

On
Eagles'
Wings

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version of the Bible. Additionally, for the sake of clarity, all Scripture quotations and parenthesized Scripture references have been placed in italics.

There is something majestic about an eagle soaring through the air. Eagles fly with such confidence and ease. They are pictures of strength, power, and freedom. It is no wonder that so many countries have used the eagle as part of their national symbol. The Egyptians, Persians, and Romans all did. In more modern times, the eagle has been used by the countries of Austria, Indonesia, Mexico, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine as part of their Coat of Arms.¹ On June 20, 1782, the eagle officially became the national emblem of the United States of America. Not only has the eagle been used on many of our coins and stamps, but it is also on the Great Seal of the United States.² For these many years, the eagle has represented the freedom that we Americans so treasure.

It is interesting to me that God has chosen eagles as a symbol for Himself. In Old Testament times He said to His people, “*I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself*” (*Exodus 19:4*). Anything used as an illustration of God must be special, and eagles certainly are.

Not only does God use eagles to demonstrate *His* power, but He also uses them to picture the strength and freedom that is available to *us*. The Bible records these

familiar words: “*Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles...*” (Isaiah 40:31).

Think about that. God compared *Himself* to eagles and then He compared *us* to eagles. He used the same bird for both illustrations; so if we can become more like *eagles* then we can become more like *God*.

And that is the purpose of this booklet...to help us develop the qualities that God Himself has and that He desires for us to have. He wants us to be like eagles. He longs for us to rise above our circumstances, to live our lives with ease, and to see things from a higher perspective. He wants us to live lives of freedom...the type of freedom that an eagle experiences. Jesus came to set us free from sin, guilt, anxiety, nervousness, anger, and every other kind of bondage. He came to liberate us.

The question is this: How does He do it? How does God go about making us more like eagles? As we will see in the pages that follow, God does this by:

1. teaching us to fly by “stirring our nest.”
2. giving us an “inner ease” in life.

3. changing our perspective of people, problems, and life in general.
4. enabling us to live consistently on a higher level than we ever thought possible.
5. renewing our strength.
6. keeping us fresh through the seasons of life.
7. giving us a heart to help others.

We don't become like eagles overnight. There is a process involved. That process involves time and patience. But if we will allow God to work in our lives, He can make us the people He desires for us to be. We can enjoy the freedom and ease in life that God intends for us to have. And, with His help, we can rise above every obstacle that life puts in our way. So let's think about the process God uses to make us like eagles.

1. God teaches us to fly by “stirring our nest.”

The most obvious characteristic of eagles is that they can fly. And they can fly fast, too! The average speed of an eagle's flight is just over 30 miles per hour.³ Some eagles regularly fly at speeds of 55 miles per hour.⁴ A great

bald eagle was once observed flying over a lake at an average speed of 120 miles per hour with some speeds in that flight in excess of 150 miles per hour.⁵

Not only do eagles fly with great speed, but they can reach great heights as well. Typically, an eagle flies at an altitude of approximately 2,400 feet.⁶ Sometimes, though, eagles reach altitudes of between 10,000 and 15,000 feet.⁷

It is almost unthinkable that an eagle could reach such amazing heights. How is this possible? Well, eagles know how to use the winds to their advantage. When a storm comes, the eagle positions its wings so that the wind will lift it up and carry it above the storm. The eagle doesn't *escape* the storm; it *uses* the storm to help it fly higher. The storm literally lifts the eagle up.⁸ The "lifting" is caused by "thermals." Thermals are "columns of rising air that are formed over the ground through the warming of the surface by sunlight."⁹ In other words, the heat causes the air to rise, and this rising air lifts the eagle higher. In this respect, a storm is an eagle's best friend.

Eagles are obviously born with the ability to learn how to fly, but that ability must be developed. Eagles would never cultivate their flying skills if they never left their nests, yet

sometimes their nests are so comfortable that they don't want to leave home.

Young eagles are normally ready to fly by the time they reach two to three months of age.¹⁰ If the mother eagle notices that her eaglets are reluctant to fly, she will hover over the nest, spread her wings, and begin to flap them. She is encouraging her little eaglets to fly. The wind from her wings lifts the eaglets "slightly above the nest" and causes them to flap their own wings and begin to hover, too.¹¹ Soon, the little eaglets begin hopping from branch to branch as they learn how to fly.¹²

Sometimes the mother eagle "stirs the nest" in a slightly different way. The eagles' nest is carefully lined with leaves, straw, and old feathers. These items make the nest comfortable. When the little eaglet becomes too comfortable, though, it is hesitant to fly. To remedy this problem, the mother eagle will sometimes remove the leaves, straw, and feathers from the nest with her powerful talons. With these items removed, the young eagle feels the sharpness of the sticks and twigs. This obviously makes the nest a less desirable home than it was before.¹³ And it makes the eaglet more apt to leave the nest.

Frequently, the adult eagle will fly to a nearby tree or rock and, with food in mouth, call the young eaglet to come. After this first actual flight, the adult eagle will often accompany the eaglet on its next few flights. The feathers of the parent eagle “create an air current which actually lifts the eaglet.”¹⁴ So as long as the little eaglet stays close to its parent, the parent will literally help the eaglet fly.

God, in a similar way, often “stirs our nests” of comfort, ease, and familiarity. He knows that we, like eagles, were made to soar, so He never lets us stay too comfortable for too long. Just “*as an eagle stirs up its nest,*” God sometimes stirs ours (*Deuteronomy 32:11*).

At times, God stirs our nest by giving us feelings of restlessness. We no longer feel peaceful with where we are in life. We are no longer comfortable and content. This happened to me when I was a seminary student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. I was living in Ft. Worth, Texas, working on my master’s degree, and I was as content as I could possibly be. I was *lonely* because seminary life is less social and more isolated than college life, but I was *content* because I knew I was where God wanted me to be. I lived in a small apartment on campus. And for my first two years there, I couldn’t imagine living anywhere

else. I was planning on staying there for several years to finish not only my master's degree, but also my doctorate. I would tell my family and friends that I had never been so content. In my third year of seminary, though, something began to change. Little by little, my contentment started fading away. Instead of wanting to stay there for three to five additional years to work on my doctorate, I started wondering if I could even make it long enough to finish my master's degree. I didn't understand at the time what was happening, but in retrospect, it is clear. God was stirring my nest. He was removing the leaves, straw, and feathers. All I could feel were the sharp sticks and the pointed twigs.

At that same time, I was working at a church near Dallas. It had been a wonderful experience for me, but all of a sudden my peace in that position was gone. I had a restlessness in my spirit about being there. A job that had been relatively easy for me was now a chore. The joy was gone. I had assumed that I might work at that church for several years, but my assumption was wrong. I couldn't stay at a church, even a good church, feeling like that. So I resigned. I resigned with nowhere to go.

I was also well into the process of applying for the doctoral program at seminary. My

grades were good. I had great relationships with my professors. Getting into the program, quite honestly, wasn't going to be a problem. There was only one issue; I no longer had peace about it. I sat down one day and did something I never thought I would do. I wrote a letter to the Committee of Prospective Ph.D. Students and asked them to no longer consider my application. I explained to them, even though I couldn't fully understand it myself, that I no longer had peace about pursuing my doctorate at that time.

All of this happened about a month before I graduated with my master's degree. I had no idea what I was going to do after graduation, but I did have peace. I had burned my bridges as far as the Dallas-area church was concerned, and I had burned my bridges with the doctoral program as well. But deep in my heart, I knew I had done the right thing. My future was completely unclear, but my heart was at rest.

Not long after I had burned those bridges, my dad called me and told me that the student minister at First Baptist Church in Pasadena had just moved to another church in another state. He asked me if I would pray about coming to Pasadena to work with the students for the three upcoming summer months. It was a three-month commitment. I prayed about it,

felt peaceful about it, and moved to Pasadena. At the time of this writing, the three months have turned into over twenty-one years. By the goodness and grace of God, I am still in Pasadena.

That never would have happened, though, had God not first stirred my nest in Ft. Worth. The feelings of restlessness I experienced there were His way of preparing me for what He had next. He made me uncomfortable where I was so I would be willing to do something different.

Perhaps you sense that God is stirring *your nest* as well. Maybe you are experiencing the same feelings I have just described. Pay attention to those feelings of restlessness. They are often God's way of getting our attention. They frequently precede a major life change.

Maybe for you it isn't *restless feelings* but *changing circumstances* that have you confused. Perhaps you have lost your job, or maybe someone has broken your heart. Now, your future seems unclear. Whatever has happened, since we know that God is ultimately in control of everything, we know that He has allowed this difficulty to come into your life. He is stirring your nest. He has not allowed this problem to come into your life for the purpose of *destroying* you, but for the

purpose of *developing* you. He is teaching you to trust Him. He is preparing you to fly. And He will be there to catch you if you fall.

The Bible says, “*As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the LORD alone led him*” (Deuteronomy 32:11-12a). This passage of Scripture portrays Israel as a man in trouble, and it compares God’s care of him to a parent eagle’s care of a little eaglet just learning how to fly.¹⁵ When a young eagle is beginning to fly, it often begins to fall in mid-flight due to its lack of strength and experience. When this happens, the parent eagle swoops down to stop the fall “by spreading its wings” so the little eaglet can “land on them.”¹⁶ The parent eagle then carries the young eaglet on its wings and gives it another chance to fly, all the while watching from above, ready to come to the rescue again if needed.

So if you are experiencing restless feelings or changing circumstances, don’t panic. God hasn’t abandoned you. Just the opposite. He’s closer than ever. He’s stirring your nest. He’s preparing you for something new. He’s teaching you to fly. And He’s there to catch you if you fall. He’s your Father, and that’s what He loves to do.

2. God gives us an “inner ease” in life as we depend upon Him.

Even when flying at remarkable speeds, eagles appear to simply be gliding through the air. And actually they are. Eagles fly with such ease. An eagle’s wingspan is approximately seven feet. This is what allows the majestic bird to soar without effort at phenomenal speeds to such great heights. Eagles primarily only “flap their wings” when they are taking off or pursuing their prey.¹⁷ In flight, they just glide. How do they do this? Interestingly enough, an “eagle’s wings are characterized by primary feathers which are separated at the tips like the fingers of a hand.”¹⁸ These separations allow air to quickly pass through “enabling the eagle to fly almost indefinitely.”¹⁹ Eagles thus allow the wind to lift them higher and propel them onward.

God wants us to experience that kind of ease in life. While we certainly face difficult challenges along life’s way, the Christian life itself is not supposed to be hard. The Bible says, “*The way of the unfaithful is hard*” (Proverbs 13:15). By contrast, Jesus said, “*My yoke is easy and My burden is light*” (Matthew 11:30). In other words, as we follow God and depend upon Him to meet our needs, our lives should be characterized by a certain ease.

While feelings of restlessness and frustration may be God's way of getting our attention and preparing us for something new, those feelings shouldn't dominate the life of the believer. Feelings of *restlessness* often precede major life changes, but feelings of *peace* should be our normal experience.

Eagles fly without having to struggle. They glide through the air. It is an effortless endeavor for them. The wind lifts them higher, and their feathers make it possible to glide.

In a similar manner, God has designed a way for us to go through life with what I call an "inner ease." Yes, we face difficulties. Yes, we encounter winds of adversity. But we are designed to rise above them. We can learn to use those opposing winds to our advantage. While other birds try to *avoid* storms, eagles *use* storms to help them rise higher. Eagles have "an ability to lock their wings in a fixed position" thus allowing them to "glide higher" because of the storm than they otherwise would.²⁰ God has given us the ability to do something similar. He has given us the ability to lock our faith in a fixed position in Him and in His Word so that we, too, can rise higher. This determination to trust God regardless of what happens in life keeps our faith from wavering (*see Hebrews 10:23*).

I frequently encounter people who have risen, or who are in the process of rising, above the storms of their lives. I am often encouraged by widows, widowers, and those who have lost a child or some other treasured loved one. I am truly inspired by people who have battled or who are currently battling cancer or other health problems. I am always blessed when I see someone who has gone through one of the darkest and most painful experiences of life and has trusted God through it all. They have learned to let the storms of life lift them higher.

Since I have been ministering at the same church for so many years, I know the stories of many of the people in our church family. I know the struggles, obstacles, and challenges that many of them have faced and that some of them are now facing. Whenever I am preaching a sermon to the congregation, many of the people in the pews are sitting there preaching a sermon back to me. Their lives are their sermons. Without saying a word, their presence says to me, “God is in control. His grace is sufficient. Never give up. Keep trusting God. There is life on the other side of great difficulties and disappointments.” That is the message so many of the people *silently* preach to me while I *verbally* preach to them. And to be honest, their sermons are often better than mine. Someone once said, “I’d rather *see*

a sermon than *hear* one any day.” I feel the same way. Some of the greatest sermons are preached by Christians who are facing incredible challenges with resilient faith in Jesus. They just keep pressing on.

I recently witnessed this during a worship service at our church. A member of our church family, a good man and a treasured friend, had just died after a long battle with cancer. He was only fifty-six years of age. On the Sunday after his funeral the previous week, I was on the platform for part of our worship time. As we were all singing, I was also looking across the Worship Center at all the people in church that day. While surveying the congregation, I saw several members of that man’s family standing up and singing together. From my vantage point, I could see that his wife, his mother, and his sister were not only standing by each other, but also that all three of them were using tissues to wipe their tears. The amazing thing about what I saw was this: While they were wiping their tears away, they were at the same time singing “The Doxology.” With heavy hearts and tear-filled eyes, they were singing, “Praise God from Whom all blessings flow.”²¹ As I saw those three ladies singing that song to God when it would have been much easier for them to have stayed home that day, I thought to myself, “That may be the

greatest sermon I have ever *seen*.” They were literally praising God through their tears. And I felt blessed to just be in the same room with them.

I see Christian people exhibit such strength regularly when they are going through times of great difficulty. Do they have pain? Yes. Do they cry at times? Absolutely. Do they miss their loved ones and wish for better health for themselves? Without a doubt. But I have noticed something about these overcoming Christians. I have noticed that in the midst of their storms they have a peace, a joy, and an ease about them. Their spirits are soft, warm, and tender...not hard, cold, and angry. They have learned that in the midst of strong and intimidating winds that there is peace to be found by trusting Jesus. When we trust Him, there is a strength that He imparts to us, an inner ease in the midst of great pain, that enables us to glide through the storm.

In the Bible, God talked about how He led the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. He used eagles to represent the way in which He carried them out of the land of oppression. He said, “*I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself*” (*Exodus 19:4*). The word “*bore*” literally means “*to lift*.”²² In other words, God lifted His “little eaglets” out of Egypt and drew

them closer to Himself. He will lift us up, too, if only we will let Him. And He will empower us to rise above things we never thought we could overcome. As He draws us closer and closer to Himself, our lives will become more and more characterized by that inner ease.

3. God changes our perspective through His unchanging Word and our ever-changing circumstances.

Eagles are known for their absolutely amazing eyesight. Studies have revealed that “eagles can see four to five times farther than the average human can.”²³ Each eye of an eagle has two “fovea” (areas of acute vision) whereas each human eye only has one.²⁴ Within each fovea are “cones” which allow the eagle to see very small details from great distances away. One example of the strength of these cones is demonstrated by the fact that an eagle can see a rabbit from almost two miles away.²⁵ Some sources report that an eagle can see a rabbit from three miles away.²⁶

Additionally, the location of an eagle’s eyes gives it an area of peripheral vision that reaches almost 270 degrees.²⁷ When you combine that with the fact that eagles have incredible color vision, you almost become envious of their

eyesight. They see shades and ultraviolet light in ways that we simply cannot see.²⁸

Not only has God given eagles incredible vision, but He has also gone to extreme measures to protect their eyes. An eagle has two pairs of eyelids. One pair is similar to ours, but the other pair of eyelids is clear. They are called “nictitating membranes,” and they can be closed to protect the eagle’s eyes “from the wind, hungry eaglets, or the violence of the kill.”²⁹ These clear eyelids can be closed whenever an eagle’s eyes need to be protected without causing the eagle to lose its sight like we do when we close our eyes.

The word that comes to my mind when I think about the amazing vision of an eagle is the word “perspective.” When you consider the sharpness of an eagle’s eyesight and the high altitudes at which an eagle flies, it is obvious that an eagle has a much clearer perspective on things than we humans do. But God wants to change our perspective. He wants to give us a clearer view of life and of eternity. The Bible says, “*Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Colossians 3:2). I’ve often heard it said that a person can be so heavenly minded that he’s no earthly good. The truth, though, is that we run the risk of being so *earthly* minded that we’re

not much heavenly or earthly good. Our focus is too narrow. It is too centered on the things of this life. And that earthly focus often causes us to miss God's view of things.

So God wants to change our perspective, and He uses His Word, first and foremost, to do it. His Word teaches us that life is brief, fame is fleeting, and money is temporary. From the Bible we learn that much of what consumes our thoughts, conversations, and time doesn't even matter. A hundred years from now, it won't matter who won the Super Bowl, or how your investments grew, or even who became the President. But in a hundred years it will matter whether or not you were saved. It will matter what you did with the opportunities God gave you to help others. It will matter if you were faithful to do what God called you to do.

God's Word has a way of putting things in a much clearer perspective for us. And He also uses circumstances to help us see things more clearly. A bout with cancer helps a person to see that a problem at work isn't really a problem at all. A sudden heart attack helps a man to see that his financial portfolio isn't all that important. A rebellious child helps a parent to see that there is more to life than a good job, a big house, and several nice cars.

Don't get me wrong. God doesn't cause bad things to happen. He doesn't cause cancer and heart attacks. He doesn't cause children to rebel. He doesn't cause people to lose their jobs. He doesn't cause divorce or other relationship heartaches. But He uses these things when they do happen. And He uses them to help us see the temporary, transient nature of life more clearly.

When you begin to view your circumstances through the filter of God's Word, you discover that what really matters in life is your soul...that part of you that will live forever. What matters is God and His purpose for your life. What matters is not so much the problems you encounter but how you respond to them. What matters is not so much how people treat you but how you treat them. What matters is not so much what others think of you but what your attitude is towards them. Do you love those who have tried to hurt you? Do you forgive those who have done you wrong? Do you pray for those who use you?

A hundred years from now, we will fully understand that God's Word, our souls, other people's souls, and our faithfulness to God were really the things that mattered during our time on earth. Because in eternity, those are the only things that will still be around.

I was interested to learn that as well as eagles can see during the day that they can't see nearly as well at night. Sure, eagles can still see at night, but they don't have the same clarity and perspective that they have during the day. They are known as "diurnal predators" meaning they hunt during the day and are basically inactive at night.³⁰

Perhaps there is something we can learn from that as well. As we seek to gain a heavenly perspective on the matters of life, let's remember that we, too, can see things more clearly in the bright light of holiness and purity than in the darkness of sin and disobedience. In the Bible, light represents God, and darkness represents the devil. When we go God's way, we are able to see things much more clearly. We are able to see the matters of life through the lens of eternity. We gain the perspective of a high-flying eagle. And, in the process, we become more heavenly minded and much more earthly good.

4. God enables us to live consistently on a higher level than we ever thought possible.

As we have seen, eagles love the heights. This is seen not only in their flying, but also in the location of their nests. Eagles prefer to

build their nests on the side of a cliff in a crevice, cleft, or nook. Since the top of a cliff would leave the nest vulnerable to other birds, the side of a cliff is safer. Eagles also know that cliffs are better than trees. Animals can climb trees and devour baby eaglets, but they can't typically climb steep cliffs.³¹ Of course, when cliffs aren't available, eagles build their nests near the top of tall trees. The point I am making is that eagles live as high as they possibly and safely can.

Once the location of the nest has been determined, the eagles begin the building process. Now would be a good time to point out that eagles tend to mate for life.³² After two eagles have come together, they begin to build their nest together. Studies have shown that the "nest building" is actually part of the bonding process between the male and female eagles.³³ During the one to three month nest-building project, the eagles gather sticks and twigs and actually construct their new home. The sticks and twigs are "interwoven," and the inside of the nest is "lined with grass, corn stalks, and other material."³⁴ Moss is often gathered and placed inside the nest to "serve as an insect repellent."³⁵

After the nest is completed, the eagles often decorate it with "a sprig of greenery."³⁶ This,

or some other decoration, makes the nest feel like home. The nest constructed by the eagles is much larger than a typical bird's nest. One pair of eagles was followed for thirty-five years in the same nest. Amazingly, their nest grew to be twenty feet deep and nine and a half feet wide.³⁷

Once the nest is constructed, high above the ground, the eagle family has a wonderful view that enables them to look for prey. Additionally, the new-born eaglets are safe, far from harm's way. And the adult eagle has "an energy-saving launching pad" whenever it "swoops down from its nest."³⁸

Humans have a lot to learn from the location of the eagles' nest. Not only do we need a clearer perspective on life, but we also need to live consistently above the petty things that often pull us down. The key to living a life of consistency is learning to live by faith and not by our ever-changing feelings and emotions. Some days we don't feel particularly victorious. We don't feel joyful. Our emotions are like a rollercoaster. They are up and down. This can be caused by many factors including how well we slept the night before, blood sugar levels, thyroid problems, chemical imbalances, and even depression. This is why it is important to go to the doctor when you don't

feel quite right. Sometimes a change in diet, a medication, or a lifestyle adjustment can bring things back into balance. But if you are just “feeling down” and there is no medical reason for it, then you have to make a decision. Will you live by your feelings or will you live by faith in God and in His Word?

Sometimes God has to wean us away from our feelings. All of us have had times in our lives when we have “felt” God’s presence. We have experienced seasons when God seemed so close to us that we could almost reach out and touch Him. Those are wonderful and special times. If we’re not careful, though, we can actually become more dependent on those “feelings” than we are on God. So sometimes God has to remove the feelings in order to teach us to trust Him and to walk with Him whether we feel anything or not. He has to liberate us from our dependence on our feelings, and He often does this by removing them. When we reach the point in our lives where we can walk with God regardless of our feelings then we have taken a huge step forward in our spiritual development. Feelings are great, but we can’t live by them. We have to live by faith. Feelings come and go, but Jesus never changes. So attach your faith to Him and trust Him whether you feel anything

or not. Your life will become more balanced and consistent if you will do that.

I am thankful that airplane pilots don't fly their planes based on their feelings. They need something more objective than that, so they fly their planes by their instrument panels. An instrument panel never changes. A pilot may be tired, have a headache, or he may be having problems at home, but if he allows those emotions to alter his perception of reality, the results could be disastrous. A pilot knows that he must fly his plane by the stability and reliability of the instrument panel, not by the instability and unreliability of his emotions. A pilot can't even always fly by what he can see through the windshield. Clouds and darkness can limit his vision, but the instrument panel remains trustworthy.

The same is true for us. We can't always see what is ahead of us, so we have to move forward by faith. There are a lot of things that affect our emotions, but we must learn not to be controlled by them. Instead, we need to be controlled by the clear teachings of Scripture that say things like: "God is in control. There is a purpose behind this problem. God's grace is sufficient. Trusting Jesus with this situation will result in peace. Another person cannot

take you out of the will of God. The best is yet to be!”

By meditating on these truths, we are being controlled by the reliability of God’s Word. The Psalmist said, “*Forever, O LORD, Your Word is settled in heaven*” (Psalm 119:89). God’s Word is settled in heaven, but it needs to be settled in our hearts as well. Once it is, we will find that our lives are more settled, too. We won’t be led by how we *feel*; we’ll be led by what we *know*.

Eagles live at a high level because they have done the hard work of building their nests there. Let’s learn from them and follow their example. May we daily build our lives upon the certainty of God’s written Word. And may we make a decision to live according to what God has said instead of according to what circumstances say or according to what other people say or according to how we may feel on a particular day. It really is possible to live above the fray. God does, eagles do, and so can we!

5. God renews our strength as we wait on Him.

Eagles are strong. Not only do they have extremely strong wings, but they also have very

sturdy beaks, powerful feet, and sharp talons. These come in handy during hunting adventures. Eagles are always on the lookout for “carrion (dead flesh), fresh fish, water fowl, and small land animals such as squirrels, chickens, foxes, and raccoons.”³⁹ Using its keen eyesight and swift flying abilities, an eagle will swoop down from its perch and grab its prey with its claw-like talons. Interestingly, an eagle can carry up to about four pounds of prey in flight.⁴⁰ Four pounds makes up approximately one third of the eagle’s body weight.⁴¹ Most of the prey they go after are under that weight limit. When an eagle seeks to kill a larger animal, or even when it prepares to eat a smaller one, it uses its beak to tear the flesh of its prey apart.⁴²

Sometimes an eagle will notice an osprey, also known as the fish hawk, hunting for fish.⁴³ The osprey will actually plunge into the water, capture a fish, and then fly away with its cherished prize. The eagle will often dive down and intimidate the osprey until it releases the fish. The eagle then swoops down at a fast rate of speed and catches the fish before it reaches the water.⁴⁴ This is an example of the power, skill, speed, agility, and strength of the eagle. Eagles are truly the kings and queens of the sky!

Just as eagles are known for their strength, we, as the children of God, should be known for ours as well. Perhaps the most well-known verse in the Bible concerning eagles is found in the Old Testament book of Isaiah. The Bible says, *“Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).*

God knew that we would get tired. Life has a way of wearing us down. The Bible says, *“Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall” (Isaiah 40:30).* Thankfully, though, God has devised a way to energize us when we are exhausted and a way to pick us up when we fall down. If we will learn to *“wait,”* He will *“renew”* our strength (*Isaiah 40:31*).

That word *“wait”* is an interesting word. It literally means *“to bind together.”*⁴⁵ It is not a passive word, but an active word. When you go out to eat, you hope that your *“waiter”* is active, not passive. Waiters work. Waiters serve. This is true in restaurants, but it is also true in the Christian life. As we wait on God, as we look to Him to intervene in our lives, as we serve Him the best we can, we become *“bound together”* with Him. As we wait for

Him to answer a prayer, meet a need, give us direction, or open a door, we grow closer to Him. If God always acted immediately, we would miss the blessings that come with waiting. Our circumstances might change more quickly, but we wouldn't. We wouldn't change at all. We wouldn't grow. We wouldn't become the people God wants us to be. Our faith grows, and our character develops, during seasons of waiting on God. That's why the Bible says that we should "*let patience have its perfect work*" (*James 1:4*). As we wait on God, we mature, and we grow spiritually. There is something about waiting that is good for us. Waiting does for a Christian what exercise does for an athlete. It strengthens us immensely.

The Bible reveals that as we wait on God we "*renew*" our strength. The word "*renew*" literally means "*change*."⁴⁶ In other words, we "*change*" or "*exchange*" our strength (or lack thereof) for God's strength. We trade in our weakness for His power. His strength becomes ours.

One of the greatest lessons I have ever learned is this: *Whatever we are waiting on in life is not as important as what we already have.* Some people, sadly, are so fixated on whatever they are waiting on that they neglect

to be thankful for what they already have. For those of us who are Christians, the greatest blessing we could ever hope to receive is already ours. We have Jesus Christ, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, living in our hearts. How foolish to think that anyone or anything else could ever compare with Him.

As you think about those things you are waiting on God to provide for you, do so with a grateful heart for what He has already given you. Focus on Him, not on your unmet needs. Be thankful for the blessings you already have such as your family, friends, financial provision, overall health, eyesight, the ability to hear, a place to live, and the gift of life itself. Pray about whatever it is you feel that you need, but be willing to wait on God's timing and be willing to accept God's methods of dealing with your unmet needs.

In your season of waiting, as you focus on God, you will find that the thing you are waiting on will lose some of its hold on you. As you become more and more "bound together" with Him, you will begin to experience strength, energy, and contentment in ways you have never known before. That is God's promise to us. Good things come to those who wait. And the best thing that comes to us is that we get closer to God in the process.

As we do, His strength literally becomes ours, and we become a little bit more like eagles.

6. God keeps us fresh through the seasons of life.

Each year, the eagle goes through a process called “molting.” During this period of time, which lasts for several months, the eagle gets new feathers. Old feathers fall out and new ones grow in their place. Interestingly enough, “no two adjacent wing feathers fall out, or molt, at the same time.”⁴⁷ This allows the eagle to continue flying and hunting throughout the molting, or renewal, process.⁴⁸

Due to the fact that the molting process is just that, a process, and an annual one at that, the eagle is constantly being refreshed. Old feathers are continually being replaced with new ones.

In a similar way, God wants His children to be fresh, not stale. He wants us to be rested and sharp, not tired and dull. He wants us to have a certain spring in our steps and a song in our hearts.

Speaking of the children of God whose lives are in step with the Spirit of God, the Bible says, “*They shall still bear fruit in old age;*

they shall be fresh and flourishing” (Psalm 92:14). So how does this happen? How does God keep us fresh? Well, just like an eagle loses old feathers and grows new ones, we, too, must shed some “old feathers” and grow some “new feathers” if we are going to be fresh.

The most obvious old feathers that we must shed are sins in our lives. Sin robs us of our freshness. David said that the sins he committed took the life out of him. He wrote that his “bones grew old” and that his “vitality was turned into the drought of summer” (Psalm 32:3-4). That is why the Bible tells us to “put off...the old man” and to “put on the new man” (Ephesians 4:22, 24).

The “old man” refers to our sinful nature. The “new man” refers to our spiritual nature which we received when Christ came to live in our hearts. The sinful nature doesn’t fit who we are in Christ. And yet, since we live in a physical body and in a world full of temptation, sometimes our sinful nature asserts itself and demands its way. When this happens, we have to view those sinful desires like an eagle would view old feathers. We have to let them go.

Other old feathers that need to be replaced are those things that somehow crowd Christ out of our lives. These could be hobbies, interests,

unhealthy friendships, sports, investments, or a host of other things that dominate our thoughts, our time, and our energy. These things are not necessarily sinful in and of themselves, but they can become sinful when they usurp the place of Christ in our lives.

Amy Carmichael, a wonderful Christian and a missionary to India for fifty-five years, once wrote a poem about such distractions. In one line of her poem she penned these words, “From all that dims Thy Calvary, oh Lamb of God, deliver me.”⁴⁹ There are some things in life that, for whatever reason, dim our spiritual perspective and dampen our passion for God. Those things are old feathers. And, no matter how painful it may be, they need to go.

Sometimes we develop attitudes that prevent us from being fresh. An attitude of bitterness, unforgiveness, regret, guilt, worry, anxiety, or anger can drain our mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual energies. God wants to replace these old feathers with some new feathers of love, forgiveness, acceptance, and faith.

One man, a mentor in my life, once shared with me how at a certain time in his ministry he was deeply hurt by the actions and words of others. He explained how he allowed this

experience to make him bitter in his spirit. He went on to describe how this bitterness almost destroyed his life and ministry. I asked him how he dealt with it. He said, “Jon, I learned that living with bitterness is like driving a car with the emergency brakes on. You can’t drive very well like that. I decided to forgive those who had hurt me so that I could be free.” Bitterness, in that man’s life, was an old feather that he wisely decided to let go of.

What old feathers need to be removed from your life? New feathers can’t grow until the old ones are gone. For your sake and for the sake of others in your life, shed the old feathers that need to be shed and let God replace them with new, fresh, better feathers. You’ll be glad that you did!

7. God gives us a heart to help others in ways that He Himself has helped us.

Eagles protect their young. Since the eagles’ nest is built upon the highest possible safe point, there is very little natural shade to protect the eaglets from the sun. The wings of the parent eagles provide the shade when they are in the nest, but when the parents leave the nest to hunt for food, they first gather sticks, leaves, and other debris and cover the eaglets to protect them from the sun.⁵⁰

In a similar way, God protects us through the seasons of our lives. And He always will. The Bible says, “*He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge*” (Psalm 91:4). Just as the feathers of the parent eagles protect their young, so God protects us from those things in life that would otherwise do us harm or even destroy us. He is a protective Father, and when we are covered by His feathers and hidden under His wings, we are as safe as we can possibly be.

Not only do the parent eagles *protect* their young, but they also *provide* for them. Once they are convinced that the little eaglets are safe, they can then go out and look for food. Some sources say that it is the mother who typically descends from the nest and gathers food for her young. She then brings what she has gathered back and “drops the food systematically into the gaping mouths of the little eaglets.”⁵¹ Eagles are indeed nurturers, both protecting and providing for their young.

We should be nurturers, too. After God stirs our nest and teaches us to fly, after He gives us an inner ease, after He changes our perspective on things, after He enables us to live consistently above the fray, after He renews our strength and freshens our spirit, then we are in a position to help others as they seek to rise

above their circumstances. Why do parent eagles teach their little eaglets how to fly? Isn't it because their parents taught them? They are simply doing for their young what their parents did for them.

God doesn't do all of these wonderful things in our lives just so we can enjoy being strong, liberated, and free. He obviously wants us to enjoy these blessings, but He also wants us to minister to others out of the overflow of what He has done for us.

The Bible says that God "*comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God*" (II Corinthians 1:4). Who better to comfort a cancer patient than someone who has had cancer? Who better to pray for someone who has just lost a spouse than someone who knows what that experience is like? Who better to encourage someone who is in a storm than someone who has been in a storm, too?

During various challenging times in my own life, the people who have helped me the most have not necessarily been those who consider themselves to be great Bible students. Neither have I ever really been comforted by people who like to debate theology. In fact, I have

never even received a great deal of encouragement from those who are all that spiritually gifted. My greatest encouragement through the years has come from people, normal people, who have been through some things in their lives that mirrored what I was going through in mine. During their tests and trials, God became even more real to them. He taught them how to use the storms of life to help them rise higher. He gave them a new perspective on life and infused their weakness with His strength. These are the people who have spoken words of hope and healing into my life. They shared their stories with me out of grateful hearts for God's faithfulness to them. And they assured me that God would bring a lot of good out of the challenges I was facing if I would respond properly. They encouraged me to move forward with God and to never give up. I owe these friends a great debt. They have been God's special blessings to me.

Eagles are nurturers. They feed their young. They provide a home for them. They teach them how to fly. These are the things that God does for us, and these are the things that God wants us to do for others. He wants us to comfort and encourage others with the same comfort and encouragement He has extended to us.

If you think about it, that's really what ministry is. It is giving the grace, love, mercy, hope, forgiveness, perspective, and help to others that God has so freely given to us. When we speak to others out of the overflow of our own testimonies, our words have a greater genuineness, transparency, and tenderness than they otherwise would. The words of some Christians come across as cold and harsh. The words of other Christians come across as warm and healing. What's the difference? The difference is that to the former group Christianity is a *religion* to be debated, discussed, and endured while to the latter group Christianity is a *relationship* to be developed, cultivated, and enjoyed. May we always be in that latter group. We will never lack for opportunities to minister to others if we are.

Are You an Eagle?

Remember, God's desire and design is for you and me to "*mount up with wings like eagles*" (Isaiah 40:31). He wants us to rise above the things that threaten to pull us down. So would you describe yourself as an eagle?

I am going to give you a seven-question test based on the material we have just covered. These questions will help you determine

whether or not you are soaring through life like an eagle. Answer them honestly.

The Eagle Test

1. Are you willing to take a risk *or* have you become comfortable in your little nest?
2. Is your life one of ease *or* struggle?
3. Are you able to view circumstances and even setbacks from God's perspective *or* do you normally see them from a purely human or earthly perspective?
4. Would you describe your life as a life of steadiness, stability, and consistency *or* as one of unsteadiness, instability, and inconsistency?
5. Has the Lord's strength become your strength *or* is each day an emotional and spiritual struggle for you?
6. Would those who know you best describe your attitude and persona as one of freedom and freshness *or* as one of frustration and fatigue?
7. Does your life revolve around serving God and helping others *or* does it revolve around you?

If the first-answer option on those questions describes you, then you are an eagle. You have learned to rise above the difficulties of life. If the second-answer option describes you, don't despair. There's still hope! The first step to changing is recognizing that you need to change. I would encourage you to re-read the section(s) of this booklet where you are lacking and ask God to mature and develop you in those areas. He will. He takes great delight in teaching little eaglets how to fly!

Are You Even an Eaglet?

Eaglets can learn how to fly. They can learn how to fly because they are part of the eagle family. Similarly, we have to be part of God's family before we can grow, develop, and mature spiritually.

If you have never received Jesus Christ into your heart by faith, now would be a wonderful time to do so. In order to become part of God's family, all we have to do is to ask Him to forgive us of our sins, invite Him to come into our hearts, and then trust Him to do it. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins. He was then buried not far from the place of His crucifixion. But three days later, He came out of that grave conquering sin and death.

More than anything else, Jesus wants to come into your heart and change your life. He can teach you how to fly, but first He must give you spiritual birth. He is the One Who said, *“Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3). Everything good in life begins with the new birth...the birth from above. If you would like to experience that new birth, pray this prayer now:

Dear Jesus,

I need You in my life. Please come into my heart, forgive my sins, and make me a Christian. I ask You to save me, and I trust You to do it. Thank You for saving me. Begin now to make me the person You want me to be.

In Your Name I Pray,

Amen.

Friend, if you just prayed that prayer, let me be the first person to congratulate you. You have prayed, and God has answered. The Bible says that *“whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved”* (Romans 10:13). That is a promise from God.

As you begin your Christian journey, remember that God is your Heavenly Father. He will meet your needs, build you a nest in

life, and teach you how to fly. Stay close to Him. The air currents from His wings will lift you up and enable you to rise above it all!

An Eagle's Prayer

The quality of our lives is, to a large extent, dependent upon our attitude. I want to close this booklet by giving you a simple prayer you can pray each morning as you begin your day. May this prayer help you to begin each day with the attitude and perspective that God wants you to have:

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the gift of this new day. Help me to live it to the fullest and to trust You at every turn. Give me the ability to keep life in perspective today and not to get upset or worried over little things. Help me to remember that You are totally in control of my life. Help me to respond to others today in the love of the Spirit instead of reacting to them in the impulsiveness of the flesh. Enable me to respond to people and to circumstances the way Jesus would. Guide my steps today and make me a blessing to others. I love You, God.

In Jesus' Name I Pray,

Amen.

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