very moment of great success? The answer is available to us if we turn back to Numbers 11 where we find the people of Israel developing a complaining attitude. They began to grumble and complain about the food God was providing. In Numbers 12 ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=numbers+12](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=numbers+12)) we find Aaron and Miriam complaining about Moses. It is dangerous when you begin to complain about what God has given you. It is quite clear that a spirit of complaining was spreading among God's people. Such a spirit is infectious and deadly. You cannot make a good decision when you are infected with a bad attitude. These people took their eyes off God's blessings and lost the promise. God continued to care for them during the 38 years it took for them to die in the desert as they had requested. God waited until another generation emerged who would trust God.

Joshua, one of only two original Israelites to cross over Jordan into the promised land, challenges us with the affirmation that will defeat the spirit of negativity and complaining. Here he speaks to the people of Israel after they have conquered the land and just before he dies. *"Choose you this day whom you will serve, ... as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!"* (Joshua 24:15) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=joshua+24:15](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=joshua+24:15))

### **Mansion Six: Obedience to God and a willingness to follow God's directions.**

Jesus Christ is our teacher and mentor here. The Holy Spirit inspires us through Hebrews 12:1-2 ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=hebrews+12:1-2](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=hebrews+12:1-2)). *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Jesus kept the joy of God in mind. God's joy enabled Him to endure the cross. God's joy kept Him focused in the garden when He admitted that He did not want to complete the journey. God's joy was the motivation for His obedience to God. When you get into your mind the great joy of the eternal and almighty God, then you can do anything. You can go through anything. The race may be long. The hardships might be many. The trials might seem unfair. The burdens might be heavy. But, God's joy will see you through.

Stay focused upon Jesus. Stay focused upon what Jesus wants you to do. Stay focused upon Jesus and the blessings of God's joy that he brings and you will more than endure. You will overcome!

This prayer was found scrawled on the wall of a WW II German concentration camp. Whoever wrote these words knew the power of living within the circle of obedience to God.

O Lord, when I shall come with glory in Your kingdom, do not remember only the men of good will; remember also the men of evil. May they be remembered not only for their acts of cruelty in this camp...but balance against their cruelty the fruits we have reaped under the stress and in the pain; the comradeship, the courage, the greatness of heart, the humility and patience which have...become part of our lives because we have suffered at their hands. May the memory of us not be a nightmare to them when they stand in judgement. May all that we have suffered be acceptable to you as a ransom for them.

### **Mansion Seven: Living within the circle of joy no matter what the outward circumstances.**

Scripture gives us a picture of the mature Christian in the life of the Apostle Paul as he writes to the churches in Philippi. The Holy Spirit inspires us to keep growing, keep learning and keep in a close and constant relationship with Jesus. For we can also become mature in Christ. We can also say with Paul. *"I rejoice in the Lord greatly...for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* (Philippians 4:10-13) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippians+4:10-13](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=philippians+4:10-13))

I am not to Mansion Seven yet in my life. I am growing and I am learning, but I have a ways to go. However, I am encouraged that a life of constant joy and trust is possible. I am challenged to keep praying and keep practicing trust so that I can know such profound joy and peace.

### **The Spiritual Journey of the heart.**

This morning's Scripture from Ephesians challenges us to choose wisely. St. Teresa gives us a map of the major spiritual choices that are set before us. Let me urge you to identify which mansion is confronting you in this season of your life. Here again the choices that God sets before you. I join with Scripture in urging you to choose wisely!

- The first mansion is your willing reception of your identity as God's child.
- The second mansion is your overcoming the questioning and doubting of God's direction for your life. (Can't I do it my way?)
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