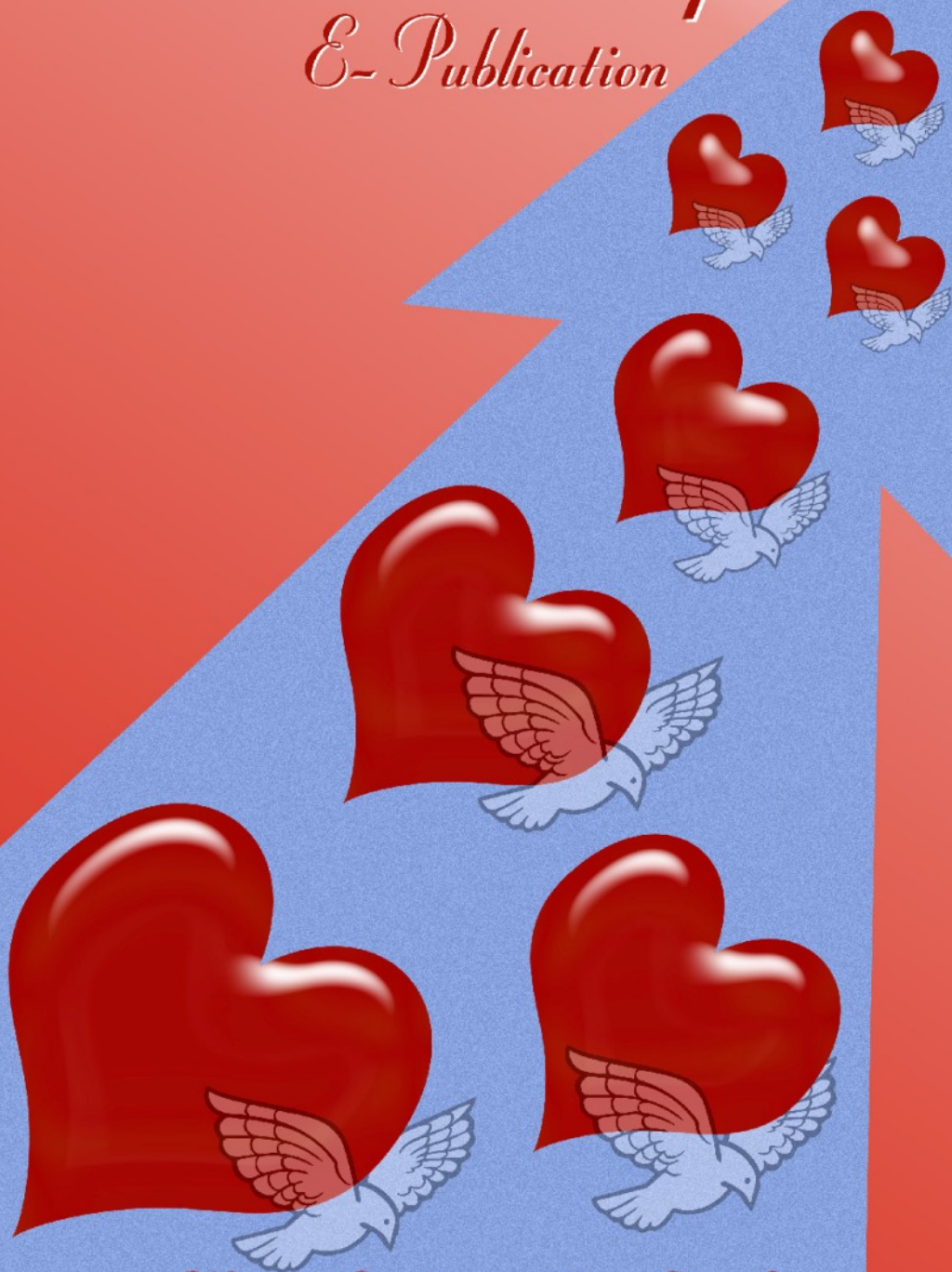


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## KEY IN-SIGHTS

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As part of the *Keys To Understanding Life* local ministry, we are building a small garden. We are growing a few fruits and vegetables to share with others in our community. We call it, “Garden for Giving.” (I suppose if someone steals from the garden, we could also call it, “Garden Forgiving!” LOL!)

Anyway, while I was moving dirt to the garden, I heard a rustling in some bushes nearby. There was a lot of dirt so I made a couple hundred trips past those bushes with my wheelbarrow full of soil. This rustling went on for the 30 hours we spent over the three days it took to move the dirt off the driveway (had to move the dirt quickly before the rains came).

It wasn’t long before I realized that the rustling was being created by a lizard living among the brush. Sometimes Mr. Lizard emerged from the bushes into a little space to see what was going on, but as soon as he saw me he, would run back into the protection of the bushes!

I didn’t make any sudden moves toward him, and I didn’t stop because I didn’t want him to think he was being stalked, or to be afraid! I didn’t look at him directly. I just passed on my way, seeing him out of the corner of my eye. I figured that my initial passing’s back and forth were probably startling to the lizard in the course of his normal routine.

I felt somewhat badly because I know how tough it can be when some of my routines are disturbed. I guess I projected that onto the lizard! So, I resolved not to make any drastic moves, or to unduly disturb Mr. Lizard. Quietly I would pass by, not trying to do anything else that he might interpret as a threat to his well-being.

As the hours wore on, I found myself really wishing Mr. Lizard well! It was kind of pleasant to see him pop out into the open from time to time. In a weird way I felt like I wasn’t alone when I heard his rustling in the bushes, hunting for food or whatever else lizards do during their day. In the end, I really liked Mr. Lizard. I suppose that I kind of hoped he’d relax after a while, realizing that he wasn’t actually being threatened, though maybe he felt that way (another projection)?!

Anyway, the point is that no matter how well I wished Mr. Lizard, and no matter how respectful I tried to be toward him, he was always reluctant to stay in that little open space and watch what was going on. As I pondered that observation, during my comings and goings with the wheelbarrow, I figured that Mr. Lizard’s behavior is quite normal for a lizard. Mr. Lizard wasn’t trying to be my friend, and frankly, I was OK with that (LOL)! Yet it dawned on me that, unfortunately, people can be like Mr. Lizard too.

With some people, no matter how well you wish them, no matter how non-threatening you try to be, and no matter how much you try to enjoy their company, some people have a tough time recognizing that their own perspectives are limiting them from connecting with others more deeply and meaningfully. Sometimes we perceive that others are a threat or potential threat to us, when in

fact the error is in our own perspective of them towards us! Yes, for Mr. Lizard to demonstrate that he trusted me, he would have had to resist his desire to run from that little open space whenever I came by. But then again, maybe lizard brains just aren’t wired that way.

In contrast, as believers, we have the ability to renew and change our minds in Christ. That is possible in every situation we face where renewal is needed in order to grow away from our old, limited selves, and to be more of the new, whole person Christ can make us! It does, however, require us to change continually through our trials. It requires us to introspect, and to be willing to question aspects of ourselves about which God’s Spirit may be trying to counsel us. I guess the point of this Key Insight was that my Lizard Experience reminded me how I need to regularly make sure I’m introspecting too. I have to make sure I’m not slipping into only recognizing the times when I perceive others (including lizards) may need to do some personal reflection☺

Of course it is possible that my perspective of Mr. Lizard was all wrong! I mean, wouldn’t it be funny if, all along, Mr. Lizard thought I’d enjoy a good game of hide and go seek!

Many of life’s possible experiences in Christ involve looking at, and changing, our own perspectives!

## **THE BIBLE’S BIGGER PICTURES**

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### **God Made Me the Way I Am!**

**T**he title of this article is something that we’ve probably all heard someone say. Maybe at some point we’ve even said it! The question is, “Is it really a completely true statement?” If it is completely true, it implies that when we do some of the things we do that hurt others or ourselves, then we don’t need to worry about changing ourselves. But, if it isn’t actually the most accurate way to explain why we do what we do sometimes, then maybe we need to see that with our spiritual eyes. If the Lord actually *didn’t* “make us” such that we act in certain ways, then maybe we need to try to see how following the Lord means *we* have to take responsibility for that! Let’s look at why the statement, “God made me the way I am,” is often false, and why it is very critical to discerning what is happening in our own, personal spiritual battles!

### **Satan’s Involvement In Shaping Who We Are**

Satan tries to use some of the aspects of our personalities against Christ in us. The Lord did create us in birth, and He knew us even before we were in the womb (Jeremiah 1:5). Yet every child ever born was “born into sin” and into the spiritual war between God and Satan! By God’s grace, love and compassion, He can choose to see the innocence of children and mitigate their being born into sin until they come of age spiritually. But, that doesn’t mean Satan isn’t being permitted to influence us as we are growing up, and even while we are children. Satan isn’t blocked from influencing us during some kind of “age of innocence.” Satan plays a big role in influencing the kinds of tendencies and personalities we have since we were born.

In our relationship with Christ, God did “make us” clean, forgiven, and whole. However, that doesn’t mean in the spiritual war of life that Satan cannot use our life experiences, as Christians, to cause us to embrace various defense mechanisms we have. While some of the ways we deal with people or experiences can be godly, we must introspect in order to identify the ones that we have that aren’t godly. The roaring lion loves to attack us in ways that cause us to justify ungodly aspects of our personalities to ourselves... aspects we may need to work on changing for Christ!

The Bible tells us followers of Christ of many things we should and should not do in the service of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master. It tells us to encourage one another, to love one another, not to argue, not to judge, etc. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-22) While many of these kinds of verses do not directly mention Satan, Satan is behind our actions when, even as Christians, we do things that do not please the Lord.

**Romans 7:15-21** For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. (*Italics are part of translation*)

Through Paul, the Spirit of God tells us in the verses above that it is sin and evil within us (meaning Christians included). This often causes us to do wrong when we actually would like to, or mean to, do good. All things that are of sin and evil are of Satan, not God. The point is that when we react to people or situations in ways that come naturally for our personality, those reactions may on occasion be a result of how Satan’s attacks have shaped us through the years, and not how “God made us.”

For example, many men are not very sensitive to things they feel. For them, talking about feelings is taboo; it is something that they believe women do, not men. When we men start thinking like that and a spiritual battle arises that actually involves our feelings more than we’d like, we might start thinking “God made me a man and He didn’t make men to do ‘feelings stuff.’” That is an assumption which probably stems from the examples of men in one’s life! The Bible demonstrates that feelings are dynamics of the heart, and they often need to be transformed so that peace and love will rule our attitudes and actions during trials (Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 3:12-15)! We men can’t submit to that continual transformation process with increasing consistency when we disregard what we feel because we are often more comfortable with the rationale of the mind.

While the men we may have learned from might have inadvertently modeled the denial or “stuffing” of the fluxuations of our hearts (i.e., feelings and desires), as followers of the Christ we must see when our hearts are troubled, and transform those troubles to peace in Him! The heart feels “trouble,” but it can also feel peace. Getting from troubled to peace requires active participation with The Teacher, God’s Holy Spirit, in order to effect the transformation.

*It's not like we experience a “troubled heart” in a way that is somehow separate from Satan's work or spiritual battles!*

In John chapters 13-14, Jesus is aware of His pending arrest, crucifixion and ultimate departure, in physical form, from this earth. He is teaching and explaining some things to His Disciples, and they have *lots of questions*. The Disciples are *struggling* to comprehend the fact that Jesus is “leaving!” They are *not in control* of the situation and they *do not understand* what will happen if He leaves (i.e., the outcome of what is essentially a trial for them!). They *fear* the outcome of this decision that they do not fully grasp. In short, their hearts are *troubled*,

and John 14:27 records that Jesus points that out! All the italicized phrases in this paragraph are various ways of describing things we feel or desire. They are the kinds of experiences we often have in our hearts. It's not like we experience a “troubled heart” in a way that is somehow separate from Satan's work or spiritual battles! All troubles of the heart are the result of Satan seeking to raise doubt in us and to keep us from experiencing peace and demonstrating faith! Jesus was fully aware His Disciples were undergoing a trial.

Jesus stated His solution to a troubled heart very simply (again in John 14:27): we must accept His peace and *not remain* troubled. Jesus' solution speaks to the transformation of the heart: changing troubled feelings into peace. It involves having and demonstrating faith.

The idea isn't to try to not be troubled; we won't be able to help feeling troubled in many of our trials. The Spirit of God through Paul tells us (Ephesians 4:26-27) that feeling “troubled” isn't always the sin. When we are “troubled,” regardless how we describe the feeling, we must take care not fall into sin *before we transform our hearts*. If we do not continually strengthen the spiritual skill of transforming the heart, then though trials may involve things we feel, we'll try to handle them *without* actually dealing with the often difficult-to-understand nature of our spiritual hearts – the feelings side! That tendency often leads us to stuff or deny feelings. Depending on the person, that practice can lead to some fairly complex problems and hang ups. Satan is pleased by that!

### **We Must Submit To The Power Of Christ To Change Who We Often Are**

Because we believe in Christ, we must be on the lookout for changes that the Lord seeks to make in us; changes that *will* go against our natural, old self grain! We must take care not to *assume* that *everything* we do is of our new selves! While we have uniqueness's as men or women, we must take care not to use that as an excuse to fail to change and grow as Christian men and Christian women. Just because we have a certain kind of personality, we must take care not to use that as an excuse for avoiding how God would have us soften some aspects, or strengthen other aspects, of our personality.

*...we must be on the lookout for changes that the Lord seeks to make in us; changes that WILL go against our natural, old self grain!*

*Satan's goal is to get us to deal with spiritual battles by avoiding the very things that we must look at, in order to change them IN CHRIST!*

Satan's goal is to get us to deal with spiritual battles by avoiding the very things that we must look at, in order to change them IN CHRIST! Do we men really think that Satan's schemes will not attempt to misdirect our tendencies to be independent, strong, non-feeling, analytical, or “fixers?” Do my sisters in Christ really think that Satan's schemes will somehow not attempt to misdirect your tendencies to be nurturing, sensitive, or strong at heart?

We all have strengths and weaknesses. When we follow the Lord, it is first and foremost about following as a disciple. As men, we will have issues with following the Lord that are somewhat unique to men as opposed to women. Women will have issues with following the Lord that are more unique to women as opposed to men. While we are all individually unique in some ways, it is vital to recognize that our own uniqueness implies we must individually seek out how to cooperate with the ways the Lord desires to mold and shape our personalities. This includes our behaviors and attitudes. Increasing awareness and submissiveness to God is essential to being disciplined through our hearts.

### **Letting The Lord Mold And Shape Our Person Involves Introspection**

Some of the things we need to be on the lookout for can include:

- Being habitually curt and short with people in general, or with certain people in certain situations.
- Being poor listeners.
- Trying to relate with someone, as if the relationship is functional and healthy, when, in fact, it is not. (This is a biggie. This deals with not accepting spiritual realities. It can lead to exposing one's self to Satan's attacks unnecessarily. Specifically, it leads to having certain expectations with certain people that aren't realistic at the time. Those desires and expectations of the heart must be transformed, and our conduct must be spiritually wise!)
- Being judgmental towards someone.

**Practical Application Exercise:** A useful exercise is to spend maybe 15 minutes in godly introspection. Start it with a very specific and focused prayer. The goal is to open your heart to hearing something about yourself that God would have you to change about your personality. Write it down. That's the relatively easy part. The next crucial step is to identify situations in which that ungodly tendency surfaces within you. You are looking for patterns. Once you've identified some patterns in your life situations, you have to be on guard for those situations! Allow God's Spirit to train you to be on the lookout for those situations. Be alert to when your spiritual battles sneak up on you! Learn to enjoy your life, while at the same time increasing your spiritual situational awareness! When one of the situations arises, discipline yourself to remain focused on how God would have you demonstrate His love and peace through you.

If, when you try this, you find you experience some inner turmoil... realize it's OK. You are simply experiencing an important spiritual fight for the Lord within yourself! Satan is attacking you, but at

the same time God is trying to speak to you through your heart. The idea is to look for what you must change within yourself – to transform your heart to peace. Seek that out with your heart. We can’t always change or influence others, or what is happening to us during an undesirable trial situation. So, as you look for what God may be trying to strengthen or soften in you, realize that sometimes it means you may have to accept some things that are happening to you. This is sometimes the spiritual warfare reality, even though we may prefer to spend most of our energy finding a way to change the unwanted things that happen to us.



If you would like to learn more about introspection, about seeking out changes that God would have you make in you, or about identifying spiritual patterns in your life, check out [Feelings 101: Pain to Peace](#). It is a very in-depth book with practical exercises you can use during both introspection and in everyday life situations. F101 is available in paperback, as well as Kindle, NOOK, and other e-versions from Amazon, BN and other online retailers.

## KEYS WEBSITE ALERTS

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**K**ey*s To Understanding Life* will be at the Jesus Jam Fest on July 21, 2012 in Sattler, Texas. This promises to be a great, wholesome event for all to attend if you are able. IT’S FREE!! You can find more info about the time, directions, musicians and bands, as well as about other ministries that will be there by finding the Jesus Jam Fest EVENT on the *Keys* Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/keystounderstandinglife](http://www.facebook.com/keystounderstandinglife))!



During the month of April we had several folks LIKE and connect with us on our page on Facebook through the special give-away we offered for the *Keys Series* book, *A Disciple’s Heart*. We thank you very much for the opportunity to share that with you. We also appreciate the comments some of you messaged us about how the page ministers to you. God bless all of you! Feel free to message us any time.

## HEART TO HEART

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If you write poems, psalms, lyrics or prose of faith, and would like to share one of them with others in a “Hearts Up” edition, you may submit it for consideration for the *Heart To Heart* feature. **You may also submit a story or testimony of your own to share how you drew closer to God during a trial or in your life!** You can email your submission through the [Contact Us](#) page or send it to the snail mail address provided on that webpage. Be sure to read the **Contribution Guidelines** before sending us your submission. You can view those guidelines by clicking the link provided on the Contact Us page itself.

Dear Reader,

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Just so you know, our ministry is not yet a non-profit ministry, although our goal is to be a fully non-profit organization this year. As it is, any gift that is given is a “true gift” in the sense that it is not tax deductible right now. At this time, donations or gifts to *Keys To Understanding Life* may be made out to: William J. Clark.

God bless you.

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