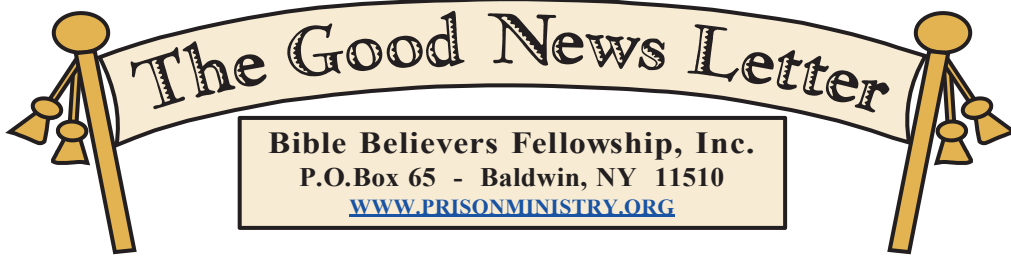




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TAX-EXEMPT

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" MARK 16:15

January 2025

FROM US TO YOU

Well Christmas is over, all the parties, fancy food, gifts, and carols, and we are about to embark on a new year. We hope you all enjoyed the holidays, and that you remembered they are "holy days." Hopefully, with all the trials and troubles, America and the whole world, has been through in the last few years, some spiritual illumination will come out of it! We have a framed plaque on the wall in our family room at home. It has a picture of a lighthouse on it, and words thanking the Lord for the Holy Lighthouse of God (John 8:12), Jesus Christ, who sheds His illumination on all the dark areas Satan has put around us. And we praise God that, through Christ, we are able to see the hazards that the devil has put in our way, and avoid them. Even during the good times, when all is going well, the dark rocks can be there, with temptation, greed, jealousy, and lust, just waiting to shipwreck your way. So keep the light of Christ glowing brightly in your heart. Even many Christians become lackadaisical about Christ. So, remember, this is more important that you realize. It's about where you will spend eternity (Revelation 20:12-15)! So "...fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith" (1 Timothy 1:18-19 NIV).

All of your good works won't get you to Heaven (see Ephesians 2:8-9), and Purgatory does not exist. It's not in the Bible. The Bible tells us that the only alternative to Heaven is Hell. And Jesus is the only one who was perfect enough to pay for our sins. Repentance to God (only God, not the priest, Matthew 6:9) and Jesus Christ is your only hope. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 NIV). We know that a lot of people are hurting right now. And some of you don't understand why this is happening to you. The devil is telling you that God is doing it to you. And you might think that God is punishing you for something, and you're confused. You might even think that God does not love you. That's not true (see John 3:15-16). Even Christians are sometimes deceived this way! However, God loves you so much that He sometimes uses painful methods to get a person's attention. He does this so that something much worse won't happen to you (Hebrews 12:2-6).

King David wrote, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalms 23:1-6 NIV). David knew that there are times that God knows that His little lamb is heading into danger. He tries to move that foolish little lamb back to the fold with His staff. However, sometimes that stubborn little lamb needs to feel the sting of the rod. The lamb

feels the pain, and heads back to the sheepfold. Now that hungry wolf, that is eyeing him for dinner, will have to look somewhere else for his prey (Matthew 7:15).

We humans may feel strong, wise, and independent. But God, our Creator, sees us as sheep. "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6 NIV). The "Him" mentioned here is God's own Son, Jesus Christ. He did it because God knows how vulnerable we are. We can't fight spiritual battles, but our enemies are spiritual (see Ephesians 6:12). So God has compassion on us. Sheep are the most vulnerable of animals. So God sometimes uses drastic measures to keep us safe and out of danger. It's because He loves us. Jesus said, "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way

there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (Luke 15:4-7 NIV).

Even nature tells us that when we put our hand on a hot kettle, we will feel pain. If we didn't feel the pain warning us, the heat would burn our skin. Jesus told His latter-day, lukewarm church, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy

from Me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:17-20 NIV).

Peter wrote to the early church in his day. He said, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in Heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1 Peter 1:3-7 NIV).

Don't let anything or anyone come between you and your Savior! Keep your faith.

In the Lord's service, Eric and Anne Kaestner



Lukewarm Churches

By Anne Kaestner

My husband and I used to watch episodes of an old television show called “Adam-12.” It portrays real police experiences reenacted by actors. One particular episode had a segment outside a church. Apparently the choir director and the organist were having a loud dispute about what music to play at the beginning of each meeting. It had become such a spectacle between them that the police had to break it up. Arguments between Christians are not unusual. Paul spoke about them in 1 Corinthians 6:1-7. And Jesus did in Matthew 18:15-17. However, when arguments and fights break out among Christians, there is always some kind of sin in one or both of them that caused it. It could be caused by pride, jealousy, greed, or something similar. James said, “*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit He caused to live in us envies intensely? But He gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded*” (James 4:1-8 NIV).

Believers are supposed to be the Bride of Christ. Therefore, when you’re unfaithful to Christ, God considers it spiritual adultery. Paul wrote, “*I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to Him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough*” (2 Corinthians 11:2-4 NIV). In those days, it was similar in one respect to the way it is today. There was a kind of elitism in the church. People tended to judge many religious leaders according to their current status in society. It’s the same way today; what college you went to, how many degrees you have after your name, and your worldly stature are how people judge you. Therefore, many of those who were believed to be the “super-apostles” and were highly regarded by the church, didn’t have the Holy Spirit in them (see John 14:16-26, 15:26, 16:7). So they spread erroneous doctrine based on what was “politically correct” at the time.

This worried Paul. He knew how gullible the people were, and he wrote back to them saying, “*But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those ‘super-apostles.’ I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. Why?*

Because I do not love you? God knows I do! And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve” (2 Corinthians 11:5-15 NIV).

Paul was also worried about the church in Galatia. Sadly, he wrote to them saying, “*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the One who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ*” (Galatians 1:6-12 NIV).

Are you a Christian? Do you go to a Christian church? According to Microsoft Bing, about one third (31.2%) of the world’s population considers itself “Christian.” Taking that into consideration, one might ask, “If Christianity brings such joy (see Matthew 25:23 and 1 Thessalonians 1:6) and peace (John 14:27), why is there so much tension and trouble in the church? And why can’t we live in more peace and contentment (Philippians 4:11-13)?” Jesus said that it is because many of the people who call themselves “Christian” are not really Christians at all. They do not live according to the teachings of Christ and His Apostles. Jesus said “*to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of My mouth*” (Revelation 3:14-16 NIV). Jesus was speaking to the **angel** of one of His **latter-day** churches when He used the word “lukewarm.” It is the only time in the Bible that the word “lukewarm” is used. The “angel” of the churches means that it is not just referring to one particular church, but a large number of churches, or congregations, that call themselves “Christian.”

Jesus is not specifically referring to any Laodicean churches today, but the **attitude** that was in the Laodicean church that Paul tried to start during his missionary trips, and is present in His unfaithful latter-day churches. Laodicea was in Asia Minor in the region of the Roman Empire called Phrygia according to Acts 18:23. What type of attitude does the Lukewarm church have that is so phony and offensive to Jesus that He would spit it out of His mouth? Obviously, they will not get to Heaven without Christ. They are represented as the five foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1-13 and the false prophets in Matt. 7:21-23. Often the lukewarm spirit is prevalent in affluent churches, and they appear to have a superior persona. Jesus described the attitude of the lukewarm church this way, “*You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize*



that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from Me **gold refined in the fire**, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I **rebuke and discipline**. So be earnest, and **repent**. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door; I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:17-20 NIV). To be fair, I have also noticed this attitude in churches that are not necessarily rich as well.

It’s really a self-satisfied attitude that seems content is the assumption that, since they **think** they are “Christians,” God has blessed them in many ways. The congregation is taught that they are God’s children (John 1:12-13), so they are a special class of society. Therefore, they deserve the best of everything. The people take an attitude of gratitude that they live in God’s blessings. There is no humility there (Matthew 18:4). Their thinking is that they live in a nice place, in a free country. They have nice clothes to wear. They have enough money for the things they need. Transportation is no problem. And they are glad that they don’t live the way the heathen do. They have plenty to eat. They don’t rob or steal. They go to church regularly and have everything they want. They believe that God has blessed them because they are “Christians” and they are so proud that they believe they are “King’s Kids” (1 Corinthians 4:8-13). So, they have what they need. But if there is anything else that they want, they believe that all they need to do is to ask God for it. And to copy a phrase that is often used in lukewarm churches, they think they just have to “name it and claim it.” That’s what **they** believe, but their main focus is in the material world, not on the Kingdom of God (Matthew 21:43)! However, the Bible says, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is **not** in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes **not** from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15-17 NIV).

The point is that God is not Santa Claus! He doesn’t exist to serve you. You exist to serve Him! “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ...” (1 Peter 1:18-19 NIV). When you claim to be a Christian, you are stating to the world that Christ is your Savior and you love and serve Him. Therefore, a certain type of lifestyle is expected of you. It means that you do **not** live for this world, or the **ruler** of this world (1 John 2:15-18). The ruler of this world is Satan, the devil (Matthew 4:1-11). Now you live for Jesus Christ! You are saying that previously, “...you **were** dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you **used** to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at working those who are disobedient” (Ephesians 2:1-2 NIV).

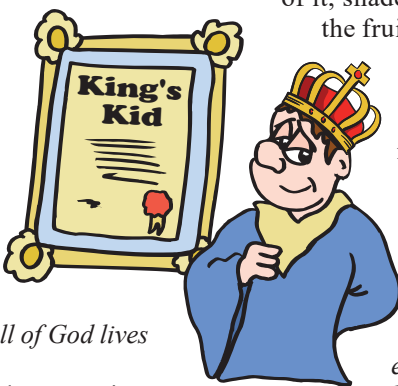
However, as a Christian, you have **turned** away from that kind of lifestyle. Now you want to just live for Christ and depend on whatever He gives you (see Philippians 4:11-13) to serve Him. But that is **not** the thinking of the Lukewarm church that Jesus was referring to. There is a big difference! The Lord said, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to Me and hears My words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears My words and does not put them into practice is like

a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete” (Luke 6:46-49 NIV). Being a **true** Christian means that you **live** for Christ and only do what He expects from you. It means that you don’t go gambling or get involved in worldly activities, like smoking anything or getting drunk. “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming” (Colossians 3:5-6 NIV). If you are a sincere Christian, “You **used** to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips” (Colossians 3:7-8 NIV).

A strong Christian church is not lukewarm. It is hot! Such a person is spiritually on fire for Christ (Hebrews 12:29 and Acts 2:3). John the Baptist said that Christ knows who His true churches are. “The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with **fire**” (Matthew 3:10-11 NIV). Metaphorically, God compares us to trees. Some trees have good fruit, and some don’t. The ones with good fruit are those that get their substance from the true Vine, symbolic of Christ. Jesus told us that a tree might have all the things you would expect of it, shade, beauty, fruit, pretty colors. But the true test is the fruit. The lukewarm church does not have any **good** fruit. It is a worldly church that just gives God lip service, but the good fruit is not there. Have you ever tasted fruit that has gone bad? No wonder it left a bad taste in the Lord’s mouth! He had to spit it out. Jesus said, “This is to My Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples” (John 15:8 NIV). Fruit from the holy Vine of Christ has to be good!

Jesus said to His disciples, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. **Remain** in Me, and I will **remain** in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must **remain** in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you **remain** in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man **remains** in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not **remain** in Me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. **If you remain** in Me and My words **remain** in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you” (John 15:1-7 NIV). Jesus said to the false prophets in His day, “You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men’” (Matthew 15:7-9 NIV. Also, see Matthew 7:15). Remember what Eve saw. “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it” (Genesis 3:6 NIV). The tree looked desirable to Eve. Temptation is usually pleasing to the eye, and innocent looking. Chances are, it made her mouth water. But that innocent looking tree had fruit that was full of poison!

“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, (Continued on Page 4)



he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:13-15 NIV). The writer of Hebrews warned Christians to stay faithful to Christ. He said, “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment” (Hebrews 6:1-2 NIV). He told us to be **mature** in our walk with God, not to keep rehashing the basics over and over again. For example, one woman said a certain church sermon had a “nice salvation message.” Well that’s fine if there are a lot of nonbelievers in the service. But if the congregation consists of those who have already been through the “Born Again” (see John 3:3) experience, they need to **grow** in their knowledge of the Lord. He said, “We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:11-14 NIV).

He was saying that when you tell people that you’re a Christian, but act like the world, you make Christ look bad! You don’t want people to say, “Here comes one of those phony Christians again.” I have seen a young, pretty woman walking on a beach wearing a very sexy bikini, handing out Christian tracts. I guarantee the men who saw her were not thinking about what a righteous woman she was. She was an advertisement for lust! A strong Christian woman wouldn’t dress like that! The writer of Hebrews said, “It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace” (Hebrews 6:4-6 NIV).

Jude wanted to write an encouraging, spiritually uplifting letter to the church. However, the Holy Spirit took over in him, and he began to deliver a different message to them. He said, “Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to **contend** for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who **change** the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord” (Jude 1:3-4 NIV). I think one of the main problems is that most Christians don’t bother to read their Bibles very often. They just depend on whatever they are told by their religious leaders. However, we are all eternal beings. Our human bodies will, some day, die in this world. Even so, our souls and spirits will **not** cease to exist. You will enter into eternity when you die. There’s really **no Purgatory**. That was just an invention of the Catholic Church. It was taught to the people for the purpose of bringing in more donations. The **Bible tells us** that there is Heaven and there is Hell. Those are the only two destinations available to people when they die. And Jesus said, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through

it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:13-14 NIV).

A man once said to me, “I want to go where my friends are.” Believe me, you don’t want to go to Hell! Jesus said, “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30 NIV). Jesus said, “...I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6 NIV). Hell wasn’t made for humans. It was “...the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41 NIV). It is a place of eternal agony (see Luke 16:19-31). Jesus said that it is such a terrible place “where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” Everyone will be salted with fire” (Mark 9:48-49 NIV). Purgatory is based on the assumption that those who go there have to pay for their own sin. But our sin is so bad to God that only Christ, His Son, is pure and righteous enough to pay for it! Therefore, “...God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NIV).

It astonishes me that so many Christians take their salvation so lightly that become lukewarm. This earthly world has all kinds of temptations and lures, yet there is nothing in this world that even compares with the wonders God has prepared for those who love Him. Paul said, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called **according to His purpose**. For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:28-29 NIV). That means that before you were even born God planned for you to accomplish great things for His kingdom and He gave you the talent to do it. Therefore, if you’re an eloquent speaker, God wants to use you to get the gospel out. If you are a good singer, don’t use your talent to be rich and famous in this world. Sing your heart out for Jesus. Give **Him** the glory! If you are able to work well with children, teach them about salvation. Whatever you do, do it to bring glory to Jesus Christ and His Kingdom.

The lukewarm church has one foot in the world. They don’t want to give it up. They want salvation as well, but they love worldly things more. If, after Jesus died for you, and all He sacrificed for your salvation, you don’t love Him **more**, then you are lukewarm. Sometimes, God sees the stupid things people do and that their heart is tempted with distractions, and He brings painful experiences (see Hebrews 12:7-11) into their lives in order to get their attention, because He loves them so much. Likewise, He doesn’t want to lose you. He wants you to buy gold from Him because you are straying off like a foolish little lamb away from the fold (Luke 15:4-7). It’s because He loves you so much! “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than **gold**, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:3-7 NIV).

